

WILLIAM H. CABLE EXIT INTERVIEW

This is an interview with Bill Cable in his office in Washington, DC, on February 2, 1981. The interviewer is Emily Soapes of the Presidential Papers Project.

SOAPES: The obvious questions to ask you are how and when you came to Congressional Liaison, to start off with.

CABLE: I was first contacted in, I guess it must have been, March or so of '77 by Frank Moore. I remember, the day was the day that they were making the announcements on the water projects hit list. I came down to the White House and sat in Frank Moore's office for about three hours. Most of which was kind of the confusion of calling various people telling them that their water project was going to be cancelled. It wasn't going to be supported. Typical of Frank Moore, four years later you could have replayed that scene on nearly any crisis, piece of legislation, or legislative decision--people in and out, running around, a little crazy. And we talked for a few minutes. I didn't even talk to Frank for fifteen minutes on that day. But, I was there for about three hours watching this process occur, and he told me what he wanted. And I told him I would think about it. And I went back to the Hill and I called him, I think it was, a week later, on a Friday. It was the Friday before Easter. And, I told him I didn't want the job. And, I told him I didn't think that the way it was organized was the best way. And I told him three or four different things and I said, "Thank you," and I took my kids down to an Easter egg hunt down in Annapolis and remember very vividly looking around and realizing that I was probably the only male in that group over about fifteen years old and thinking that there are things more important than working all that hard. I went back to the Hill and worked on the Hill for a couple more months and then early in May I got called back a second time by Frank. I had lunch with Frank, taking me to see the Vice-President, to see Hamilton, and Bert Lance, and Charlie Schultze, Jody, and Stu, and then in to see the President.

SOAPES: You were there all day then.

CABLE: It was about an hour-and-a--it was lunch and then about forty-five minutes or an hour after that with just brief stops in to see various people. And had about--just maybe two minutes with the President. It was the first time I had met him face-to-face. He told me that Frank thought I would do a good job on Pennsylvania Avenue. I said, "My problem, Mr. President, is that I'm not sure that there's a desire to make Pennsylvania Avenue the kind of two-way street that it ought to be." And he said, "That's a perception problem. I want to do that, and you're the kind of person that will make--that will help me make Pennsylvania Avenue the two-way street." So I said I'd get back to Frank on Monday. That was on a Friday. And I went back to the office, I told my, then, boss what had happened. His administrative assistant looked at me and said, "Cable, you avoided the draft the first time, but you've just been had." And so I

left. I went down to the White House. I guess I went on board officially in May of '77.

SOAPES: So had you been on staff of one of the Congressmen or Senators on the Hill?

CABLE: Yes. I had been on the Hill for about twelve years before that. I learned later that the Speaker had--Speaker O'Neill had told Frank on a couple of occasions that there were some people--that he had to do better and that he had to have somebody that knew the House and made some recommendations about me--recommended me and a couple of other folks. And Frank decided he wanted me to do that job. But, that's how my Pennsylvania Avenue street sign got--that was the Speaker's going away present to me from the Hill. It's just a very--it, sort of, describes what I did for four years and what I tried to do for four years--make Pennsylvania Avenue a two-way street. So that's how I got there.

SOAPES: So, you had not worked in the campaign or the transition, but had spent a lot of time...

CABLE: [I] ran a precinct for Utah in the primary, in a couple of primary states.

SOAPES: Yes, you've mentioned--there at the beginning Congressional Liaison, Frank Moore in particular, got terrible press. Did they ever recover from that? What was the long-term effect of that? I was going to ask you that much later, but you mentioned that was part of your coming, partly.

CABLE: I think Frank's bad press stemmed from the period of time between the election and the inauguration where in those transition--those ninety days of transition period, he, literally, had no staff and his bad "rap" was he never returned phone calls; he didn't know how to deal with the leadership; Hamilton didn't treat the Speaker nicely for the inauguration, which is just untrue. Whether Frank returned phone calls or not is something that was a function mostly of physical time and sheer hours in the day. Frank was very responsive to members of Congress. I found him to be after I got there. I don't know a whole lot about what happened in advance. But the question was did we ever recover from it? And, I guess, the popular perception is that we didn't ever recover from it. You read the news stories about Max Friedersdorf and his experienced legislative crew as some sort of contrast to us. Max is a very experienced individual. He's been there a long time. And there are a couple of people who have got some Hill experience, but I had more years on the Hill than anybody in that operation right now.

SOAPES: Did you have more [experience] than the people you were working with, too, probably?

