

Location: Francis' Office in the West Wing Office of the White House

Transcribers: Lyn Kirkland and Winnie Hoover

Exit Interview with Les Francis, Deputy Assistant for Congressional Liaison Coordination

Interviewer: David Alsobrook of the Presidential Papers Staff

Date: November 19, 1979: 2:00 PM

Alsobrook: Les, first of all, can you tell me briefly a little about your experience prior to coming to work in the Carter White House?

Francis: Immediately prior or—?

Alsobrook: You can go back to your, I guess, your days in California.

Francis: OK, I came to the Carter White House from the staff of Congressman Norman Minetta of California. I served as his administrative assistant from '75 through March of '77 when I came over here. Prior to that time, for the better part of eight years, I had been an organizer for the California Teachers Association and with one brief stint here in Washington in 1969 working on the 18 year old vote and then school year, the academic year of 69-70, was Assistant Professor at San Jose State in the Student Personnel Department. But most of my career in California had been as an organizer for the Teachers Association.

Alsobrook: You went to school at San Jose State?

Francis: San Jose State, right.

Alsobrook: How did you come to work in this particular administration?

Francis: I had—well, I guess like a lot of us—I came out of the campaign. I had taken some vacation time in April of 1976 and went up and did some work for Kraft in the Pennsylvania primary, and then worked for him at the convention in New York and then during the general I was in California as the Deputy State Coordinator. And then, after the election, they asked me if I would like to work in the transition which was not something I wanted to do. And then I guess, it was in mid-February or something like that, Frank Moore called and asked if I wanted to talk about a job in the Congressional Liaison Office. So that was that.

Alsobrook: Why didn't you want to work in the transition?

Francis: Well, several reasons. One is, I had just spent, you know, three months, involved in a very tiring and emotionally draining experience, and I just was not up to getting into what I knew were going to be the hassles of transition—people jockeying for position and all that—so I just wasn't interested in that part of it. And too, I had told Congressman Minetta that after the election, I would come back and help gear up his office for the next term which was his second term. I had taken a bit of a financial bath in the campaign and needed to get back at the salary that I had been working at before to kind of recoup some of that, so there were a lot of reasons.

Alsobrook: Did Frank Moore discuss with you the type of job that you would have when you came to work here?

Francis: Yea, we talked about really two jobs. One was assisting him in kind of a management, administrative assistant spot and the other was this new spot that they created called—what my first job with Frank was called Legislative Projects Coordinator and it was a position that Frank and others had kind of designed, the idea being to monitor the tasks of the various White House staff people involved in legislation. And so we talked about that. It was a little bit, how do I say... mushy, I mean it was—the parameters were defined, but the exact nature of the job was something that, as is the case with any job, I think, in this place, it is something you kind of define as you go along.

Alsobrook: Could you tell me a little bit about how the job began to shape up, you know, once you were in the White House?

Francis: Well, quickly it became apparent that one of the main things that they wanted, that they had in mind when they did it was “tracking” of legislation. And that proved to be kind of futile. You can't track all that much in one office. It changes so quickly that the best thing you can do is track the progress of work being done on legislation rather than the status of the bill itself. And there are many ways to check the status of the bill—various systems exist to do that. So what we did was we started moving in these task forces and then I spent more and more time with Frank kind of coordinating activities of the staff and so it gradually evolved from a kind of one person operation into the coordination quasi-management job that it ended up by the time I left his office.

Alsobrook: Les, you mentioned this “task force” concept. Could you tell me a little bit about how and when the administration began to rely more upon the task force concept, as a means of marshalling support on the Hill?

