

EXIT INTERVIEW
WITH
CHARLES W. COLSON
ON
JANUARY 12, 1973



Nixon Presidential Materials Staff
National Archives and Records Administration

Exit interview with Charles W. Colson
conducted by Jack Nesbitt and Susan Yowell in room 182 of the
Old Executive Office Building
on January 12, 1973

JN: ...It will be part of the President's papers of the White
House...

CC: Hm hmm.

JN: ...but it wouldn't be that controversial, but it wouldn't be
available to the Library staff.

CC: Now are you going to ask questions as we go through this...

JN: That's right.

CC: ...or are you simply going to...?

JN: Well, a little of both. If our question can be enough to
get you started on summarizing some things, why, it's worked
well that way. Maybe at this point I'll let Susan say a
little bit more, since she's got her machine working now.

SY: Well, I think what we've been doing in most cases is asking
a lot of what's already known about you as far as basic
responsibilities. And for that reason, and because you're
someone who would definitely be interviewed in the future
in a more in-depth oral history project, the best thing
might be for you to go over some of the areas which you
think you might want to talk about in more depth at a
future time. Some of the areas, first of all, which are the
most significant from an historical point of view, and
which might not be fully documented in the paper records
which would be going to the Library.

CC: In other words, just tick off sort of a check list of the

kinds of things that later I'd want to be reminded of to talk about more fully. Is that what you mean?

SY: Right. Well, I noticed in one of the recent articles on you, I think it was the [Washington] Star, one of your comments that they had quoted was that the press hadn't touched ninety-nine percent of what you were doing. And obviously, in a short time today, we wouldn't have time to go over all of that, but just a basic outline.

CC: Hmm. OK. I think, well, first of all, when I joined the White House staff it was basically to establish liaison with people outside of government. In other words, all the organized constituencies that have an interest in government, going all the way from labor unions to the NAM [National Association of Manufacturers] to the conservationists. The reason I came into the White House staff was that Bryce Harlow, who was then handling the legislative function, recognized that with a hostile Congress, a Congress of the other party, the President would have difficulty getting important issues resolved in the Congress his way unless he got outside assistance and outside resources. So my job was basically created to be the person who keeps in touch and in contact with outside groups. Mainly with a view to having an established relationship, so that when there was a major fight in the Congress, I would be the guy, or my office would be the office, that could go to the chamber of commerce and ask them to gin up a letter-writing campaign to put [unintelligible]. Or to get the

military and veterans groups organized to work for the authorization of the ABM [Antiballistic Missile], or any of the major issues in the Congress.

That job quickly, well, that job had a lot of other ramifications to it. Like being certain that we in the White House got a good perspective of what the impact of government policies would be on outside, on the country. Because you would hear from the home builders if you did something with a housing program, you would find out what the impact was very quickly. Previous Presidents had done this in a rather ad hoc fashion, in other words. There'd always been someone in the White House who tried to keep contact with people outside, groups outside. But ours was the first effort at institutionalizing. It had another advantage, in that it kind of opened up lines of communication into the President. In other words, people coming in and talking to him and seeing him. And he'd get from that some appreciation of how people on the outside were perceiving us and what we were doing. That's how I started. That led really into, in the first year, into taking a lot of people in to talk to the President, different outside groups that it would help. For example, if you wanted the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] to organize a letter-writing pressure campaign on the Congress, it would help a great deal to have brought their national officers in so they can sit down and talk with the President and tell him what their concerns were and he, in turn, could talk to

them.

The inevitable result of that was that I would have to, well, I got involved in a lot of their policy problems. In other words, if the home builders would come in and there was a, that happened to be one of the early examples. There was a problem because housing starts were way down. The President would ask me to pick up the ball and work with [George W.] Romney on seeing what could be done in HUD [Housing and Urban Development] (this is an actual case) what could be done at HUD to start building up the, start regenerating new housing starts. So I, for a few days or a week, would be working with the Federal Reserve Board and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board and George Romney to crank up new housing starts. Or, I brought in a group of Catholic educators, and the President got very concerned with the problems of parochial education, which he had been concerned with over a period of time, but I happened to be the one that brought in the National Catholic Education Association board of trustees, and as result, after they met with the President, reminded him of some of his campaign commitments. He called me in afterwards and said, that "I've been in office over a year now, and I have been trying to get a commission started that would come up with a solution to this problem. And it hasn't been done, and Colson, you break all the china in the White House, but get it done this weekend." So, I got the Commission on Nonpublic Schools formed in a weekend.