CABLE: Yes, more than anybody in the Carter--except for Valerie Pinson, who started with Senator Dodd back in the '50's sometime on the Hill, and been on and off the Hill

for twenty years. Bob Thomson had been on the Hill for a good while. Danny Tate had been on the Hill for a good while. Bob Maher had been with Paul Rogers for twelve years when he came to work for us. So we were, I think, we were given a public image because of those initial days as a bunch of know nothings from wherever, and I don't think it was--it wasn't a fair assessment of who we were or what we did. We had a lot of experience on the Hill. Even the guys that hadn't had a lot of Hill experience were around elected politics, Free, Straub, and Beckel, those guys have been around Democratic National Committee and campaigns. Beckel worked in campaigns of a half dozen members in Congress and was well known to many of them. So we, I think, we never did recover from it because it still is a popular perception, and we're still being compared to that. It's hard in this town. Once something gets in your clip file it's hard to ever get it out. Once the pencil press has, under Frank Moore, "He doesn't return phone calls," that gratuitous shot is going to be in--I'll bet it's been in thirty different stories about Frank Moore, that I've read. And it is part of the literature at that point and it's hard to ever get it out even if it's inaccurate. And the fact is that in the initial literature I got to be relatively well received. It's still reflected in most of the stories whether I screw up or not. I get away with a lot of things just because I've got good aim to start with. There was a perception in this town, I think, and I can say that as being part of this town by that definition, that they, the Georgians, whatever that means, were hillbillies, a little country, a little less good than the rest of us who were the Washington professionals and knew everything about everything, who knew Jimmy Carter would never become President. That's why we worked for Mo Udall and other people like that. And there was that kind of mindset against, that Washington had a little bit, and has, I think, to a certain extent, against--that you never overcome. You never overcome the image whether it's true...

SOAPES: They were the outsiders. They ran as the outsiders. And they stayed the outsiders. You read that even now. So when you came you said that Frank Moore had a real problem with amount of staff.

CABLE: Yes. We had--when I came to the White House, I was the third House lobbyist. Jim Free and Valerie Pinson were the only other two who were there. When we ended, we had Cable, Pinson, Straub, Free, Beckel, Maher, and a good piece of Jim Copeland's time, and a piece of Ronna Freiberg's time. We ended up at the end having a significant--oh, and then we had the whole budget task force process. We had four more people that we pulled in from agencies to work on behalf of the White House to work on the budget and appropriations matters. And, those were four more folks. Plus, we got to use, very effectively, the OMB people, the Walker Nolans, the Gary Fontanas, and that whole support group along with Herkie Harris and Mark Gordon, and the OMB's legislative shop directly. It got to be a big team. Our going away parties got--you started out, without spouses with about forty-five people. When you take the broadest sweep, Madeleine Albright at the NSC staff, Bill Smith from the Vice-President's staff. If you took the whole, not just for the House, forty-five people, but for the Congressional Liaison shop--if you took the whole panoply of people in the

executive office of the President, that somehow or another were related formally to the lobby legislative process, we ended up having a lot of folks.

SOAPES: But that evolved gradually didn't it?

CABLE: Oh yes. It did evolve gradually. And one of the things, one of the reasons for the bad ink in the beginning was that you just couldn't do it. What do you do with 150 to 200 phone calls a day? We did a couple of phone surveys where the telephone company just recorded incoming calls for us. We were trying to justify to some of the management types over there at one point the need for a switchboard kind of operation rather than having the people, Pat Carroll and Beth Byrd answer the phone and try to do any work. You'd never get off the phone. They had to wait until the phone was done for the day before they could type a memo or to do letters or to do anything. And we were averaging over 300 phone calls a day regularly in office 7130. Those were, I would say, not all from the Hill, but they were from Domestic Policy Staff and the NSC Staff. They were incoming attacks on us. That's eight hours or nine hours a day, six, probably, five-and-a-half days a week on that kind of average. So, we ended up having two people answering the phone. We just needed to. You needed a bit of insulation so that the phone didn't ring all the time.

SOAPES: And along with that, talking about the staff, I understand that, at first, Mr. Carter thought that perhaps the agencies themselves would do a good bit of the lobbying. Do I have that thought correct there? I may have heard part of a thought.

CABLE: I don't know exactly how that ever developed. It was always clear that there was going to be a substantial role for the White House. It wasn't until November, Thanksgiving, of the first year that we really sat down and created a priority document to look at what was important. What was important to the President? Where would the President spend his time? A legislative agenda that itemized how much time was left in the Congress, and how many things needed to be done. At the point in time, my memory's a little vague on this, but at the point in time we created it, we had some sixty odd legislative initiatives that we had set up in the first nine months. And if you took a horseback guess at how many days, hours of time on the floor of the House and Senate it would have taken to accomplish the legislative items that had been sent up; we had more than consumed the legislative time available in the balance of the Congress and had never factored into that the routine appropriations bills, the normal reauthorizations of things that needed to be done. We could demonstrate--and that was one of the most impressive things about that document that we did the first time is that we could demonstrate that we had to start making some choices among some of these things because if they just did what we'd asked them to do, and they would not have time to even do that, a lot less to appropriate for the continuation of the government. I mean, pass the debt limit and do all the normal things that have to be done in order to keep the process going. A lot less, whatever their initiatives, felt important or if things needed reauthorized. So, that document became the beginning of an annual process that was

