

CARTER PRESIDENCY PROJECT

**FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEW WITH HAMILTON JORDAN  
WITH LONDON BUTLER, THOMAS DONILON**

November 6, 1981

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**YOUNG:** I want to welcome our guests and in advance express our appreciation for giving us this time. I know this is an unusual privilege that you've bestowed. on us, Hamilton, and I appreciate it very much. Let me just mention some of the ground rules so that everybody has them straight. The discussion today, though it is being taped, is entirely off the record and all of us understand that what's said here doesn't go out of the room. That's so you can feel free to say what you want and we can have some candid exchanges without anybody feeling that there is a risk of publicity or a misuse of remarks.

**JORDAN:** You mean I can say anything I want to about Joe Califano for the first time?

**YOUNG:** Or anybody else for that matter. When the transcripts are made, they will not be shown to anybody but you and Landon. You'll then have the chance to review them, make any changes in them you feel appropriate. Then they will be used for research purposes. Our present plan is to have a few people use these as primary source materials for a serious overview of the Carter Presidency and the Carter White House.

**JORDAN:** Let me ask you a question. When I get the transcripts, can I differentiate between things that I don't mind being on the record and things that I want to remain off the record? Can I delete things?

**YOUNG:** You certainly will have that option. You can delete, you can amend, you can say that it's all right for this to be used or it's off the record. Eventually, after the transcripts have been used for research purposes here at the center, by scholars of the center, we would plan to give them to the presidential library archives in whatever form is approved.

**JORDAN:** I don't want to be picky, but let me just pursue that one step further. If I left something on the record, would that mean that a presidential scholar would then be able to quote what I had said in a future paper or book?

**YOUNG:** Yes, it would.

**JORDAN:** If I put it off the record, he would be able to use it as a piece of information, but not attribute it to me.

**YOUNG:** Yes, he could use it as a piece as information not attributed to you. Optionally, you could say you wouldn't want to be quoted on this without seeing the context.

**JORDAN:** Fine.

**YOUNG:** But it is important to us to use these for serious research purposes. There's no question of their being put out to the press. Nobody in the press knows you're here. We've followed that rule.

**JORDAN:** Or cares any more, I believe.

**YOUNG:** I wouldn't be too sure of that. So with those understandings, let's proceed. We'd love for Hamilton to begin by giving us your overview of the Presidency, touching some of the points that we would like to discuss in detail later. We're interested in the Carter White House and how the Carter Presidency evolved over the four years. We're interested in learning something about the White House setup as it started out and the way that might have changed. We're interested in hearing you talk about what you saw your role as being, the various capacities in which you served the President, and how that also might have changed over time.

We're interested in the relation between this President and the world of politics, inside and outside Washington. We're interested in exploring what were the main problems of this administration, whether they seem different to you in retrospect than they might have seemed at the time. We're interested in how the President and his staff dealt with some of those problems; the ones you felt you coped with successfully, the ones you felt you didn't. What lessons did you learn as you look back on that experience? What lessons do you think people studying the Presidency should learn about the experience of those four years? That puts it very generally, but it gives you an idea of the things we're trying to bring out in this project. It's a kind of oral history.

**JORDAN:** All right. At the risk of being redundant, I don't think you gentlemen have me here to make a speech to you, so I think I'll repeat some of the things you said. I'll go over by category some of the things that I would enjoy talking about and reflecting on, as opposed to trying to broach each of these subjects in some kind of presentation. Maybe that will stimulate some questions or thoughts from you.

I'll introduce my colleague and friend Landon Butler. I wanted Landon to join me because his experience with Jimmy Carter basically is about as long as my own. He saw Jimmy Carter as a gubernatorial candidate, as a Governor, as a presidential candidate and as a President. He's got some unique insights from a different perspective that he can add to the topics that Jim reviewed. Landon and his wife were environmentalists trying to save an island off the coast of Georgia when they met Jimmy Carter in '68 or '69. He did some things for Governor Carter. Along with Jerry Rafshoon and Peter Bourne, he and I went to see Carter to suggest to him that he run for President in October or September of '72, even before the Nixon landslide.

When we presented this crazy notion to Carter, we quickly saw that it was not an original idea with us. He didn't flinch at the prospect of being President, nor did he consider himself unprepared or unqualified to be President at that very moment. Then Landon helped us in the campaign and was the person that led a group of Georgians up to New Hampshire in the 1976

primaries, probably making the difference enabling us to win that first primary. He went to the White House with me as my deputy. It's hard to describe what I did, and it certainly is hard to describe what my deputy did for me. Some people would say I did nothing and Landon assisted me.

We worked closely together on the Panama Canal treaties, which were significant in Carter's Presidency. It was the first time we learned to effectively focus the cumulative resources of the Presidency on an issue. The format and approach we took to the Panama Canal treaty ratification was repeated time and time again on a slew of domestic and foreign policy problems. Then later, during the last two or three years of the administration, he was working specifically on preparing for the SALT [Strategic Arms Limitations Talks] ratification fight. He was the President's primary liaison with organized labor, and became a very close friend of Lane Kirkland. He had a strong relationship with the labor movement. Landon wore a lot of different hats in the administration. He can address some of these same subjects from a different perspective, so I appreciate him coming with me today.

Some of the topics that I think we should discuss are the origins of Carter's Presidency, why was it that he ran, the rationale for his candidacy, how he was successful as a presidential candidate, and the larger question of the meaning of the election in the larger scheme of things. Certainly Jimmy Carter could not have been elected President of the country twenty or even ten years ago. Only because of the fragmentation that's taken place in the Democratic party was it possible for him to be elected President. There is also the influence of television.

The same fragmentation that allowed him to be elected President made it more difficult for him to govern. Was Carter prepared to be President? Were we prepared to assume different roles in the White House? No. But I don't think that any modern day President can be particularly well prepared for dealing with the new generation of problems that face our country. President Carter had certainly studied the Presidency and had a fairly balanced sense of the institution of the Presidency. But we went into the White House with our own preconceived notions as to how to do business. Some of those notions were correct, some proved to be incorrect. So we might want to talk about that a bit.

Would it have been an advantage for President Carter to have had Washington experience? Certainly it would have been. But I also think one of the strengths of his Presidency was that he carried a different set of concerns and a different approach to the Presidency and to the White House. The dynamics of a Governorship, with the notable exception of foreign policy, are very comparable and helpful to a man who would serve as President. When you're the Governor of a state and you've got a legislative branch to deal with, you've got problems, you've got limited resources, and you've got a bureaucracy to manage. I would say that there are advantages to having congressional experience prior to serving in the White House. They're at least comparable advantages to those attained by having served as a chief executive of a state.

What were the strengths and weaknesses of our structure and our team? When did we perceive them and once we perceived them, what did we do about it? Were the changes that were made in the summer of '79 improvements in the functioning of the White House, the Presidency and the government? I'm sure it was a considerable improvement. I don't think we really were able to

give a good test to our new approach to government or to the organization of the White House because those changes happened in the summer of '79. We became preoccupied first with [Edward] Kennedy, then with the hostage crisis, then the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. There were two White Houses after November of '79. There was a White House focused almost exclusively on the hostage situation and there was a White House that was working on everything else. The new structure and approach to government and to the Presidency that evolved after the Camp David changes were never adequately tested.

My own role at the White House did change. My role in the White House was grossly exaggerated by the press. Fortunately for the American people, when the President had to make a critical economic decision or a decision on a weapons system, he did not turn to me and say, "Hamilton, what in the hell do I do?" The perception was that he did, that I was intimately involved in all policy decisions across the board and that I was a major voice in all policy decisions across the board. That was not true. I was selectively involved and did not have the substantive background or the inclination to try to have input into these decisions. I had a political input often times. I learned and I hope grew during the time I was in the White House. There were issues and problems that I began to understand and on which I did have some input. But my own role was grossly exaggerated by the press. My role did change and evolve during the course of the four years. It was never static.

I really would most enjoy talking about the lessons of the Carter Presidency. What are those lessons? Where did we succeed and where did we fail? I have a lot of strong feelings about the institutions in our country today, particularly the relationship of the political institutions to the media. I do not have a very optimistic outlook for the next ten or fifteen years. My concern is that we are in for a generation of one-term Presidents. And I fear that we are going to elect one group of people and they're going to march us in one direction for four years. The American people are very fickle, and unwilling now to accept some of the difficulties that our country faces. They will throw the first group out and elect someone that takes us in another direction for four years, and then a third that takes us in a still opposite direction. And I'm afraid that's the nature of our country and the new generation of problems that we face. I'm afraid that's my short term forecast for the institution of the Presidency.

The political parties are hollow shells, they mean almost nothing in this country. At the same time, we've had the demise of political organization and structure in the country. We've had the enormous impact of the news media, particularly television news. I don't think we've begun to understand or quantify the impact of television on our people, particularly in terms of informing them about political issues and personalities. I have a lot that I could say, and would like to say, about the relationship of the Presidency to the news media. As you gentlemen know better than anyone, you'll never find a President or a presidential staff who is satisfied with what the press said about their performance. When you sit in the White House, you want the press to report all the courageous things that you've done, all the marvelous accomplishments of the administration. It's not their job to do that. Their job is to report the mistakes, the inconsistencies and the flaws.

What's happened in the last twenty years is largely a result of both Vietnam and Watergate. As a result of those two events, a feeling has grown in the press that they were right and the political

institutions, particularly the Presidency, were wrong. Carried to the extreme, the attitude among many people in the press today is that the press are the good guys and the politicians, particularly the President, are the bad guys. The probing, skeptical questioning attitude, the fine tradition of the free press in our country, has become in the last ten or fifteen years a very cynical attitude about politicians generally and our President specifically. This whole demise in respect for all of our institutions, whether it be the church, organized labor, politics is related to the enormous impact of television.

I have a lot on my mind that I could say on the relationship of the demise of the party, the impact of television, and about a President in a very vulnerable and weakened position who is trying to deal with this new generation of problems that face our country. When you're sitting down in south Georgia looking up at Washington, the White House and the Presidency, you see all of the powers and levers and strings and all the things you can do. Once you're in the White House, you're much more acutely aware of all of the limitations on a President's power, including the lack of discipline in the parties, the situation in the Congress, a much more active and aggressive news media, these enormous new problems that confront our country, the enhanced role of Congress and the excessive role in many instances in our foreign policy process. The actual powers of the Presidency are more limited than the perceived powers appear. Those are just a few of the things that I'd be interested in talking about.

**YOUNG:** I think you've stated them very well.

**BUTLER:** I'll just add two or three things to what Ham said. While we were in office, there was a lot of discussion about White House organization and about how the White House functioned. I thought it was an issue which got a lot more attention than it deserved. All the books I read before we went in said that there was about an eighteen month learning curve for the job; I suspect that eighteen month learning curve applies to us as well. Sometime around the middle of 1978, we had hit our stride in terms of the White House functioning.

After the middle of 1978 there was not a great deal of current criticism about the way we were functioning. Also, a subject worth talking about is the separation of the policymakers from the political people. When these two groups worked together, as they tended to do in mid-1978 and thereafter, we really didn't have a lot of organizational problems in the White House. The kind of problems which reach the White House are per se very difficult. If there was an easy way to resolve them, or if there were ways to resolve them which would avoid conflict, they would have been solved long before they got to the White House. The organization and the functioning of the White House was by and large a non-issue, certainly after eighteen months.

It's worth giving some thought to whether or not there was—and I believe there was—a very large backlog of unfinished government business by the time we took office in 1977. During the last years of the [Lyndon] Johnson administration and for a good part of the [Richard] Nixon and [Gerald] Ford administration, government wasn't functioning. The routine, controversial issues of the magnitude of airline deregulation, for example, weren't being addressed. Watergate paralyzed things. Lord knows Ham could speak as well as anybody about what happens when a White House gets paralyzed by a crisis the way we were paralyzed with the Bert Lance crisis.

The Nixon White House could not possibly have dealt with a great deal of other issues besides Watergate.

**YOUNG:** Vietnam and Watergate.

**BUTLER:** And Vietnam. Because of Vietnam, the Johnson White House was unable to give a lot of attention to some important issues during its last couple of years. The Ford administration didn't have long enough: it didn't have a political base to develop a program of its own. So by the time we took office, there was a large backlog of controversial issues. Energy pops immediately to mind. It simply hadn't been addressed. Had the seventies been more normal political years, perhaps there would have been some attention given to these controversial issues, which require a lot of time from Congress and the executive branch. Those issues might have been processed in normal years. Because they were not processed, we had this big backlog.

We also had no unifying Democratic consensus, no program, no set of principles on which a majority of Democrats agreed. I often said, and I think some other people agreed, that the middle ground was not the high ground during the Carter years. The political high ground was on the extremes of left and right. The middle ground simply was not the position of strength during those years. So as we addressed this myriad of issues, we had to have an *ad hoc* approach to every issue. If we dealt with the natural gas problem, we put together one coalition; if we dealt with the Panama Canal, we'd put together an entirely different coalition. Our rhetoric would be aimed in different directions. We would wind up with a hodge podge, *ad hoc* approach to our initiatives.

The center administration had a very productive four years. Both our domestic and our foreign policy records were impressive. Yet the perception remains that we were ineffective, inept, and that nothing got accomplished. The only evaluation I can offer is that, because of these constraints underlying Democratic consensus, we were forced to take an *ad hoc* approach to our policy initiatives, and the result was confused perceptions. For example, the success we enjoyed on the Natural Gas Act of 1978 didn't spill over in any way. We got no political momentum from our successes. Lord knows we got no political momentum whatsoever from the Panama Canal.

**JORDAN:** Yes we did, but it was a negative momentum.

**BUTLER:** But that was pretty much the case. We wound up picking up the negatives in all these things. There were no positives.

**JORDAN:** I asked Landon last night if he could recall a specific bill, program or policy that we had advocated that was popular and helped us politically. We couldn't think of a single thing. Everything was politically a loser. Try to reconcile that with the image of President Carter in October or November of 1980 as the ultimate politician who would do anything to get reelected. There was no way to square what we tried to do with the way we were perceived.

**BUTLER:** We all avoided the obvious conclusion that the Democratic agenda was unpopular. Yet a Democratic President does not have the freedom to completely repudiate his party's

agenda. We hoped that this man that was doing all these unpopular things would be seen as courageous; instead he simply became unpopular.

**YOUNG:** The issues you gave in chronological order are what we'd like to focus our questions on. We would first like to ask about the move from the campaign and the winning of the election to the confrontation with the problems of government. Life became very different. You had to confront a whole set of problems that were new to you. I believe you said it was a while before you learned what your strengths, resources, and weaknesses were. We might explore that in several ways. When you came out of the election, was there a fully articulated sense of what you wanted to accomplish? What do you do when you get elected? Why did the White House get set up the way it got set up in the beginning? Was that related to a certain operating style of the President? Was it based on an explicit view of the way the Presidency ought to operate, was it related to the kinds of problems you sensed, or the kinds of accomplishments you wanted to make? We might have some specific questions in this area.

**JONES:** I'd like to pick up on one of your early statements about the effect of the fragmentation of the Democratic party on the election side probably helping in getting the nomination but leading to problems of governing. Could you just begin to explore that a little bit with some cases of how that worked out on the governing side? How did that lead to organizational problems initially, and then later to problems of operation?

**JORDAN:** Maybe the best way to describe it would be to talk about Jimmy Carter as a new President and about his perception of what needed to be done. We could contrast his reading of the American mood with the mood of the new speaker of the house, Tip [Thomas] O'Neill, or the new majority leader, Robert Byrd. If I talk about it in specific terms, it'll be more relevant. Carter's election to a large extent was non-ideological. I don't think his Presidency was an aberration. His Presidency will stand the test of time. He was the only Democrat that could have carried the South in 1976. He carried the South not on issues but because he was a southerner. He carried the South on regional pride. Almost any other Democrat that would have been nominated against Gerald Ford would have been defeated.

Carter had a different sense of what the Democratic party was all about. I can remember in '74 and '75 going to 88 conferences around the country. They had these God awful forums with 99.9% screaming, unrealistic, doctrine liberals. Mo [Morris] Udall and Birch Bayh would stand up and give the traditional meaning of the Democratic party. Jimmy Carter would stand up and talk about trying to balance the budget, we've got to be Democrats and we can't forsake our traditions and our principles. We've got to make government work better because some of the things we've tried to do over the last twenty years have just not worked. People would hiss or boo him. There was hostility toward Carter preaching this new message. But in fact, that new message was much more in tune with what the American people wanted in 1976 and in '80.

Carter arrived in Washington with a considerably different perception of the country and the country's needs and a different approach to the country's problems than had speaker Tip O'Neill, who tended to see these things in a more traditional way. Also, Carter's approach to these problems was different. I can remember those first six or eight months.



One of a number of great myths about the Carter Presidency is that he and Tip O'Neill developed a deep affection for one another. I remember the times I would see Carter in meetings with the legislative leadership talking about cutting the budget and reducing jobs programs. O'Neill's eyes would just roll back in his head. It was like a bad dream. He'd spent all of his life waiting to be speaker of the House and to have a Democratic President. "My God, we've got this Democrat that's not doing what Hubert Humphrey or Lyndon Johnson would have done."

So there was a basic cleavage that started from the outset as to what the party was all about and what the mood of the country was. If you look at what happened in the election in the intervening years, Carter's reading of the American mood was more accurate and perceptive than that of the attitude best exemplified by speaker O'Neill.

So that was one problem. There was also the problem of the resentment Carter created by whipping the political establishment and not being a product of the Congress. This is a very subtle thing and impossible to quantify or prove. They say, "My God, the guy's not from Congress, and on top of all that he's from Georgia of all places." If we'd been from Nevada or Rhode Island or Vermont or Illinois it would have been different. But there continues today to be a strong, maybe subtle, anti-southern bias in Washington. "Here's a guy that challenged the people that we know, Mo Udall and Scoop [Henry] Jackson and Birch Bayh. He won the election and here he comes to town. He's going to try out all these ideas that are at variance with what we think the party has meant historically."

So that was the origin of the problem, which contrasts with the situation President Reagan has today. One of his unique advantages, although he's in for some rough times on his economic policy I'm afraid, is the philosophical unity within his own party. The Republicans in the Congress believed in increasing defense expenditures and balancing the budget. Now they're going to disagree how to do those things, but he's got philosophical unity in both houses of Congress. He's got a philosophical majority in the House.

There we were with a solid Democratic majority in both houses, and our fights were always with the Democrats, trying to get them to support these different approaches of the President. So that was the origin of the problem. Because of that, Carter was seen as being ineffective with the Congress. We certainly made our share of mistakes, but the origin of the problem was this different reading of the country's mood, the different approach to problems, and the resentment among people on the Hill, particularly among the staff people, of Carter being President.

**JONES:** If I could just follow up on that. Were you aware of this difference at the time? Did the difference between the Washington based Democrats and your operation, and your winning the campaign in particular, determine the way you set up your operation when you got to Washington? Was that an important part of the way you decided to set up the White House? Did you think, *What the President has done here in winning this election reflects a different view of the Democratic party than we're going to face when we get to Washington?*

**JORDAN:** I'm sure there are things that we did that we could have done stylistically differently. That would have maybe patched over some of these differences. But the thing that was unavoidable and inescapable was that Tip O'Neill and Jimmy Carter disagreed. Speaker O'Neill

was very kind to us over the years. I mean he swallowed hard and did a lot of things for the President that he didn't believe in. I'm not criticizing speaker O'Neill, because he was very generous to President Carter. But I'm using him as a representative of this other attitude. The basic problem was that Tip O'Neill and Jimmy Carter looked at the country, the party, the approaches to problems significantly differently.

**BUTLER:** Most of the Democratic institutions were in disarray in 1976 and 1977. Certainly the state of the Congress, with the reforms and the unwillingness of the membership to follow the leadership, was well-documented at the time. But less well documented was the almost total paralysis that existed in the labor movement, in the black institutions, in the civil rights institutions, in the women's groups, and to a lesser extent in the environmental groups. These are the groups with which we had to deal day in and day out in the White House. We found ourselves not only trying to take care of our own politics, but their politics as well. I came to know the labor movement very well. They were barely functioning as an institution in 1976 through 1978. George Meany was in his declining years, and yet most labor leaders were very much afraid of him. The AFL-CIO staff operation was stale. They were unable to make difficult political decisions and to support a Democratic President.

**JONES:** Defray the problems but not support you.

**BUTLER:** That's right.

**JORDAN:** The fragmentation that took place in the party took place in all the different institutions. Twenty years ago if a President wanted to pass a bill to the Congress, he'd get speaker Sam Rayburn and majority leader Lyndon Johnson and George Meany and maybe somebody from the business community. They could sit down in the Oval Office and write a tax bill and leave with a high degree of confidence that it would pass pretty much in the form they'd agreed on. Our experience was that you could have the President and the speaker and the committee chairs putting on a full court press on a piece of legislation on the Hill, and you could get defeated in subcommittee by a group of people whose names were barely recognizable to you.

The same thing happened in the political institutions. Twenty years ago if you wanted the black vote in a national election, you dealt with Martin Luther King. Who do you deal with today? You deal with Vernon Jordan of the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] or any number of black mayors around the country. So the same fragmentation that happened within the party happened with all of these political institutions making the job of governing more difficult.

**FENNO:** I want to pursue the same question by asking why it was that this didn't deter you, or why you were able to capitalize on this during the election campaign. You had differences of viewpoint; you had a sort of fragmentation in institutions; yet as far as your campaign experience was concerned, you turned that to your advantage, or did you?

**JORDAN:** The point is that those institutions didn't mean anything.

**BUTLER:** It worked to our advantage during the '76 campaign.

**JORDAN:** Yes. The fragmentation of the institutions didn't mean anything because if there'd been one black leader in 1976, chances are he or she wouldn't have been for Jimmy Carter. The fragmentation of all these institutions created the kind of general chaos in the party that allowed Carter to run a non-ideological campaign and that addressed some feelings and themes in the country.

**BUTLER:** The labor movement is a good example. During the campaign in '76 the labor movement was deeply and bitterly split between the New Left unions who were active in the primaries and the moderate mainstream unions. Had they been together, had the labor movement been unified, I think there's a real question about whether we would have ever gotten out of Florida.

**JORDAN:** Because they didn't help us get there, they didn't have a stake in us either. Because none of them felt like they were part of our early effort, which they were not, they weren't willing to go the second mile to support Carter. Very few of them did. We basically rose to the Presidency over this amalgam of interest and organizations by running successful campaigns in the individual states. We had a better understanding of the role of the media than anyone else, at least on the Democratic side. But again, that same chaos and fragmentation made it more difficult for us to govern.

**BUTLER:** By '77 and '78 the split between the [George] McGovern wing of the party and, for lack of a better phrase, the Jackson wing of the party was beneath the surface, but unbelievably bitter. It manifested itself in the labor movement and among blacks in the Congress. It was most apparent in the Democratic foreign policy establishment, where the bitterness that existed between the Jackson wing and the McGovern wing was almost unspeakable.

**JORDAN:** We had Frank Church in '77 coming in saying that Carter has got to recognize Cuba and start meeting with [Fidel] Castro. On the other side of the spectrum you'd have Scoop Jackson taking us apart on our defense budget or our approach to the SALT process. I don't want to make any of this sound like we didn't make plenty of mistakes, which we certainly did. But the fragmentation and chaos in the party was the reason we were able to be elected, and one of the reasons that it was difficult to govern.

**HARGROVE:** Had a Udall or somebody like that been elected, which you say was probably not possible, that person would have had trouble governing the liberal coalition because it had a failure of nerve and was uncertain about what to do. But Jimmy Carter had a double burden because he also wanted to move that coalition in a new direction.

**JORDAN:** That's exactly right.

**HARGROVE:** If that's the case, what constituency did he see out there as a potential constituency for that new set of missions?

**JORDAN:** He had a more non-ideological approach to the country's problems. We had, and we still have, a terrible energy problem. There's no liberal or conservative answer to that problem.

The answers are fairly obvious. We need to reduce imports of foreign oil, we need to conserve more in this country, we need to produce new forms of energy. It was more of a common sense, non-ideological approach. We thought, possibly naively, that if we approached those problems not from a doctrinaire posture of the Democratic party, that our approach would work and that the American people would understand and ultimately appreciate it.

**HARGROVE:** It was an appeal to a general interest or a general will rather than specific groups.

**JORDAN:** Again this gets back to our friend in the media. On one hand we had defeated all of these institutions. Jimmy Carter was not the first choice of any of these institutions or component parts of the traditional Democratic coalition. We had defeated all of them in winning the nomination. But those people, once you're elected, are disproportionately important. We talked last night about Vernon Jordan. Vernon Jordan was head of a large national organization. He was striving, while head of the Urban League, to be the key black spokesman. Even though he was from Atlanta and knew Jimmy Carter, Griffin Bell, and all of us, when he had to make a speech about the Carter administration, he couldn't stand up and say that we were doing a good job or an OK job. He had to stand up and point out all of the shortcomings of the Carter Presidency. That gives birth then to two or three days of coverage about Carter who got elected with the black vote and is now going to lose the black vote. That was almost the story of the administration. These special interest groups that didn't feel a part or didn't feel a stake in the election of Carter pursued their own institutional interests after we had been elected.