And this, you know, this is why my job grew into something other than what it started out to be. It grew into being sort of the generalist trouble-shooter. I developed most of the relationships with the labor unions. Then, for example, when we wanted to ship grain to the Soviet Union, the maritime unions had historically refused to agree to do so, because they insisted upon the cargo preference, the fifty-fifty American hull cargo requirement. And it is not economical to ship grain in the world market if fifty percent has to be in American bottoms. But, because I had developed the relationship with the maritime union leaders, simply by being in contact with them all the time, when that problem arose, when earlier in 1972 we had an understanding with the Soviets that we would ship grain to the Soviet Union, but had to get the final governmental approval. The President called me in and asked me if I would take charge of the negotiations to get the labor unions to agree to ship. In the [John F.] Kennedy administration, Kennedy had gone ahead without getting the labor unions' agreement, and I guess only about a third of the contract was ever fulfilled, because the unions simply wouldn't agree to load or to transport the grain abroad. When that contract couldn't be fulfilled the Soviets started buying their wheat and agricultural products elsewhere. [Lyndon B.] Johnson tried the same thing and had the same problem. But we negotiated an arrangement whereby we committed ourselves, we committed to the maritime unions,

that if they would load and ship, we would try to get a bilateral shipping agreement [unintelligible] into the Soviet Union. They loaded and shipped; we subsequently got a bilateral shipping agreement. As a result, I think we will probably have an ever-expanding and very productive agricultural export market with the Soviets that wouldn't have been possible otherwise. I don't know whether you want me to go Is this too much...

SY: Yes.

CC: ...detail?

SY: As much detail as you would like...

CC: OK.

SY: ...we will record.

CC: Well, the significance of that, and this is probably what prompted that comment at the start, because this is not what the newspaper people focused on, the significance of that is that (a) we are shipping a great deal of raw agricultural commodities to the Soviet Union. That is very useful from a foreign policy standpoint. Not only in terms of improving relations with the Soviets, but it puts us in a position where we are giving them something they need, and therefore we have some leverage to get things from them that we'd like. Second, it helps the balance of payments. Third, and maybe the most important of all, is that the increase in acreage allotments this year in the agriculture program will save about a billion and a half dollars to the tax-payers in farm subsidies. That is being made possible

by the increased exports of agricultural products to the Soviets. So that's a very big, lasting accomplishment of the Nixon administration. It's not a credit to me; it's a credit to the fact that we made a conscious effort in this administration to develop these kinds of relationships with people outside of government who could come here and talk, either to me, knowing that I would talk to the President, or in many cases come and talk to the President. That we were able to build up relationships that enabled us, for example, in the Soviet grain deal, to do something that was of lasting significance to the country.

Those are just a few examples, but the office that I have maintained started out with the responsibility for just dealing with outside groups, to get them to help us when we had problems and needed outside pressures. Primarily to work with the, primarily to work against the Congress, but it by its very nature got me more and more into substantive areas and specific assignments from the President. I have spent three quarters of my time in the last three years handling particular, sort of trouble-shooting things he would ask me to do. I think probably, one way or another, the files will cover each of these things. Whether it was the ABM or the Russian grain deal or the [G. Harrold] Carswell nomination, aid to parochial schools, busing. So that's the evolution of the office. During the election year my job was not only trying to cultivate them politically, the people that we had developed a liaison with

in this office, but also running what was known as the administration's attack and counterattack program. I guess that's been written on. John Osborne did a piece that someone obviously gave him, which was reprinted in the [Washington] Post. Are you saving, I mean, do you get all these clippings?

SY: Hm hmm. We're trying to collect as many as we....

JN: I hope to inherit a mountain from [Lyndon K.] "Mort" Allin's shop when they're done with them.

CC: Yeah, well Osborne did a piece for the New Republic which was reprinted in the Washington Post which was essentially accurate. About the so called "nine-fifteen meetings" here that started in the summer.

JN: This is for the '72 campaign?

CC: '72 campaign.

JN: [Unintelligible]...

CC: Yeah, right.

JN: ...attack group.

SY: [Unintelligible].

CC: That was, "attack" is really the wrong name. I would meet each morning at eight a.m. with, let's see, [H. R.] Haldeman, [John D.] Ehrlichman, [Ronald L.] Ziegler [to] decide what it was that we were trying to, we wanted said that day. And then the job at nine-fifteen [a.m.] was to decide who would say it and how we would get it out and who would release it and which one of the Cabinet members would go where and what kind of a surrogate program we'd have and

how we would respond to attacks that might have been made upon the President by Senator [George S.] McGovern or his people. So that was kind of a non-related job that I did, but it was not related to the evolution of this office.

Over the course of the three years, despite my inherent distaste for the bureaucracy as such, we did our own empire-building. And had [Llewelyn J.] "Bud" Evans who dealt strictly with the aging groups; Mel [Melville] Stephens and Bill [William F.] Rhatigan who dealt with veterans groups; Don [Donald F.] Rodgers who came in and dealt with the labor unions, more intensively than I had done. He came in this year. George Bell who had worked for me and dealt with the labor unions and other groups before that; and Henry Cashen, who came in and dealt with most of the business and trade association guys.

JN: Terry Good is with Henry Cashen right now.

CC: Oh.

JN: Our other colleague.

CC: Great! The idea of dealing with the outside kind of expanded into something that the President was very interested in, which was to keep a fairly accurate account of most of the important movers and shakers in the country, and we have maintained fairly accurate...[unknown person enters] What? OK. [recorder shut off] [recording resumed] I've forgotten where I was, but.

JN: Well, you were talking about your own staffers and the...

CC: Oh, yeah.

JN: ...kinds of jobs they did.