managed by the Vice-President that included Stu, and Zbig, and us (Congressional Liaison). And the way it worked is that we would get input from all the agencies. We would ask every secretary of a department agency to--what's on your agenda for the balance of the year? Or, for whatever the time period we were working on. And, then we would just catalog all these things and look at them and make some comments as to what was really important to the President. For example, civil service reform was a very big thing in those early days. And, it was a very high priority. And, it cut across agencies. Scotty Campbell was clearly the guy that was the lead on that. But, it did affect lots of different agencies. And so we moved that along with Scotty Campbell, and Les Francis sort of managed that in the White House task force. It was a living list. When we beat out the defense appropriations bill, we created a task force--put that on the highest legislative priority list. Sustaining the President's view was an important thing that had to be done and had to be done right. And we did it. Dick Moe, of the Vice-President's staff, managed that operation. Creation of the Department of Education didn't have a natural advocate. The Secretary of HEW was historically opposed to the idea. And, while I won't say he did any--I don't know whether he did any active damage or not, he sure didn't do much to help us. And we took that over within the White House. I think the best we ever got out of Joe Califano was benign neglect. And that was the high point of his activities. Anyway, so that was an important process. That was one of the first times that we looked at managing the thing. And what we tried to do in that context was to focus the activities of all of the departments and agencies on the priorities that were the President's highest priorities. And, in that sense, we worked together with those people very well and tried to do some cross-lobbying. If the Defense Department had, well Defense is not a good--if the Department of Transportation had some discretion on a highway program or a rail program where they were going to be giving Washington, D.C., or Chicago, or something, a big grant; if they knew we were working on some of the people from Chicago, and we really needed their help on another matter, we could use the Secretary of Transportation to say, "Now look, I'm doing you these kinds of favors, why can't you take another look at that? Couldn't you really find it in your heart to do that?" Not necessarily--just, basically, to encourage some cooperation and just knowing what's in the process can help you, sometimes, encourage that cooperation. That is not to say that the Secretary of Transportation would withhold a grant that he had decided was a good grant for transportation policy that Chicago--just because somebody wasn't cooperating. We never even attempted to do that. We just tried to use the coincidence of timing and the knowledge of process to induce a more favorable reception rather than to trade things like that because the President never would have, in my judgment, let us do that if he knew we were doing it.

SOAPES: It wouldn't have been his style.

CABLE: No. And we didn't try to do it. There's a fine line. It's a fine line because: (1) we didn't exercise any of the discretion, I mean, I didn't decide whether UDAG [Urban Development Action Grant] grants what. Jimmy Carter didn't, in fact, decide whether UDAG grants what. Maybe some people would say that's part of the problem. But they

were done by HUD and whoever the secretary of HUD was decided whether UDAG grants what. Not us. Now that I'm in private practice, it's appropriate that that has kept me from a lot of the contamination of the ethics in government act, too. I'm free to do a lot of things that some of the people at HUD aren't because I didn't exercise that discretion and the way the revolving door provisions are written, if you don't have the authority, you're not covered by the proscriptions on dealing. So I'm relatively free to do anything. I'm about non-existent in terms of those revolving door--just not covered, which is fine. It's delightful as a matter of fact.

SOAPES: It certainly is a help to you here in February of '81. This November review, was this where the task forces that then frequently were used, was that the first time and then after that they were so successful? Les Francis' civil service reform, I think, being the first one.

CABLE: What really happened is that, I think, civil service and the veto came right back to back. And, we had two or three victories in September of '78--legislative victories, that were--and then the press all of a sudden discovered that we had a management mechanism to focus attention on those kinds of problems. We started it in November of '77 but it took nine months or so for it to come, for the legislative process to come to a point where it was a conclusion. And then, all of a sudden, everybody noticed, oh gee, they're doing something different. They must be doing something different. They did it right. The fact is we've been doing it for nine months. We just hadn't had any successes at that point. But, yes, Les's civil service reform task force--my recollection says that the veto was done in that same time frame. I think we had--well, that was the end of the Congress. And what happens at the end of a Congress is that those programs, those proposals that you made in January, February, March, April, May of '77, have spent eighteen months kicking around in the process and what's left of them or what's good of them or what's acceptable of them are going to get disgorged out of the Congress because the Congress acts in two year bits of time. That's the unit of time in which they deal. And the fact that you didn't get anything done in the first year is irrelevant. If at the end of the second year you didn't get anything done, then you can be critical. Decembers of odd numbered years, '77 and '79 aren't deadlines for anything. It's the close of the year. But, it's nothing. January 1 is the next day. Nothing has to be started over. Whereas, Decembers of even numbered years are important deadlines against which a lot is pressured, a lot is packed.