**THOMPSON:** This may sound as though it's provocative but it isn't meant that way at all.

**JORDAN:** I'm accustomed to dealing with the national press corps, so I'm not unaccustomed to provocative questions or unreasonable questions. So be my guest.

**THOMPSON:** I didn't understand fully the answer to Jim's original question. Was there anything in the conduct of the campaign that made governing more difficult? In other words, was there anything, if you were to do it over again, that you would change about, just to mention a code word, the [Zbigniew] Brzezinski-[Cyrus] Vance statement?

**JORDAN:** That I made?

**THOMPSON:** Whoever made it. This statement seemingly challenged a certain bloc of people in a confrontational way. Did any of that make governing more difficult with these groups who were fragmented?

**JORDAN:** A little bit. Maybe marginally, and maybe I'm being naive. There was nothing we could have done differently in the campaign. Maybe there were things we could have done in organizing the White House that would have obscured the fact that Carter had a basically different notion about the country and its problems than did Tip O'Neill and the traditional Democrats. Sure, there were little things we could have done. We could have involved the regular Democrats earlier in the campaign. There was this whole difficulty of meshing the people that had stuck their necks out for Jimmy Carter in '74 and '75 when people were laughing at him. We had fights in the state as to who was going to head up our campaign. Was it going to be

the Senator's political man back in the state, or was going to be our man? There were all kinds of rubs like that. We made plenty of mistakes along the way, but I don't think any of that could have bridged this basic difference that existed between Jimmy Carter's notion of the country and its problems and his approach to those problems, and the approach that the "traditional" Democrats would have had him take.

**THOMPSON:** In other words, the differences were so much more fundamental than the differences Roosevelt confronted, for example. Even if the postponement of confrontation which Roosevelt so often practiced had been used, it wouldn't have made any difference?

**JORDAN:** I certainly can't profess to make these historical analogies, particularly in front of you gentlemen, but the difference is that at the time Franklin Roosevelt took office, there was an acute sense in this country that the country was in trouble. When Jimmy Carter took office, the country was in trouble but the sense was not acute. Let's contrast it to World War II. It was easy for Franklin Roosevelt to go to the American people and identify the problem. The problem was Germany and Japan. The solution was fairly obvious. We've got to build an enormous war machine and defeat them. In the '70's, in the '80's, and in the '90's, the problems that face the American people and face our country are much more subtle and much more complex. One of the shortcomings of the Carter administration was that we failed to articulate for the American people both the problem and the sacrifices required to deal with those problems. That was one of our shortcomings.

**THOMPSON:** The word paranoia has come up in almost every one of our sessions. I just wonder if there's any proof in this whether you overreacted to the differences with some of these constituencies. Were there deep differences? Apparently it was reasonably easy for you to work later on with [Hedley] Donovan, with [Lloyd] Cutler and with others. In the beginning, one had the impression you were taking on almost everybody.

**JORDAN:** There was an arrogance and a confrontational attitude. Sure there was a little arrogance. I still have a little of it left. The perception was that we thought we were the new guys on the block and we were going to show everybody a thing or two. There wasn't the sense of the thing. This gets back to Carter's gubernatorial experience. At a much different level, we'd previously had to organize the staff of state government, set priorities, try to pass legislation and deal with the legislative body. Things were so much more complex at a national level in part because of the additional foreign policy responsibility. But God knows we didn't go into it thinking that we weren't going to need to have a good relationship with George Meany, Tip O'Neill and Robert Byrd. That was certainly the perception. And it hurt us, it hurt us badly.

**BUTLER:** I would add that if it's true what we're saying about Democratic institutions, then they were at a very shaky stage themselves. You really can go institution by institution and say that they were. Then it's also reasonable to conclude that they may have been a little bit paranoid themselves. Had those institutions been more sure of themselves, they could not have very quickly leveled at us the criticism that we didn't return telephone calls and that we didn't know what we were doing. These were the kinds of criticisms that Jimmy Carter didn't face his first year as Governor of Georgia. They may well have reflected the uncertainty of the Democratic institutions themselves.

**JORDAN:** Governor [Averell] Harriman said it best, you're probably familiar with this quote. He became a dear friend of mine but he said to somebody in March or April of '76, "This man can't be elected President. I don't know him and I don't even know anybody that knows him." The sudden rise from obscurity was one of the reasons that we almost lost. The rise from obscurity in January-February of '76 to March, to Carter being treated as if he was almost the President in March, April, and May was remarkable. We had a 25- or 30-point lead over Gerald Ford. All of these people in Washington that had historically had a stake in the election of Democratic Presidents, and who had been waiting for another Democratic President for twelve or fifteen years, all of a sudden saw that some guy from Georgia was going to be our President. Did we reach out enough to these people? Probably not. Did they give us as much of a chance as they should have? Probably not.

So there were mistakes made on both sides, and there was some paranoia on both sides. But none of that can obscure the basic difference. Mr. Clark Clifford used to come see me regularly. He said several things to me that I think almost epitomized the difference. He used to cite Carter's first big mistake; the Panama Canal Treaty. We spent too much time, effort and political capital on it, he said. Normalizing relations with China was something we should have done in our second term, he thought. The conventional wisdom in Washington was that Carter was foolish to have a summit with [Menachem] Begin and [Anwar] Sadat at Camp David. You never brought heads of state together without some preordained result. Then when the Camp David peace process began to fall apart and Carter made the wild dash to Egypt and Israel to glue it back together, people said he was risking his Presidency. If you had asked the hundred wisemen of Washington what Carter should do on any of these issues, they would have advised him to do exactly opposite of what he did. "Put off the Panama Canal Treaty, put off normalizing relations with the Peoples Republic of China until a second term." That was the basic difference in approach to the Presidency.

**BUTLER:** I remember a conversation we had early on, Ham, I don't know if you remember it. Talking to Len Garment, who advised Nixon on relations with the Jewish community Ham ended up by asking him, "Well Len, what's the best that we can expect out of the Middle East situation?" Len thought for a moment, and then he said, "The best that you could expect is the status quo." The conventional wisdom on issue after issue after issue was that the status quo was what we should hope for. This made it difficult.

**JORDAN:** Carter arrived there with a different assessment of the country's needs and its mood, and a different approach to its problem.

**HARGROVE:** After the first year, particularly when perhaps you sent too much up to Congress, did you sense that you needed successes that would be popular?

**JORDAN:** Yes, but nothing we did was successful.

**HARGROVE:** You never really identified anything that was joined to a political strategy?

**JORDAN:** We were dealing with a collection of issues. The best example is the foreign policy area. We were dealing with a generation of issues that no one had dealt with because they were so politically controversial. Every one of them were losers. We spent an enormous amount of time lifting the Turkish arms embargo because it was very important to the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] alliance and to our strategic posture in the Mediterranean. That made every Greek in this country mad. The enormous time and attention that was given to the subject of peace in the Middle East hurt us in the Jewish community.

**HARGROVE:** Camp David was unpopular?

**JORDAN:** Yes sir, it sure was. Pat Caddell was doing polling for us every month or six weeks. He took a poll two or three weeks before Camp David and two or three weeks after Camp David and Carter's popularity after Camp David went up one percentage point. Then two or three months later it was continuing downward. So all of these things that we engaged were political losers. It's like the recent AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System] vote. These things like AWACS and the Mid East arms package are irrelevant to the American people. The economic issues are the ones that ultimately matter. On the economic front, our energy policy was premised on the notion that we had to raise energy prices in this country closer to the world price. That meant that people would be paying more for gasoline and for home heating oil. All of the things that we did were political losers, although at the time we thought that we could explain and defend them.

**HARGROVE:** Had you anticipated that?

**JORDAN:** Jimmy Carter could never have been reelected Governor of Georgia, even if he could have run for a second term. I told people when we went into the White House that if he did all the things that he was talking about doing, he probably wouldn't be reelected President.

**BUTLER:** We focus on what the President did or didn't do and how that would have affected his popularity, but we should remember that throughout this whole period the political opposition had a life of its own. The rhetoric of the political opposition was rhetoric which was unrelated to what we were doing in Washington. It had to do with getting the government off your back and letting the oil companies produce. There was twenty years of rhetoric growing up along an entirely different track. Many of the things that we did were simply nice little things for them to hang their hats on, like the B-1 decision. Anything we did was going to fit into a world view that the opposition had, which existed independently of anything we did up there. Eventually, we just came to a sea change.

**MOSHER:** I'm curious why the four of you fellows wanted Carter to run for the Presidency and why Carter already had this idea. Why did he want to be President? In relation to what you've said more recently, at that time did you anticipate the fragmentation of the Democratic party? Did you know what you were getting into? And if so, did you anticipate that you were going to, in effect, reform the Democratic party on a different perspective? Was this part of the motivation? At the time that McGovern was nominated, it was fairly clear that the party machinery was being fragmented. I am curious whether Carter intended to reshape the

perspective of the Democratic party. Could you describe if he was really out of touch with the needs of the American people.

**JORDAN:** No, I can't really say our motivations then were to reform the party, because I don't think we understood sitting in Atlanta in '72 how fragmented the party was. That realization came to us along the way. When it came to us, we thought that if only Carter can get elected President and into in the White House, then the Democratic party will coalesce behind him, begin to fall into place and redefine itself . That obviously was a mistaken notion. Sitting in Atlanta in '72, we underestimated or did not perceive the degree to which the party was fragmented. We realized it along the way, and saw it was helping us get elected. We underestimated the degree of difficulty that a Democratic President would have in leading the party in not a drastically new direction but in a moderately different direction.

We were sitting down in Atlanta in '72 and saw all these, I was going to say clowns, we'd see all these gentlemen come through that were running for President. It was not an overwhelming experience to see them and be around any of them. President Carter used to say when he was Governor that he could never think of himself in terms of Abraham Lincoln or Thomas Jefferson or George Washington, but he had no difficulty comparing himself to Scoop Jackson and George Wallace. In '72 when they all came through there wooing him, the notion evolved that Jimmy Carter is as intelligent and as capable as any of these people. Then we went to the '72 convention, as I've just written about that in my book, and we had this notion that Carter ought to be McGovern's Vice President.

We went down to the convention in '72, which was the first time I'd ever been to a national convention, and we found out how naive foolish we were, and how little we knew about the national political scene. But we also came back from the convention in '72 convinced that if we could understand the party structure and understand the process, that Governor Carter could be elected President. It's hard to look inside a person to answer a question about why anybody wants to be President. I suppose a combination of ambition, ego, and a real feeling that he could make a difference and could accomplish some things. All you ever had to do for Jimmy Carter was to tell him something was impossible and he would usually do it. The worst thing you could do was tell him that he couldn't do anything.

**BUTLER:** I think we felt at the time that moderate southern Democrats had a lot to be proud of in 1971-72. At a time when the country was preoccupied with Vietnam, the South was much more preoccupied with the civil rights movement, which the South resolved with some success. Certainly moderate Democrats felt that way. I think that middleclass blacks felt that way too. There was a lot of regional pride swelling up in the wake of the civil rights success. Then you had extraordinary things going on in Atlanta. For four or five years Atlanta was leading the national revival of the inner city. John Portman was the leading architect in the country. His picture and his work was on the front of national magazines. Four moderate southern Democrats were elected to southern governorships in 1970, in stark contrast to what was perceived as a reactionary South.

**JORDAN:** [Reubin] Askew, [Dale] Bumpers.



**BUTLER:** Right. This contrasted with the political drift of the nation as well as with George Wallace. So there was a feeling among modern southern Democrats that, "By God, we have a lot to offer the Democratic party and there is no reason for us to defer to Mo Udall or to Scoop Jackson."

**JONES:** Southern Democrats may even have been unifying some while the rest of the party was fragmented. First a comment and then my question. As you've described this Democratic party fragmentation, it occurred to me there was not only a horizontal fragmentation but also a good bit of vertical fragmentation between the structure at the top of the Democratic party and people who called themselves Democrats. That's always been a problem in the Democratic party but it seems to me that it has increased in recent years. The Democratic party doesn't speak as much as it used to for all Democrats. The thing I wanted to turn back to was that you in your initial statement, Hamilton, used the phrase, "preconceived notions on organizing," and I made a note to ask you about that. What were some of those preconceived notions in organizing the White House that you had when you got there?

**JORDAN:** One digression about the party and then I'll try to address the question you asked. I think that to maybe state more succinctly the way I feel about the party is to use the extreme examples. Look at the role the Democratic party played 25 or 30 years ago and the life of a person living in Chicago or New York. The party helped people. If you had a sick child or a problem, and you and your family regularly voted Democratic, you had a precinct captain who could get your child in the hospital or would bring you a turkey for Christmas or Thanksgiving. It did things for people, it also served the role of informing people about candidates and issues.

The party stood for something. The ultimate purpose of the party is to govern. To govern, you have to get elected. To get elected, you've got to get nominated. Today all the party does is serve the mechanical functions in nominating. The Democratic or the Republican party doesn't really help people any more and it doesn't inform people anymore. With the advent of television it doesn't stand for anything any more. The Democratic party and the Republican party used to represent general notions. Those perceptions of what parties stand for are very blurred today, again because of television.

**THOMPSON:** Even on civil rights?

**JORDAN:** Well, I think there are some exceptions, but the Democratic party used to stand for jobs. There were some broad notions as to what both parties stood for, which today is reflected in the Congress. Those perceptions are blurred considerably.

**MOSHER:** There still is a difference between a Democratic party's compassionate treatment of people versus what Reagan is demonstrating currently.

**JORDAN:** Of course there is a real difference, but the difference is not perceived because of television and the demise of the party organization. That perception is blurred with the average voter. The working people and the people in organized labor were equally divided in the 1980 election. They split 50-50. Look at this tax bill. It's a rape of the Treasury for advantaged people in this country. But again, the historic notions of what the party meant and what Democrat

Jimmy Carter stood for and what Republican Ronald Reagan stood for were so blurred in the mind of this working guy that he voted for Reagan instead of Carter because Reagan put on a hard hat and said he was President of the Screen Actors Guild or because he thought Carter hadn't been tough enough on the Russians. For the individual going in and casting the vote, those historic distinctions and meanings of what both parties are about are very blurred.

**YOUNG:** I want to get back to Chuck's question. Let's get to the organization question first.

**JONES:** You've mentioned preconceived notions of organizing. I am interested in what those were.

**JORDAN:** Well, several things. This would be the stuff I have to put off the record. I don't like to go around talking about any of my colleagues, even Joe Califano. When people ask me about Califano when I lecture, I just refuse to talk about it because I don't really like to go around and say unattractive things about people.

The mistake the President made was that he and his staff tended to compartmentalize problems and issues in the White House too much. Our organization reflected that. We also overreacted to some of the excesses of the past. As a result of the Nixon experience, it became a campaign statement that we would not have a powerful chief of staff in the White House. "I'm going to be the President and I'm going to make decisions and run things." We never sat down and talked about whether Jimmy Carter should make that statement or not. That was a political reaction to the excesses of the Nixon administration. It was also the kind of hands-on President he thought he would be.

We made some of the same mistakes that every group makes going into the White House. Now you have the phenomenon of the Reagan administration coming in and overreacting. Just as we overreacted to some of the excesses of the Nixon Presidency, they overreacted to some of the things that were said about us. It was said that the white House wasn't nice when Jimmy Carter was President. So they've gone to the other extreme and they're now catching it for Nancy Reagan buying china. They said that Jimmy Carter was too involved in and was immersed in details and was never able to rise up and see the larger picture. Now about this new structure they're saying that Reagan is not engaged enough in managing the country's problems. So you know I'd say the main mistake we made the first year or so was compartmentalizing these issues.

Another mistake was Vance and Brzezinski not understanding enough of the political realities and constraints in terms of what we were doing in foreign policy. The compartmentalization and the failure to set clear public priorities were two key mistakes. The thing that President Reagan has done magnificently, and that we did poorly, has been to push everything else to the side for the first five or six months of his Presidency and talk about an economic package. They managed that issue well publicly.

Our big priority when we came in was energy. But you wouldn't have known it if you were sitting here reading the paper or if you were a member of Congress, because every time they turned around we had sent some new program or were dealing with some new issue. President Carter—and Governor Carter—was almost incapable of seeing a problem and not addressing it.

He had difficulty setting clear public priorities. Privately and internally the priorities of the administration were really fairly obvious, but we did a poor job of defining them and presenting them both to the American people and to the political community.

**JONES:** Could you say a little something about your role in those early days of setting up the organization?

**JORDAN:** The first thing that I did for the first three or four months, the most debilitating and terrible thing, was staffing the government. Frankly, after having worked with the President and Vice President [Walter] Mondale in picking the Cabinet, having to worry about who was going to be in the SBA [Small Business Administration] in Houston wasn't very interesting to me. Staffing the government is just a politically and emotionally debilitating process. Just to keep that away from the President, I spent an enormous amount of time the first three or four months going around and around with Cabinet secretaries and trying to weigh political considerations in terms of who was going to be the assistant secretaries and so forth. I was preoccupied for the first four or five months of the administration doing that.

There were so many people in the White House with specific responsibilities. Stu [Eizenstat] had to deal with domestic policy, Jody [Powell] had to deal with the press, Frank Moore had to deal with the Congress. Vice President Mondale and myself were really the only two people who had a lot of flexibility to focus on things that were topical and that were problems for the President. So if I had to tell you how I spent that first year, I spent the first three or four months on personnel matters. We then got into the Panama Canal treaty negotiation and ratification fight, which we saw as being important in itself but also a dry run for SALT ratification. The Bert Lance case paralyzed the smooth operation of the White House for two or three months. I was a short order cook that first year.

**BUTLER:** I had worked for Carter his first year as Governor of Georgia and then I went out and I started my own business. When the campaign started, I stayed in touch with Ham and worked on these things with him in my spare time. But when the campaign was in full swing, I called Ham a couple of times and wouldn't get any answers back and wouldn't get my calls returned. One day, within two or three weeks of the Pennsylvania primary, Ham called me and said come down here and help me answer these telephones. Here we were with Jimmy Carter on the verge of being a national candidate—Pennsylvania put us over the top—and the political operation of the Carter campaign consisted of Hamilton Jordan and a newly-recruited secretary, Caroline Wellons. Every damn phone call which came in on political questions from all across the country had to be fielded by Hamilton Jordan and this girl from South Carolina who was completely in a daze.

Ham not only had those calls coming in, but he had a campaign strategy to work out and he had the President's personal political business to handle. That role really never changed for Hamilton through the first year and a half. I used to try to tell Ham to try to do something about it, but there wasn't much we could do about it. The President's personal political business took an enormous amount of time. There was nobody else who could make those telephone calls. If, for example, the President wanted someone to call a close political supporter who was upset about something, the only person who could handle that was Hamilton Jordan.

Those were time-consuming things for Ham. First he had to make two or three calls so he could understand the pros and cons of the problem. Then he had to spend time with the supporter who was upset. Then he had to go do something to resolve the problem. So Hamilton was torn as the President's chief political aide. He was the only person the President could turn to on sensitive matters. And he was the court of appeals in the White House. He got the worst of all possible worlds on the chief of staff situation because he was first among equals. He was expected to organize things, but he didn't have the staff to structure his effort.

**JONES:** And no mandate to be chief of staff.

**BUTLER:** No mandate.

**JORDAN:** I didn't have the ability. I got rid of people and I made people on the senior staff get rid of deputies after I had that responsibility. But I did have the worst of both worlds. I had the perception of being a guy that could do all of these things, but no real mandate from the President or my colleagues.

**BUTLER:** His own personal staff, such as it was, was comprised of people who didn't fit in anywhere else in the chart. It was people who were useful, who had a role to play, but who really didn't fit into any of the other organizational structures in the White House. He was pulled in as many possible ways as one could be pulled. I doubt if that's an unusual situation. There are probably one or two people in every White House who wind up in a terribly difficult situation organizationally. On the one hand there'll be the guy who's expected to pick up that phone instantly and handle the President's personal political problems. And on the other hand this same person is expected to give organizational leadership to the White House staff.

**MOSHER:** Are you describing only the first year?

**BUTLER:** I think that was true for the first year and a half. It may have eased up some later.

**JORDAN:** I still had this amalgam ranging from somebody who had helped us in the '76 campaign that needed some attention, to advising the President on political situations, to a Senator not being satisfied with the answer they got from Frank Moore's office. I ended up as a kind of catchall for all these different people who saw me, because my role was so grossly exaggerated by the media, as the person that could solve their problems. It was hard for me to focus in a sustained way on things.

**MOSHER:** Was this true all the way through, Hamilton?

**JORDAN:** No, sir. It was acutely the case during the first year. It was a problem I continued to have all the way through, but particularly the first year.

**REDFORD:** I wanted to get this back to this discussion we had about fragmentation. As you moved from the campaign into the problem of setting up the government, how conscious were you at that time of what the problem of fragmentation would be? Did you have an opportunity to

assess, in the way you had done removing the obstacles to getting elected, the problems that you would have in governing a divided party, and if so, what kinds of strategies did you develop?

**JORDAN:** We considerably underestimated the degree of fragmentation. We hoped that despite all of these differences, now that the Democrats finally had the White House and finally had a President, we were going to get more help and loyalty from these people and institutions than in fact we did. We were aware that it was there. We were not aware how extreme the fragmentation was. Either hopefully, wishfully, or naively, we thought that these people would fall in line with the President on some of these issues.

**YOUNG:** The impression that I get is that you were quite aware of the fragmentation in the electorate and knew how to play it to your advantage as far as the election was concerned. You said he couldn't have gotten the nomination if it had not been for that kind of fragmentation. But you just didn't perceive the degree to which that fragmentation was institutionalized in Washington and in the Congress. You were not thinking about those problems.

**JORDAN:** There are not many things that if we had to do over, I couldn't think of marginal changes, and in some cases significant changes, we would make. If we had to do it all over again, I really don't know how we could approach the problem. The problem is the fragmentation of the party and of the institutions. I don't know how a President sitting in the White House gives some structure and cohesion to institutions lacking them.

**REDFORD:** You didn't have any discussions at that time right after the election about the problems you would have dealing with the Congress?

**JORDAN:** Oh, yes sir, yes sir, yes sir. I was thinking more about constituent groups and political groups. Oh, but yes sir, we knew we were going to have a tough time with the Congress. The problems we had with the Congress did not surprise me. I had seen Jimmy Carter as Governor, and he stayed in a damn row with the Georgia legislature the whole four years he was Governor. He had a largely successful record in what he did. I knew his approach to the Presidency was going to be, I knew that he was going to have at least the same degree of problem with the Congress.

**REDFORD:** You don't think that you could have anticipated any more the kind of problems that you were getting into that first year?

**JORDAN:** There were certainly things we could have done better in our relations with Congress. But it would not have obscured the different way that the President and Tip O'Neill saw the issues and the problems facing the country. We chuckled all during the transition of the Reagan administration. Reagan was getting all these high marks for being with Congress and doing things with the Congress in advance. Jimmy Carter did all of those things. He had all kinds of sessions. We calculated that he had more meetings with congressional leaderships and committee chairs prior to taking office than Ronald Reagan has. We weren't derelict in failing to recognize that dealing with them was a need that we had.

I knew too there were going to be problems because I knew that Carter was going to do a bunch of controversial things. We made the Democrats in Congress vote on issues that were controversial to us and to them. You give the Congress on any occasion a chance to vote on something controversial or put it off two days or two years, and they'll vote to put it off. Carter said, "You've got to vote on the Panama Canal Treaty, you've got to vote on the Turkish arms embargo and you've got to vote on energy." The Democrats yearned to get the White House. Then they do, but it's a guy that they don't know. It's a guy that sees issues somewhat differently from a good many of them. On top of all that, he's going to make us vote on these controversial proposals.

**REDFORD:** Could you describe for us the relationships in the White House with respect to congressional contacts? How much did you participate in that and how much did Moore participate? What were the relationships?

**JORDAN:** Frank Moore's staff per person was the strongest staff in the White House. It was stronger than Eizenstat's staff or Brzezinski's staff or my staff. Per person it was the strongest group of individuals with the greatest accumulation of knowledge and political skills in the White House. Without exception. Bill Cable, Jim Free, Bob Thomson, Bob Beckel, it was an extraordinary assortment of talent. But having a great congressional staff didn't bridge this very different way we saw the problems and the issues. I was a court of appeals and a catchall for people anywhere that had any kind of problem. My role had been grossly exaggerated by the press.