CC: The other thing that I did, just quickly, was early in 19-- , the spring of 1971, I took over most of the operations of Herb [Herbert G.] Klein's office. Not Herb's function, not going out and dealing with the media, but trying to program all the White House communications and support activities that had been done in Herb's office--Herb being busy out on the road most of the time. Most of his staff was assigned to me. We set up a function here of revamping the White House, I mean the governmental communications apparatus. [Talks on telephone] Yeah. Yeah, yeah. [Hangs up] Taking, getting control of the different PIO [Public Information Office] operations. And Des [Desmond J.] Barker and John Carlson you should talk to Des before he leaves on January twentieth.

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: He's leaving next week. Their job, Des's job, he worked for me in this, was to kind of modernize the public information offices in each Department and get them working more closely with us so that we were able to better program what they were putting out. That got me more into the kind of thing that we just interrupted for where, if the [George P.] Shultz briefing didn't get quite the result we thought it would, and so we go back now and try to do it a little bit differently to get: this is where the press missed the impact of what we were trying to do, they misinterpreted it. Now the other area has been one of, I guess

I've been the President's principal legal advisor on communications law and broadcasting, which I fell heir to by accident.

JN: Where does this connect you with [Clay T.] Whitehead?

CC: Well, I've been the guy that has given Whitehead most of his policy direction on broadcast policies as distinguished from broadcast policy of the networks, license renewal. Most of the Federal Communications Act problems I've handled, mainly because, after the first six months or a year, I was taking sort of the odd jobs that didn't fall logically into somebody else's category. When there were a lot of challenges to the President using television for press conferences, he asked me to handle it. So, I became the guy who figured out how we keep the President on TV when he wanted to address the nation without having Larry [Lawrence F.] O'Brien come on and get a half an hour of equal time. That got me into Whitehead's stuff. That's a quick...

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: ...broad brush of what I've done.

SY: Were there any particular areas which you stayed out of completely in the special interest groups, or where did you overlap? At what point did you overlap with other key staff who were assigned particular areas, like business...

CC: Well, it was one of the...

SY: ...liaison [unintelligible]?

CC: ...most painful parts of my job that I overlapped with everybody, because...

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: ...some of the ethnic groups would come in and they'd be very concerned about busing. These were groups that perhaps had been very supportive of the administration's policies in a particular area. So, I would have to kind of go to bat for them, which would get me in the position where I was battling some of John Ehrlichman's people, who may not have agreed. The job has an inherent conflict built into it in that people in the White House who were dealing with substance and policy exclusively want to just do what, they want to carry things out the way they see the particular problem. When you inject how the world outside sees it, there is an understandable conflict, and my job had to be at times to be an advocate for a point of view. So, you had overlap to a degree, but you also had a certain amount of conflict, you had staff conflict inside the White House. That was inevitable. The only real overlap was in the business area, where Pete [Peter M.] Flanigan had a lot of business contacts. But that was never a problem. Pete and I worked very closely together, and I was delighted to have him see as many of the business people as he could. The less I had to do there the better. I think I started to say at one point that we did build up a large reservoir of names, the key people around the country, the movers and shakers. From time to time we would get them letters from the President. We would get them on our mailing lists to receive information. We did develop a, have developed a

mailing list of about 700,000 people.

SY: Were these just...

CC: Which Kathleen Balsdon keeps.

SY: Oh, I'm sor--...

CC: Which goes all the way from the select leaders of the labor unions and leaders of business and veterans leaders and leaders in the media all the way to broad based mailing lists that we have of community leaders. Now, the mailings are all done by the Republican National Committee, but most of them we would order from here. [telephone rings] This will just take a second. [talks on telephone] Hello. Hello, Herb, how are you? Good, I...[recorder turned off] [recording resumed] Now I've lost where I was.

JN: Does [Michael P.] Balzano function under you?

CC: Yes.

JN: On the ethnics thing?

CC: I forgot to mention him, yeah. He handles the ethnic.

JN: On a smaller scale, tailored to the second term type operation continues...

CC: Right.

JN: ...even with your departure...

CC: Right.

JN: ...and Cashen's departure.

CC: Probably Bill [William J.] Baroody, who's coming in here Monday, with whom I will have a few weeks of overlap. He'll be doing basically what I did in the first term, only he'll

really be going back to where I started. The principal function of the office will be liaison with the outside. The specific assignments that I've handled, the troubleshooting job that I've handled for the President have largely grown out of the personal relationship with the President. That's something that isn't transferable, I mean, it isn't transferable without the President developing that relationship again. And, he probably will. In which case, I would imagine this staff could come back to, I hope not as large as it was before. The whole White House has been too big. Balzano and Rodgers, will both stay on. And [W. Richard] "Dick" Howard, who's been my deputy, we hope will stay. Kathleen Balsdon doing the mailings and Baroody doing the principal contact to the outside.

SY: What was your relationship in the organization structure with Mr. Haldeman?