SOAPES: Had you had, previous to the setting up of the task force, any kind of tracking system for keeping up with bills?

CABLE: Yes. Les did a lot of that and he was the natural task force. That was his job. Coordination was kind of his title. Bob Thomson did that. Jim Copeland did that with Les and then Thomson and Copeland did that after Les went off to--through his career. He went to the [Carter/Mondale Presidential] Committee, I guess. He went to Hamilton's office for a little while and then went to the Committee.

SOAPES: How were you organized? Were you organized, in Congressional Liaison, according to issue or region? Like, would you take all the Southern Congressmen?

CABLE: We had two levels of organization. One of the things I didn't like about the way that the place was organized when I got there was that there had been an organization that gave lobbyists--gave Bill Cable six departments and agencies. They gave me Transportation and HUD and Commerce and Veterans Administration and HEW. And, those were supposed to be the things I watched. My philosophy is that I'm never going to know as much about HEW or about HUD or about Transportation as the people who are working on a full-time basis in those departments. And, as a matter of fact, if I never heard from those departments and agencies in the congressional cycle, far more the better. I don't need to watch everything they're doing all the time. What I wanted to do was to take--what we ended up doing was taking those priority pieces of legislation and assigning one of our people to be the task force leader. We were divided House and Senate. So, my focus on the House was to take one of our people and put them on those issues. And, put them on the issue of energy policy or whatever it was, and worry about that task force in that regard. It wasn't useful to worry about everything else at the Department of Energy. It was only useful to, in my judgment, to worry about those specific kinds of things that were important on our priority list. We had a second level of organization that gave each of us a group of about ninety members of the House to deal with as individuals. And, we took--what we did was take states as units and I insisted that we not have a representative of the Southeast or a representative of the Northeast, but I wanted people to take the group of states and, one from the North and one from the South and one from the West and one from the Midwest or wherever, whatever they wanted, and to divide the country up into those noncontiguous units because I really didn't think Jim Free needed to be any more of a representative of the South than he already was. What he needed to do was to get to understand New York better. And to get to understand other places in the country. So we didn't end up having regional wars within our own operation either. I didn't think any of those were important. And we did that. And what we tried to do was to set out a schedule where every one of us would go to each of their members' offices on a non-issue basis, introduce themselves, talk to the member, do a little outreach to find out what they liked or didn't like or where we could help or where we could develop a mutually rewarding working relationship so when they needed something they felt free to call on me. And when I needed something I could, at least, go in and talk to them given an attitude on their part that I was not some kind of an ogre or monster who only came asking for things. Occasionally, I came just to talk or deal with them. That worked a little while and then it just sort of all fizzled out. And we had a little difficulty enforcing the kind of discipline that I think we should have had in that process. And we would have done better. We have a tendency to go back to our friends too much. We're more comfortable, whoever we are, dealing with known than unknown and that is the same in any lobbyist or legislative person's life. I would much rather go back and deal with the guys I had worked for nine or ten years because I know what they're going

to do to me. They're not going to yell at me or bite my head off. I know their secretaries and I know their--but I could have known a lot more, and I think we should have continued that process. We just didn't. And I bear a lot of the responsibility for that, but we didn't.

SOAPES: So that you went back more to being assigned by the issue?

CABLE: Yes. Oh, we always had those dual--those were simultaneous and dual...

SOAPES: Oh, those were simultaneous. That explains why when we'd ask various people, some of them said, "Yes. We were organized by region," and some said, "No. We were organized by issue." So that explains that.

CABLE: Yes. And they were dual--the issues overrode, were an overriding concern. It wasn't that you only dealt with your members on issues. Jim Free and I split up energy and I did the tax side of energy and he did the non-tax side of energy in the beginning. And then at the end it got to be, we were both doing most of it together. I would take advantage of the other people's relationships with members and let them help in that regard and have them help in that regard. But, it was the legislative person's responsibility to call the shots and those were duplicate and overlapping in that sense. And the issue priority.

SOAPES: Was this one of those organizational improvements that you saw when you interviewed, I guess you could call it interviewed, for the job in spring of '77?