Jody, Frank Moore, and I realized early on that we could not get into a situation where any time a member of Congress was dissatisfied with the answer they got from Frank Moore or Frank's staff, that he would be able to get a better answer from Jody or me. We made a conscious decision before we went into the White House with Frank Moore that Jody and I would stay off the Hill and that we would direct congressional requests and problems to Frank, because Frank's office had to keep the tally sheet. He had to know who was voting with us, who was voting against us and who wanted an appointment to see the President or a picture with the President or some who had constituent problem. Frank had to keep the tote sheet as to who really was deserving of help from the administration. So we made a conscious effort to try to deflect congressional calls.

**YOUNG:** That's why you never got to know Tip O'Neill?

**JORDAN:** No, I did know Tip O'Neill. I read all these things in the paper. There's so many things that were said about this thing—that Tip O'Neill called me and I didn't give him his inaugural tickets. I'm no fool. I never would have done that. That never even took place. Where I made a mistake was I should have personally gone up to the leadership on the Hill the first several weeks of the administration and explained to them our approach to congressional relations. It was perceived that we had an arrogance toward the Congress, and that I felt I was too good or too busy to deal with the Congress. It wasn't that at all. I didn't want to set myself up as someone that could undermine Frank Moore's posture as the person for members of Congress to deal with.

The decision made by Jody and me, two highly visible people coming out of the campaign, to stay off the Hill and not get into Frank's business was the correct decision. The mistake that we made, and that I made specifically, was not going and personally explaining to the leadership, "You're not going to see me on the Hill. The reason you're not going to see me on the Hill is not because we don't appreciate you or care about you but because we want to enhance Frank's role."

**BUTLER:** There's one other dimension to the question of whether we anticipated the problem of unifying the Party and Congress. Look at the choice of Vice President Mondale, and the decision to retain Bob Strauss as party chairman, and that whole array of Cabinet officers that were selected. Averell Harriman told us one day that it was the best Cabinet he'd ever seen. There was a time when the center Cabinet was considered a first class choice, Cabinet officers. Most of those decisions were made on the basis of which constituencies needed to be represented. That was one of the major reasons for selecting a lot of those people. Starting as early as June, those problems were being anticipated. One of the surprises was that we didn't get as much mileage out of people as we thought.

**JORDAN:** Again, that was one of these considerable gaps between perception and reality. Right in the middle of everything Carter had Fritz Mondale. One of the reasons he had Mondale was because the former Senator had this Washington and congressional experience. He had Bob Strauss who is the personification of the Democratic Washington insider. He had Cy Vance and Harold Brown who were establishment figures from previous administration. Yet he received no credit for having these people in the middle. Instead, there was a perception that I was making economic decisions or having a big impact on foreign policy decisions, which was just absurd.

**BUTLER:** That came out of left field to me. I was just appalled by the fact that people wouldn't know that Cy Vance, not Hamilton Jordan, was the Secretary of State.

**REDFORD:** Were you too much in the public eye as a staff member? Was that part of the problem?

**JORDAN:** Yes. That wasn't my doing entirely. I didn't go up there and hold press conferences. But sure, I was too much in the public eye. I never went to Washington with the idea of being a public figure. I underestimated the fact that anybody that's with the President is a public figure. When I arrived in Washington there was an article written to describe me as the second most powerful man in Washington. I knew then that I was in big trouble. I knew then I was really in trouble, because I didn't give interviews to the press or hold press conferences. I didn't go there seeking public attention, but I sure got it.

**FENNO:** I wanted to ask a question about the rhythm of the Presidency. Landon talked about an eighteen-month learning curve and you felt that after eighteen months you sort of got things in stride.

**JORDAN:** I think that's a bit long. I think after the first year we had settled in pretty good.

**FENNO:** You talked about the problems of the first year, which made it a difficult time. Well, political scientists have a notion that the first year for a President is terribly important and that you can lose a lot in the first year if you don't get a kind of momentum going. As you look over the four-year sequence, did you have any sense that you lost valuable momentum in the beginning?

**JORDAN:** I've never heard political scientists apply the rhythm method to the Presidency. It's an interesting notion. Everything is exaggerated. The first six or eight months it was said that Carter was all style and no substance. You know, "Carter is a great manipulator of public opinion but he doesn't stand for anything." You go from that to two years into the administration people on the Hill screaming and shouting he's sending too much legislation up here. It has so much to do with perceptions. When I turn on television—like this morning and see all this on television about [Al] Haig and Richard Allen—the dark side of me kind of chuckles, but the better part of me says this is really tragic that this is happening because it's really hurting Reagan and it's really hurting our country and it's really hurting our foreign policy interests.

It has a lot to do again with the role that media, particularly television, has in conveying these impressions to the American people. There's no proportion or balance to television. Television news doesn't have balance. They can't cover a small story in a small way or a medium story in a medium size way. Everything is enormous. You also have the phenomenon that in television you don't have a group of experts reporting on subjects and issues that they understand. You don't have in television someone like Drew Middleton that writes on defense matters for the *New York Times*. You don't have somebody with ABC or CBS or NBC that can report on defense matters in the balanced and expert way that Drew Middleton has.

Instead you have these glib people who have to stand up for two or three minutes but who are speaking to 20 or 30 or 40 million people and making enormous judgments on what's important and what's not important and has the President done well or poorly. I don't know if there's any way for a President to look very good, to have a rhythm as you describe it, or to have a good first year. It's unlikely because of the attitude of people in the press towards the institutions and particularly toward the Presidency.

I'll use the example of what's happening to Haig now. Haig is one of my least favorite people in the administration, but I think the coverage of this past weekend when you had Haig saying to Jack Anderson that somebody in the White House is trying to get me or has been trying to get me for nine months is unfortunate. That's a very human reaction to what's happened to him and probably true. But Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday that was the lead subject on all three networks, it was the subject of front page stories in most newspapers, columns, editorial comment, I don't think that's the most important thing that's happened in this country for two or three days this week.

I really blame television. Television is an enormous obstacle to a President projecting an image, an impression or addressing a problem in a sustained way. And we failed. We failed. One of the ironies is that we understood so well how to use the media to get there and we failed miserably in articulating in a sustained way what Jimmy Carter was about and how he wanted to deal with these issues. So I may have dodged your question.



**FENNO:** You didn't. Let me just finish it. If you think the media makes it difficult to have a good first year and that the media probably made it difficult for you to have a good first year, my question is, if you don't have a good first year does that have an effect on all subsequent years? And if so to what effect?

**JORDAN:** Well, I don't think we've had enough experience and again I hate to harp on the same thing but I think they're valid and all part of the same ball of wax. I don't think we had enough experience with Presidents functioning under these new circumstances. Television, the fragmentation I mentioned, trying to address this new generation of problems. The obstacles to the modern day President are going to continue; I can't see them changing in the next ten or fifteen years. The obstacles to our Presidents being successful or being perceived as being successful are enormous. I don't see that changing.

Yes, if you have a poor first year it makes it more difficult to have a good second year or a good third year or a good fourth year. My guess is right now, for example, that President Reagan will be as vulnerable in '84 as we were in 1980. My guess would also be, though, that due to the degree of fragmentation, particularly in the Democratic party, the Democrats will not be able to take advantage of it. But I wouldn't be at all surprised to see in the next ten or fifteen years a series of one-term Presidents that will lead us in one direction for four years and somebody comes in and tries to take us back in the other direction. It's not a very happy situation. It doesn't bode well for the short term future.

I thought of a better way to express my feelings about the question Dick posed about if you have a bad first year, is there a way to recover it? I was fairly pessimistic on that on the basis that I think the institution of the press makes it difficult for any President to have a good first year. But a better way for me to express it is by noting that by the end of the first year, there were a number of perceptions about the Carter administration. Fair or unfair, the perception was that he didn't know how to deal with the Congress, that he was not successful in getting things through the Congress, that he was surrounded by too many people from Georgia who were in over their heads, and that he was overwhelmed by all the details of issues in his Presidency. By the end of the first year there were six or eight broad perceptions about Carter, his Presidency, and his administration. Those perceptions never changed. It's difficult to change perceptions once they take hold, fairly or unfairly.

**YOUNG:** Let me put to you a view that some others have expressed when they talk in the same area, about what one of the things that they feel really hurt the Carter administration. You've talked about and I think we fully understand the kind of fragmentation that you're talking about. One of the things that your predecessors here haven't made so much of a point of as you have, and it's very interesting and useful, is that we are usually inundated with everything that's wrong with the administration, such as the President not knowing how to deal with Congress. You have emphasized the balancing view that you've got to understand that there were fundamental philosophical differences between this President and his party, especially those Democrats on Capital Hill. That's a very useful and I think an important perception to make.

One of the views that has been expressed is that the Carter Presidency in fact had this fragmentation within its own ranks and that it suffered greatly from a lack of internal discipline in the sense that it was very difficult to get the President's own appointees rallied behind a decision he had made and speak with one voice. Landon mentioned there was a cleavage between the political people and the policy people, which is inevitable in any administration. You felt that that problem was solved in the first eighteen months. But then you come back to the fact that in '79 there was an agonizing reappraisal or self appraisal.

**JORDAN:** It wasn't agonizing. Parts of it were fun.

**YOUNG:** I'd like to hear something about that because it goes to this question. Out of that came a sense that the administration did have a problem within itself of internal discipline. There was a clear attempt, it seemed from the outside, to tighten the ship, both within the White House itself as symbolized in the decision to move from the spokes of the wheel to putting somebody in charge of staff work and staff operations in the White House, and in terms of the changes in the Cabinet. As the Carter administration evolved, there were some perceptions of problems within itself in addition to these perceptions of the problems in dealing with the rest of Washington and the rest of the country.

**JORDAN:** Good point. How did we try to accommodate this fragmentation and how did we reach out to these people? One of the ways we tried to accommodate it was to try to people the administration with representatives of these different groups and organizations, such as the feminist movement, be sure that there were women in the administration. We took some from the environmentalist movement so that this group would be represented. This group in the party and that group in the party were represented more than the President. The primary loyalty or obligation felt by many in the administration was not to the President who had appointed them, but to the organization that they represented, which they perceived had leveraged them into this new position in the White House. So when it came to a question of supporting the President's position on a proposal, because it might be a good deal less than their organization or constituency would want it to be, more times than not they'd go against the President. They did so internally privately and publicly.

**REDFORD:** Do you think it was a mistake to compose the White House with representatives from various groups?

**JORDAN:** It happened in the extreme out in the departments and agencies, but it certainly happened in the White House. Unfortunately, there weren't enough people in Georgia for us to people the whole government. We got criticized for that so often. Charles Kirbo always said we were overreacting to this thing of all the Georgians. Griffin Bell, Kirbo and I had lunch together in my office at one point. They said they wished that we had been able to fill the whole government with people from Georgia because at least we could count on them.

**YOUNG:** You might have a team, but then again you might not. I'm from Georgia too.

**JORDAN:** Well, you would have been something. Anybody from Georgia that could walk and talk at the same time deserved consideration. We almost tried to duplicate in the administration

the chaos and the fragmentation that existed out in the party. The way we were going to deal with all these people was by having a black and an Hispanic and a woman and an environmentalist and a consumer type. So in trying to reach out and be able to stay in touch with all these moving parts of the party, we almost created the same set of tensions within our own administration. Because of this notion of Cabinet government, we did not have the disciplined organization within the White House and within the administration we should have had. We had too much democracy and not enough organization.

**MOSHER:** When you made appointments, to what extent in that process did you take into account this representative criteria and to what extent did you stress loyalty to Carter?

**JORDAN:** We didn't stress the loyalty factor enough. The Reagan administration has done a much better job of that than we did. They've got more ideological compatibility and more loyalty within their administration than we had within ours at the outset, which hurt us badly. Also, because of Watergate and Vietnam, there existed among some second and third level people in our administration an attitude that when you lose out in a policy debate with the Secretary or even with the President, if things go against you, you have a right to go public and leak a memo that embarrasses or compromises the President. We had a lot of that going on. We had a lot of people who saw a decision going in a direction differently than they wanted it to go. They would leak a memo that showed the other side of the story, and we'd wake up and see that in the *Washington Post*. It would compromise or make more difficult the decision the President faced, or made it more difficult to get it through the Congress.

**REDFORD:** What was Carter's attitude on that? Did he fire anybody for that?

**JORDAN:** It was always difficult to pin down the individual, and it was always difficult to prove it, although you always had hunches and notions. One time he called in the whole top echelon of the State Department and basically told them off for a number of leaks that had come out in the foreign policy area to the embarrassment of Secretary Vance. But to answer your question, no. We should have had a few highly publicized examples during the first six months so if people weren't loyal to the President, at least they would have some fear of him. The lack of discipline was a major shortcoming of ours. But again, that lack of discipline and loyalty was inherent in our effort to try to duplicate within the administration all the constituent groups and organizations, and all of these key policy problems, which characterized the Democratic party.

**YOUNG:** In light of the fallout that came from that, would you advise another President to go about the staffing that way?

**JORDAN:** There weren't enough people in Georgia.

**YOUNG:** You had no option?

**JORDAN:** Yes. I don't know anybody in Georgia that could be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. You end up having to rely on congressional staff members and people that have been in government in previous administrations. You have to reach out to these obviously talented people. However, they often have a different agenda than you have. I think of what the

Reagan administration has done. There was a lot of criticism about how long it took them to get all of their appointments in place, but I think they did a very thorough job of screening these people politically and being sure that there was some modicum of loyalty and compatibility with what the President believes in. We didn't do that.

**YOUNG:** Particularly at the subcabinet level.

**JORDAN:** Particularly at the subcabinet level. I never had the right to call Secretary Vance and say to him, "Cy, person X or person Y is not qualified to be assistant secretary for this or that," and I shouldn't have had that right. My pressure was, "You know Cy, we've got to have a black in the state department, we've got to have some women, you know we've got to have Hispanics." Our pressure was not for compatibility or loyalty. The pressure these people felt from the White House in the first three or four months of setting up their departments was for their appointments to reflect men, women, black, Hispanics, and so forth.

**YOUNG:** One can trace a lot of the problem of public perception, which is instructed by the press, to this problem. That's a proposition I would offer you. Examples have been offered by your predecessors at these conferences of just how difficult it made things. The President would make a decision, we were told, and the decision would be communicated to various people on the Hill before the person had hardly left the office. There would be somebody else in there for the administration saying, "Oh, the President just had to say that, he doesn't really mean that." That gets out into the press and contributes to the notion of a President who's indecisive and weak. In addition it presents the picture of an administration where the left hand may not know what the right hand is doing, an administration fraught with internal conflicts. "The President can't even control his own people; he's no leader."

**JORDAN:** We had some of those problems, but with a few exceptions, they were exaggerated. But we had some of those problems. That was the gap between perception and reality. Anybody that has known President Carter or Governor Carter and watched him operate knows that he's a tough son of a bitch. The one thing he is not is indecisive. The way these decisions were carried out or not carried out often reflected indecisiveness. The other thing is that in the world and in this country, there are a lot of inconsistencies. The black and white decisions don't get to the Oval Office. Every one of them is a shade of gray. So it's hard to make ten decisions and lay them out on the table and say, "Those ten decisions are completely compatible." They usually are not compatible at all. Your basic premise that we had a lack of loyalty in the administration is correct. That we had a lack of discipline in the administration is correct. If we had to do it all over again—

**YOUNG:** You would have fired somebody.

**JORDAN:** Oh, we would have fired some people, we would have had tighter control over the agencies.

**REDFORD:** Do you think in the White House operations, that the President ought to follow the principle of having no representation of special groups or of not searching for people who'd be expected to have a different kind of perspective?

**JORDAN:** Well, my head and my heart kind of tug at me in different ways in response to that question. Carter resented having to have a black in the White House to deal with blacks and an Hispanic to deal with Hispanics. He thought that was patronizing and insulting to the groups that they were dealing with. But when we sat down with five or six of the civil rights leaders just after we were elected, the top of their list of demands was who they were going to deal with in the administration. They wanted to deal with Carter, who said, “I can’t deal with you on a day-to-day basis.” Then they wanted to deal with Jordan. “Well, Jordan can’t deal with you day in, day out.” So they said they would have to have a top level black in the White House to know that their views would be heard. There was enormous political pressure to reflect these constituent groups in the White House.

Carter resented it because he thought it was patronizing, but we did it anyway. I do think the other argument for doing that is its symbolic importance. It is important for people that have not been represented in the past, such as women, blacks, and Hispanics, to be able to see that there are women on the Federal bench and Hispanics on the Federal bench and blacks in the higher echelons of government, including the White House. So there’s a strong argument for doing that. The catch is finding people that can do that who are also qualified for their jobs. Sometimes you have to stretch and reach a little bit to have that representation.

**REDFORD:** So there were variations in philosophy and ideology within the White House. Should you have people that represent the conservative point of view, the liberal point of view?

**JORDAN:** I don’t think there was. There was much less of that in the White House than there was in the administration at large. You didn’t have a “conservative” faction versus a “liberal” faction. You did have people like Jack Watson who was dealing with mayors and Governors, and Frank who was up on the Hill, Stu Eizenstat who was dealing with issues people, policy people and department heads. These people were on the front lines and in the trenches. They usually reported back the conventional point of view. “You can’t do this because it would irritate the speaker.” “You can’t do this because it’ll make the labor movement mad.” These things were often contrary to what Carter was trying to do. We had less of a liberal-conservative thing, and more of how we were going to approach these issues. How would we deal with them technically. Would you say that’s right, Landon?

**BUTLER:** Yes, I think the job of the White House and of the White House staffer has much less to do with ideology than it does with the day-to-day mechanics of running the President’s business. I always thought we were just short-order cooks and super secretaries. We lined up meetings, we worked on protocol, we gave the President advice—and hopefully it was shrewd advice—on how to deal with groups of people. But our role was not to advance various points of view from an ideological standpoint. Indeed, when we did, we were usually overwhelmed by either the people in the Cabinet or in the various departments. That’s where policy was formulated.

**JORDAN:** Stu Eizenstat was an incredibly honest broker in presenting all these issues and problems. He’d say, “Here’s the problem. You’ve got five options. This is where so and so stands.” Stu would have his own strong feeling and point of view, which was often decisive in

Carter's decisions. But you didn't have a lot of ideological bickering in the White House. You did have political bickering. "If Carter does this, it's going to make this guy mad or it's going to insult this group or insult this member of Congress."

**BUTLER:** We almost never heard ideological debates. Occasionally, when we did hear them, it was a breath of fresh air, but we almost never heard in the White House a discussion that we can't do something because of what would it do to the poor or what it would do to the blacks. That was not our job. Policy was made by appointments in the agencies and the departments. I can't remember a senior staff discussion in which we talked ideologically about what was the right thing to do from a conservative standpoint or a liberal standpoint.

**JORDAN:** It was discussed in terms of what Carter's campaign promises were and what his own philosophy was and what the impact would be. But there was never a liberal band in the White House and a moderate band and a conservative band all pushing their own points of view.

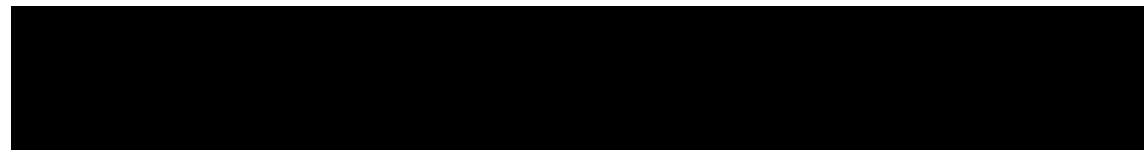
**BUTLER:** It's worth asking whether or not the perception of disloyalty was a symptom of a loss of political momentum and a symptom of the problem of having no Democratic consensus, or whether it helped cause our loss of political momentum. My own inclination is to say is that it was more a symptom of the loss of momentum than it was a cause of the loss of momentum.

**JORDAN:** When we got in real trouble politically, like with the Bert Lance question, of these two or three hundred people that represented the President or were presidential appointees—I could never prove this—75% were on the side that'd say, "Carter really screwed that thing up. I worked for him and I sure disagree with the way they handled this." There was no loyalty given to Carter.

**YOUNG:** I don't think I can recall an administration in which there was more badmouthing of the boss and of the people close to him by people presumably below and appointed by them. A lot of historians are going to wonder why that was. Was there something unique about the administration?

**JORDAN:** Part of it was our fault because of the lack of discipline and organization. Part of it was just a symptom of the times, in which the inclination, absent in our political system 20 or 30 years ago, that you could go public if the decision went against you was predominant.

**HARGROVE:** It also reflects this lack of congruence between the Carter people and the Democrats.



**HARGROVE:** But a Democratic President had to staff his administration with those kinds, as he said earlier.

**JORDAN:** If we had known some people from South Carolina, if we had two states to draw from instead of one, we would have done a lot better.

**YOUNG:** I'm amazed at the cohesion you attribute to the southerners. We've heard different.

**FENNO:** I bet you knew everybody in New Hampshire.

**BUTLER:** You all can probably develop this idea more thoroughly than I can, but there's a notion among political scientists that there are really four political parties: the Congressional Democrats, the Presidential Democrats, the Congressional Republicans and the Presidential Republicans. The assistant secretaries and their staffers either came out of the various constituency organizations or they came off the Hill, from the Congressional Democratic party. Time and time again a senior staffer on the Hill would move over to be one of our agency heads.

**JORDAN:** And for every person we appointed on the Hill, there were fifteen disappointed people who thought they should have had the appointment or that they should be in the White House.

**YOUNG:** That's better than it was in [Thomas] Jefferson's time. He said, "For every appointment I make I get one ingrate and a hundred enemies."

**BUTLER:** There were lot of people who came off the Hill who served the President loyally and very well. I think we need to remember that.

**JORDAN:** Name them.

**BUTLER:** No, I think there really were. But there were others who were not loyal.

**JORDAN:** Frank Moore's staff is a good example.

**BUTLER:** Sure. But there were others who would pass a difficult decision to the President, a decision which could have been decided at a lower level where someone could have taken the heat. The President would make the decision and then the word would go out, not publicly, but in a late night phone call or at a cocktail party, "I recommended this, but Jimmy Carter did that." The President got saddled with the bad decisions.

**JORDAN:** To tie that to your question about if you can change the perceptions the first year, I think if we'd had the Camp David summit and the abrupt kind of public change in the way we were doing business the first summer we were in office instead of the third, then that would have probably been seen as a President six months into his administration not satisfied with the way things were going, cracking the whip and changing the way that he did business. But I think the fact that it came in the third year we were in office was almost seen as something contrived not to deal with the problem but just to give the impression of dealing with the problem.

**BUTLER:** The Democrats in Congress really had been setting the country's agenda for the sixteen or so years before. A big permanent establishment developed around that Democratic

Congressional power center—the law firms, the lobbyists, the special interest groups, and so forth. For an awful lot of people who moved into our government, the maintenance of their relationships with that permanent establishment was much more important to them than their own loyalty to Jimmy Carter, whom they never met.

**JORDAN:** A friend of mine, a brave young man that really ran our 1980 campaign, was Tom Donilon, who is a first year student at the University of Virginia law school. He did a study which I failed to mention earlier, of Carter's first six months in office. He looked at all of the evening news and front page headlines in most of the newspapers. Eighty-five percent of the public criticism of the Carter administration in the first six months came from Democrats.

**REDFORD:** Whether the White House ought to be staffed as a small operation, cohesive and loyal, in order to provide a more successful operation, or as one which carries the principle of representation into the White House and thereby makes a larger, more diverse staff, is the issue of this discussion.

**JORDAN:** In the abstract, I would certainly prefer it be a small and lean group. Today government is so big and there are so many moving pieces, it is physically impossible to monitor and manage all these things with a small group of people.

**BUTLER:** Fragmentation was a problem in the later movement, an area that I know well. If the AFL-CIO had been a strong institution which ran its own business when we were in office, then it would have been perfectly possible for Hamilton or myself to have dealt simply with Lane Kirkland or Tom Donahue, and that would have been our relationship with the labor movement. But, in fact, the labor movement was so weakened that we had to deal with fifteen or twenty international presidents in addition to dealing with the AFL-CIO. That increases the work load by a factor of fifteen or twenty: it means we must bring each of those fifteen or twenty international presidents and their own executive council members in for a briefing on tax reform, or for a briefing on SALT, all of which involves an enormous amount of time. The numbers of fragmented groups were extraordinary.

**JORDAN:** The numbers of people, groups and problems just make it physically impossible for a small, lean group of people to manage and monitor the government on behalf of the President.

**YOUNG:** Not to speak of responding to everything that comes in.

**JORDAN:** Sure.

**BUTLER:** Exactly.

**YOUNG:** The amount of stuff that moves in, the amount of calls that come in, the amount of reports that have to be made by law.