CC: Well I was, when I started I worked really, I mean Haldeman was my direct superior. He is obviously chief of staff, so everybody reports through Haldeman. But I, after the first year, had less and less contact with Haldeman on what I was doing and more and more directly with the President. I guess in the last two years I had, since 1971 and 1972, most of my contact was directly with the President.

SY: [Unintelligible]

CC: Although Bob was always the guy you would go to to clear things with. Bob was chief of staff, but he's a good delegator, and, once you're off running with

something (especially if it was something the President had an interest in), I was normally reporting directly back to the President, or the President would call me and ask me how it was going. You maintain the phone logs I [unintelligible].

SY: Yes, we keep the diary, so we're very familiar with your frequent contact with....

JN: Especially the last two years. You know, especially newspaper comments occasionally or columnists saying, "Now it's the person who speaks to the President last each day," you know.

SY: Very frequently.

JN: So Susan and I have monitored this right along, thinking they may not realize, but the record will show that the last call out is on the signal board line in the Colson house.

CC: Not often to the house, usually here until nine o'clock at night. Most nights.

JN: Can you think over four years and pinpoint perhaps something that you felt was the most significant aspect of the four years here? Like I'm sure you can for previous jobs with Senator [Leverett] Saltonstall, and whatnot. Something way back gives you satisfaction, or can, are we too close to the White House four years to stop and isolate one or two things?

CC: Well, you mean in terms of this period that I've been here?

JN: Yes.

CC: Obviously to me the most satisfying thing

was the election, and the President's reelection.

JN: 1972, not 1970.

CC: 1972, yeah. One other function was, I think I had a part in developing the strategy of the reelection, starting really at Key Biscayne, in that meeting we had right after the 1970 election. My particular bag was the thesis that the northern, white ethnic, new middle class, Catholic, traditional Democratic voter was ready to make a switch to the.... [telephone rings] May I? [talks on telephone] Yeah. Yeah, John. I know. And I've spent some time with him. I don't think it's going to be reversed. [recorder turned off] [recording resumed] That was my particular bag. The thesis that these voters, most of whom live in the peripheral areas of the city, and as to whom the President's position on most social issues would be very appealing.

JN: Which is really what Ben [Benjamin J.] Wattenberg and Richard Scammon tried to tell some Democrats.

CC: That's right.

JN: Who didn't read it right.

CC: Scammon is one of my close friends. I've had Scammon together with the President several times. Obviously you people know this.

JN: Well, our work on the historical diaries made this oral history thing even a...

SY: Made it a lot easier.

JN: ...totally, yes, both ways, we're building a better record on top of whatever is left for him...

SY: Well, that doesn't...

JN: ...in the paper record.

SY: ...that just has the fact of the meeting, it doesn't have any of the content, but it gives you a good....

CC: Well, Scammon probably was the, he and I sort of teamed up to really push hard to get something on busing, because, see, this is where you asked about overlap. I think you were talking about dealing with individuals outside. But it was not only that overlap, but there was overlap substantively because, if my thesis was correct, that these voters were ready to switch from their traditional mooring of the Democratic party that they had been tied to by [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, and were basically conservative on social issues, and that this was the year that they would move to the Republican candidate for President. Then I had to be able to sell the White House staff, my colleagues on the staff, on strong anti-busing legislation, aid to parochial schools, the President's position on abortion-- which was very controversial--and a number of other, to stop HUD from scatter housing. And a number of other things that would become, that would identify the President, which basically, which very accurately reflects his own philosophy, by the way. It isn't a question of his changing his own point of view. This really was the Nixon philosophy. We had to do things to articulate it and express it. So that got me into a lot more policy issues, which probably had me as a burr under a few saddles.

JN: Was this thesis without regard to selection of the Democratic party?

CC: Oh, yeah.

JN: How did, how does the thesis apply to that fiftieth state that you call home? [laughter]

CC: I don't call, that I used to call home. I think McGovern was actually right yesterday when he said that there were three reasons why he won Massachusetts. A higher influ--, I mean a larger number of students. [unknown person enters] Yeah. [recorder turned off] [recording resumed] Well, the higher proportion of students, McGovern said yesterday, the, how did he put it, overly generous, overly friendly press that he had. Which means the overly antagonistic to us Boston Globe. I had a third reason. I saved it [McGovern's quote] because he's so right. Well I'm, it's not important [unintelligible]. The students plus the very liberal media in Boston, plus, really the high percentage of technical-oriented industries which create a heavy concentration of sort of the upper income, upper middle income suburbanite. I think they're mostly people who are trying to atone for their own bigotry by wearing their social conscience on their sleeve. They tend to be more liberal on social issues. That's just Massachusetts, but the neighboring state of Rhode Island, which is more heavily Democratic than Massachusetts, voted for the President. Massachusetts was an aberration, I think.

The general thesis that we started to try to advance as

the "northern strategy" in 1971 and 1972 proved accurate. I mean, the President won a majority of the Catholic vote. The first time a Republican President's ever done it. Won large segments of the Jewish vote in areas where they have similar interests to the white ethnic Catholic; won the trade union vote; won sixty-five percent of the Italian vote, just unheard of. So, I think that worked. The other thing, of course, was to crack the solid wall of opposition from organized labor which was the, I mean with the, without that being united on behalf of the Democratic candidate, the Democratic party is really not the majority party. Since 1932 the Democratic party has been the Democrat/Labor party. If you break large pieces of labor off, then it really isn't the majority party, I mean it's....