CABLE: It was one of the things I thought was wrong with the way it was done before. I just didn't need to compete with Dick Gordon at HEW. He was always going to be better than I was on what was going on in HEW. I don't have a problem with that. I think he should be. He should be a resource. And the way things work, 99 percent of the stuff never gets to the White House's attention and shouldn't. It clearly shouldn't get to the President's attention. Maybe 99 is high, probably 95, somewhere in there. A lot of it should just happen. I don't have people to sit through hearings and listen to hearings. That's got to be the agency's responsibility, the department's responsibility. I've got to be told on a timely basis that the world is falling apart in committee X or Y or Z and not after the fact. And we tried to develop a system of recruiting...(end of Side One, beginning of Side Two)... Each agency was responsible for reporting at the end of each week in a prospective fashion. Saying, "Thus and so happened." And say that briefly. "And next week we expect hearings, marked up, to continue. In this subcommittee, these are the--the issues will be these. These are the members we're counting for us. These are the members we're counting as question marks. These are the members we're counting against us. And, maybe on Wednesday we'll need your help with X, Y, and Z."

SOAPES: This is a memo to the President?

CABLE: This is a memo to Frank Moore and me. To Frank Moore. And then we had a weekly meeting where we went through our agenda. Basically, [it] was the priority legislation and then anything else that the agency people wanted to bring up. But it was designed to be prospective. And from those legislative reports that we got from the agencies; we built a legislative report for the President every week which was the same thing. The President did not particularly like a rehash of what had been in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post all week. He really wanted to know what wasn't publicly available. And he had every right to assume that we knew something that wasn't in the newspaper. Sometimes the newspaper knew more than we did, I would guess. But, we would do that. And we would write a legislative report, and, sometimes, in the Frank Moore legislative report to the President, we would say precisely what the agency person said. "This is a critical subcommittee vote. We don't think we can get Congressman X to go along. We may ask you--later we'll send you a phone call request with some talking points to call the Senator or the Congressman." And we tried to use the President as a resource in that way. And we used the Vice-President as a resource in that way. And we had good--if I had the kind of cooperation from the rest of government that we had from Jimmy Carter, we would have been about one hundred times more successful. And the President would do things that you could never get underlings in departments and agencies to begin to do. It was incredible. I mean, like support the President.

SOAPES: Do you mean like phone calls?

CABLE: Yes. Like, call Congressman X. The Defense Department, particularly on water issues, was absolutely atrocious. We had to undo damage from our own teams. I don't know. I feel this very strongly. One of the things that, I think, was an overreaction to the Watergate syndrome of hauling all the authority into the White House, the Haldeman-Ehrlichman White House. One of the overreactions, I think, that the Carter administration was responsible, not responsible, overreacted, in the sense, in terms of Cabinet government. And I think we recognized it in the middle of the term when we tried to get a little better reign on the Cabinet. But, those people at the assistant secretary level really own the discretion of this government. The secretaries don't because they don't manage it that carefully. The administrator doesn't. The next level down and the levels right below that person are really where the discretion of the government lies. And those people were loyal to their secretary and not to Jimmy Carter.

SOAPES: I've heard that said a lot, particularly, in the appointments for the new administration.

CABLE: That's why I was pleased to see the new administration look at those assistant secretary positions as the President's appointments and not as the secretary's. We didn't have--you couldn't be sure that anybody in the highest levels of an agency was really working for what was in the best interest of the President. Not that I think the

President and his people ought to control every decision that's made by every department and agency; but, you know, the fact is that you don't need to shoot yourself in the foot all the time. Somebody could have been sensitive to what was going on, in a general way, without ever even changing policy. Just not blabbing it out.

Contradicting--one branch contradicting another almost simultaneously. And I think that, as I said, I think that an overreaction to the excesses to the Haldeman and Ehrlichman kind of--the perception of Haldeman and Ehrlichman signing off on every federal grant that went out. I know that was impossible to do. There's no way that you can do it. As a matter of fact, the Congress spent most of the eight years that Richard Nixon was in the White House and the four years that Jimmy Carter was in the White House, eight from Nixon and Ford, limiting secretarial discretion. Basically, the discretion is very minimal, in one sense. The formula programs are written such that if an eligible recipient, be that a county or a city or a housing authority or a water authority or whatever, meets X prescribed criteria, 1-2-3-4-5, they're in the pool. And they get a proportionate share of the monies that are done. And the secretary really only exercises discretion in the terms of molding those applications into a form that fits the requirements of the statute. Because the Congress wanted to take away the ability of the President to manipulate that kind of thing. And we did it. We spent a long time writing that...

SOAPES: The other one was going the other way.

CABLE: Yes. And so that has affected the President--whomever moves into that office. It affects his ability to control what the government does. There are some new programs, discretionary programs, UDAG (Urban Development Action Grant) and CDBG (Community Development Block Grant). Some of those things are an exception to that, but most of the ongoing programs are formula programs. If you meet the statutory criteria and file your application properly and say all the right words and be all the right places, you're going to get the grant.