**BUTLER:** It's also complicated by the fact that the news media does a very, very poor job of reporting the substance of a given issue. We could not rely on the media to explain the pros and cons of a given issue to the public. We had to bring people in ourselves and, for example, go



through the Panama Canal treaties. One can look long and hard during that whole debate for an explanation in the media of the Panama Canal treaties themselves. We can read all about the politics of the issue, who was up and who was down and who was winning and who was losing, but if we wanted to convince United Brands that the treaties were in their best economic interest, someone from the White House had to sit down and go through the treaties with them.

**YOUNG:** Another view of the things within the administration that turned out to exacerbate this external fragmentation was the contributing factor that either the President's staff system or his own operating style caused a great many things to be brought in to him. He took on a great deal, therefore he got identified with a great many more issues than maybe he should have gotten identified with. I'd like to have your comment on that because it's been a view that's been offered us. It's been said that that changed later on.

**JORDAN:** It did change. The first year was obviously a learning experience, for the President and for the staff. He was compartmentalizing and dealing with too many things himself. That did change later on, but that perception never changed. He tried initially to be President in the same way he had been Governor. That was just not possible, but he saw that and changed. We had strong Cabinet members who kept the problems off his desk. The less strong Cabinet members ended up bringing most of their problems and laying them on his desk. The way we were organized didn't protect the President from issues and problems that didn't really merit presidential attention.

**YOUNG:** That was coupled with something you said earlier. When President Carter saw a problem, he had to do something about it.

**JORDAN:** It was hard for him to say, "No, there's a problem, but I'm not going to deal with it." It was just difficult for him.

**BUTLER:** The only place in the administration where politics and policy at the highest level came together was in the person of Jimmy Carter. There was no point below Jimmy Carter where politics and policy came together. He was the man who had to apply the policy judgments to political decisions or the political judgments to policy decisions. One of the things that's kind of appealing to me about the Reagan White House is that apparently policy and politics come together at a level below Reagan. On the other hand, I think he has a very weak Cabinet. That's going to hurt him in the long run. Carter reserved for himself the role of combining politics and policy.

**JORDAN:** But that changed after a while.

**YOUNG:** Didn't you, Hamilton, as time went on, bring together those two things?

**JORDAN:** Yes, but it was never done across the board because I didn't have the substantive background to make judgments on these things. Stu had the substantive background to make judgments on some of the domestic issues, but not to always factor in the political considerations. So selectively, yes, I tried to bring those things together. And we did things the last two or three years that we didn't do the first year. I started sitting in on all of the foreign

policy breakfasts after the first year. We started meeting as a staff. A small group started this routine of having a ten o'clock meeting with the President. None of those things happened the first year, which contributed to the problems.

**YOUNG:** Many of those who have preceded you have talked about the evolution of those meetings as an effort to coordinate particularly the political with the policy side. It was a real problem for some of the people on the congressional liaison staff.

**JORDAN:** They bled for the lack of those mechanisms the first year.

**YOUNG:** Even to the point of not even knowing, except by reading in the *New York Times*, what the policy was going to be. The round of meetings apparently began about 7:30 AM, after which the deputies went back to their principals. There was a senior staff meeting and after the senior staff meeting, at about ten thirty the senior staff went in for a meeting with the President. That was routine, wasn't it?

**JORDAN:** The deputies identified problems, opportunities, general information, and gave me an agenda. We had a senior staff meeting at eight thirty and we talked about all those things. Jody would tell everybody the spin he was going to try to put on the news story or what we should say about a different issue that was coming up. Frank Moore would give a report on votes coming up in Capitol Hill.

**YOUNG:** Did you chair these meetings?

**JORDAN:** Yes, although during the last year as I got involved in the hostage thing, Al McDonald sat in for me a lot. I was kind of removed from the scene the last six or eight months. Then at ten o'clock, usually every morning, a smaller group of us, and there was resentment among other senior staff members of the composition of the group, Jody, Stu Eizenstat, Frank Moore, the Vice President, and I went in. I had an agenda at that meeting that evolved from our eight thirty discussion. Frank would tell the President what was happening on the Hill, "We need for you to make three calls, Mr. President." Jody would tell the President his ideas on how we would handle different things that had come up publicly. Frank would have the benefit of hearing that and knowing then that he and his staff should be saying the same thing on the Hill. It's amazing that it took us a year to get to that system, but it had to do with our overreaction to the Nixon administration. We were not going to have a chief of staff. It was also due to the fact that the President too much compartmentalized his approach to his Presidency.

**MOSHER:** Brzezinski was there?

**JORDAN:** Yes, he was there. Frank was very generous toward his staff. Frank wouldn't get briefed up and try to tell the President what Dan Tate was doing on an issue. He would bring Dan or Bob Thomson in and they would give the President a personal report. So there were some interchangeable people. If we had a big labor problem, Landon might go in for a senior staff meeting. It was a mid-morning look at what was happening, what needed to be done that day. We were always trying to look ahead to the next day or the next week, but the immediate problems were always right there staring us in the face.

**BUTLER:** That approach didn't take away from the President the job of combining policy. It did keep him from being nickel-and-dimed to death during the day with different opinions coming in the door at different times. It pulled the key players together to give an array of opinions at one time. It was not a decision making body.

**JORDAN:** That same group of people heard his reactions. They also had time to make specific requests of him.

**BUTLER:** Think about the problems. Take the case of Hamilton Jordan and Landon Butler coming to the White House from the state of Georgia after a campaign, which is not really very different from what happened to an Ed Meese, and feeling fairly confident politically because they know the political personalities around the country and how to run a campaign. But then they face the problem of intellectually getting on top of SALT II, economic policy, the Middle East, or just to read the maps of the Middle East to learn where Iran is. The problem of combining politics and policy does not yield itself simply to having a series of meetings. It's one of the weaknesses of the modern Presidency.

**YOUNG:** It's interesting because Al McDonald talked along these same lines. He spoke of the policy people as the glamour boys in the White House. The real problem of melting policy to the larger political and strategic considerations was left to the political people.

**BUTLER:** You must have Cabinet officers you can trust. There is no way that a politician in the White House can pass judgment on energy plans. I just don't see how you can do it.

**YOUNG:** I haven't forgotten my question—maybe you prefer to—about that agonizing appraisal at Camp David where some of these problems were presumably addressed.

**JORDAN:** We just put off for a long time in addressing them. There's no question that the personal changes that we made were in every instance an improvement. How well our different approach, structure and organization was going to work was never given a fair test because two or three months after that, I became preoccupied with the situation in Iran. There were two White Houses, as Landon aptly put it. There was a small group of us working on the hostage crisis, and everybody else was working on everything else.

**YOUNG:** How did it come about, though? Did it initiate with the President himself? He had been in Tokyo. He cancelled his vacation early.

**JORDAN:** And I think rightly so. He made two or three energy speeches and had another one scheduled. Nobody had listened to his other energy speeches and they weren't going to pay any attention to this one either. He had to symbolically get the attention of the American people. At a different level we had to make our government work better, both in terms of some replacements and also by ourselves being better organized. The premise for doing this was valid. If it had happened the first summer instead of the third summer, it might have been perceived a little bit differently.

**YOUNG:** I'm trying to look at this from the perspective of somebody who's going to be studying the Carter administration later. A lot of people are going to focus attention on the phenomenon of a President going up the mountain, which gave a sense that the administration was in deep trouble. People are brought in to register complaints, the different agendas that were before probably a tired President. Then a President going public and saying that our fundamental problem is the faith in democracy, the malaise, and that, "I've been spending too much time trying to manage the government rather than lead the country." That's an extraordinary event in the history of the Presidency.

**JORDAN:** You want me to talk more about the event itself.

**YOUNG:** How does an administration come together with the President in secret to think over its problems?

**FENNO:** We'd like to see it from over your shoulder.

**JORDAN:** OK, the genesis of the Camp David summit was the recognition that we had a number of problems. Certainly we were in political trouble in the country at large and within our own party. Certainly we thought the country was in trouble because they had quit listening to their President. Maybe the message was not a good message, maybe the messenger was not as articulate as he should have been, but the people were not paying any attention to what Jimmy Carter was saying. We had these problems within the administration both in terms of personnel and structure that had not been addressed or corrected.

Pat Caddell wrote Carter a memo that certainly there was a political dimension to it, but it spelled out very elaborately all these problems. It said, "You're getting ready to make a third or fourth energy speech. It's going to be just like the other three. Nobody's going to pay any attention to it. You've become irrelevant. People aren't listening to you as President any more. They're not paying attention to what you say. You've got substantial lack of discipline in your own administration. You've got some people that should be replaced. What you ought to do is use this as an opportunity to take a hard look and make some changes."

**MOSHER:** This was Caddell speaking?

**JORDAN:** Yes. After Carter read that, he said, "You know, you're right. I am getting ready to make another speech and chances are people are not going to pay any more attention to it than the three other energy speeches that I made." Caddell prompted everybody, particularly Carter, to focus on the problem. Once he cancelled the speech, he realized the extent to which he had an opportunity to capture the attention of the public and to say something different. So that was the genesis of it. And we did capture the attention of the American people. We did have an opportunity. Unfortunately it was almost all dissipated because of the Cabinet resignation thing. Not that that was not something that was deserving of attention, but the press was preoccupied with the process.

**HARGROVE:** Could you spin that out a little bit in terms of specific events of who went and who came. What really happened?

**JORDAN:** At the policy level, Carter was saying, “We are going to deal with some of these problems. We’ve been dealing with energy now for three years and Congress has only dealt partially with the problem. How do we get some momentum back in our policy? Politically and publicly, how do I try to reestablish myself as a President that people will pay attention to?” And thirdly, while we’re doing these other things, this is the time to address these personality and structural problems that have plagued the administration. It became the natural vehicle for an across the board look at the problems facing his Presidency. The personnel changes were largely beneficial; the structural and organizational changes were never really tested. We did regain the attention of the American people, but it was not sustained, largely due to the fact of the Cabinet resignations.

**JONES:** Did you set the agenda for the meeting and invite the people? Who made those decisions about a daily agenda for discussion?

**JORDAN:** Once we got up there, a group of us sat down. Stu, the Vice President, Pat Caddell, Jody, and I heard the President out and saw that he was determined to do this. Then we just sat down and decided how to go about it.

**REDFORD:** Could you tell us what difference there was in the operation after you were named chief of staff, and how it was before?

**JORDAN:** It was a perfect operation after I was named chief of staff.

**YOUNG:** Before you get to the answer to that there’s a couple more questions.

**FENNO:** Did you, Hamilton, have something to do with the writing of or the ideas in the speech delivered just after Camp David?

**JORDAN:** Caddell wrote a memoranda that was the intellectual stimulation for the idea. His memo was the seed. When we read it, we said, “He’s right.” The broad conclusions that Caddell had reached about Carter’s Presidency were largely accurate. There was a lot of disagreement as to how to implement it, and some of the things he wrote in his memo were crazy. Some of what he wrote was an extreme overreaction to the problem. Pat described the problem in the extreme, but basically we said, “Caddell is right. We’ve got these problems; the country’s got these problems. Carter has become largely irrelevant to the American people. They’re not listening to him anymore. We do have these problems within the administration and now’s the time to deal with them.”

**FENNO:** Did you think that the malaise twist to the speech was the right twist?

**JORDAN:** I want to say this. I don’t think the word “malaise” was even in the speech.

**FENNO:** That’s why I use the word “twist.”

**JORDAN:** No, one of the premises was that Carter could gain credibility with the American people by spelling out very bluntly the magnitude of these problems that we faced. Only by doing that could we hope to gain the sacrifice that was necessary. We talked last night about the gas lines. The gas lines were inconvenient for a lot of people, but it said something very bad about our country when the rage and panic that set in in May and June of 1979 just because people had to wait at a gas pump for 25, 30 minutes or maybe even 45 minutes. There was a rage and panic that swept the country all out of proportion to the inconvenience that it caused the average citizen.

By giving his speech a malaise twist, Carter was saying to the American people, "You know we've got some tough problems and there are no easy answers to them, but if we can deal with these problems, we'll be a stronger nation in the future. So the idea was not to say the country was screwed up, the idea was to say that the country was inherently strong and resilient but that we couldn't continue to ignore some of these problems that faced us.

**BUTLER:** Caddell claimed that the reaction to that speech was overwhelmingly favorable based on the letters which came in.

**JORDAN:** But that was all a wash two or three days later when we had a Cabinet meeting.

**YOUNG:** We were talking about Carter being in tune with the country and Washington being an island. Here is an effort, it seems to me, to reach out. The speech had some unintended consequences.

**BUTLER:** I was with him the next morning. He flew out immediately and went to give a NACo [National Association of Counties] speech to county officials and to speak to the communication workers, which was why I was along. The response was fantastic.

**JORDAN:** People were saying that. "Carter is exactly right." They were really saying that.

**BUTLER:** The crowds were on their feet and cheering. He did question and answer sessions. The reaction was genuine.

**JONES:** I wanted to get a little more clarification here. It seems that you had several goals at Camp David. You hoped to define the problems and to demonstrate that the President knew how to define the problems.

**JORDAN:** It was a symbolic recognition that we had problems; it was a public acknowledgement.

**JONES:** You also wanted to show that the President was worth listening to on these problems. You hoped to reestablish that picture that the President knows how to articulate those problems. It seems that you were also thinking that some of the problems for the image of the President were internal in your organization, and wanted to solve those kinds of problems. Some of them were perceived, some of them were real, and some were both. And you've spoken about him coming out of that experience with a new approach. The President's new relationship to the

public and to his own organization were never really tested. What was behind this organizational approach? Was this beginning to implement political tests that you didn't think were feasible before? What was the new approach as far as the organization was concerned?

**JORDAN:** It encompassed several things, including the real changes that were being made and the symbolism of those real changes, which suggested increased discipline and organization in the administration. We got rid of three Cabinet officers. I made some changes at the White House. We dealt with both the perception that changes needed to be made and the reality of making those changes.

I had been approached on three different occasions to be chief of staff by the President. I always said no, mainly because I was not sure I wanted to do it. More importantly, I was not going to do it if I didn't have the authority. Finally in May, a month or so before the summit, Stu Eizenstat and someone else went to the President and said, "You've got to name Hamilton chief of staff." I told him I would think about it. Then we had the summit, and I said I would do it only if I had the authority to make some difficult changes in the administration and in the White House. It was a combination of personnel changes with some structural changes. There was the need for less democracy and more organization in the White House. Part of that was to bring in Al McDonald to focus on things that I'm not good at, systems and details and administration. I had the authority to run the White House.

**JONES:** This new approach that was never really tested because—

**JORDAN:** —two or three weeks after the summit I had drug charges launched against me, which absorbed a couple of months of my time and a lot of my emotions. We went from there to the hostage crisis, which became my chief preoccupation from November-December through May and June. I don't think it was really given a fair test. I would argue that things were beginning to work better; how much better I can't really say.

**BUTLER:** While your role was never given a fair test, I thought the administration's finest hour in terms of running the country were those first three or four months of the hostage crisis. We were able to continue to conduct a wide range of domestic business, organize for a campaign, while the top people in the administration focused on a major crisis. You'd be hard put to say that the White House was bogged down by structural problems in the fall and early winter of '80.

**JORDAN:** I'm not sure if there could have been a fair test given the fact that we were going into a campaign. But things certainly didn't get worse. There was improvement in personnel. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There were some other less obvious changes. They substantially strengthened the hand of our team at the White House. We got rid of a number of deputies and other people who had been problems in the White House. Those changes, less dramatic than the ones that were made in the Cabinet, were of some consequence.

**REDFORD:** What changes were made in the flow of information that went into the President as a result of this?

**JORDAN:** The problem that we had during the first year of the President seeing too much paper had already had been addressed by the third year. I couldn't say there was an improvement from the way that had been changed. I wouldn't say the paper flow changed after I was named chief of staff. It was not any better or any worse.

**BUTLER:** I don't think there was ever a serious problem of paper flow in the White House. Rick Hutcheson did a terrific job.

**JORDAN:** There was too much the first year.

**BUTLER:** That's to be expected.

**HARGROVE:** You refer to the negative effect of the Cabinet resignations. I'd like to go into that and open up a question. [James] Schlesinger, Bell, [Michael] Blumenthal and Califano all went at the same time. Two or maybe three were fired, I'm not sure about that. Bell was apparently not fired.

**JORDAN:** Schlesinger was going to leave anyway.

**HARGROVE:** So two were fired.

**JORDAN:** Califano, Blumenthal, and Brock Adams.

**HARGROVE:** Oh, Brock Adams, I don't remember that.

**JORDAN:** I remember that one.

**BUTLER:** He resigned.

[REDACTED]

**HARGROVE:** Were these firings already on the way, did Camp David simply act as a catalyst? Why were these resignations perceived as negative, as you said? The fundamental question is what does a President have to do to win the allegiance of the Cabinet officer? Califano would be a negative case. Do you have a positive?

**JORDAN:** If there hadn't been the summit, there never would have been the replacements of Blumenthal, Califano, and Brock Adams.

**HARGROVE:** That precipitated it?



**JORDAN:** Yes. They were all recognized as problems, but I'm not sure that the President would have ever done anything about it. Outside of the context of this kind of serious review of everything that took place at Camp David, they would have stayed on longer.

**HARGROVE:** Why do you say that the resignations had a negative effect on the administration?

**JORDAN:** All the Cabinet resigned. That was a crazy thing. There was a bad idea that shouldn't have happened, but it did.

**HARGROVE:** That was associated with the report card business.

**JORDAN:** No, the President and myself met with the Cabinet and the Vice President. The President said, "I'm going to look hard at everybody and I'm going to make some changes. I'm going to do it over two or three days. I'm going to try to not embarrass anybody, but there're going to be changes made." Vance said, "Maybe we should offer our resignations so you'll be in the posture of just accepting some resignations, like you're just starting all over again." The idea wasn't original with Vance. Somebody had already mentioned it to Carter. Everybody said, "Why don't we just do that? That'll make it maybe a little bit easier for you." Not that it did. All of a sudden you had the world's coming to an end. All the Carter Cabinet was resigning, which was noted in foreign capitals where they have Cabinet government. We made a mistake in using that device.

**HARGROVE:** You aren't saying that the departure of these people was a plus?

**JORDAN:** Oh, it was a big plus. Not to disparage any of the people that went before, but Bill Miller was a good Secretary of the Treasury, Neil Goldschmidt did a good job in Transportation, and Moon Landrieu did a good job at HUD [Housing and Urban Development]. They were all better politically and substantively than their predecessors. Isn't that right, Landon?

**BUTLER:** I don't think there's any question about it.

**HARGROVE:** Are there example of the bad Cabinet Secretary and the good Cabinet Secretary? The fundamental strategic question for the President of the United States is how to get the support of this person. You want their loyalty, and yet you want them to be a little bit afraid of you. How do you do that? It's a delicate balance.

**JORDAN:** Well, let me give you an example of two people who were good Cabinet Secretaries. Cecil Andrus. His views were largely compatible with Carter's on environmental and resource questions. He was a good manager. He was sensitive to the President's political interests. He was good on the Hill. He was good at dealing with constituent groups and most importantly, he kept his problems over at the Department of Interior. Cecil Andrus was a big plus for the President.

The same thing was true of Griffin Bell. He ran the Justice Department. There are a thousand problems over there that can work themselves over to the White House, and every one of them is a loser. Judge Bell did a good job of running the department and dealing with those issues. He

did a good job with the Hill. He did a good job publicly although there was a lot of skepticism in the press about him initially. Both Andrus and Bell were loyal to the President. Their views on the issues in their department were largely compatible with the President.

**HARGROVE:** So it's as much selection of the right person in the first place.

**JORDAN:** Yes. [REDACTED]

**BUTLER:** There were several HEW initiatives which the President backed fully and to which the administration was committed, but which somehow just never came together.

**JORDAN:** Hospital cost containment is the one we came closest to winning. We came close to winning it only because we brought it over to the White House ultimately. The lobbying for it was done out of the White House.

**BUTLER:** If you're in the West Wing of the White House on the first floor, you judge a Cabinet officer by how often his problems wind up in your lap.

[REDACTED]

**BUTLER:** If you read Califano's book, you get the feeling that he thought of himself as a President. He organized his staff the way a President would. He was far more concerned about his image than other Cabinet officers.

**JORDAN:** Joe Califano is a shrewd and capable guy.

**BUTLER:** His various political problems somehow always wound up in the White House's lap.

When you think about what the White House can do about problems, there are very few things you can actually do. If things aren't going well in an agency, a department, you don't have a lot of flexibility. You can't fine tune an agency from the White House, so you change the person at the top.

**HARGROVE:** Is there a conflict? A little while ago you said you had to deal not only with Lane Kirkland and lots of other people. Why didn't you just let Ray Marshall do that? Is there a sense in which the President is worried about some things and doesn't fully rely on any Cabinet officer for those things?

**JORDAN:** You couldn't fire Kirkland.

**HARGROVE:** But why didn't you just rely on Ray to handle that?

**JORDAN:** George Meany wasn't content to deal with just Ray Marshall. George Meany deals with Presidents.

**HARGROVE:** OK.

**BUTLER:** That's right, but I should say that Ray Marshall carried a lot of water for Jimmy Carter.

**JORDAN:** Ray Marshall did a good job.

**BUTLER:** Ray handled DOL's [Department of Labor] problems. Ray Marshall's problems didn't consistently fall into our lap.

**JORDAN:** I'd put Ray Marshall in the same group with Bell and Andrus who did their jobs well.

**HARGROVE:** But there are some questions that are strictly presidential that simply cannot be delegated, is what you're saying.

**JORDAN:** There were questions that were strictly presidential from our perspective and there were questions that were not presidential, but that doesn't mean they're not presidential to George Meany.

**HARGROVE:** You can't turn him away.

**JORDAN:** That's where you knew you've got the wrong guy.

**BUTLER:** Ray Marshall's non-presidential problems got handled by Ray Marshall.

**JORDAN:** The coal strike. He did a good job on all that.

**HARGROVE:** He tried to get rid of a couple of assistant secretaries. He got rid of one, didn't he?

**JORDAN:** He got rid of a good many.

**HARGROVE:** No, I mean in the Department of Labor. He tried to get rid of one and he couldn't get rid of the other. I remember that because I knew some of those characters. He couldn't get rid of Ernie Greene.

**JORDAN:** No, we didn't try to get rid of Ernie.

**HARGROVE:** Didn't you?

**JORDAN:** No.

**HARGROVE:** You should have.

**THOMPSON:** Was there any way you could have separated these things?

**JORDAN:** I don't think there is any way for a President to pick twelve or fifteen people and not have two or three disappointments.

**THOMPSON:** In those first four months, you had to make a lot of quick decisions, I imagine, and you also had some turn you down. Rumor was you tried [Robert] Rossa and you got Blumenthal. Perhaps it's not true. It seems to me in some of these areas you were dealing with people that, given your own constituency, didn't have any contact with you. You hadn't had any contact with Blumenthal, for instance. Blumenthal, more than any other trustee, gave the staff at the Rockefeller Foundation consistent hell. He knew everything. If it was morality in foreign policy, a topic that some had worked on for twenty years, he knew more about it than they did.

At the moment when you were raising the sights of the nation on the mountain, which was a great unifying effort it seems to me, couldn't you have gone the way a few past Presidents have done? Did some of these hatchet jobs, as the press would call it, or getting rid of people, move things over to something else? It seems to me that two things confused the American people. One, you did seem to call for a Gettysburg-like address to create unity in the nation, which was inspiring. One or two days later, Carter made a hard hitting partisan political speech in Kansas City. The press was down on you for that, comparing the two. You were playing partisan politics at the same time you were unifying the nation. Some of you were looked at as tough political street fighters who were getting rid of people. That affected the image at least in some ways.

**JORDAN:** I think you're right. I wish you'd called me about Blumenthal, although I wouldn't have returned your call.

**THOMPSON:** Pat Harris had a reputation of being a terrible administrator of our law school.

**JORDAN:** She's excellent.

**BUTLER:** One of the best administrators. Superb staff.

**JORDAN:** So that perception was incorrect. I think your assessment of the inconsistencies of the speech and then the firings is right. You asked the basic question, why didn't you make some of these changes after three or four months? We were just learning our job, and were making mistakes. The President was learning his job. He was making some mistakes. It was difficult to draw a conclusion that early that somebody was not going to cut it.

**THOMPSON:** Why join one great unifying effort with what seems to be a very hard hitting political effort with people symbolizing partisan political street fighters for the public?

**JORDAN:** That was a mistake. I agree with you. We should have gotten rid of the people first and then made the unifying speech. No seriously, that's what we should have done in terms of the sequence of things.

**REDFORD:** Were those two discussed in relationship one to the other?

**JORDAN:** I don't remember. It's just all kind of a blur to me.

**JONES:** It's easy in retrospect. Was Camp David the first experience where there was communication on all of the problems of the administration? Was it a learning experience for everybody about what was going on within the White House structure?