Francis: I can try to remember. I guess the first one was the Panama Canal treaties and that was one that Hamilton set about putting together. And then the next one was Civil Service Reform. And I guess that really served as kind of the prototype for others because in October of '77 as we were getting the legislation ready for introduction the following year, you had two agencies, plus the White house, very much involved in the Civil Service reform. You had the Civil Service Commission, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and you had the White House itself. And I can't say that the notion of a “task force” came out of any exciting kind of discussion. What it came out of was the

fact that we were having mechanical problems whereby one person representing one of those units would call a meeting to discuss events and somebody else representing one of the other units would call a meeting and we met ourselves coming and going, sometimes talking about the same issues with a slightly different cast of characters. So I talked with Scotty Campbell and with Harris Wellford and Wayne Granquist, and we hit on this idea of a kind of umbrella group and I served as kind of the convener of that group and Scotty Campbell took the policy lead on it and he and I kind of, with Wayne, just kind of formed a little management team. And then what we did was we made sure we had every unit in the White House covered--- press or publicly--- or whatever it was, and we then used the task force approach on both of the major vetoes—the Public Works veto and the Defense Authorization Bill—and based on those four things: the Panama, Civil Service and the two vetoes—we then decided that on all of our major initiatives that we were going to be White House directed, that that would be the approach we would use.

Alsobrook: I think you may have touched on this, Les, but exactly how would you decide which people to put on a particular task force? You just mentioned Civil Service Reform.

Francis: Well, Civil Service Reform was actually—the cast was pretty much determined before we even had the script because you had units and players already involved because of their responsibilities in their place of appointment, whether it was Granquist and Wellford at OMB or clearly Scotty Campbell at Civil Service Commission, or Jule Sugarman or whoever. And then what we would do is if we wanted the press office involved we would ask Jody: “Who do you want to have work with us on this?” Or let’s see, I guess Anne Wexler hadn’t yet joined the staff at that point, but we would go to each of the offices. And Domestic Policy Staff we had two people already involved, Sy Lazarus and Steve Simmons, so we didn’t actually go out for that one and recruit people.

Alsobrook: All right. I want to ask you a few specifics: first, about the Civil Service Reform Task Force. First of all, how about presidential involvement?

Francis: I should tell you, you know they did an oral history on this, already.

Alsobrook: I didn’t know that.

Francis: Yea, somebody, I think Scotty, arranged for somebody and you might check with him, because there was a guy who came around and spent a lot of time with all of us on that.

Alsobrook: Oh great, yea, I would like that. That would be of some interest to me. Just on Civil Service Reform?

Francis: Yes.

Alsobrook: And Scotty would be the man to check with on that?

Francis: Yea, yea.

Alsobrook: That's great. Presidential involvement—what do you recall about that in terms of civil services?

Francis: Well, that was an issue that he felt very strongly about and wanted to be kept constantly abreast of developments, either through written reports or weekly legislative reports that my office was responsible for. Or I would go in with Frank about two or three times a week in his morning meetings with him and give him the latest. So in terms of just monitoring, he was very much up to date on it. And then the task force would then decide that we needed to either highlight the President—highlight the issue by using the President in an event, speech or awards ceremony, whatever—or we did a town hall meeting out in suburban Virginia with a bunch of civil servants themselves. We would set up meetings between the President and key members of Congress, either the Post Office or Civil Service Committee, or some other group. Those were all tactical decisions that the Task Force made and then, you know, worked with the President's appointment people to get them on his schedule. But, I mean the level of involvement was very intense.

Alsobrook: Do you think that was largely because of his commitment during the '76 campaign or were there other factors involved?

Francis: I think clearly that was part of it. It was also because of the fact that the President, like the rest of us, once we got into this place realized that if we are really going to change the way government operates, one of the things we had to do was to reform the Civil Service System. And clearly, I mean the political payoff must have been a part of his interest too. I mean, it was an issue that was and is popular with the electorate. So I would think that all of those were factors.

Alsobrook: As you get into this thing, who were some of your key supporters on the Hill and elsewhere?