SY: Was that one of your major goals all along, not just the election, but all along?

CC: To break apart the...

SY: The labor.

CC: Yeah, not only because it was good politics to get the President reelected, but it was good for the country really. I mean, that good example I used of getting the cooperation of the labor unions and shipping grain to the Soviet Union. I think, really, our grandchildren will be better off because of that, and that's important. Well, this action yesterday of getting labor's support, labor and business both supporting Phase III is a direct outgrowth of having not come through a bitter, rancorous election when busi-

ness is lined up behind the pro-business Republican candidate and labor is lined up as an ally of the Democratic party. Then, after the election, you still have that cleavage, that adversarial relationship. I think breaking labor out of one political party is a very, very healthy thing for the country. That was a big thing behind the, one of the big reasons for the appointment of [Peter J.] Brennan as Secretary of Labor.

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: We will see the benefits of this to the public, not just to the presidential election, but to the public, in terms of things like Phase III, in terms of possibly more restrained collective bargaining agreements this year. Possibly in terms of finding a device to bring an end to strikes, is possible in this administration. Because we'll have that more even handed, more cooperative relationship. Now historically, since Roosevelt, businessmen have been afraid of Democratic administrations. Labor has been afraid of Republican administrations. This second Nixon term will be the first administration in which he has an opportunity to really have an even-handed relationship with both, and that's a good thing for the country.

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: It'll be felt policy-wise. Now there are a whole lot of other areas I've been involved in. I don't know, I know you could [unintelligible].

SY: Are there any that stand out to you that would be something

which we may not have time today to go into, but which would be something you think should be talked about?

CC: You mean after...?

SY: Or which you would like to talk about later?

CC: Later, later, yeah. Later I would probably think it would be useful from an historical point of view. What did you say, come back in four years and talk about, yeah.

SY: Hm hmm.

JN: When the administration's over and the President says, "I'll call Chuck and tell him to talk to you."

CC: OK. The additional things that would probably be of interest, from the standpoint of writing a history, would be the advice I gave the President, or counsel he sought from me after the election, on the Vietnam issue, and the way in which we--. Some of the relationships with, between the President and [Henry A.] Kissinger. There was a two-week period when Haldeman was away and I kind of did what he often does, just serve as the guy that the President talks through the problems and the options with. The New Year's weekend when we, after the bombing, were able to get the North Vietnamese back to negotiate. Working with the President, who was at Camp David on that Saturday, when Kissinger was in Palm Springs. Then the discussions with the President on New Year's Day. Kind of the evolution of the.... Apart from the President himself, during that one limited period of time, I'm probably the only guy who really knew what was going on in his mind. Well, I'm

sure Kissinger knows part of it, but not all of it. Haldeman knows part of it, but not all of it. And I know part of it, but not all of it. But, to really piece together what happened from November sixteenth through today the people who would have to contribute to that would be Kissinger, [Richard T.] Kennedy, [Alexander M.] Haig, Haldeman, and myself, and I have, I mean foreign policy is not my area, but purely because the President brought me into some of the discussions. And also, because Haldeman was away, I got more deeply into that than I would normally get into the foreign policy matters. From the historian's standpoint I would have something to contribute.

The other thing would be that series of meetings that I had with the President at Camp David, after the election, and at Key Biscayne after the election. In terms of his ideas about the second term I suspect that this would overlap with what Haldeman will tell you in many respects. Maybe not entirely, because Haldeman and Ehrlichman and I had some disagreements. Four years from now we'll see who was right in hindsight. I guess the whole story of staffing the second term is one that would best be told after the second term rather than before. Some of the problems with, some of the. (I'll say these things just to remind myself), some of the differences between [Frederic V.] Malek's approach to it and mine, and how those problems got ironed out.

JN: Probably more detail on the 1972 campaigns.

CC: Yeah, there'd be a lot of that. Of course I've been having difficulty figuring out what to leave and what not to, as you can see from files here.

SY: Hm hmm.

JN: And if you leave a xerox of those things you do take with you, it would be helpful to have.

CC: I don't intend to take much with me, but will...

JN: It'll all be sealed in a...

CC: ...it will keep the shredders busy.

JN: ...special vault down the line.

CC: Is it being sealed for the four years?

JN: Yes.

CC: Oh.

JN: In fact, if it comes in one of those Federal Records Center boxes, it is left in Trudy [Gertrude T.] Brown's custody in that box. It's not taken out and refiled.

CC: So can I get back to it if necessary?

JN: Yes. That's right.

SY: Hm hmm.

JN: She and I are going to get together with Dick Howard, but we're going to wait until after inaugural, when everything's died down.

CC: OK.

JN: But the provision is that her special vault, which is right about under here, I guess, was built to contain those types of things that people like you, and Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Rose [Mary] Woods would be accumulating that really

shouldn't get to the White House Central Files.