**JORDAN:** Yes. It wasn't the first, but it was certainly the most comprehensive. We invited people to tell Carter and us what they thought was wrong with us. We asked how we could do business in a more effective way. Certainly it was a learning experience and a self analysis. It happened before in bits and pieces, but never in so comprehensive a way. It tended just to confirm or to expand notions that we had as to what our problems and weaknesses were.

**JONES:** Did you reflect on the original organization structure within the White House, the spokes of the wheel concept?

**JORDAN:** Oh sure. I wrote all kinds of memos and did graphs.

**HARGROVE:** For the historian, we ought to go back a little bit and ask how you [Jordan] developed your own role as political planner and strategist. You said you cut your teeth on the Panama Canal ratification. Maybe you could tell that story to illustrate how you began to carve out a role for yourself as a political strategist in relation to policy. We ought to get that out on the record.

**JORDAN:** There are a lot of things that I don't do well. I won't try to enumerate them here. One of my strengths is my ability to conceptualize, to see an objective and plan how to get there. The Panama Canal thing I mentioned was something that was consummated in the summer of '77. The ratification fight began immediately, although it was not signed until September and not ratified until the first part of the year. For a peculiar set of circumstances, I ended up being the primary contact with the Panamanian government and with the Panamanian ambassador. I quickly found myself at the crossroads of both the politics of the ratification fight and also the substance of the issue.

I wasn't intimidated by it. I found that you've got the same dynamics in foreign policy that you have in a domestic political situation. It's much more complex and much more subtle, but instead of looking at the country and looking at states and interest groups, you're looking at the world and trying to understand the relationship of nations to your own country, and interests that are compatible and interests that are divergent. So out of that experience, which happened in my

office along with Landon, we on one hand were having to worry about public opinion polls and how Senators were going to vote, and at the same time I was having to deal with the Panamanian ambassador and with Omar Torrijos, trying to see what changes in the treaty were tolerable to Panama.

Out of that grew for the first time an approach to these issues which was replicated then on other issues that went before the Congress particularly. Whether it was civil service reform, or a Mideast arms package, we used a task force approach, having a lead person in the White House who coordinated the resource of the agency and applied all these resources toward the problem. I don't know if I've addressed your question specifically or not.

**HARGROVE:** How did you experimentally develop your role? As you say, you couldn't do it across the board, so it was always selective.

**JORDAN:** This gets back to the fact that the President has to have a few people that can focus on things that are topical, sometimes even intransigent, or that are top priorities. To outline the way I spent my time over the four years, beyond that first six months on personnel, I worked on the Panama thing. After that I worked on the Mideast arms package when it was before the Congress. I was always focused on the big challenge that faced us, in addition to doing a lot of other things. Is that fair, Landon?

**BUTLER:** Yes, I think so. At the time, we were using the "spokes of the wheel" concept. There was a good deal of frustration about how to organize the White House in the summer of '77. In the summer of '77, Ham outlined to the President in a rather brief memo an approach that we would take to the Panama Canal debate. This approach was to marshal our resources and to put together a task force of people. I fleshed that out along with Joe Aragon, who was Special Assistant for Hispanic Affairs. We prepared a strategy memo for mobilizing the administration's resources, for using the State Department effectively, using the Defense Department effectively, using congressional liaison and reaching out to a large number of people.

Panama was unique during our four years. There was virtual unanimity among informed people about the need for the treaties. The leadership of the country and foreign policy establishment agreed on this. There was almost no disagreement about the need for the treaties. However, the public was opposed to it by 75 to 25, so we had to put together a plan to exhibit to the country and to the Congress that these opinion-makers were in favor of the treaties. So we put together a structure and that structure wound up working pretty effectively. It worked and eventually produced a victory, so it was imitated over and over, which helped to establish Ham's authority. It was the process he used in the campaign. Prepare a memo, develop a plan ahead of time, then carry it out and execute it well.

**HARGROVE:** One question. Does this kind of effort have to be led from the White House? Why couldn't you have just said, "Cyrus Vance will do it?"

**JORDAN:** Big things have to be done from the White House. It has to be done with the signature of the President. If you leave it at an agency, it doesn't have a high priority or the impetus that it has coming from the White House.

**HARGROVE:** Also, an agency head can't coordinate everybody in quite the same way.

**JORDAN:** That's right. When we were dealing with the Panama Canal, for example, we had to worry about the Defense Department. We had to get people in the Pentagon to see the need for the treaty. There were some that didn't. You've got to ride herd over those people. So most big issues had an impact on a number of agencies. You had to have it based in the White House, because you had to be able to use the resources. That's ironic, because we didn't have a lot of loyalty and relationships with these people that we had selected to people the government, but we became very close with a number of people. We became close to many people in the State Department during of the Panama Canal fight. That's where Warren Christopher and I became very close friends. So these fights also fostered some relationships and alliances that stood us in good stead.

**HARGROVE:** There was not a charge of poaching?

**JORDAN:** Oh no.

**YOUNG:** The State Department couldn't immobilize public consent. And that's what you would do.

**JORDAN:** We didn't either. We immobilized it against us, that's what we did. But we won the fight.

**REDFORD:** Did Brzezinski feel that you were getting into his province and resent this?

**JORDAN:** You'd have to ask Zbig this. The Panama Canal fight was not one of Zbig's priorities. He had people on his staff that worked with us on it. He had an excellent person by the name of Bob Paster. Zbig initially was a little bit skeptical about my involvement in the foreign policy process, but I think ultimately he saw me as someone that could sometimes help him with his point of view. No, he was not resentful of my involvement.

**MOSHER:** How did you relate to Vance and Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker in this thing?

**JORDAN:** Ambassador Bunker and Sol Linowitz negotiated and completed the treaty. From that point on it was a question of selling the treaty and ultimately persuading the Panamanians to accept some changes. You've never seen two more different men than Cy Vance, who I love, and Omar Torrijos, who I also loved and who was killed a few months ago. They didn't understand one another. Along the way I developed this close relationship with Torrijos. When the Panamanians had these problems, they started dealing with me. I would never make a move on them without checking with Warren Christopher. It just evolved that because I had this relationship, I was the primary political and substitute contact on the treaty.

**MOSHER:** Did you get into it?

**JORDAN:** Approximately. Yes, I was superficially aware of the contents of the treaty.

**MOSHER:** Did you get involved again after that?

**JORDAN:** Yes, I was more involved after the fact, and my relationship with the Panamanians developed after the treaty had been consummated. Then we had to make some decisions. I had to ask them to swallow some things that were very difficult for them. These were almost insulting, particularly the DeConcini amendment.

**FENNO:** Did you get involved in the lobbying effort? Did you get involved with Congress and with the Senate at all?

**JORDAN:** No. Again Frank Moore and his staff had the primary responsibility. By that time I was perceived on the Hill as such a liability that it would have been counterproductive for me to have been involved in it.

**JONES:** Did this experience lead to Anne Wexler's operation later on?

**JORDAN:** Yes. There was a realization that to make these various campaigns compatible with all the different legislative balls we had in the air, there had to be an outreach office that would form task forces and bring people in and brief them. That's when Anne was brought in. That was a natural thing for her to do, given her contacts in the political community. She had good contacts in the press and she was a good organizer. That was the essence of Anne's operation.

**REDFORD:** Could you explain how you got into a foreign policy advice function to the President? Did the President ask you to do this?

**JORDAN:** Because of the way things were compartmentalized, I along with the rest of the people on the senior staff read about our foreign policy position in the *New York Times* every morning for the first five or six months. Things were still compartmentalized. As an outgrowth of the experience with Panama, and maybe a realization on the part of the President that there had to be some meshing or reconciling of foreign policy objectives with domestic political considerations, he asked me to start sitting in on the foreign policy breakfasts.

I viewed my role there not as a participant but as an observer. If Zbig or Cy or whoever was arguing that we ought to do something, I'd say, "If we're going to do that, we really ought to get Frank Moore in and let him tell us if there's a chance we can get that through the committee or whom we should inform on the Hill. My role in the foreign policy process initially was as an early warning system for the rest of the senior staff. I would pass things onto to Jody or Frank Moore that were said at the meetings so that they should know about them. I would try to raise political objections, problems and concerns with Vance, Brzezinski, and the President as they talked about how they were going to change the world.

**BUTLER:** Panama was fundamentally a domestic political issue for us. Once the treaties were signed, it was a terrible domestic political problem.



**YOUNG:** Just so there isn't any confusion on the tape, what you were saying was that you were not really a foreign policy advisor in this sense. There's really no question of turf with that establishment. The involvement had to do with getting the thing passed through Congress and building support, the issue parties and the coalition.

**JORDAN:** I was not an advisor, but an observer of the process, with the exception of raising political concerns and problems.

**YOUNG:** Political feasibility issues.

**JORDAN:** I'd say, "If we're going to do that, Mr. President, we'd better get Frank Moore to get a group in from the Hill and get their reaction to this or that initiative before you go ahead with it."

**THOMPSON:** Jim, can I sharpen this by using a specific political case? Landon was in the center of this, dealing with the East-West Committee. George Kennan and a variety of people from that group came to see you. Your explanation to them, which got discussed widely in the Committee, was that you had to make a judgment in the administration between Panama and SALT. Panama was like a track star warming up on the track, putting on a sweat suit and gradually taking it off. When you really got the thing worked up and ready, then you'd tackle SALT. But you needed to hone yourself to deal with the SALT thing, and you were going to do it by first tackling Panama. Now maybe that's false reporting, but this is what we were all told on the committee.

**BUTLER:** I said that? I don't recall that.

**THOMPSON:** Yes, you also said that you saw [Paul] Nitze. You had that long initial talk because in a sense he was an enemy. If you talked with us it would be the converted talking to the converted. That tends to get over into priorities. The historic class textbook definition is that foreign policy decisions ought to be made in terms of the primacy of the problem. Here it turns it a little bit the other way around. It says that your ability to get it through Congress and your ability to build up a political capacity is going to decide what you're going to do with it.

**JORDAN:** No, that's wrong. Your question implies that we had control over when SALT was going to come up. We had no control over when SALT would be consummated. In fact it wasn't finally consummated until the Vienna summit in the spring of '79. So it was not like we had a choice to consummate SALT or to consummate Panama. The fact was that we found we did have a chance to consummate Panama, and the President made the decision unilaterally.

Once he made the decision that we were going to be able to have a Panama treaty along acceptable terms to our country, we did look at it as a dry run for SALT. Because if you looked at the basic groups that were going to be opposed to any Panama Canal treaty and the basic groups that are going to be opposed to any SALT treaty, regardless of what was in it, you were fighting a lot of the same people. You were fighting the Jesse Helms and a lot of the right wing groups and organizations. So once we realized we were going to have the Panama Canal treaty, we welcomed it as a test of our ability to bring these resources to bear and try to ratify the treaty.

But it wasn't a question of choosing Panama before SALT. The failure to ratify the SALT treaty was the greatest disappointment of the Carter Presidency, and my greatest disappointment. We never had a choice between Panama and SALT.

**YOUNG:** We might want to talk about SALT II.

**HARGROVE:** Let me give you a hypothesis: It was the President himself who made that choice by trying, attempting and failing, to reorder the nature of the SALT agreement. Perhaps he could have had a SALT agreement if he'd simply gone with what the Ford administration had negotiated.

**THOMPSON:** In Vance's first visit.

**HARGROVE:** Yes. Vance's first visit may have proved to have been a disaster.

**JORDAN:** Well, Vance's first visit was proved to be a mistake because it didn't work out. Basically the purpose of the visit was to go beyond what had been done and really try to accomplish some deep cuts.

**HARGROVE:** That may have been a mistake.

**JORDAN:** Well, that may have been a mistake but I'm not sure that we would have ended up with a SALT treaty any sooner. My recollection of the SALT negotiation is that we were continually thinking we were on the verge of having a SALT treaty. I can remember Cy Vance saying, "I think we're about to get a treaty," and everybody just started laughing. He'd said it 25 times. It went on and on and on and on.

**BUTLER:** Actually, there was a brief period when we thought SALT would come before Panama. Do you remember that?

**JORDAN:** Yes I do remember. Bob [Strong] over there is an expert on the history of SALT. Maybe you are too.

**HARGROVE:** No, I'm not.

**JORDAN:** I'm certainly not. I sat in on all those meetings, which doesn't mean anything. The failure to ratify SALT was largely due to the complexity of the issues we were dealing with and the difficulty of negotiating with the Soviet Union.

**HARGROVE:** You wouldn't fault Jimmy Carter the slightest bit for trying to reorder an agreement that seemed to have been made and therefore losing a political opportunity for a big victory?

**JORDAN:** I would say that the attempt in the Vance mission to obtain a different SALT treaty based on genuine deeper cuts was a mistake because it didn't work. It was a good try. I don't think that appreciably affected the outcome. It surprised the Soviet Union, which didn't help

initially in their relationship with or their understanding of a new President. That aside, I don't think it appreciably altered the ultimate contents of the SALT II treaty or the time frame in which that treaty was negotiated and finally signed. Bob, do you have an opinion about that?

**STRONG:** The conventional wisdom of commentators is that it did delay the treaty, partially because of the problem of compartmentalization in the early Carter administration. The real problem with the Vance summit was that it wasn't well coordinated with the human rights issue and with statements about open diplomacy. The combination of all those things really did force the Russians to stop and reexamine the SALT process.

**JORDAN:** Still, there wasn't an easily obtainable SALT treaty there that we could have just plucked if we hadn't had the March '77 mission.

**BUTLER:** Well there was the Ford and [Henry] Kissinger Vladivostok agreement.

**STRONG:** Yes, but it is also true that the narrower the differences became, and the more technical and minor the questions were, for some reason the longer it took the Soviet Union to answer the proposals we put on the table. That is true.

**JORDAN:** I won't abandon my earlier position that the Vance trip and the reaching for something beyond what Ford and Kissinger had agreed to was fundamentally detrimental. It might have cost us several months. It certainly didn't cost us several years. I don't think it affected appreciably the final contents of the treaty or the time frame in which it was consummated.

**BUTLER:** The other point of view, which came from our serious opposition in the Jackson wing and Paul Nitze, was that we didn't stick with that Spring position long enough. They claimed that had we waited, we might have eventually gotten those cuts.

**HARGROVE:** Which is not true either.

**BUTLER:** I have no way of knowing. I don't think that was in the cards. From the Soviet perspective, I don't think that was true.

**BUTLER:** It is true that the treaty which Vance took over there would have been an acceptable treaty to our opposition, to Senator Jackson and Paul Nitze. That, in turn, would have produced earlier the possibility of a consensus on SALT, which we never were able to develop later.

**THOMPSON:** I think that something got priority, which in my opinion ought not to have had priority, in the early foreign policy actions. A lot of your trouble came from the fact that human rights and SALT weren't linked in some way. The big push to start over again was based on a miscalculation. One of the things seen by the outside world as a problem was that you came in with so many new ideas, like an open government. Yet, your great success came at Camp David with Sadat and Begin, which was altogether closed. The business Reagan administration has done it too. Starting all over again.

**JORDAN:** That's because the world and foreign policy are filled with inconsistencies. Your actions can hardly be calculated with the long run in mind. It's impossible for them to add up, since they are all consistent and compatible. So I agree with you.

**JONES:** The several examples which you have given that you worked on are in the foreign policy area. In your initial statement you said along the way there were issues you began to understand and to work on selectively. Were there domestic issues as well?

**JORDAN:** Well, it's ironic, I think. There were always people around who understood the domestic political game you had to play to pass civil service reform or hospital cost containment. Ironically, because I was involved in the foreign policy process, and because every one of those things was so tough, I ended up spending most of my time on the foreign policy battles. After Panama, there was the Mid East arms package, which was the sale of F-15s to Saudi Arabia, F-14s to Egypt, and something to the Israelis. Because I was sitting in on the foreign policy breakfasts and because of my experience with Panama, it just naturally fell that my operation would deal with SALT. Out of that I got heavily involved in the Middle East situation.

For me, it was all kind of crazy. Here I was from South Georgia and was being exposed to all these problems at the very highest level without having a background or context for understanding a lot of these things. It was exciting, it was stimulating, but I was not always able to understand or put into a context some of the things I was working on. By the time I got involved in the Saudi arms package and started dealing with the Saudi Arabians, and after I was immersed in the Middle East situation for a couple of years, I developed some understanding and confidence in making judgments.

**JONES:** Are these the kinds of problems that must come to the President, that he has to resolve, given the defense and foreign policy organization in the country? Does the President need somebody close to him so that he can talk with and work with an audience?

**JORDAN:** I wrote the President a memo during the first year that was a 150-page critique of his first year. I listed all of the mistakes and problems. I had all kinds of graphs in it. I had a great guy over at the CIA. They can't tell you what's happening in Iran, but they do great graphs over there. And I had this book full of graphs, and the point of one of my graphs was that Carter had spent too much time on foreign policy the first year. I went through and quantified the amount of time he spent on foreign policies contrasted with the time he spent on domestic policies. That was before I got involved in it.

When I got involved in it then it all seemed natural. It's a lot more interesting than civil service reform or these other tedious things you have to deal with. For me it was much more intellectually stimulating and challenging to try to understand and figure out foreign policy. Carter also developed the same interest and saw the same challenge in foreign policy. So those things naturally ended up on the President's desk more than domestic issues. Issues like the Middle East and SALT are the things that deserve to be on the President's desk. As long as they're on the President's design, you need somebody there that's trying to reconcile your foreign policy interests and objectives with the political realities.

**BUTLER:** There was one other minor facet to that, which is that neither Harold Brown nor Cy Vance was particularly effective in explaining our foreign and defense policies to the American public. Cy Vance hated to give a speech. So did Harold Brown. As strong as these men were, the White House wound up having to do a lot of the work of explaining the issues to the public.

**JORDAN:** I can't imagine a President having a better Secretary of State and Defense than Cy Vance and Harold Brown, but what Landon says is true. The public dimension of these issues, the articulation of where we stood, the national interest and the reason for doing X, Y, or Z—that largely fell to the White House.

**MOSHER:** Was Brzezinski in on this? If Kissinger had been in that job, I can't imagine what you could have done with him.

**JORDAN:** If Kissinger had been in that job, I wouldn't have been there. Or he wouldn't have been there, I don't know. The stuff between Vance and Brzezinski was grossly exaggerated, just like I'm sure the stuff now between Allen and Haig is grossly exaggerated. I'm not sure if I want to say this for the record. The perception was that Brzezinski had the President's ear and that he was the dominant person in foreign policy. On nine issues out of ten Vance and Brzezinski agreed. The tenth issue usually had to do with U.S.-Soviet relationships or the use of military force. Nine times out of ten times when Brzezinski and Vance differed, Carter supported Vance. But that was not the perception. There were problems and the men disagreed.

The thing that really happened that was harmful was when people in the NSC [National Security Council] and in the State Department contributed to the friction by saying things about the other's principal. There was one story of harmony and working together when Warren Christopher, Landon, Harold Brown, Cy Vance, Brzezinski, and I worked on all these problems together. And there was never a question as to primacy. Cy Vance was the Secretary of State. We would defer to him. But he'd defer to me on some of the political judgments and how to get these things done. I became personally involved in the Iranian hostage crisis. Some of these things happened by accident. They usually had to do more with trying to get something through the Congress than in the actual negotiation of a treaty or arrangement.

**JONES:** Many of these foreign policy issues, certainly Panama, had important domestic implications, but were there any occasions where there was an issue that was strictly domestic in which you really got very much involved?

**JORDAN:** To the extent that I became involved in the others? No, because there were always the Anne Wexlers and the people on Frank Moore's staff that had the political and substantive skills and knowledge. It was easier to set those things up. It was more difficult to set up the foreign policy things. I ended up doing it because I was the only person on the political side that was regularly involved in the process. Is that fair, Landon?

**BUTLER:** I think that's true. There was a lot more apparatus available for the political things we did on domestic issues than there was on foreign policy issues.

**JORDAN:** That's right. That expresses it better than I expressed it.

**JONES:** And were you important in triggering the apparatus or setting up the apparatus?

**JORDAN:** Yes. Once the things were formed and underway, I would focus on something else.

**BUTLER:** By the first year we had a system set up where the Vice President and the President established an agenda. They would survey the agencies and go through 50, 60, or 70 different agenda items. Then the agenda items would be ranked as Cabinet issues, presidential issues, presidential top priority, or presidential low priority. There were five rankings. Once there was an agreement on ranking, then Ham's office would assign task force managers to the seven or eight presidential issues that were important. From that point on the task force would take over. Usually, both a Cabinet officer and a White House senior staff member were co-chairmen of the task forces. That was the apparatus.

**JORDAN:** At a working level it might include a person on Stu's staff dealing with a deputy secretary.

**BUTLER:** Once the Panama Canal process was established, people really liked the task force approach. People came to us and said, "You guys have got to do again on civil service reform what you did on Panama." There were 35 issues for which Hamilton was expected to organize a task force in order to do the same thing that we did on Panama.

**JORDAN:** It was almost a curse because everybody then demanded that we do for them on an issue what we did on Panama.

**BUTLER:** We had to establish a procedure for task forces where Ham didn't run every one of them, but he oversaw the process of establishing and monitoring the task forces.

**HARGROVE:** Is this process necessary because you have to have a new coalition on every issue?

**BUTLER:** Exactly.

**JORDAN:** Yes, and because you can't do all these things with the White House. You don't have enough people and resources in the White House, so you've got to meld together the control, management, and maybe the public relations dimension from the White House. You've got to have something, for example, on Panama that involved Ambassador Bunker and involves generals from the Defense Department who would then go out and make speeches and talk to Senators about why we need the treaty. So you've got to form an umbrella that is inclusive and is open to all these individuals and resources.

**HARGROVE:** We should talk later about the interaction between the President and such groups. What kinds of things they ask him to do, and what he sees that he needs to do.

**YOUNG:** Anne [Wexler] has talked something about the meetings in the East Rooms.

**REDFORD:** Could I ask you about timing? Was this establishment of task forces through your office? Did you do that before you became chief of staff, or was that after that?

**JORDAN:** I did a lot of planning memoranda for the President that were ignored. Some of them were on target and a lot of them in retrospect were not. To answer your question, no. We didn't go into the thing with this being set up. We had a work plan which described the issue and described the points we were going to make in pursuing this article. It described the mechanism: who was going to be involved, how often would they meet, what was going to be the way of communication. People then had to develop written work plans for each of these subject areas. And most of that was done out of my office. Landon supervised a lot of it.

So you had a person in the White House that spent 60 or 70 percent of his or her time working on subject X. They had a counterpart in a department that spent most of their time working on that subject, garnering the resources of that department to make them available to the White House. Part of the work plan was how much of the President's time do you need. Do you need him to make a major speech or do you need for him to appear at three or four briefings? Who do you want involved in the Congress? Frank Moore's office would add a congressional dimension to each plan. That all was a result of the Panama Canal experience. It worked well, but there was also a tendency to trivialize it, because the answer then to every problem was to set up a task force.

**BUTLER:** The same approach that worked on Panama just wasn't going to work on every issue. SALT's a good example.

**JORDAN:** Well it didn't work on energy because the energy issues didn't limit themselves.

**MOSHER:** Were there problems that arose which were strictly within the scope of one department? Would the White House get involved in this?

**JORDAN:** Only if it was a presidential priority, and there weren't many problems that arose. Most of them had several priorities. We said that we were going to set an agenda for this year. The Cabinet officers would come and make the argument for their issue being a presidential item. If it was a presidential item, it would be managed at the White House. The President would be personally involved; it would be a priority of the administration. There were different gradations of even presidential priorities.

If it was going to be a Cabinet priority, that meant that responsibility for lobbying the Congress would rest with the Cabinet officer. The President was not going to be involved, Frank Moore's office was not going to be involved. The future, and the failure or success of that program or legislation, was the responsibility of the Cabinet officer. That doesn't mean that if it got down to the two or three days before the vote, and there were two or three people to talk to, that they might not get Frank Moore to help out a little bit or even get the President to call somebody. But that was the differentiation that we tried to make in these issues, and it wasn't perfect. It was arbitrary. Things would sometimes slosh over from being a presidential issue, and it would really turn out to be a Cabinet issue or a Cabinet issue would get elevated to being a presidential issue. But that was the approach we took.

**YOUNG:** Do any of you presidential scholars know about a previous President that adopted this systematic task force approach to issue management? I think it's an innovation.

**REDFORD:** Was this procedure adopted after you were chief of staff? Had you come to occupy that planning position before being chief of staff?

**BUTLER:** The December before Camp David is when we actually started the process. Les Francis and I cooked it up.

**REDFORD:** December before when?

**BUTLER:** Before the shake ups, and before Ham was actually named chief of staff. Remember, Ham was named staff coordinator there for a while.

**JORDAN:** I think his question is if I had a plan or idea for this approach before we went in the White House, and the answer is no.