Francis: Well, on the Hill, on the Senate side, Ribicoff, Sasser, Eagleton, members of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee—Percy were very helpful. On the House side we had a much more difficult problem because the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee is a committee that had a long history of close ties to the employee groups and was chaired by Congressman Robert Mix who was then defeated in the primary in '78. And he did not evidence much interest in the issue.

We had some out and out opponents on the committee, Gladys Spellman and Herb Harris from suburban districts here in Washington—Spellman from Maryland, Harris from Virginia. You had people who were very skeptical like Bill Floyd from Michigan who has long, close ties with the Labor movement; Bill Clay from Saint Louis, likewise. But our champion turned out to be Mo Udall, who was the ranking member of the committee under Mix at the time and who really believed in Civil Service reform. I mean he, too, felt that was the only way we were going to get a handle on the government was if we

somehow reformed the system. And I think Mo also saw the political attractiveness of an issue like that for his purposes back home. And he became really the spear carrier on that thing and did a tremendous job.

On the House side, we never made a tactical decision that wasn't first cleared or run by or suggested by Udall. We just said to him, "OK, we'll follow your lead on the house side." And it worked well. That's not to say that we didn't suggest things to him that he didn't agree to.

Alsobrook: Les, were there certain lobbying efforts or techniques that were—

Francis: You're talking about the outside?

Alsobrook: Yea.

Francis: Uh, outside groups—there was an issue where we had probably as broad a based support as anything we have done in this administration. You had—eventually—we got the American Federation of Government Employees to support it. You had Common Cause, Business Round Table, all of the academic groups associated with public administration. The National Federation of Independent Businesses were supportive. I mean, it was just an across-the-spectrum kind of citizen support, organizational support. Opposition came from National Treasury Employees Union. Let's see—who else really fought us on that? Well, the Chamber of Commerce, interestingly enough, opposed this because of one provision. That was, we, as part of the negotiations process, agreed to a codification of the collective bargaining rights for federal employees, moving it from an executive order to statute, which was a major development on our part. I don't want to say a concession, because it really wasn't that, but it was a major development. And it was what locked in AFGE and AFL-CIO. It never was enough to get the more militant unions in but the Chamber of Commerce, which like every other part of the bill said that so long as that was in it, they would have to oppose it and true to their broad, long-range perspective, fought us to the end.

Alsobrook: I was going to ask you also were there certain lobbying techniques or efforts that you felt like were particularly successful in doing this?

Francis: Well, you see the issue was one that we knew if we could ever get it to the floor would go through very smoothly, as it ended up doing. I forget what the vote was—360 something to 8 or whatever. I mean, it was hardly a close one. The problem was the committee itself—Post Office and Civil Service Committee—so all of our quote "lobbying" activities were directed at the committee and they really took a couple of main forms. One was "presentation of factual data" to members of the committee by Scotty and members of OMB. And the other was focusing public and collegial support by the members of the committee. In other words, there were a lot of guys who didn't serve on that committee in the house who wanted to be able to go back home and run on the fact that they had reformed the Civil Service System. So we used a lot of peer

pressure on the committee and then a lot of these outside groups that were supportive also indicated their interest to the members of the committee and elsewhere.

Alsobrook: So once you got it past the Mix Committee, it was in pretty good shape?

Francis: Yea, yea and then we were just up against the calendar, you know, the clock.

Alsobrook: Did your success with this particular task force logically lead to the Federal Compensation Reform Task Force too? Was this—were these two things—?

Francis: Well, only in the sense that the Federal Pay Reform thing was one of the issues that we wanted to pursue this year but we've used it on energy, we've used it on—I hate to mention it—real age insurance. We used it on SALT, hospital cost containment. I forget what.

Alsobrook: There is one question that comes to mind when you talk about Civil Service reform. That is, how did this particular piece of legislation become the centerpiece of the President's entire reorganization program? Was this accidental or was this something that yall discussed?