SOAPES: Was your work with legislators--did you see a perception of you as the, you alluded to, you didn't want to be seen as the ogre, you as the big man from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue? Was that something you had to work against?

CABLE: Well, I don't know. Most of the guys--I had a pretty good relationship with a lot of the people on the Hill. I mean, I'd been at the House Administration Committee and that was a place where lots of members had to go for lots of different things. To pay their electric bills, and to get their staff pay, and do a lot of things. So, I knew a lot of those folks and, I think, most of them were relatively sympathetic to me personally. And, I must admit, even people you don't know--the initial kind of approach by any member of Congress, Democrat or Republican, is not to screw the President. They want the President--they want the country to succeed, they want the Presidency to succeed. They don't necessarily view this thing in greater partisan terms. There are some things that are. But, more times than not the debate is one that if you can be the

least bit reasonable at, they want you to succeed. If you change it into a partisan, you know, if it gets boiled down to a partisan--the greater you offend somebody or you don't do your stroking properly in advance then you can get into trouble. Most of the time, not. Most of the time that wasn't a problem. I approached members of Congress as potential allies and partners and friends and as a way to make my job much easier. If I can get John Dingell to like my energy program, I'm going to do a much better job of selling the President's energy program than if John Dingell doesn't like it. And so I don't think it behooves anyone to go to the Hill with an attitude of being the bigshot who's carrying a stick who's going to beat you up. I used to go up there and say, "Please, help me. I know I've got this crazy thing to sell, but how do we make it work?" Not necessarily be that apologetic in any case. But, there were times when you had to take things up there and try to sell them and people would look at you like, real wage insurance, are you crazy? Didn't they teach you nothing while you were on the Hill, Cable? That kind of reaction. I went to an EPG [Economic Policy Group] meeting, Tate and I went to an EPG meeting on real wage insurance and told them that it was the craziest thing we'd ever heard and it wasn't going to pass. And not to propose it. They'd kill it.

SOAPES: So you were able to bring back to the White House...

CABLE: That's the other end of the two-way street. I was the one who was for the Hill, for the White House. And most of the senior Democrats in the House treated me that way. They would use me as an asset, in the sense that they would go to--use me as a funnel, channel of communications either to other people on the White House staff or to the President directly. Stu was a big help in that. Eizenstat was a big help in that. And Bert [Carp]. Bert and I spent more time together than any other person on the White House staff out of our own staff. Just as an essential component.

SOAPES: It makes sense, Domestic Policy, sure.

CABLE: They created all this nonsense that we had to sell on the Hill, and they had to help me sell it.

SOAPES: Who, on the White House staff, maybe you just answered it, was your best source of information?

CABLE: The two places we went most was Stu's staff; Stu and David [Rubenstein] and Bert. And then all of Bert's people over in the EOB. I really liked moving over to the EOB. We moved from the east wing to the EOB and it was great. You'd run into people getting a cup of coffee, going to the men's room, or getting a drink of water. And you'd get a lot of--three phone calls that you exchanged before to get the message to intersect on the decision--you could do, walk upstairs to Bert's office and sit down and say, "Now. Do this for me. I need an answer. I'm getting killed by Congressman X. I need this answer." And he'd go ahead and do it, or he'd get his area people to do it.

And OMB was the same way. Having them there, physically present. It really--I think it improved my perception of our ability to get an answer quickly out of the system.

SOAPES: Improved communications there.

CABLE: Yes.

SOAPES: Because at the time of the move there was some perception of Congressional Liaison being exiled from the east wing.

CABLE: Well, then they bribed us with all the space in the world. They just gave us an enormous amount of space. We were scattered all over the place. We had people in the EOB. We had part of our--the mail log unit, the Presidential mail log was already in the EOB. Les Francis and Jim Copeland were on the first floor, basement of the west wing. Frank and Russell and those guys were up on the second floor. And we, Tate and the lobbyists and me were all over in the east wing. And it was just all over the place. I enjoyed the move. Besides that, it was nice to have an office in the east wing, but you fight the tourists and the flies in the summertime. The doors were always open so it was never as cool as it should have been. The air conditioner didn't work as well as it--the bathroom, you had to walk across the tourist line. A pain!

SOAPES: Communications with Moore weren't affected from east wing to EOB I wouldn't think.

CABLE: We were as close to Moore in the EOB as we were in the east wing, probably closer. And a lot more quickly because you didn't have to walk through the kitchen with the tourist line and things like that.

SOAPES: Yes. I've made many trips through the kitchen in the last few weeks.

CABLE: Other people dealt a lot with Madeleine Albright and Jerry Schecter, when he was the press guy for the NSC. [I] did a lot of that NSC stuff through those two people. [I] spent a good bit of time talking to, not a good bit of time spent, regularly with Jody.