**BUTLER:** Not before you became chief of staff.

**JORDAN:** You mean before becoming chief of staff in '79? Yes, the approach was formalized in December. But we started using the approach as of June of 1977.

**REDFORD:** So you were moving towards the chief of staff position before you were designated as such?

**JORDAN:** I'm not sure. I was perceived as having the authority but I did not have the actual authority. I didn't have the authority to fire people on other people's staffs. It was the worst of both worlds for me. I was perceived as being something I wasn't.

**FENNO:** This started with Chuck. It's of great interest to us to get the sense of the range of problems that you were involved in. We talked about foreign policy issues and domestic policy issues. Did the Bert Lance issue paralyze the administration for some period of time? Would you want to say something about that?

**JORDAN:** It wasn't self-paralysis, it was just that every time we would try to talk about other issues, we would be asked, "But what about Bert Lance?" We'd try to lobby stuff on the Hill. Frank Moore's people would go to see Senators and Congressmen. Moore's staff would try to talk about the votes on the bill, and be asked, "What is the President going to do about Bert Lance?" We ended up being paralyzed by it. It wasn't self-paralysis. It was just the way the thing evolved as a major issue.

**FENNO:** Would that be representative of a type of issue that you might get particularly involved in? If so, how would you characterize that set of issues?



**JORDAN:** Yes. I was heavily involved in trying to help the President figure out what to do along the way and trying to communicate with Bert Lance. It was a tragic situation.

**THOMPSON:** Dean Rusk used to say to never get too close to any of your subordinates, nor to any of your superiors. He used to imply to the Rockefeller Foundation that he never got too close to any trustees because if they ever wanted to fire him, they ought to feel perfectly free and not be influenced at all by sentiment. Would problems like that have been easier if there hadn't been close personal ties?

**JORDAN:** In the abstract, yes. But that's like saying you shouldn't be close to Bert Lance and you shouldn't be close to Judge Griffin Bell. Those friendships existed, as well as an awareness on the part of the President that these people had talents and could make contributions. We certainly underestimated at the outset the ability of an issue like that to overnight become what it turned out to be. We made some mistakes along the way.

The President thought all along that the treatment of Bert Lance was unfair. It had a lot to do with the fact that he was a close friend of the President. It had a lot to do with the fact that he was the man that was going to help Jimmy Carter balance his budget. That didn't seem to square with these actions from years past when he was a country banker. It had something to do with rhetoric from the campaign that the people in the press interpreted as being self righteous. You know, we were not going to tolerate any impropriety or even the appearance of impropriety. So all these things conveniently came together in the person of Lance. Some wondered if Carter was going to be tough on a close friend and a Georgian. Within days and weeks it became an enormous issue. *Time* magazine had the issue on the cover maybe for two weeks in a row. It ultimately came to a point that we realized that we could not continue and that it was doing serious damage to Carter's Presidency.

**YOUNG:** There were an awful lot of agendas being played out in that affair.

**JORDAN:** Oh, there were, there were.

**JORDAN:** I may not have answered your question.

**FENNO:** As much as you could.

**JORDAN:** As an inside person and as a man that was emotionally involved, I thought the treatment Lance was receiving was terribly unfair. Not that he had not made mistakes, but that he was being held to a different standard, and that Carter was being held responsible for Bert Lance's banking practices six or eight years before. I thought a different standard was applied.

**FENNO:** You described it as a problem that was causing the Carter Presidency political disadvantages. Could you think of ones less close to home where you might have gotten involved in that, but not a policy?

**JORDAN:** All kinds of things like personnel problems and easing people out of the administration never surfaced. The Lance thing was difficult for me. I couldn't be objective

about it because I was so close to Bert. But there were a lot of things like that. They were time consuming. You ended up spending time on the things you never would expect to spend time on going into the White House.

**JONES:** Would it be fair to say that you were heavily involved in foreign policy and major personnel issues?

**JORDAN:** Yes, but I wouldn't want to leave the impression that over the course of four years I spent a lot of time doing those things. I didn't. The Bert Lance thing is an example of one thing that happened that took a lot of time. I didn't spend a lot of time along the way on personnel matters.

**JONES:** Was the President likely to ask for your advice when some particularly sticky personnel issues arose? Was he likely to call you in on that?

**JORDAN:** Yes.

**REDFORD:** Did you feel that you could talk to Jimmy Carter on anything that you wanted to? And did you feel that you could argue with the President about policies and object to a policy that he seemed to be pursuing?

**JORDAN:** I often did not feel that I had the substantive background to argue with him on policy, but I felt completely free to argue with him and differ with him on anything, and I frequently did. Jimmy Carter was a difficult man to work for. He was very demanding. He pushed people and expected a lot from them. The best thing about working for him, though, was that you always knew where you stood with him. He was very direct and straightforward. If you did something he didn't like, he would just tell you. If you didn't do things the way that he thought they should be done, he would tell you. You never wondered, *I wonder if I'm doing this right or the way he wants*. If you weren't, you would hear about it. People who worked closely with him had a very open and comfortable relationship with him. One of the many things I always regretted was that people never had any sense of his keen sense of humor. He was tough and demanding to work for, but it was fun to work for him.

**THOMPSON:** As tough with Blumenthal and Califano as with you?

**JORDAN:** I don't know. Yes.

**REDFORD:** You could tell him that you thought he was wrong?

**JORDAN:** Oh yes, sir, I did. That's what I normally had to do. I had to. People would bring their arguments to me. I spent a lot of time going in and making arguments that I didn't always believe in just to show the President another point of view. Yes, I did that a lot.

**BUTLER:** Ham could consistently write a cogent memorandum to the President which disagreed with him but which left no doubt about Hamilton's loyalty and objectivity. Ham could find mediating language which would spell out the different sides of the question in a cogent

memo. That took an enormous amount of time. When we first went to see Dick Cheney during the transition, Cheney told us never to try to write anything from the chief of staff's office. "You've got to get other people to write for you. You don't have the time to sit down and compose and write yourself," he said. Ham made himself day after day sit down and write memoranda for Jimmy Carter which would lay out the political issues. The President must have relied on those memos quite a bit.

**JORDAN:** I'd orally present objections and concerns whenever I felt them, but I also learned when Carter was Governor that if I went into the Governor's office to see him and had five arguments against something, I wouldn't get beyond point one before he'd be arguing back with me. I'd never get to points two, three, four, and five. When I had a particularly subtle point to make, or a complicated thing to try to influence him on, I'd usually resort to writing it. I knew he couldn't argue with a piece of paper, he'd have to sit down and read it all.

**YOUNG:** We've also been told that he preferred to work off pieces of paper. Was that correct?

**JORDAN:** I think that's exaggerated. One of the things that I tried to do, particularly after the first six or eight months, was to give Carter more of the flavor of an issue before he made some of these big decisions. I got six or eight people in the Oval Office to spend three or four hours talking some of this stuff through, because you just can't get all the nuances of an argument and you can't anticipate everybody's reaction to every argument by just having a 30- or 40-page memo. Jody and I always encouraged him to set aside some time before he made a decision on energy policy or the B-1 or whatever, to sit down with a group of people and talk things through.

**HARGROVE:** How many people in the administration felt that they could disagree with the President to his face?

**JORDAN:** Without naming names, there were people on the senior staff that were more reluctant than others, but I'd say the large majority of the people on the senior staff were very comfortable in expressing a different point of view while arguing with the President. Some people gave up. Oftentimes even those people would come to me and convince me that he was really wrong or about to make a mistake, and I'd end up having to go in to him, not even understanding what I was talking about, and try to change his mind or give this different point of view one last time. A lot of times I was just the bearer of bad news.

**THOMPSON:** We read so much about the President's working days. To do all the things you've told us about today, you must have put in 24 hours a day, didn't you?

**JORDAN:** Initially I made the mistake that everybody makes. I thought there was some relationship during that first six to twelve months of hours invested to the quality of results. After that first year I usually went home by seven thirty or eight o'clock at night, just saying to hell with it. I was no good after that time of day. I couldn't think and function. There were always important things left undone, but that was true if you worked ten, fifteen or twenty hours a day. I think all of us developed a sense of balance and of priorities after that first eight or ten months. Don't you think, Landon? About that first year, though, you're right. I'd come in Saturdays, Sundays, but I wasn't any good after I did that for a while.

**BUTLER:** You're just wasting everybody's time, including your own.

**JORDAN:** Yes, you're not productive when you work that much.<sup>1</sup>

**YOUNG:** Hamilton, we'd like to talk about how we should look at and try to understand Carter as a politician and as a President. Second, we'd like to hear your views on how you think things may have gone if Carter had been reelected, bearing in mind what's happening with Reagan now. Third, if you think it's interesting for our purposes, we might like to hear about the Iranian crisis and what that tells you about the Presidency. And fourth, it would be very instructive, not just for us, but for future students of the Presidency, to discuss the human experience of being in a position such as you were in. What, if anything, does it do to a person? A lot of people have studied what it's like to be a Congressman, but very few people have asked what it's like to be a staff person in the White House, and particularly a person that had to do the things you were given to do.

**JORDAN:** I can answer all those things quickly and easily.

**YOUNG:** Oh no. That's not what I had in mind. To start with, Carter as a politician. Some hold the opinion that the real source of the problems President Carter had in office stemmed from Carter's being an apolitical, an anti-political President, or at least a President who had no taste for or perhaps very sensitive fingertips about politics. You're familiar with the theme in the press. Of course that causes ears to prick up, and reminds people that this is what they said about [Dwight] Eisenhower. They said that he, too, didn't know how to deal with the process. I'd like you and Landon to comment on that and give your views on that.

**JORDAN:** Let me just introduce my friend Tom Donilon, who's a freshman at the University law school, and until last year ran the Carter presidential campaign. Tom worked in the White House for a couple of years and then went over to the campaign, so he may also have some comments. He understands better than anybody in the country today the rules and procedures of the Democratic party. To say that Jimmy Carter does not understand politics or is not a good politician denies the phenomenon by which he got to the White House. He is without question the best politician, when he's working at it, of anybody I have ever seen. He was able to win the nomination only through sheer energy, commitment, and political skill. The first trip he made to Iowa, he had a reception. One person came, but that didn't deter him from walking the streets, meeting people, getting names, writing notes, and going to coffee klatches in people's homes. He is as good a politician as there is. To say that he doesn't understand the political process is almost to ignore the phenomenally successful campaign out of which he rose from Georgian obscurity.

The man didn't change when he took office, but his priorities did. It was the same thing when he was Governor. Once he was President, I knew he would deal with the problems. He understood that part of the problem was maintaining some political support, especially in Congress, for the things that he believed in. But people expected him to be Lyndon Johnson. He was not Lyndon Johnson. He was not that kind of person. But even Lyndon Johnson would have had a difficult

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<sup>1</sup> End of morning session, begin afternoon session

time in 1976, because Lyndon Johnson wouldn't have had to cajole and twist fifteen or twenty arms. He would have had to have twisted and cajoled a 150 or 200 people. The fragmentation of political power, particularly in the Congress, made the job of selling his program to the Congress more difficult.

Jim Wright told me that Carter's knowledge was the most admirable thing about Carter, but was also obviously one of Carter's weaknesses. He said that every time that he had ever been in the White House for a meeting with the President, the President was always well informed. The President was always on the high ground and was always talking or discussing the issue in terms of what was best for the country. But he said he never pulled me aside and said, "You know, Jim, I've just got to have you as a Democrat on this vote." It was almost like the President was so preoccupied with the merits of the argument that he didn't approach these legislators with requests to Congressmen in a personal or partisan sense. Not that that would have made a lot of difference in most cases.

The perception that Carter did not enjoy politics, and found it anathema, was exaggerated. It overlooks the very means by which he became President. Once he became Governor of Georgia, and once he became President, he spent the bulk of his time learning to understand issues and shaping solutions to those issues, and didn't spend as much time as he could have and should have on just pure old politics.

**BUTLER:** To say that he was not a politician is absurd. Here's a man who came out of nowhere to the pinnacle of his profession.

**JORDAN:** Same thing as Governor of Georgia.

**YOUNG:** Carter read about and studied the Presidency; as I think you said earlier. What did he study, what did he read, what was his view that he got from studying? Also, do you think when the time comes to evaluate Carter and understand him as a President, that scholars should pay a good deal of attention to the beginnings of his political career in Georgia, his experience as Senator and as Governor and as campaigner in Georgia, and the Georgia political system at that time? Very little attention has been paid to that. Most people have even forgotten that Carter was ever a Senator.

**JORDAN:** To answer the second part of your question, yes.

**YOUNG:** And why?

**JORDAN:** There are a number of parallels. All of his political campaigns were long shots. He was always the person that stood little or no chance of winning. He was always the person that was running against the political establishment. One of our problems in the general election of 1976 was that we had spent four years figuring out how to win the nomination, and given very little thought to the general election. Another problem in the general election was that Carter all of a sudden went from being this kind of loner who was out there fighting and scrapping, the little guy against the system and a status quo, to wearing the mantle of the Democratic party.

This will really have to be off the record, but he came back after one of those early trips and said, "You know, they had me up on some platform in New Jersey, and half the people on the platform with me were under indictment. They were all grouped around me. I had 30 minutes there, and they spent about 45 minutes introducing all of these jokers. I got up there and didn't know quite what to say to the crowd."

Neither he nor we were emotionally prepared for all of the problems of being the established center candidate. We ran a much better primary campaign in '76 than we did a general election campaign. And we ran a better primary campaign in '80 than we did a general election, obviously. When Carter ran for the state Senate, the race was stolen from him. He won the contest in court. All of the old rural machine was against him. When he was running against Bo [Howard] Callaway for Congress, he was the long shot, he was against the political establishment. That was true in '66, that was true in '70.

Carter's election as Governor of Georgia in 1970 was much more incredible than his election as President in 1976. Carl Sanders had all of the political establishment, all of the money, all of the newspapers, all of the political talent. It was really just Jimmy Carter against everybody. Those early experiences taught us not to be intimidated by the fear of defeat or people saying, "You can't do this; you can't run for President." Our reaction to that was, "We've heard that before, and Jimmy Carter's heard it all through his political life." Those things certainly had a significant impact on the development of his own political outlook and his confidence about himself as a candidate.

**HARGROVE:** Did this loner posture carry over into the way he attempted to conduct the office of Governor and President?

**JORDAN:** The fragmentation allowed us to get there, but the fragmentation in the party and the country made it more difficult to govern it. So how do you separate the thing? He wasn't Lyndon Johnson, but he obviously had the ability to be very charming or persuasive or he never would have won the nomination.

**HARGROVE:** So you wouldn't draw a distinction between been good at electoral politics and being good at governing politics?

**JORDAN:** Well no, I'd say that was exaggerated. I would say that his own focus shifted once he was elected from the art of politics to solving the problems. And there are some political leaders, like Lyndon Johnson, that gloried in the art or the technique of governing. We've gone through an age where we tended to glorify political technique. But Carter could be very persuasive and very charming in dealing with Senators and Congressmen.

**BUTLER:** His rhetoric could be spell-binding.

**JORDAN:** But there were so many of them to deal with.

**BUTLER:** In the late sixties, Georgia was perceived as the state of Lester Maddox, when in fact it was a very fertile area for all sorts of ideas. People forget that the man who burdened the world

with the word ecology was Eugene Odom, of the University of Georgia. John Portman's architecture was literally changing the face of cities. Compare the climate for ideas in Atlanta with that in Cleveland, Houston, or San Francisco. Atlanta and Georgia really flowered for four or five years. Jimmy Carter was always in the forefront of those ideas. He was not necessarily a part of the individual constituencies but he certainly understood environmentalists, the blacks, the city people, and the business community. Georgia has a very highly respected business community. Interestingly enough, Vietnam was not a major issue in Georgia. Carter himself was never a part of that split between the McGovernites and the mainstream Democrats.

**YOUNG:** What did he read about the Presidency? What did he take his instruction from?

**JORDAN:** He read all of your books.

**YOUNG:** This is not self-serving. No names need to be named.

**JORDAN:** He read everything he got his hands on for several years during the campaign, and particularly as the time approached over the summer before the general election he just read all kinds of books. You know, books about the lives of Presidents, different books about how to organize the Presidency. I couldn't give you a laundry list. He studied just as a student would study the Presidency. He studied how different people had organized the Presidency.

**DONILON:** He liked [Robert] Donovan's book a lot. He mentions that a lot.

**YOUNG:** Did he have a particular President that he had an interest in?

**JORDAN:** He always mentioned [Harry] Truman. He really felt an empathy for Truman.

**DONILON:** His first speech out of office was when he got the Truman award in independence. And he talked about parallels with Truman's administration.

**YOUNG:** Did they ever meet?

**JORDAN:** No. Mr. Clark Clifford used to come see me fairly regularly and he gave some stuff to the President and me. He used to talk about all the similarities in the problems that both men faced and the similarities in the two men. Truman is someone that he had admired. Ironically, John F. Kennedy was the President who first inspired Carter's interest in politics. His family were about the only white people in that area that had enough guts to say they were for Kennedy, and later for Johnson. The Kennedy example of public service, running for office, caring and thinking that government could make a difference, was a strong early motivation with Jimmy Carter. I'm not sure if he'd remember it that way now after Ted Kennedy. It was originally the case with him, as it was with me.

You couldn't separate any of these early motivations from the pride that we felt as southerners. We felt proud of the way in which the South had successfully grappled with the civil rights question. These things were all part of an emotionally complicated ball of wax that made us want to prove to the country that we were as smart as anybody else and that we could elect Presidents

too. That regional pride thing was a strong force in all of us, and it was a decisive factor in Carter being elected, Carter was the only Democrat in 1976 that could have carried the South. He carried the South not on the issues, but on the strength of regional pride.

**MOSHER:** Is that regional consciousness still in the South?

**JORDAN:** To some extent he satisfied the feelings that were in the mainstream of political life in this country. It's maybe not as strong, but as a southerner, I can say that we continue to be the only region of the country that thinks of ourselves as a region and is regarded by other areas of the country as a region. The southern regional feeling is still fairly significant. Less so in 1980 than in '76.

**DONILON:** The numbers in 1980 verify that.

**YOUNG:** What do you mean?

**DONILON:** Carter got beat by large margins in every place but the South. Only losing some southern states by one or two points testifies to the regional pride of the South.

**JORDAN:** If you look at the electoral results, it looks like we got beat everywhere, and we really did. But in the South, we lost a lot of southern states by only one or two points. You couldn't find mid-western or western states that we lost only by one or two points. So I think your point's valid.

**YOUNG:** Some people have suggested that Carter really has to be understood as a person of two political sides. The term often used for one of those sides is the populist, the compassionate President, and the other side is the fiscal conservative side.

**JORDAN:** He didn't see those things as being incompatible, and I don't think they are. That was one of the reasons it's hard to explain him to people. There are things about him that are apparent contradictions. He was from a small town and had the naval experience. He was also an environmentalist and a small businessman. All these things don't easily add up to being one human being. He's a very complex person.

**BUTLER:** After the election, at a meeting of senior advisors with the President, Fred Kahn made the comment that he thought the most difficult problem President Carter faced was the conflict between compassionate public policies and a conservative fiscal approach. The President said, "That's well said." He agreed that was a very difficult conflict. I'm still not sure how a Democratic President can resolve fiscal conservatism with the day-in-and-day-out problems of dealing with the traditional Democratic constituencies.

**JORDAN:** Carter used to say too that an inefficient government bureaucracy doesn't help a needy child. Making government work better and care for people that were disadvantaged were compatible. In his own mind, there was no inherent contradiction. He cared about people's needs, but also tried to get the mechanism that served those needs to work a little better.



**YOUNG:** On the other hand, there are people who might find cause to characterize him as a visionary.

**JORDAN:** He had an ability to understand the details of the problem, but also to step back and see where that problem fit in the larger scheme of things and how it impacted on other problems. You find some people that see the big picture and some people that see the details. Jimmy Carter really saw both things. Do you think that's right, Landon?

**BUTLER:** Yes. I always thought of him as the country's foremost student of government. He really knows government inside and out. He understands, appreciates, and respects it. He believes it can be good. He spent hours and hours on reorganization plans and on budget plans. Nobody knows the executive branch better than Jimmy Carter.

**YOUNG:** We've been told that he spent considerable time soon after he got in office studying the budget in detail, and that that was an important self-instruction process for him. Is that true?

**JORDAN:** Well, yes. The Joint Chiefs couldn't go in there and bedazzle him with either budget figures or technical talk about weapons systems. He was well informed and well prepared for meetings, particularly on things relating to the budget. It gave him a leg up on the department heads. They learned early on in the game that they couldn't easily fool him about what the numbers meant. You could say that the President was bogged down in details, but it's a knowledge gained in the first year that gave him considerable leverage and insight in functioning the last two or three years of the administration.

**YOUNG:** Another comment that's been made—

**JORDAN:** I'm sure you don't believe any of these comments that you're alluding to.

**YOUNG:** I don't know what to think.

**JORDAN:** I'm afraid I'm not helping you much.

**YOUNG:** The only thing I'm sure of is that this President was a much more complicated person than the caricatures that have appeared. He has left a legacy in the off the cuff commentary that is filled with contradictions. So much in print about Carter is contradictory. I'm trying to figure out what, if anything, that tells us. To give you another example, you had talked earlier about his being a very difficult person to work for.

**JORDAN:** Difficult in the sense of demanding and pushing.

**YOUNG:** Exactly. Others have said he was too kind. He didn't demand as much of others as he demanded of himself. There's another contradiction, for what it's worth.

**JORDAN:** My answer to that contradiction would be yes and no. While pushing and always expecting more, he was also able to turn around and extend himself personally. He could show

that he cared about you and was concerned about you if you had personal problems. I never had the experience that he didn't push me. He didn't fire some people as quickly as he should have.

**YOUNG:** Let me give you just a little story about Eisenhower and ask you to think of Carter in this context. Was he the sort of person who would deal with staff this way? Eisenhower once called in Jim Haggerty, his press secretary, and instructed him to go out there and say such and such and Haggerty objected very strongly. Jim Haggerty said, "God, Mr. President, if I go out there and say that, they will absolutely eat me alive. I can't do that. It's a very tough thing to do. They'll kill me." Eisenhower said, "Yes, Jim, better you than me." Was Carter the kind of person who could have said that?

**JORDAN:** Oh yes, I think there were most memorable spats between him and Jody Powell. Landon, you probably saw some of these, and Tom, you might have. He and Jody were like an older and a younger brother. They would just argue, and Carter would get mad and not speak.

**BUTLER:** I'll have to say he never got madder at any single human being than Jody.

**JORDAN:** He could just make you feel awful.

**BUTLER:** I can remember sitting in meetings with the President waiting for Jody to get there. Jody wouldn't be there, and the President would get on the phone and call him and say, "Jody, we're all sitting here waiting for you," and twenty minutes later Jody would stroll in. They'd go round and round.

**JORDAN:** If you did something wrong in a way he didn't like it, or if it was less than perfect, he would just tell you. He was demanding, but you always knew where you stood with him. He would always let you know just how things were.

**DONILON:** It's a contradiction in the White House staff system to say that the President works harder than the staff. That's not the way it works. If Jimmy Carter was going to make 100 political phone calls in an evening and wanted 50 more, his staff was there to provide those phone calls. The staff has to work at least as hard and sometimes harder than the President.

**JORDAN:** They were talking more about the question of discipline from him. He was a tough guy to work with.

**BUTLER:** He was not a compulsive guy in the sense that he would want something right away. He worked regular hours and had a regular schedule. He demanded high quality work.

**JORDAN:** But if something became an obsession with him, he was very unrealistic as to how quickly he wanted it done.

**HARGROVE:** I hear in Jim's question the question of how calculating he was at the use of artifice or at deflecting criticism on others and away from himself as a conscious strategy. Could he appeal to the worst in others in order to get something done? In other words, how much of a

thoroughly political man was he in the sense of knowing how to play on the irrationalities of other people? Did he play with very intentional political dimensions, or was he a rationalist?

**JORDAN:** Well, he's a rationalist. He never berated people, he never did the kinds of things, for example, that I've read Lyndon Johnson did to his staff.

**HARGROVE:** That whole dimension to Johnson's personality is missing from Carter?

**JORDAN:** Yes. He was still very much the Annapolis graduate captain of the ship. You know, do this do that; reasonable requests. He expected it to be done right; he expected it to be done well. I never had the experience personally of me doing something poorly and him just accepting it without comment. He was a very demanding person to work for.

**HARGROVE:** But he was not an intriguer, a Machiavellian, or a calculator?

**JORDAN:** No. You would have difficulty finding people that worked close in to Jimmy Carter, like his immediate staff, who did not like him as a human being very much or did not feel an emotional commitment and relation to him. Don't you think that's right, Landon? It's so self-serving to say that, but I really believe it's true.