Francis: Well, I don't think we ever discussed it in terms of making it the centerpiece of the President's reorganization. I think the term "centerpiece" probably was something that the press coined. But I think it goes at the heart of this thing in that no matter what you do to the form of government, in terms of where are the boxes and "who-reports-to-who" kind of things—which are important—that unless you got a handle on the Civil Service, that unless you did something about while protecting employee rights, providing incentives for better performance, until you provided incentives for management flexibility, all those kinds of thing, that you never would be able to truly make a difference, no matter what you did with the structure. So, I guess it just kind of evolved as, you say, the centerpiece.

Alsobrook: So it really wasn't something you sat down and talked about. It was just something that everybody on the task force knew?

Francis: Well, yea, let's face it. The reform of civil service is a political issue. Reforming civil service is a whole lot sexier than federal disaster assistance or civil rights enforcement or a Department of Energy or even a Department of Education. I mean in terms of broad appeal, I mean civil service reform has a lot more political juice behind it than did the other things.

Alsobrook: I want to ask you a little about the Department of Education Task Force. Once again, what kind of presidential involvement did you have in this one, too?

Francis: That was one, of course, that the President had been saying for two years that he wanted to get done and we moved it to the highest kind of priority status in the 1979 agenda, last year—almost a year ago now. And that was an issue where he did not have

to get very much involved himself. I mean, as it went through the Senate, I think he probably made a few calls to Ribicoff and others.

It was something that just kind of went along. We had good advocates on both sides. You had Ribicoff and Percy on the Senate side. You had Jack Brooks and Frank Horton on the House side, but then as we got down to the wire to get the bill out of committee which we won in the house 122 to 21 —we had the President making phone calls and bringing people down—the Vice president—and then as we started gearing up for floor action, he got very heavily involved. Probably, personally we won that vote 215 to 201, think it was, and there is no doubt in my mind that the President probably single-handedly reversed a dozen or more votes through phone calls and visits the last 48 to 72 hours.

Alsobrook: What kind of interaction did you have between Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and the White House staff in working on this particular task force?

Francis: (Laughs) You really expect me to answer that question? (Laughs). Let me put it this way, the HEW/White House relationship on the Department of Education improved noticeably after we got a new Secretary of HEW; up to that point it had been almost non-existent. They spent a lot of time working on the issue—none of it in favor of the issue, prior to the change in leadership of that department.

Alsobrook: (Laughs) How about the involvement of Domestic Policy Staff for this particular issue?

Francis: Very much so. Bert Carp spent a lot of time on it, Steve's deputy. He had been working on it and, of course, education is his background too. So, but we had Bert for a while Beth Abramovich working on it too, but Bert Carp was really the guy that spear-headed the DPS involvement.

Alsobrook: Essentially, what was the administration's argument for the new Department of Education?

Francis: It was really two-fold, I think. One was the President's belief that education,--- that a society probably does nothing more important than provide education for its citizenry—and if that is the case then it certainly ought to deserve sort of pre-eminent status at the federal level --so, just status, prestige. The first year that we worked on it, I remember meetings in the Cabinet Room where he would have meetings with members of Congress and he would talk about it and he would say—this was like '78—and the whole time he had been President at that point the subject of education had only come up twice in cabinet meetings and both times it was brought up by the Attorney General in conjunction with law suits —desegregation or Title 9, or whatever it was—never having been brought forth as an education issue with someone advocating for the cause of education. That was not necessarily a slam at Califano; it was just a statement of fact.

Whereas education took up about maybe 10 or 11 percent of the HEW budget, it got even less of its attention. So, the whole visibility/status/prestige question was I think on the President's mind. In other words, it was just another case where you have the federal government's involvement in education being spread throughout several agencies that, like he said, if you were an average citizen or an average school superintendent or school board member out in the country and you wanted to know who do I have to talk to in the federal government, to talk about an education problem, there are not many people who can name who the Commissioner of Education is or whether or not that is the right one to go to. So, if it was an education issue, it had to be a department. So I think management issue thing was a big part of it. Uh, those two things.