SY: Then once it's out of the EOB [(Old) Executive Office Building], even, it would be sealed for some time.

JN: Well, that's right. I think...

SY: It's been holding....

JN: ...the material she has is probably stuff that....

CC: Right.

JN: The parallel would be Mr. [Harry S] Truman has forty-five four-drawer cabinets, that his will provides, can be turned over to the [Truman] Library. But here we are twenty years after he left office.

CC: Hm hmm.

JN: Those cabinets are still in his wing of the Library, under his secretary's control, Rose Conway. The will now will turn these over, with the director of the Library in charge of screening. Now I would think that most of the material Trudy has would be kept till the last bit of stuff that the President would ever turn over to the Library for scholarly use. Even then, some things have seventy-year automatic restrictions on them that the National Archives has imposed, where it would reflect very badly on somebody.

CC: Kenny [P. Kenneth] O'Donnell, who is an old friend of mine from Massachusetts politics, told me that, after he left the White House, he simply didn't have any files.

SY: Hm hmm.

CC. That was before the days of shredders, so I'll bet he kept

his fireplace busy.

JN: Well, they took along with them [unintelligible]. Since Dave [David F.] Powers is at the [Kennedy] Library,...

CC: Hm hmm.

JN: ...he's sort of in charge of the museum there. He's really like a walking oral history of the whole thing. I had a talk with him one time and just was amazed. Can you think of anything else prior to that 1972 campaign that we ought to come back to? Something like the 1970 campaign?

CC: Well I worked very deeply in the 1970 campaign.

JN: Maybe we can touch upon the House and Senate elections of both years given passage of a little time, hindsight.

CC: Yeah, I don't know that, oh you mean as to the results in 1970 and the results in 1972?

JN: Yeah.

CC: I wrote about 1970. I wrote a lot about 1970, which will stay here. Because, to me, the analysis of 1970 is what dictated the strategy for 1972. For example, the [James L.] Buckley election. The [Thomas J.] Meskill election in Connecticut. I mean the "northeast strategy," if you want to call it that, that we developed for 1972, was really based on what we learned in 1970. What I think we've learned from it, some of the analyses. A lot of that is in writing. A lot of the labor strategy is in writing. I dug it out simply for my own amusement, I'm not using it for my own records. Most of the memos going back on labor and on, memos back and forth for the President, with Haldeman and

others on the staff. September 1970, talking about how we would build our "New American Majority." A memo written on election day in 1970 pleading with the President and everybody else not to write off labor. Notwithstanding, how hard they worked against us in 1970, because I thought we would be able to neutralize the AFL-CIO and get the support of the Teamsters [Union] in the 1972 election, regardless of who the Democratic candidate was. But these I will leave somewhere. And those will be part of what, these will be available as soon as this tape would be, wouldn't they?

JN: And no sooner, and the whole thing would go through a screening process in California. Very rarely has anything ever been opened, except in the [Lyndon B.] Johnson Library, within less than five years of the time the man they left office. Johnson broke a couple records.

CC: Most of that...

SY: [Unintelligible].

CC: ...most of what I talked about.

JN: We will probably be back to see you for in-depth...

CC: Yeah.

JN: ...discussions on these various topics before this tape was even available to a researcher at the [Nixon] Library.

CC: Right.

JN: Because we're talking about 1982, 1981/1982 at the.... I've been dealing with this problem all week, in advance of the Nixon Foundation board meeting, coming a week from today.

CC: Right.

JN: And trying to get the Archives not to promise too much. They're projecting, maybe the papers would be open for research within three to five years. Johnson made it in three in segmented areas like civil rights or education, and really messed up their collection down there in Austin. Whereas the other librarys, FDR's, and all of them, have taken about five years just to unpack and find out what it is. Put it in some arrangement and...

CC: Finally go through it, yeah.

JN: ...go through it, page by page, to make sure that everything that we're going to release was in conformance with the deed from the President, and the restriction statements put on. Then a large portion of it is just simply held back. The better the material, obviously, the longer it is before it ever reaches the public. The Kennedy Library has, I think, eighty percent of the White House Central Files, Subject File, open for research now. Well, we're going on over nine years. And the stuff that got in the Central File, still twenty percent of it is not available.

CC: Of course there are certain aspects of the past four years, that I will be among those who are most eager to see finally come public.

JN: Yes.

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: I have carried around my neck the albatross, the [Alex B.]

Shipley ads and the Watergate, neither of which were my babies, so to speak.

JN: We were asked about, on the general topic of oral history, and we went telling them what we were doing in the way of oral history. Our colleagues in the Democratic presidential libraries. We smiled and said, I smiled and said, "No, that's not an extension of our project down there. We have no connection in oral history interviews with the five Cuban-Americans...."

SY: The tape recorders.

JN: The Watergate incident brought out a lot of these comments from people. Like at the Johnson Library, they just wanted to know if this was another version of oral history...

CC: Oh, I see.

JN: ...that we're collecting.

CC: I see.

SY: Hm hmm.

JN: So I hasten to point out now. I don't have any other questions and we really...

SY: Well.