**FENNO:** Did he try to persuade other people to do something he wanted them to do? We've just gone through the AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control Systems] debate where a President called people in and tried to persuade them to do something by saying, "I'm the President, you've got to support the President." Would he do that?

**JORDAN:** Yes. That's how we got the Panama Canal treaty ratified. The same argument. If we'd had a SALT treaty and if it would have been ratified, that would have been ultimately the main argument.

**REDFORD:** Congressman Wright made the opposite statement. He said Carter never did talk anything except the issue to him.

**JORDAN:** That's right. I think that's right. It can't be 100 percent one way or 100 percent the other. Most times Jim Wright's assessment was correct. But certainly on the Panama Canal treaty, Carter made this other argument, that he couldn't afford as President to be defeated on a treaty vote. But you're generally right, Professor Redford.

**REDFORD:** There's some inconsistency too, isn't there, in the statements that he was a hard taskmaster, he was tough, but that he wouldn't ever fire anybody?

**JORDAN:** He waited too late to fire people. We didn't do those things early enough.

**YOUNG:** Actually there are not many Presidents, when you think about it, who could fire people.

**HARGROVE:** FDR [Franklin Roosevelt] couldn't fire anybody.

**JORDAN:** I have never found anybody that I liked very much that enjoyed firing people, because regardless of how poorly somebody does a job, when you dispense somebody from their job, there's a lot of human grief and disappointment. In the White House or in the Cabinet, that reluctance is a thousand times as great because you fire a Cabinet member and he's going to be known as Mike Blumenthal, the guy that Carter fired as Secretary of the Treasury. You're doing something that permanently affects a person when you do this, so I think there's an additional reluctance to do it. But look ultimately at what he did. He fired four Cabinet officers in two days.

**YOUNG:** Doesn't seem to have affected Califano very much.

**JORDAN:** Oh, I think it did, I think it did a lot.

**YOUNG:** Well, maybe he's trying to repair the damage.

**JONES:** I'd love to fire somebody, but I don't have anybody to fire. People who are really good at it don't have anyone to do it to. This talk about Johnson and his involvement in so many aspects of building majorities led me to wonder about this: How did the President take a defeat and how did he take criticism personally? How did he react to it? I think we all have a pretty good picture of how Johnson reacted to those kinds of things. Was he very involved in it, did he get angry or did he take it philosophically? How did he take policy defeats in Congress?

**JORDAN:** He didn't take cartoons, editorials, and things in the newspaper well. Some of the congressional votes successfully tore our energy bill apart. He didn't like them. He reacted on a personal basis very strongly toward them. I can count on one hand the number of times I ever heard him complain or whine about stories in the press. Getting back to his study of the Presidency, he just had an understanding that there were going to be a lot of unfair things said about him and his administration. Some of them might even be untrue, but that was just part of being President. He was philosophical about most of the criticism.

I read these stories about Johnson with one of the wire service machines in his office, calling up reporters and hunting down leaks. I didn't see Carter personally upset about press stories but maybe a half a dozen times, and usually they were related to things that he thought hurt his policy or hurt the country. There was a *Washington Post* story that basically said that Carter had decided to put the SALT process on the back burner, which was totally untrue. He was worried about what message that would send to the Soviet Union. Would they think that we were basically giving up on SALT? If they really thought that, they weren't going to make any other concessions. That was the maddest I ever saw him about a press story when we were in the White House.

Other things bothered the hell out of him, like the Billy Carter thing. But he reacted confidently and philosophically to most criticism in the press. That's not to say that he ignored it. If there was a leak coming out of the State Department, if a memo from the State Department leaked on issue X, Y, or Z, he'd say, "Jody, call Cy and find out who in the hell is putting that stuff out and get them to get out a clarifying statement." He was not paranoid or insecure about things in the press. But he did not like to be defeated on congressional votes.

**JONES:** What about criticism from Democrats? Was the criticism reported in the press from Democrats? Did he react strongly to that?

**JORDAN:** Yes, oh sure, he did. I told you about Tom Donilon's study.

**DONILON:** If you look at the network stories for the first year in office, about 85 percent of the attributable criticism was from Democrats.

**JORDAN:** I reckon we'd have had to be mad at everybody in that Congress if we'd become angry about any criticism.

**DONILON:** Or identify with a Democratic constituency.

**MOSHER:** Was he vengeful toward Congressmen that criticized or undercut him or voted against what he felt was important?

**JORDAN:** Appropriately vengeful. He wasn't obsessed with getting even or trying to create a circumstance where he could prove something to somebody, but he wouldn't forget the people.

**MOSHER:** Did he do the kind of thing that Reagan is said to have done with the budget? Did he invite Congressmen and threaten them, or say, "I'll campaign for you or I won't campaign against you depending on how you vote?"

**JORDAN:** No, he never did that.

**YOUNG:** One of my colleagues at Princeton, when President Carter was up there, said that Carter said that the Democratic party was an albatross around his neck. It shows that he had some sense of that 85 percent of criticism that you mentioned.

**DONILON:** When he said that, by the way, he was talking about running in a general election in '76 and in '80, after having to go through in 1980 an uproarious convention and in 1976 after having to take much more seriously the political structure.

**YOUNG:** You mentioned, I think, if I remember correctly from earlier this morning, that you had a pessimistic view of his chances for reelection as this unpopular program and as these issues that he was biting the bullet on came up. Did Carter himself have that view? Did he expect to be reelected?

**JORDAN:** I think he expected to be reelected. All of us expected that he would ultimately be reelected. It was once again Carter against the odds. He had always been successful before, and so the feeling was that somehow or other this thing was going to work out for us. He always had phenomenal luck. It was a combination of hard work and some luck that had been the ingredients in his success in political life. There was a feeling of inevitability that somehow or another, despite all of these problems, we were going to figure out a way to win this election. At the same time, if not in my heart, in my head I knew that if Carter just rushed into his Presidency the way

he did his Governorship, and jumped on all these problems without regard to the cumulative political consequences, he was going to have a difficult time being reelected.

I think it's fair to say that any Democrat or Republican that had been elected in 1976 would have probably had a difficult time being reelected. Anyone would have still had the phenomenon of enormous increase in energy prices. The barrel of oil on the oil market was \$9 dollars a barrel when we took office in '77, it was \$34 dollars a barrel when we left office. That single fact had a lot to do with the economic conditions in our country. Anybody that had been elected in '76 would have had some difficulty in '80. We had greater difficulty because of the hostage situation, which was our responsibility. It was the President's decision to let the Shah into the country. The third factor causing our defeat was the fragmentation in the party, epitomized by Kennedy's yearlong challenge to Carter.

**YOUNG:** If he had been reelected, how do you think that the second Carter administration would have looked?

**JORDAN:** Two things: One, I would have seen it from a distance. I wouldn't have been there. I would have been sitting down in Atlanta. There would have been some changes in the staff, maybe a few changes in the Cabinet. The domestic emphasis would have been on consolidation of the progress that we made in the energy area. There would have been some additional deregulation, more emphasis on conservation and new energy sources. That would have been the centerpiece of what we did domestically in the second term. In foreign policy there's no question that the key thing would have been the SALT II treaty. There also would have been sustained emphasis on the situation in the Middle East. Those would have been the priorities.

**YOUNG:** Budget balancing would have been a priority?

**JORDAN:** Yes.

**YOUNG:** Budgetary issues emerged as a major issue.

**JORDAN:** It was one of the premises for his candidacy. We were going to try to balance the budget, and the budget deficit went from 66 billion when we came into office to where the last budget we proposed had gotten down to 22 billion, before the recession. We balanced it, but the Congress didn't accept that balancing. Further progress in balancing the budget would have been a theme. But again, the centerpiece of our second term domestic would have been energy. And in foreign policy, SALT II. Think that's right, Landon?

**YOUNG:** And in terms of the White House, the system would have stuck with changes that were made after '79.

**JORDAN:** Yes. With me gone, things probably would have fallen apart.

**YOUNG:** They would have come back to place in the same way.

**JORDAN:** Well, I don't know, it would have taken several years. They would have scotch taped and glued the thing back together. The President would have had to resign before his second term was over. None of us were indispensable. Maybe Stu was, I'm not sure.

**YOUNG:** Two things about it. The domestic policy staff under Carter was by far the largest of any domestic policy staff before or since. It seemed to have an expansive growth. I wondered if that was a conscious decision to build up that staff, or did it just happen?

**JORDAN:** It wasn't a conscious decision to build it up. In terms of numbers, I'd be surprised if it was a significant growth. Was it?

**YOUNG:** It's supposed to have been, that's what I've been told.

**BUTLER:** I'm surprised to hear that.

**YOUNG:** [John] Ehrlichman's shop was pretty large.

**JORDAN:** All I can remember is Stu having to get rid of some slots when we first went into office and finding out ways to get a couple of people hired here or there. So I'm not sure if that's right.

**YOUNG:** Well, I may be wrong. It certainly played a different role from what it did under Ehrlichman.

**JORDAN:** It was a strong staff. Under Stu's leadership it was a strong staff.

**MOSHER:** You mean professionally strong?

**JORDAN:** Yes, sir.

**MOSHER:** Not politically strong?

**JORDAN:** Well if you wanted to fault them, there were a lot of political biases, but you say the same for any staff in the White House. The kinds of people that you can get to work sixteen or eighteen hours a day are disproportionately young and disproportionately liberal. So I think that if you looked at the ideology of Stu's staff, you would find some variance between what they thought on issues and what Carter thought on issues. But Stu was an honest broker in presenting these things to Carter. So in the long run it worked out pretty well.

**REDFORD:** Thirty-five professional staff?

**JORDAN:** No, sir. I think maybe like fifteen or eighteen professional staff and fifteen secretaries or something like that. That's a very rough number. But my impression was the Ehrlichman staff was quite a bit bigger than that really.

**YOUNG:** Certainly even regardless of question of size it seems to have served a very different function from what that staff operation had served before.

**JORDAN:** Largely because Stu was so respected by everyone, particularly the President.

**YOUNG:** Two more points at least unless there are some more questions on this second term business.

**JORDAN:** Let me just say we would have had a great second term. Without me.

**YOUNG:** We won't pursue that then. Leads into all sorts of speculation.

**JORDAN:** Its history it would be different.

**YOUNG:** It was perfectly obvious from the reports that you were very heavily involved in the Iranian crisis. Maybe that's a good way to begin talking about what the job of working in the White House is like, and what it tells you about life in the Presidency. We'd appreciate it if you'd tell us something about your view of the Iranian crisis and what your role in it was. What kinds of things did you do?

**JORDAN:** I spent three or four months this year going around the country and around the world interviewing people that were involved. I'm not even sure if I understand in retrospect exactly what happened to us in Iran. I think that our administration inherited a flow of policy toward Iran. Although we made some attempts to adjust it, we continued that flow of policy. The Shah could have fallen two years before Jimmy Carter was in office or two years after he was in office. He could have fallen during Reagan's administration. But at some point in time in our history or in Iran's history, dating back to the middle '70s, the Shah's days were numbered. It was just a question of when various social, economic, and religious factors came together in Iran in a way to cause his downfall.

There was a serious intelligence failure in our country. Frankly, no other country in the world saw it either, and although there were people like Richard Collumb at the University of Pittsburgh that had been predicting for ten years that the Shah's going to fall next year. There are a lot of those people whose predictions now look accurate, but they had been predicting that for a long time. They saw the seeds of the unrest, but no one could predict when they were going to come together. I don't know if this is what you want me to get into, but I think the Shah fell basically because of the Shah. U.S. policy was a factor, but not the critical one.

It had more to do with the enormous change that had taken place in Iran and the movement of the people from the rural areas and to the cities. There was enormous inflation and unrealistic expectations raised by the Shah as a result of the '73 oil embargo and the tripled price of oil on the world market, which brought an influx of billions of dollars into Iran. Those billions of dollars were perceived as not going to their people, but instead went to buying military equipment from the United States. A combination of all those things had to do with the unrest in Iran. By the time we saw it as a problem, it was too late for us or for the Shah to do anything about it. So my personal assessment in retrospect was that the Shah's days were numbered from



somewhere in the middle '70s. It was just a question of when he was going to fall. To get more specifically to the hostage question, then of course the Shah came into the country for medical treatment and the hostages were seized.

**THOMPSON:** Was his admittance debated? Was there a long debate in the administration?

**JORDAN:** Yes, we debated. When the Shah left Iran, he did not want to come to the United States for several reasons. First of all, he had the dream, totally unrealistic, that [Ayatollah Ruhollah] Khomeini might quickly fall on his face and that there might be a chance for him to return to Iran just as he had done in 1953 with the help of the CIA. To take advantage of that possibility, he thought it was a mistake to leave the Middle East. He particularly did not want to play into the hands of his opponents by leaving Iran and rushing to the United States. So the door to him coming to the United States was open in December and January of '78 and '79 primarily as an inducement to get him to step down while there was still a chance of the moderate elements of the Iranian government forming something less radical, less extreme than the Khomeini government. He chose not to do that.

By the time he went to Egypt and Morocco, we had to make a different judgment. The reality of the thing was that the Khomeini government was a fact of life. We had an enormous stake in a relationship with Iran both in terms of the oil we received from Iran and the strategic importance of Iran in the Persian Gulf. Our position changed to one of, "Please don't ask to come now because we're trying to develop a relationship with this new administration, this new regime in Iran." That of course proved to be fruitless. We were not able to do that because of the pressure particularly from Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller, which continued through the year, to let the Shah come to the states. We resisted that pressure because in the view of the President and Secretary Vance we had compelling national interests in trying to build some kind of new relationship with the Iranian regime.

**THOMPSON:** Were Mexican hospitals ever discussed?

**JORDAN:** Yes, I'm about to that point. So by the time the situation was described to us, the Shah was critically ill, he was in a life threatening situation, which he was. He could die and he needed medical attention of a sort only available in the United States. That was the way the situation was described to the President. The President was the only person at the foreign policy breakfast that was skeptical and did not want to let him in. Yes, Vance had changed his position because, as a matter of principle, Vance did not see how we could say no to a medical need of a dying man, particularly a dying man who had been an ally of this country for 37 years. So Carter sent Vance back to get an additional medical opinion on whether the help the Shah needed was only available from the states. He also sent the cable to Tehran. We got renewed reassurances from the Iranian government that they would protect our embassy as they had the previous February when it had been overrun.

The Iranians objected to the Shah's coming to the States for medical reasons. They were skeptical that it was true, they thought it was part of some conspiracy to try to return the Shah to power. Our embassy in Tehran, including Bruce Langdon, advised strongly against it. But based with the reassurance that they would protect our embassy and the compelling humanitarian

argument for letting the Shah in, the President begrudgingly agreed to do that. The last thing he said at the last meeting we had on it was, “What are you guys going to advise me to do when they overrun our embassy now and take our people hostage?” Carter actually predicted what would happen, although everybody said you’ve got to let the Shah in.

**THOMPSON:** Did Vance ever mention the millions and millions of dollars the Rockefeller Foundation had spent on medical research and care in Mexico?

**JORDAN:** Yes, I’ve interviewed all of the doctors. I’m the only person that’s ever talked to the Shah’s French doctors, called Jean Bernard and Georges Flandrin. I’m the only person that’s looked into the medical history, and I’ve had a couple of doctors helping me. There’s no question that the operation could have been done in Mexico, but the doctors that the Shah was relying on then were American. The safest thing from their perspective was to take him to the hospital that they were most comfortable with. I’m not sure if I’d been the patient if I would have wanted it any differently, but there’s no question he could have received the same treatment in Mexico that he received in New York.

One of the interesting questions and one of the conclusions I’m going to draw in my book, once I probe this a little further, is that the Shah got poorer treatment and poorer medical care and attention than you or I would have gotten if we had walked in off the street with the same problems, because in every instance there was a political dimension to the care. The doctors tended to overreact to the fact that he was the Shah. Some wanted to be more conservative in their treatment, others wanted to be bold and try to do extreme and experimental things. The quality of care that he received was uneven and at times contradictory.

**JONES:** Was the science magazine account during January accurate? The thing about Benjamin Kean, by a guy named Mark Brooks?

**JORDAN:** I’m not sure. I just recall that in that they said that there was not a second medical opinion gotten by the State Department.

**JONES:** That was correct?

**JORDAN:** Yes.

**THOMPSON:** Is there any lesson here about having first resisted the establishment, and then later on having a tendency to give into the establishment?

**JORDAN:** Carter’s instincts on the thing were correct in terms of what might happen if he let him in. But ultimately he was faced with the situation being incorrectly described to him that the only place the Shah could get this treatment was in New York City. They asked, “Mr. President, are you going to let him in and get that treatment, or are you going to make him stay in Mexico and possibly have him die and us be blamed for that death?” There was a foreign policy argument to be made on the other side that my friend Zbig made, “What is it going to say to the world when a man who’s out of power but who’s been our ally is not given the same treatment

and rights to come into our country as we would give anyone else? What does that say to our allies around the world?" So that was the argument on the other side.

**THOMPSON:** There is also the opposite precept of international politics: there are no permanent friends or allies.

**JORDAN:** Well I agree with you, and that was Carter's view. But ultimately it was put to him, "The Shah's in a hospital in Mexico, he's dying, he needs immediate attention." All those things are true. He was dying, he was badly jaundiced, he did need immediate attention. That was all true. "He has to go to New York to be cared for." That was not true.

**THOMPSON:** I've always wished that Cyrus Vance knew as much as Dean Rusk about the medical efforts of the Rockefeller Foundation. He might have said something differently.

**JORDAN:** The irony in the medical thing was this Dr. Benjamin Kean. I have to really be careful what I say about doctors, because they've got the money to sue you. The irony was that the Shah had two French oncologists who were renowned in the world for their treatment of blood cancer. His care was turned over to Dr. Benjamin Kean, who was a pathologist, a man who'd worked on malaria all of his life. He managed the Shah's care through Panama and at that point Dr. [Michael] DeBakey, who's a cardiovascular surgeon and who hadn't taken out a spleen in maybe twenty years, became the surgeon. So he had a pathologist and later a cardiovascular man dealing with something that should have been dealt with by an oncologist or a hematologist. So he didn't receive as good a care as you or I would have received if we walked in off the street. A lot of my book is about some of these things. Because you'd have to look a long time where the medical treatment of one man had such an enormous impact on world events.

**YOUNG:** Go on to the hostage crisis.

**JORDAN:** The initial effort was to quickly resolve the crisis. We had this experience before where the embassy had been overrun and the Prime Minister [Mehdi] Bazargan had gone and released the people. He resigned after the hostages were taken, partly in protest to the fact that they were taken. Khomeini endorsed the seizure. We had this incredible circumstance of the Iranian government endorsing the holding of our diplomats. And we went from a period of the first three, four, or five days when we just knew it was going to be over and then it began to dawn on us that the situation was so chaotic in Iran than maybe it wouldn't be over soon. We went to all of our western European allies, to Moslem countries, and even to Moslem religious leaders trying to find someone who knew Khomeini, or knew someone that knew Khomeini, in order to try to resolve the thing, and it all came to naught.

At the same time, we concluded that the only way to resolve the crisis was to have the Shah out of the States. The pretext for seizing the embassy was the Shah's entry into the States. As long as he stayed in the States, the Iranian specialists said it was not likely they were going to let our people go. So then this is where we found who our friends were. We went all over the world trying to find somewhere for the Shah to go. The Mexicans refused to let him come back in. We sent cables to all the capitals in the world. Our ambassadors went in to see foreign ministers, and

the answer from most places was, “We get oil from Iran and we can’t afford to have him here,” or “We have an embassy in Iran too, we can’t afford to take him here.”

And after about two or three weeks the only invitation the Shah had was from Egypt, from Sadat. The President thought that with all of Sadat’s other problems in the Arab world, to send the Shah there would be bad for Sadat. The Shah understood that. The strange ironies that involved me, of all people, in this thing was Carter just called me in one day and said, “Do you think can get the Panamanians to accept the Shah?” That went back to my relationship with Torrijos. So I flew down and saw Torrijos, and he immediately agreed to accept the Shah. I went back and had to negotiate with the Shah for a couple of days.

Then the Shah was off to his new home in Panama. I went home to the States feeling satisfied with myself that I had been able to manipulate this move without any publicity. I was prepared to retire from diplomacy. I figured that I was one for one, and I was going to stay that way. I didn’t realize that [Abolhassan] Bani-Sadr read an account in *Time* magazine about me moving the Shah. He said, “Well then, if this guy can do stuff quietly and is close to the President, he’s the guy we need to negotiate with.” So I became, unbeknownst to me, the target of efforts to try to negotiate the release of the hostages. He reached out to a French lawyer and an Argentinean lawyer who had known Khomeini when he was in exile there. They sought me out and we began to meet clandestinely all over Europe.

For four or five months I was totally preoccupied with the hostage thing. We had very precise written scenarios that we developed for resolving the crisis that had been agreed upon by the United Nations, by the Revolutionary Council, by Khomeini, and of course by our own government. We came close on two instances to winning the release of the hostages, once in March and once in April. Once that channel ran its course, it was obvious to us that while the Iranians had the desire to resolve the crisis, they didn’t have the capacity to resolve it. That’s when we then attempted the rescue mission.

**REDFORD:** Who of the Iranians were you negotiating with?

**JORDAN:** I can’t really talk about that. I may be able to some day. Most of my time was spent negotiating with these two French lawyers, one was an Argentinean named Christian Bourguet and the other guy’s name was Hector Villalon.

**MOSHER:** As a third party approach.

**JORDAN:** Yes, I had some direct contact with the Iranians too, but I can’t really talk about it, I may be able to some day. Marvin Zonis, a scholar of Iran at University of Chicago, sometime in March or April learned from the press that I was involved in the hostage negotiations, and he said, “What in the hell is Hamilton Jordan doing in the hostage negotiations?” That’s the same question I had asked. It wasn’t like I was trained or ordained to do that, it was just this peculiar set of circumstances through the Panamanians where I became the target for their diplomatic efforts. Pierre Salinger just has published a book about it. It’s about the secret negotiations that we conducted.

Then of course the rescue mission failed and the Shah died. That was probably a positive factor to the ultimate release. Most importantly, you had the Iran-Iraq war. Finally there was the realization on the part of the Iranians that the hostage crisis had become a domestic political football which jeopardized the success of their own revolution. The hostages were freed certainly not because they feared Jimmy Carter or they feared Ronald Reagan, but because the Iranians reached a conclusion that the thing no longer served their own purposes. It was time to put that behind them.

**YOUNG:** What was Carter's reason behind staying in Washington and not being out on the campaign?

**JORDAN:** We made a early judgment in a time when it looked like it was going to first last a few days and then a few weeks. At first he needed to stay there because all these things were going on behind the scenes and no one knew about them. He was having to stay on top of them and make decisions or approve working on these different things that we were negotiating. There was, for one, a real need for him to stay there. The decision not to campaign until the hostages were released seemed to take the high ground.

As the days and weeks passed, it looked like an excuse for Carter to hide behind the issue and to avoid the campaign. In fact, by election day in November of 1980, the perception widely held was that Carter had manipulated the hostage crisis to his own political benefit, which was not true. But that perception was largely a result of what was called the Rose Garden strategy, which is a decision we made in late December, stating that it wasn't appropriate for him to be out campaigning until they were home. We didn't take into account the fact that they might be held not only for weeks but for months.

**HARGROVE:** Ted Kennedy was a factor then?

**JORDAN:** He was.

**HARGROVE:** In the primaries.

**JORDAN:** The perception is that the hostage crisis saved Carter from Ted Kennedy. The week the hostages were seized there was a public opinion poll out that showed Kennedy running neck and neck with Carter. Kennedy had already begun his enormous decline from his summer lead over us of almost two to one. Certainly Carter benefited from the American people. As you know better than myself, they always tend to rally around their President in a crisis, and that rallying took place during the hostage crisis. Carter said that before he had the debate scheduled with Kennedy.

Then on top of all that, we had the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which in a lot of ways was much more ominous in its implications than the hostage crisis. Carter said, "If I go out to debate Kennedy in Iowa, I'm going to go out there as a President and I'm going to come back just as a politician. I need to stay on the high ground on these issues if we're going to do these things, if we're going to lift the grain embargo and boycott the Olympics and go for draft registration." So Carter made a move not ignoring the politics of it, but he made a decision that he needed to stay

there to work on the thing and he needed to be perceived at home and around the world as a President and not as a guy out there scrambling around for votes. When he made that decision, neither he nor any of us dreamed that the thing was going to go on for weeks or months, and then ultimately for over a year.