Alsobrook: You mentioned some of your supporters on the Hill. I guess Representative Erlin Bourne was certainly an opponent.

Francis: Yea, he sure was.

Alsobrook: Can you think of others besides him?

Francis: Well, yea, under the Department of Education, you had a strange coalition, a marriage of otherwise incompatible partners. I mean, you had Erlin Bourne on the right and a Ben Rosenthal on the left, for example. You had other conservative Republicans and Shirley Chisholm against it. The reason for that, the right wing was arguing greater federal control, more bureaucracy, all that crap. Whereas the left side of the party, some of the left, not all of them, because we had some good liberal support too. We had a lot of members who came from American Federation of Teachers (AFT) cities.

The issues got very muddled when you came down to it. In many cases it was an anti-aid versus AFT organizational dispute having little to do with the merits of the issue, which I think explains part of the opposition. Then you had, I think you had some people opposing it, liberals opposing it, who had a concern that the labor/education coalition that had been so effective in Congress would be split with the creation of this department and not able to unite on causes. I don't think that is a valid concern but I think it was one that was heartfelt. I don't think it was a contrived thing.

Then you had a group of people, I would guess mainly among the minorities, who feared that the education establishment itself would dictate the policies of the department and these would be the same, if not individuals, the same forces that those minorities have had to fight time and time again. The education establishment has been no more responsive to minority causes than had the rest of the establishment. So, there were those factors.

Alsobrook: We were talking about the forces on the right. Could you tell me a little bit about what Jesse Helms did to obstruct this particular--?

Francis: Yea, yea, he had his prayer amendment. The tactic that the right took was to muck it up, to cloud it up with these extraneous things, like abortion and prayer. Helms

succeeded the first time we got the amendment on. Then we had to go back and screw around with some other language to nullify the impact of his first try.

Alsobrook: Was he the one who got the anti-busing thing in there too?

Francis: Did he do the busing one? He may have. He had a whole list of them. I don't recall exactly.

Alsobrook: The work of both of these task forces that we have talked about now is, I guess, completed, but could you tell me something about your work with some of the groups that are still in operation? And the work that you did with these groups before you--

Francis: Well you see most of my job was to set them up and just kind of monitor them. I paid a lot of time and attention to Civil Service reform and chaired it, in fact. As a matter of fact, we made a conscious decision, going into this year that I shouldn't chair any, because if you chaired one, it left you no time to do anything else. I mean, Civil Service reform, I probably spent 75 % of my time on that, maybe, and so this year I just kind of would talk with the Task Force chairman on occasion to find out how things were going—whether they needed help or if I needed to get involved to give somebody a boost or a prod or whatever.

Alsobrook: Les, what were you doing with the other 25 % of your time during the time you said you spent 75 % on the Task Force?

Francis: Yea, just general staff coordination stuff and we have a computer vote count system that we put into effect and did a lot of vote analysis stuff, advising Frank on strategy and issues, playing utility in-fielder when I could, watching over the California congressional delegation because that's my home. So I did just a hodgepodge—the weekly legislative report was generated out of my office.

Alsobrook: Did you institute the use of the computerized vote count?

Francis: Yea! Yea.

Alsobrook: Could you tell me what is the difference in the task force groups on energy and energy management? In title, those things seem to be sort of similar.

Francis: Well, one of them-- the energy management group that Jack Watson chairs—was set up to deal with—I remember those meetings, they took place in, I guess, in the late spring—that was set up to deal with the short term, hopefully, shortages--The gasoline problem, the home heating oil problem, the shortages that grew out of the Iranian revolution and the cut-off of supplies from Iran. It was not a policy group. That group got into things like the safe transportation of—remember when because of the diesel shortages, the truckers strike and the problems with that? So it did that, whereas the group that Elliott Cutler heads up on the new energy bills was more along the lines of

these other legislative task forces that we had before when we had a specific legislative agenda that you were working on. Actually, the group that Elliott heads was a little different. We did not set up a task force. What we did was in that one, because we had to move so quickly and somebody had to have a clear authority, was we designated Elliott as the energy—I forget what the hell his title was—but we gave him some sort of title and the said, “Now you work with whoever you have to cutting across offices and in whatever combination you need to get things done, but you don’t have to go to a nightly meeting or twice weekly meeting but just meet as needed with whoever you need to meet with to get the job done.” It was a variation on the same theme.