SOAPES: Because there was no such thing as a Congressional Liaison press office.

CABLE: No. We didn't have a press office, but we needed to help Jody understand what the legislative issues were, how to couch them in terms that were our terms. And how to react so that we didn't offend somebody on the Hill with something Jody said, too. And Jody would use us occasionally to generate the kinds of questions that he wanted or kind of play and twist on a story from the other end and we were--probably the next most close operation other than Stu's was Jody's. A little bit, and again it was more sporadic, a little less with the Jack Watson, Gene Eidenberg relationship not...

SOAPES: Intergovernmental affairs.

CABLE: Intergovernmental affairs. That was--and again, Bruce Kirschenbaum was over in the EOB right down the hall from Bert. And Anne Todd was over there. A lot of those people were over there. We just--that became closer by our proximity over there which we almost never used it before that, except in crisis kinds of situations.

SOAPES: What about on the Hill? What was your best source of information?

CABLE: Tip O'Neill. Without any question. Tip and his staff, Brademas and his staff, Jim Wright and his people. The Democratic leadership, which is where I focused on three different things: the leadership, the Rules Committee, and the Ways and Means Committee. Those were the areas where I spent most of my time. The leadership function included the Rules Committee. It was sort of a general scheduling, process, crisis, orientation of what was going on in the House. And we were a player. The President was generally involved, in some way or another, in what was going on. And so I spent most of my time in Gary Hymel's office. I mean, I would probably spend two-thirds of my day on the Hill in and out of Hymel's office and seeing members and having lunch and doing that kind of stuff; that was where I spent most of my time was working out of the Speaker's office. On a typical day I would go to the Hill--the Speaker had a press conference fifteen minutes before the House went into session every day. Still does. He had a leadership meeting fifteen minutes before the press conference. So, I would try to show up right before that leadership meeting and just be there to see if they wanted me or wanted to tell me anything or wanted me to, you know, have any information to exchange. Then I would not go, I deliberately didn't go to the press conferences because, Gary and I talked about that, I didn't want to be put in a position of reacting on behalf of the White House to something O'Neill said. I just didn't need that. O'Neill wouldn't have liked that. And I wouldn't do it. But, if you weren't there physically, there wasn't even a tendency to do it. Reporters are pretty lazy. They didn't usually--if it's not easy to seek you out, a lot of times they won't do it; but, if it was easy they would try to create a...

SOAPES: Yes. If you were in the back of the room.

CABLE: They would try to create a disagreement or a confrontation or a hostility. I mean, that's their job. The leading Democratic leadership was just great. And the Rules Committee and Richard Bolling and Chip Sayers, when they took over after the--those guys were just super up there. They really--I had, practically, free reign of their offices. They treated me as nicely as anybody. And I'd been at the House Administration Committee, which was in the Capitol and so I used the House Administration Committee as a place to go and sit and use the telephone and drink a cup of coffee. I think, I stayed contributing to the coffee fund up there through the whole four years. So, I felt free to go up and grab a cup of coffee whenever I needed one. And the people up there were just splendid, really super nice to us.

SOAPES: So that you were able to work very well with them?

CABLE: And then Ways and Means was where the action was. Ways and Means is where the action is forever. I got to be very good friends with Rostenkowski, Congressman Rostenkowski through the process. As a matter of fact, the friendships that developed during this administration is really one of the things I will--I made a lot of good friends out of this process, but Danny really is a special friend. So is Tip. And so are a lot of people, but Danny is one that I didn't expect to be working with as much as I did and just a great guy. I mean, on a personal basis. I spent six weeks in the campaign in Chicago in '80 and Rostenkowski was as much indispensable out there as he was here. He took me to political meetings and introduced me to everybody and treated me like his kid. It was wonderful.

SOAPES: You've mentioned the departments that you worked with. Can you run through some sort of a laundry list? Maybe giving a ranking of issues that you worked on that we could talk about in depth in another three years or some such?