JN: ...imposed upon you beyond the hour...

CC: That's all right.

JN: ...we asked for, and just assumed that call was cancelling your four o'clock session upstairs.

CC: It was, yeah, it was, but I'm all right. If you think of other things, I don't, you know, it's very hard for me. I

did not really keep a, when I practiced law I used to keep very meticulous diaries. I have not here.

SY: That's something that not many people around here have done...

CC: No. I should have.

SY: ...from what we've learned.

CC: Yeah, I've kept notes. Actually I've kept handwritten notes. I keep them, I'll mention this because eventually this will be important. I keep a folder of things, that is the folder I always have with me when I'm talking to the President, either on the phone or in his office. I take instructions from him, and I keep the kind of stuff I'm doing for him in that. I have a couple of feet of yellow pads of notes, because I've kept all of those and usually marked what's happened with each one. So that....

SY: You may need the thing to go through to refresh....

CC: Yeah, I would think four years from now, if I went through that, I would be able to go back and say, point by point, what.... That probably would tell a great deal about, if I matched it up against days and phone calls, I probably could almost reconstruct what I dealt with him on. If that's, if it's, but that would have to be something he would, I expect he would want me to do.

JN: It was the same with Murray Chotiner when he left two years ago. He said, "Well I really don't have any papers," as he patted his telephone. He said, "Here's how I do my business." But the oral history thing made sense to him.

He said, "Well, if he tells me it's OK." Well, this is what we hope to do in four or five years from now, is simply have him decide, yes, OK. He's given Whittier College permission to do an oral history up to 1945, so they've almost finished a two-year project of the people that saw the President as he grew up.

CC: Up through 19--, oh I see.

JN: 1945, the entrance to politics.

SY: [Unintelligible] political.

CC: Yeah.

JN: And they're winding down now. But they've interveiwed college teachers, the football coach. One or two of the aunts before they passed on.

SY: Well,...

JN: They've gotten a lot of little things.

SY: ...we're at a great advantage now, in just touching base, and our thinking about it ahead of time, and letting other people think about it. Although, right now, you don't have the same perspective or keen....

JN: The most extensive oral history program and the one probably that cost the most money to date, has been the one at the John F. Kennedy Library. That really started up privately, through friends, in the aftermath of the assassination. And then was picked up and has been financed for years by the National Archives. Operated out of the initial cadre staff of the Kennedy Library. They've got a tremendous collection, really representing a three-year pinnacle

career. And now we're talking about a man who's served eight at the top and eight as "number two," as well as both Houses of Congress. So I,...

CC: Big job.

JN: ...think that, not that we want to outspend the Kennedyites, but we've got more ground to cover than they do.

CC: Well, in subsequent oral interviews, I can probably throw in a lot of loose ends with the, I could somehow take a calendar of events. Actually, on the domestic side and sometimes on the foreign policy side, I've usually been involved in what has been the hot issue of the moment. Because, if it became a hot issue, that one way or another that I would get into it.

JN: I think the New York Times here, your yellow pads here, and this minute by minute running account of the President's day that we keep here, the three together...

CC: Yeah.

JN: ...would....

CC: Would probably be able to do it. I know, I was just thinking that I was deeply in the Carswell thing.

JN: What about Clement Haynsworth?

CC: Actually Haynsworth was pretty well along when I came into it. See I came here...

SY: In November?

CC: ...November first, 1969, yeah.

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: And that was--was that pretty well along or was it

decided?--I think it was decided. I don't remember whatever the date was, but the Haynsworth thing I was very much involved in. Not in selecting him, trying to get him confirmed. Witness that cartoon. I wrote the [William B.] Saxbe letter, the letter to Saxbe.

JN: Yeah.

CC: But if I could, if I went back and took.... You know, I sat in all the morning meetings that we had, trying to get that through. Then I managed, inside, the kind of the defense against the ITT [International Telephone and Telegraph] charges this last Spring. So, if I took it event by event. And the ABM thing, that I was in charge of for the White House.

JN: Did you travel much in this...

CC: No.

JN: ...[unintelligible] you were pretty much operating in and around this?

CC: Well in various, very much an inside job. The first year I traveled somewhat, going to some associations that were particularly important ones that I was doing. The past year I think I only, well I traveled with the President a few times to Key Biscayne and once out to California. Once to the [John B.] Connally ranch and that's another area that I suppose I would talk about. I was the one who organized Democrats for Nixon. So that's probably an area to be talked about.

JN: On the April 1971 staff list Dick [Richard A.] Moore appears

under your heading. Was that just for posturing effect?

CC: On the April 1971?

JN: That was the only one Ziegler ever published, I think, unless it was one in early 1969. But he issued that one to the press as a handout press release.

CC: Well the actual staff list, I mean the staff list released by Ziegler bears no resemblance to the actual staff. God! [Bruce A.] Kehrl's records are accurate. Dick Moore is on my staff, yeah. The most up-to-date staff list was one dated June 30, 1972, that was the budget for my office. Which has John Scali, Dick Moore, Des Barker, Henry Cashen, George Bell (who was then on leave), Dick Howard, Pat [Patrick E.] O'Donnell (who ran the speakers scheduling operation), Bill Rhatican, Steve [S. Steven] Karalekas, John Carlson, Howard Cohen (gracious!), Doug [Douglas L.] Hallett, and a good number of secretaries. This would be your most accurate list of the Colson...