(End of Tape 1)

Alsobrook: And of the two methods groups, did Department of Education (DOE) have a lot of input in both?

Francis: Yea. Of course, a part of that during the life of both of those you had a change in stewardship at DOE so there were some soft spots there during the summer during that transition, but no, they were heavily involved.

Alsobrook: Les, do you think in the coming year there will be other task force groups created to deal with various issues?

Francis: Well, seeing as how we are going into 1980, I would hope that we would have a minimum number of legislative initiatives which would require a minimum number of task forces. The re-election will not be served by cooking up lots of new proposals.

Alsobrook: All right. This question may sound rather vague, but essentially I want to ask you about political trade-offs that are often necessary in accomplishing goals on the Hill. For example, take the Tellico Dam Project, for example. What was the administration’s thinking in regard to this project, making a decision to support that? Were you looking at trying to win support on other pieces of legislation down the road?

Francis: I was not involved in that. You would have to talk to someone who was more closely involved with that specific—Jim Free was very much involved if you want to get information on that. I think there was--just on the issue generally in trade-offs, I think we matured greatly in that respect over the period of a couple of years. I used this to describe early on what I saw as the President’s approach to legislative negotiations, which was at variance with the traditional Washington approach and to some extent probably accounted for some of our early difficulties. Not that he was wrong; it just that it wasn’t something this town was used to.

He is and was always willing to engage in what I call “vertical” negotiations within an issue. If you want to talk about Civil Service Reform, he would sit down and talk with the opponents of civil service reform who were skeptics or whatever and say, “okay, within that issue, what sorts of change do we need to make that will make this thing move along and still get the job done?” He was not inclined, nor was he inclined to let us

operate in such a way, to trade *across* issues—what I call “horizontal” negotiations. And it was really, when we got into those veto fights that we first started to really engage in what is referred to as classic sorts of horse-trading and I think probably was a major turning point in the administration where you would talk about a project or another issue, support for another issue, in return for support on a particular initiative of the administration.

Alsobrook: Okay. I want to talk a little bit about your job with Hamilton Jordan after the reorganization of the summer. Could you briefly describe what your duties were?

Francis: Well, the whole thing came up—they had some meetings in early June, I guess, even before the Camp David meeting, at which time they talked about, the President, the Vice President, Hamilton, Frank, the senior staff, talked about the need for some alterations in the way the White House was operating and a determination was made that Hamilton ought, in fact, to become the Chief of Staff. Frank Moore then called me the day after that meeting and asked me if I had anybody in mind to do for Hamilton what I had been kind of been doing for him, staff coordination, management, and I said, “No, I would think about it, but if they were serious, I would like to have my name thrown in the hat for that position”—which is ultimately what happened.

My job was, I guess it was really to do more work coordinating the people at the deputy assistant to the President level, to focus on the agenda for the senior staff. What we did was we met every morning at 7:45—the deputies—and out of that grew the agenda for the senior staff meeting at 8:30 and out of that grew the agenda for the meeting with the President at 9:30, 9:45. And then I kind of served, I think, as Hamilton’s internal political, you know, point person to alert him to things that were coming up through the pipeline that had a political impact that we needed to get on top of, to whenever necessary, to lend the weight of his office to a particular issue, like the last few days of the Department of Education thing, I got involved in that fulltime for about three or four days just because we wanted somebody from Hamilton’s shop to be able to oversee and pull together the various elements of the administration to work on that thing. It is an impossible job to write a job description for—I mean, you just do whatever—whatever he wants done that day.