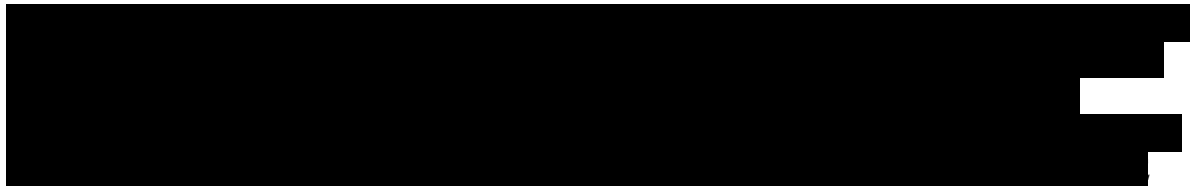
**JONES:** Did you discuss with some frequency, as it continued to go on, the problem of being trapped?

**JORDAN:** Oh yes. We discussed how to get out without looking foolish and really looking political. We put ourselves in a hell of a box.

**THOMPSON:** Did the State Department help in all this?

**JORDAN:** In the negotiations? Oh yes. The first thing I did after I was approached by the Iranians, was to ask Secretary Vance to let Hal Saunders work with me. Hal Saunders is a marvelous man who was Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East and, along with Warren Christopher, had as much to do as anyone with the Camp David peace process and also with the ultimate negotiations that freed the hostages. So everything I did was with Hal Saunders at my side.

**MOSHER:** Was the timing of the release not conditioned among the Iranians by the timing of the election?



**MOSHER:** They weren't trying to influence the election?

**JORDAN:** They didn't understand our country, just as we didn't understand theirs. You remember they let the blacks and the women out the first few weeks with the feeling that there'd be some uprising in this country by blacks and women in protest of our Iran policy. They didn't understand our country, but they wanted to see Carter defeated. They would tell you today in Iran that Khomeini defeated Carter.

**JONES:** Landon Butler mentioned earlier the functioning of the White House during this period. As an outsider thinking about the events, you had the Iranian thing going on, had the campaign coming up and then you had the other business of the White House. I've heard it said there were two White Houses, and perhaps there are three during this period. One dealing with Iran and then of course the Afghanistan situation. One gearing up to deal with the campaign and how we're going to treat that and having to focus on the relationship of this Iranian thing in particular to the campaign. The third one dealt by that time with the continuing domestic and other kinds of issues. Is that a fair description?

**BUTLER:** Yes, I think it's fair. My impression is that the continuing domestic programs worked fairly smoothly. The campaign part probably suffered a little bit.

**DONILON:** Hamilton is too modest to say this, but the campaign suffered because of his not having time. Hamilton was having to direct a campaign from all the capitals of Europe. The most important asset a campaign has is a centralized decision making mechanism, particularly at the national level. The acknowledged leader and decision maker was distracted during critical months. So there was a deficit there.

**BUTLER:** The White House continued to function pretty well on the non-Iran issues. Furthermore, I think the White House did a good job in a support role for the campaign, to the extent that we could. We were constantly bringing in people who were politically important. We stepped up that activity quite a bit.

**JONES:** Was there anybody who experienced all three White Houses, even including the President? Did even the President experience all three, or was he so preoccupied with the Iranian matter that really no one could say, "This is what it was like here, and this is what it was like here, and this is what it was like here"?

**BUTLER:** I'm sure the President did.

**JORDAN:** He spent more time on the campaign probably than I did.

**DONILON:** There was in effect three different White Houses: a campaign White House, the Iranian crisis White House, and the domestic policy White House. The greatest single aspect in the campaign from which we suffered was Jordan's lack of time. Ham was calling us from all the capitals of Europe to direct the campaign.

**JORDAN:** I remember calling Tom Donilon when I was over negotiating in Switzerland with these people to find out what was happening in the Maine caucuses.

**HARGROVE:** You were traveling secretly, weren't you? The newspaper men never found out. I don't remember reading about it ever.

**JORDAN:** No. I was worried about it in terms of the way I was perceived anyway. If people thought, *My God we've got this terrible crisis and Carter's got this jerk Jordan involved in it*, I was worried about the impact on the negotiations. It would have been terrible politically. Yes, I was traveling secretly. People in the White House knew something was up, but they didn't know what was up. I got a lot of criticism from people in the campaign who said, "Hamilton's not giving the campaign enough attention."

**DONILON:** That was probably the biggest impact.

**YOUNG:** That surely is without precedent in the annals of staff work in the White House. Phoning in about the caucuses while negotiating with a revolutionary government in Switzerland.

**JORDAN:** Well, if you think it was strange, I really thought it was strange.

**HARGROVE:** But the President didn't chose to replace you in the campaign, though.

**JORDAN:** The campaign had enough talent and momentum then that it didn't need as much direction from me. Tom and some of the people there thought that it probably did require more direction. To me the things were all inseparable. When I wasn't thinking about Kennedy, I was thinking about Khomeini. When I wasn't thinking about Khomeini I was thinking about Kennedy. Getting the hostages out was completely compatible with our political objectives. In fact the President said, and I really believe this is true, we never had to chose between doing what was right to get the hostages out and doing what was right to get reelected. Those things were compatible.

**REDFORD:** A substantial number of White House people were transferred to the Democratic party committee during the campaign.

**JORDAN:** Yes, sir.

**REDFORD:** What kind of guidelines were you following in transferring people to the Democratic committee? Obviously the White House staff continued to work on the campaign. What was the guideline?

**JORDAN:** Well, there were legal guidelines. In fact our lawyers were too harsh on us in most instances. You had to give the government 40 hours a week and you couldn't use government resources. We had to bend over backwards to do that and to prove that we were doing that.

**REDFORD:** The report that's come out shows we fully satisfied the legal requirements.

**JORDAN:** Speeches were still written in the White House for the campaign. Speeches written at the White House that were used for political purposes were charged to the campaign, which was charged for the number of hours that the speechwriter worked on the campaign speeches. We took our best political talent from the White House, particularly from Frank Moore's staff, like Jim Free and Terry Straub arid Bob Beckel. We sent them out to run big states for us.

**REDFORD:** Did the GAO [General Accounting Office] audit you afterwards on it?

**JORDAN:** Yes sir.

**DONILON:** GAO audited it and its public report gave us a clean bill of health on the practices.

**JORDAN:** Our lawyers were strict. Our lawyers were excessively strict on some of that stuff.

**REDFORD:** Was this a new development from twenty years earlier?

**JORDAN:** Oh yes, sir. Even I think from probably ten years earlier.



**REDFORD:** The Ford campaign was directed from the White House, and I don't know if they kept books as well as you did.

**JORDAN:** The 1980 campaign's big decisions were directed from the White House. The implementations of those decisions were done properly from the campaign.

**THOMPSON:** If you had been full time on the campaign, would it have made any difference?

**JORDAN:** It wouldn't have made a bit of difference. The problems and the issues were bigger than the campaign.

**MOSHER:** Did the fact that Kennedy ran in the primaries damage Carter's stance for the election?

**JORDAN:** It was the single critical factor in his defeat. When people ask me why we were defeated, I say the hostage crisis—which was seen as a failure of Carter to free the people after being held for so long—the general state of the economy, and the Kennedy challenge. Without any one of those three problems, we might have been elected. Of those three problems, the most significant was the Kennedy challenge. For a year Jimmy Carter was in political trouble. Everything we did, regardless of whether it was politically unpopular or controversial, was presented to the American people by the media as being related to the campaign.

And so for a year, instead of bringing the party together and being united and getting ready for a tough fight against Ronald Reagan, you had the phenomenon in August of a terrible image of Carter projected from the convention of squabbling Democrats. This image persisted even into September or October. The President met with Jewish, black and Hispanic groups and labor organizations people, on whom he should have safely been able to count. But he ignored the large number of people in the middle who ultimately voted against him. If Ted Kennedy had not challenged us, and if there hadn't been the Kennedy challenge, there wouldn't have been the [John] Anderson phenomenon, which was an outgrowth of the Kennedy challenge. If we'd had the whole year to pull the party together and to try to work on the economy, I think Carter would, or at least could, have won.

**THOMPSON:** Can I ask a question about your role once more. Dean Rusk used to say that people in government do not so much seek power as flee from responsibility. Did all of these responsibilities flow to you because others were unwilling to exercise power, or did they flow to you because the President trusted you more than anybody else, or both, or something else? Rusk would argue there are some people who are willing to take on tasks and use power and the vast majority who don't want to do it because this is the way you get into trouble. So they hang back, particularly in government.

**JORDAN:** Well I didn't hang back. I didn't relish power or try to build an empire, but I didn't shirk from exercising power. Maybe Landon can address that.

**BUTLER:** I'd say it's a little bit of both.

**JORDAN:** Thank you, Landon. That's why I had Landon around. Kind of mush. I wasn't trying to avoid a serious response to your question, but it's hard to be objective about that. I didn't shirk responsibility. A lot of it got back to the confidence I had developed over the years in my relationship with Carter. In the '76 political campaign, Carter didn't know what was going on. We ran the campaign. He didn't see his political advertiser until about a month before the election. He never saw any of his television advertising until about May, after he had already won the Democratic nomination. He had no idea where he was going to go every day or every week. He didn't know which primaries we were going to emphasize or not emphasize.

To be immodest, at a pretty early age I had to develop confidence in making some of these judgments, knowing that he would back me up. At the outset, I was saying, "OK, this is how we're going to run the campaign, and these are going to be the themes of the campaign." At some point in time he had to be the candidate and had to run the campaign. From my political experience in the campaign with him, I had developed enough confidence in myself and in my relationship with him to make decisions and bear the consequences, whether they were good decisions or not.

**THOMPSON:** And you thought that enjoyable?

**JORDAN:** I didn't shirk it. And I was also smart enough to know which decisions I couldn't or didn't have the ability to make.

**BUTLER:** There were 50 or 100 self-styled hot tickets who would have been anxious to exercise the same power. It was a trust relationship as much as anything else. Wouldn't you say, Ham?

**JORDAN:** Yes, I wasn't trying to build an empire. I had a small staff, and again to attempt to be immodest, President Carter asked me to be chief of staff several times. I didn't want to do it, primarily because I thought I wasn't going to have the authority to really be the chief of staff. So I wasn't on any kind of power kick myself.

**THOMPSON:** The early battles in the transition weren't related to power then?

**JORDAN:** To some extent they probably were. This will have to be off the record, because Jack is running for Governor of Georgia now and I'm helping him. I wouldn't want to say anything that could be interpreted as negative in any way. One thing was as much Carter's fault as it was Jack's. Jack was setting up the government in exile in the last two or three months of the general election campaign in '76 while all the rest of us were over there trying to win the election. In Jack's plans, there was no blending in or involvement of the political people. There had to be a way to reconcile those things. It got to be a question of who's going to play these roles? Who's going to do this and who's going to do that?

But it never was personal between myself and Jack. There was some resentment, back and forth. On our side of the street, the attitude was, "We've won this election and they're over there carving the pie up." Their attitude was, "We're the scholars, we know the issues and we

understand the structure of government and what the Carter Presidency is going to be all about, and those people over there are just a bunch of political hags. They've performed a useful purpose, but after the election is over it's time for them to go home." Well neither side was right. The fact was there had to be an integration of political and policy people. How did you do that? How do you do that?

**YOUNG:** Jack [Watson] said much the same thing but not in the same language.

**JORDAN:** Jack Watson is a very, very capable person, and did the job of dealing with governors and mayors and all these federal issues as skillfully as it has ever been done.

**YOUNG:** I'm reminded once more of the different roots of this problem of political versus the policy management inside the White House, and getting those two together. It started early. It was the campaign versus the issue of staff organization to begin with. And it persisted. We'd all be interested in hearing, and people that read these transcripts long after we're gone from the scene would be interested in hearing you reflect about the pressures not from a political but a personal point of view, and about what it means. What qualities serve one best in getting in a position so close to what is seen as the center of power and getting all of those pressures? What is the human side of serving in a senior and important capacity to a President of the United States in this time? You were a very young man when you went in there, younger than most people who have occupied such a position in the White House.

**JORDAN:** I felt like I was fifty years old by the time I got there.

**YOUNG:** Well, that's part of what we're trying to get at. It put you in a goldfish bowl, which must be a little bit traumatizing. You found that people related to you in ways that you never thought they would before. When one gets invested with power and that kind of responsibility, relationships change. There's a lot of inquiry and understanding of what it's like to be a Congressman or a Senator, but there just isn't anything about what it's like to be on the senior White House staff, and I think it's important.

**JORDAN:** Good question, I'll try to answer this. How did it feel to be there? Not surprising. We had worked for four years to be there, and we never doubted that we would be there. There wasn't the phenomenon of pinching ourselves and saying, "Oh my God, what are we doing here?" We had an awareness of all there was to learn and to understand and all the things that we didn't know, but also I had a personal sense of confidence, and the group around the President had a collective sense of confidence in themselves, that was largely a reflection of Carter's confidence in himself. You see a lot of people that go to Washington and are enormously changed by that experience. One of the nicest things I can say about the group of men and women around the President was that if you had known them five years ago, and if you knew them today, they're all a little bit older and hopefully quite a bit wiser. But as human beings I don't think they've changed hardly at all. The pressures and the goldfish bowl aspect just go with the turf.

You have to make a number of sacrifices today to be in public office. On the front end, nobody told me how great that sacrifice would be. But the whole time I was there, I never regretted that I

was there. I look back on it as a great experience in my life. I wouldn't have stayed if Carter had been elected for a second term. I had had the experience, I had enough of the experience. My ultimate personal feeling, that I'm sure will only be enhanced with the passage of time as I get some distance and perspective from the time in the White House, is that I was lucky to have been one of a small group of people over the years that have been able to work in the White House for a President. Beyond that, I'm proud of the things that we did. I think that history will judge well the Carter years. My guess is a hundred years from now, they'll say that Carter came to office in a period of transition in this country and dealt with some issues and problems that had been ignored, particularly energy and some of the foreign policy issues. He dealt with them well, making mistakes like all President's do. I'm fairly confident that ultimately the Carter years will be judged as having been solid years for the country.

Other personal feelings or thoughts. Beyond the initial period of settling in as a human being, it becomes your work and it becomes a job. The White House was the place that I worked and I had things to do there. Most of them were not glamorous and most of them were not stimulating or intellectually challenging. A lot of them were frustrating, but I enjoyed my work. I would not have wanted to do it for a sustained period of time. This contrasted with my colleague Stu Eizenstat. If Jimmy Carter had been reelected or Walter Mondale reelected and you asked Stu to be the domestic and policy advisor for eight more years, he'd jump at the prospect. But my own feeling was that I had a wonderful and rich experience and I was fortunate to have had it, but I'd also had enough of it.

**YOUNG:** Did you feel burned out?

**JORDAN:** Well, yes, I think I did. Burned out has a connotation that suggests you're kind of bitter and tired and worn out and frustrated. I wasn't burned out in that sense. I was burned out—and this sound probably slightly arrogant—in the sense that I was no longer stimulated by just being there in the White House and working on these things. I wanted to do something different with my life. Don't ask me what because I still don't know, but I was just ready for some different challenges. I've always wanted to write, and I'm trying to do that now. The academic world is attractive to me, although as you gentlemen understand better than myself, with a BA and C's from the University of Georgia, it's not easy to crack into the academic world. I wasn't burned out, but I was ready to move on. I'm not sure if I've adequately answered your question.

**JONES:** I'm interested in this whole matter of press attention. Earlier, you quite rightly pointed out the problems with the media these days and the press. I'd like to have you reflect a little bit on the effect that so much press attention has on a person like yourself. You were the subject of a great deal of press attention. Did it affect your behavior?

**JORDAN:** It didn't affect my behavior. This was largely a result of Carter being an unknown and not being a product of the Washington political establishment. There were two people that came out of the campaign with high public profiles: Jody, who was traveling with Carter and dealing with the press, and myself, who had managed the campaign. When we all came to Washington, there was intense press speculation not only about Carter, but about Jody and myself. I was not prepared for that. I was naive in not understanding the extent to which I was a public figure. The last thing in the world that I ever would have dreamed of would have been that

I would have been a public figure, and then very quickly a controversial figure. I never would have dreamed that I would have become myself a controversial figure. But after about a year in the White House, I had become a caricature of all these things that people were saying about the people around Carter. I'm not quite sure why I was the target, but I was vulnerable in several respects.

I'd say that none of the things that you ever read about me in the paper were true. They were totally untrue. One of those perceptions which developed that first year that never changed was that Jordan was this kind of arrogant social buffoon who was in over his head at the White House. That was one of the things that I had to live with. After the first year, I just never went anywhere. I wouldn't go to any social functions. I wouldn't go to public restaurants in Washington. The last three years of the administration, I was basically just a hermit. That's not to suggest I didn't enjoy myself; I did have fun sometimes. But I just had to limit the possibilities so that somebody was not going to say, "Well, I saw Hamilton Jordan do this" or "I saw Hamilton Jordan do that."

**JONES:** You didn't find it possible to change this image?

**JORDAN:** Well, the first time I tried to change it was when I went to a dinner for the Israeli-Egyptian ambassador, and I was accused of looking down the dress of the Egyptian ambassador's wife and saying something rather obscene. His wife happened to be this stout, fiftyish, not particularly attractive woman. This simply did not happen. Then later on, I went somewhere and somebody threw a pie in my face. It was like wherever I went something happened. I would pick up the paper and read about these things that I had allegedly done according to an anonymous source. None of it was true. But it made me a vulnerable person publicly then for more serious things which were said later. Jack Anderson accused Charles Kirbo and myself of getting ten million dollars from Robert Vesco. There was a big investigation of that. Then later on I was accused of drug charges. I just sat back amazed at this kind of caricature of myself that developed in the media. I knew the things were not true but I also had enough sense to know that it was very damaging to the President, so after the first year I went underground.

**THOMPSON:** What do you think about the theory that this happened because during the first six months or so, you were the best communicator? In the early interviews people said, "Well, he doesn't have a degree from here or there, but this fellow is terribly good at explaining the politics and the direction of the administration. Did the media turn against you for that reason?"

**JORDAN:** I don't think I was used as much in that respect as you're suggesting. You've got to remember that for the first six or eight months, Carter could do nothing wrong. There was an adoring press. Carter had his fireside chats. So it was difficult to attack the President. But it was much less difficult to dislike Jordan or Frank Moore. I was a very visible lightning rod for people that had other gripes about the Carter administration. My greatest personal disappointment is that I had developed not twenty, but four or six friends in the press. When all these things came up about me that weren't true, the relationships that I had with these press people, and the fact that they knew me and knew I wouldn't lie to them and wouldn't deny these things if they weren't true, counted for absolutely nothing in the way the stories were covered.

An analogy is the way the William Casey thing was developed a few months ago. It was starting to smell like the Bert Lance thing. There was an inevitability that Casey was going to have to go. And yet all of a sudden you had about 100 people in the—for the lack of a better word—the old boys network, who started getting together and saying, “Now wait a second, Bill Casey is an honest man,” which I personally happen to think as well. But all of a sudden you had people standing up in New York and Washington saying, “Now wait a second, Bill Casey has not done anything wrong.”

That never happened with Bert Lance and that never happened with me. Instead, the worst thing that people said about me was repeated and accepted as being totally true. It’s a combination of things. I made some mistakes. I didn’t do any of the things that I was accused of doing. But I was not serious enough about the fact that I had this public image, whether I liked it or not. Because I was close to the President, there was going to be public attention focused on me. I was a lightning rod and a caricature of everything bad that people wanted to say about Carter. “He’s too young, he’s from Georgia, he doesn’t understand government, he’s against Washington,” etc.

**JONES:** Is there advice one would give to a White House staff novice?

**JORDAN:** The same advice Dick Cheney gave to me. He said to keep your head down, keep your name out of the newspapers. That was good advice, but I never had that option, because when I arrived there in Washington, there was this big column in the paper about me being the second most powerful man in Washington. So that was good advice, but I was never in the position to take it because I arrived there as a person with a high public profile. I thought maybe it was going to just all go away.

**THOMPSON:** Did Carter’s alleged self righteous ness make it harder for any of the rest of you to live a natural life?

**JORDAN:** Oh no. Jimmy Carter has never made a suggestion to me about my personal life. I got divorced while I was in Washington. He’s always been a friend and very supportive.

**THOMPSON:** I mean the way he moralized sometimes. Did that make it harder for people to work with him?

**JORDAN:** It was not difficult for anybody on the staff. One of the perceptions of Carter that I think is unfair was that he was this self righteous, pious man, which he was not. But that was one of the perceptions the national news media had of him.

**YOUNG:** That was one of the things that was used to set up people who had other agendas for beefs about the administration. They set up Carter as a moral, arrogant person. I think they didn’t understand what “born again” really meant. I suppose that as you had to become a hermit, as you put it.

**JORDAN:** I don’t want to make the hermit image sound that bad.

**YOUNG:** We understand this. A little hyperbole here. The historically extraordinary barrage of criticism against the President and against people around him was based, if not on attributions about their personal characteristics, then on bad grades in this era of the glorification of political technique that you talked about. Something sustained you all through that. You said you had a great deal of self confidence, and I noticed you said it was because the President himself probably also had that. One of the things that made it possible to live through all that, besides the importance of your work, was that you probably had an extraordinarily close relation with the President himself.

**JORDAN:** And with each other. Yes, I think that's true. Carter said at one time, "Everybody from Georgia is going to catch it sooner or later," and they did. Bert Lance did, Griffin Bell did, Frank Moore did. Not everybody. Stu avoided receiving much criticism. Jack, they had all these things that were written about Jack Watson, about how he'd lost out in the struggle with me. It just came with the turf. Any time you started feeling sorry about all the crappy things they said about you, all you had to do was look in the paper and see that they said things ten times worse about the President.

The greatest sense of disappointment I had was that these personal relationships in the press, in my case, didn't add up to being anything. It didn't mean anything. I'd have a bureau chief of one of the major magazines, who was a close friend of mine and who worked for the wire service, or I'd have this person that worked for the *New York Times* and this person that worked for CBS, come up and say, "You know we're sorry, Hamilton. You're an important guy. We've got to report these things." Take the incident of the Egyptian ambassador's wife, which everybody who was there denied happened. That was written in a gossip column and attributed to an anonymous source. I just flinched when I saw it.

I said, "This is just terrible that they could do this to me." Then I turned on the television at seven-thirty that night and saw Walter Cronkite and John Chancellor talking about it. It was just unbelievable to me. The sense of proportion is one of the problems with television news. But to answer your question, certainly the fact that we were all going through this together, that everybody was criticized and that we had these personal relationships with each other and the President, saw us through sometimes.

**HARGROVE:** Could you draw a large conclusion that because of the inevitable criticism, Presidents need to appoint as their personal aides people with whom they are close? In other words, you couldn't hold together at all had you not had close personal relations.

**JORDAN:** I think that's right.

**HARGROVE:** Now there may be a downside to that.

**JORDAN:** Certainly there's a downside to it, but I can't imagine a President going into all the difficulties of running the country and not having a small group of people that he knows he can depend on in a showdown.

**HARGROVE:** He could do it in the wider government, he has to do that, but the inner group has got to be his.

**JORDAN:** I think it's admirable. It was admirable the way that President Carter involved Vice President Mondale, and I think it's admirable the way that President Reagan, for example, has brought Jim Baker in and integrated him with Mike Deaver and Meese. But you've got to have a small tested group of people that the President can depend on in a crisis.

**THOMPSON:** Reagan did too, didn't he? Is there any difference between Reagan and Carter in this regard? If you had to do it over again, could you have cut by a fraction of something the number of Georgians who were in the staff?

**JORDAN:** Oh, I'm sure we could have.

**THOMPSON:** Would that have made any difference?

**JORDAN:** Look at the administration and some of the people that I would describe as the stars of the administration. There certainly were people like Frank Moore and myself, who were perceived as being complete failures. But some of the people who were most successful were Griffin Bell and Stu Eizenstat. I can't imagine any President ever having had a better domestic policy advisor than Stu Eizenstat nor a better press secretary than Jody Powell.

**FENNO:** You held the same position in Georgia that you held in Washington, and yet you were terribly surprised by what happened. I guess what you're saying is that there is an enormous difference in scale between press attention of Georgia politics and Washington politics.

**JORDAN:** Oh sure. Yes, there is. You can't in fact be the Governor and run the Governor's office. You cannot in fact be President and run the White House. I had less real responsibility in the Governor's office than I had in the White House. Carter could be involved in three or four different areas, such as the press, legislative work, and managing the government.

**FENNO:** Georgia was preparation for some things, good preparation for some things, but inadequate preparation for certain other experiences.

**JORDAN:** Sure. Just like serving the Congress is good preparation for some things and inadequate for others. Unfortunately, there's no way to be prepared for the Presidency. It's almost impossible. If you had to write a prescription, you'd have somebody be the mayor of a city and a Governor of a state and then a United States Senator. That would be a little bit of executive and legislative and understanding government at different levels. Then maybe they should serve as ambassador for few years. It doesn't happen that way.

**YOUNG:** I want to thank Hamilton Jordan and Landon Butler very much for the time you've given us, and for the candid way in which you talked to us.