CABLE: Well, we worked on a lot of different things. We worked energy, a lot of energy legislation. I went to the Ways and Means Committee on the very first day that I worked for the Carter administration. And one of the things I worked on there was energy legislation, the '78 Energy Act. Some of the big things we worked on were the civil service reform, the Department of Education, the trade embargo, MTN (Multilateral Trade Agreement Negotiations). We worked on some things we weren't very successful on. We worked on hospital cost containment and real wage insurance, and what else did we work on? Over the years we did things like the strip-mining bill. We did a lot of different things. All the energy stuff was--there were five or six energy bills. It seemed like every time you turned around there was an energy bill. We had a couple of big highway bills. We had--I remember that one highway bill that was a veto candidate. It was right at the end of the session. The President and the Speaker talked on the telephone in the closing hours of one of those thirty-six hour sessions. The President agreed to sign the energy bill--sign the transportation bill in order to keep Jim Howard and some of those guys from going off the reservation on energy. We had the airplane sales to the Saudis, that was the F-15's to the Saudis, was a legislative, a matter for--. We had the Panama Canal which was, the implementation of the Panama Canal treaties was a major accomplishment of the first two years. We had the windfall profits tax. We had a whole bunch of regulatory things. We had, not only civil service reform, but we had deregulation of trucking and rail and banking. We had financial institutions, regulation of small savers act. We had a couple of major solar and renewable energy programs. National health insurance, that we didn't do very well on. SALT we didn't do very well on. We had the legislation that went along with the recognition of China. We had that Taiwan bill which was a tough thing to pass. We did a reauthorization of mental health which was a major shift in the way the federal government looked at its responsibilities toward mental health. I don't know. We had fair housing, labor law

reform. Both of those we were unsuccessful on. We were successful on things like Alaska lands and--it's funny. Jimmy Carter is the best environmentalist that's ever sat in the Oval Office and has probably gotten more, taken more crap for it from--some of the purest elements of all of these things. You could never make them happy unless you did it--you were a thousand percent on their side. As soon as you wanted to compromise a little bit you were, somehow or another, against them. I guess that's part of the--used to say that you get one of these decisions out of the President where he really did take the middle road. He did exactly what--took a view that pleased nobody. He had an energy issues--energy interests. He would have the producers mad at him and the consumers mad at him. It's a little bit hard to figure that the way you define success is having the whole world angry at you. But that's kind of the way we were defining success there for a while.

SOAPES: You mentioned a couple of really tough ones like SALT, Panama Canal what was--you said earlier, every once in a while you had something really off the wall that you went in and said, "I know this sounds odd, but this is what I need to talk to you about today." What was the toughest one you had to work on, successful or unsuccessful?

CABLE: I don't know. I guess hospital cost containment was the toughest one that I ever had to work on. I really felt that what we were asking was so incredibly reasonable and so basically right for the people. And we were so vehemently opposed and so effectively opposed by the hospital association and hospital industry and all kinds of people that I really found that one very difficult to live with. I really, in my heart, believed that we were, you know, that it is absolutely essential for this government to get a handle on costs or you're never going to be able to afford any kind of a national health insurance program. And I still think that's a good idea, national health insurance. I think we're talking in sort of a theoretical world. I don't see that as one of the hot items on the agenda; but, I really think that had to be the toughest thing to deal with. Energy was a tough thing to deal with, just generally. Those things--see we had a couple of items where we had the House of Representatives, where we had one or two vote margins. And when it is that unsure it is really difficult to deal with. Everybody can hold you up for the world and that's hard. That's hard to do. But, cost containment was probably, personally, the most frustrating one on the whole. [It was] the hardest one to deal with because I really believe that it was the right thing to do and we didn't do it. We didn't get it done.

SOAPES: Let me just ask, sort of an overview question, an evaluation of the importance of any kind of congressional liaison, congressional relations staff as a cog in the machinery of making or breaking an administration. We talked earlier about the lack of recovery from the impression of Congressional Liaison in the Carter administration was affected which you feel it certainly was.

CABLE: I think it--I think the President recognized, President Carter recognized that, I

think, anybody who gets in that office recognizes that dealing with a co-equal of government that has a great portion of your destiny under their control is essential. The President used us in a way--if you looked at the President's schedule, President Carter's schedule, every day Frank Moore had a meeting with Jimmy Carter. We went to those meetings on a regular basis as we needed to. The President recognized the importance of his relationships with the Congress. He spent an enormous amount of time dealing with matters of Congress. As a matter of fact, the agenda for most of the days included the Congress and so he has to--any President to be well served who wants to do any--you can't avoid the Congress. No President--even if you don't want anything out of the Congress. You'd just like them to go with you. They won't. They have to authorize the money to run the Secret Service and pay the bills for the White House and fly the helicopter to Camp David and pay for Camp David and the National Park Service budget has to be authorized in order to cut the grass out there. So the Congress has to get involved. And I think the President--I think if there's any advice that you could give a President on how to have better Congressional relations, it would be to develop an attitude or to develop the Congress in a meaningful partnership role rather than treating the Congress as a problem to be dealt with. I understand the sensitivities about giving away Presidential discretion. There is only one President; but, there is a kind of continuum between consultation, announcement on one end and real consultation on the other end. And as you cross that continuum you do avoid some discretion. But, I think there's a point in time where the result of giving away some portion of discretion just benefits the President so much that you've got to do it.

SOAPES: That's an appropriate note to end.