JN: Operation.

CC: ...ragtag operation.

JN: I've got one last question I'm going to ask, and that is some offices have been very conscientious about low profile and not [unintelligible] to create news stories, and everything else. And it seems as if that was the general approach you practiced.

CC: Oh, good God, yes.

JN: Except for good exposure to the particular interest group that you had to deal with.

CC: You mean good press exposure?

JN: Not necessarily press exposure, but in-house, within a given segment of labor. Not just dealing with the key people, but....

CC: [on phone] Yeah. See where he is and I'll call him back in just a few minutes. [hangs up]

JN: Not just the key teamsters, but the teamsters were to know that Colson's at the White House, that he listens to our people when we have something to say or ask, or something like that.

CC: Well, yeah, but that would also come because I would be the one that took them in to see the President. And the President would, I mean they would develop.... I remember, I learned, I think, or I tried to learn, the lesson of not dealing with the press for a variety of reasons. Not that I don't like them, although I don't, most of them. But I didn't deal with the press because I didn't have time. It's very hard to know where to draw the line. If you start giving on-the-record interviews to people, then you really can't say no. It can take up a mammoth amount of time. Plus the fact I felt I could be more effective if I didn't get publicity. I was unsuccessful in that. But, I tried not to have any more press contacts than necessary. I also tried to stay out of the Washington social world, because I have lived here since 1955. If you get drawn into that, it poses a lot of problems.

JN: We felt one of the best articles was the one in National

Journal. It seemed to be borrowed by a lot of later writers who would pick up and almost redo....

SY: This series that they did on various staffs...

CC: Oh, yeah.

SY: ...and they did a feature on your staff.

CC: ...of course that was way out of date. I mean that was done....

SY: It was done in 1971 I think.

JN: Yeah.

CC: Yeah. That was very different.

JN: Yeah.

CC: Things changed a lot after that. The other one was that, actually, that was not an unfair piece, was the one in the Washington Post by Myra MacPherson.

SY: That was just last month?

CC: Yeah, just last month.

SY: Hm hmm.

CC: She spent a lot of time with my wife and started making a.... I wasn't going to give her an interview.

SY: Hmm.

CC: Then I discovered she'd talked to everybody, including my mother and father, and my son at Princeton, so I finally saw her for a little while. But it came out to be a reasonably accurate piece.

SY: Hm hmm. It was a fairly long one.

CC: Yeah. Anything else?

SY: Well, I guess what we want to say is we hope to see you

again.

CC: Yeah, I know.

SY: At the end of a few years.

CC: Fine.

SY: Or anytime you would like to...

CC: OK.

SY: ...go into anything in more detail.

SY: We will be....

CC: You're going to be bringing, I mean...you're going to be pulling stuff out of what's written also, I mean, Teddy [Theodore H.] White's book or about a lot of stuff.

JN: Right.

SY: Well this is something that....

JN: Do you have any contact with him? You know he gave the Kennedy Library, I suppose the original manuscript and everything for the 1960 book. Now maybe then, I guess, he could, he may have used it as a tax deal, prior to the 1969 revision of the tax law. A lot of people gave things to...

CC: Hm hmm.

JN: ...Presidential Libraries and the Library of Congress, when you could still give something you created yourself, and get a tax benefit from it. But, if you have any contact with him on that book, you might...

CC: Ask for the manuscript?

JN: ...see what he would throw to the Nixon Library someday...

CC: All right.

JN: ...in the way of that sort of thing.

CC: Yeah, hm hmm.

JN: Always makes for an interesting exhibit. Authors' marginal notes in an exhibit case or something.

SY: Unedited.

JN: Yes, unedited...

SY: A draft is....

JN: ...notes would be pretty good.

CC: Yeah.

JN: All this stuff can be sealed for, you know, a sufficient number of years so that.... We've had these on so many lower echelon people at the White House since the [Abraham] Lincoln analogy, or something, because they overvalue what they have created in their own office and think that it's so sensitive it really all should be burned. When by comparison with your files and things, it really is pretty low level stuff. What I've tried to explain to them, if we just had more left from the Lincoln period, we'd know much more about the Civil War, or that Lincoln administration. And yet everything got scattered or burned by the family. Or Robert Todd [Lincoln] sat on what papers remained until about 1912.

CC: Hm hmm.

JN: And then was very sparing when he let happen to his father's papers. That was a tragedy, and we would hope that to keep for the President, so the President and his family can decide for themselves what, out of this vast collection,

they would slowly turn over to the American people for later use.

CC: Of course [Abraham] Lincoln didn't have a probing press like we do. There's been a lot more written about this administration....

JN: I know.

CC: OK.

SY: Thank you very much.

JN: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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conducted by Jack Nesbitt and Susan Yowell in room 182 of the
Old Executive Office Building
on January 12, 1973

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