Alsobrook: Les, when that job came up was there a feeling that this would be something that you would keep, say, until the campaign geared up?

Francis: No, as a matter of fact, the notion was that when I was on Frank’s staff the thought was that I would go out to the campaign and probably work in California sometime after the first of the year. When I went to Hamilton’s office, the feeling was that I would probably stay on the White House staff and not go to the campaign at all, but then in, I don’t know, late September or early October sometime, we started talking about some campaign needs and Hamilton, Mondale, Dick Kraft and ultimately the President, I guess, talked about it and decided that maybe I ought to go over there.

Alsobrook: You know, back during the time of this latest reorganization, there was a lot of talk in the press about one reason why there was a reorganization was to have more discipline within the White House staff. Was this a major factor? Could you tell me about other factors? You touched on this earlier. What were some of the other factors involved in the reorganization at this point?

Francis: Well, there was a need to have a little greater sense of discipline. There was a need to have what I call a political screen or integration of policy and politics—a little more. There was a need for some long term planning that hadn't been going on, a need for greater follow through. Our feelings were that whatever problems we were having were not so much with policies we were generating, but it was with the execution. Our screw-ups were in the execution area rather than anything else and we just needed to tighten up.

Alsobrook: Was that part of Al McDonald's role—to follow up?

Francis: Yea, yea, yea—to tighten up things a bit.

Alsobrook: How about the decision to bring on Hedley Donovan? Was there talk during this period about that, about bringing on a man like Hedley Donovan?

Francis: I'm sure there was. I was not part of this.

Alsobrook: Okay. Could you in general terms, Les, describe what your role is in the new campaign? Whether or not it is anything like your role in the '76 campaign?

Francis: Well, first of all, no it's not. First of all, the task is much bigger than what I did in '76 and in that sense it is a little terrifying. My title is National Staff Director. In that capacity I serve as Kraft's kind of chief deputy. My job is to—primarily---is to run the field organization in the various states—to staff it, to assign staff, to rotate staff, to run the field offices and the Headquarters in such a way that it is providing service to people out in the states. The second responsibility is to assist in Headquarters management to make sure the various units of the campaign are working together, and the third is to be involved in various strategy discussion and decisions with Kraft (Tim) and Hamilton (Jordan) and now Bob Strauss and others. That third thing is of lesser concern to me in the sense that my own involvement in the other two will keep me plenty busy.

Alsobrook: I want to ask you a sort of philosophical question. Are there certain management skills or theories that you've been able to put into effect or that you've seen in action here while you're working in the White House—things that you've maybe studied in school or seen elsewhere but here you've actually seen them in practice?

Francis: First of all, you've got to understand, I have no background academically in management at all. I mean I was a social science major and then an organizer for a teachers' union. So whatever management experience I brought to the job was primarily out of the campaigns where I had served in that capacity some places. Darn, I don't

know. This place was set up and continues to be different than any kind of classic model that it's really hard to I guess one of the things I've learned is that the classic models themselves really don't make a whole lot of sense. Let me back up: when I went to work for Congressman (Norman E.) Minetta when he was elected in '74, the week after that election I came back to Washington to begin setting up his office and begin recruiting staff or interviewing staff. I didn't have to do much recruiting. I mean, we had like six positions and 1400 résumés. One of the first things I did was I went around to other congressional offices, people I knew, either staff or members of Congress, to see if I could find out what was the ideal way of setting up a congressional office, what kind of structure should you have, titles, lines of authority, job descriptions, things all that.

The first conclusion I came to after about a week of that particular task was that there was no ideal way to set up a congressional office. What you do is you set up a congressional office to meet the needs and personality of the member and of the administrative assistant, quite frankly, as was the case in our office, where Norm just did not want to be involved with the management of staff, either in Washington or in California. Not only did he not want to I didn't want him to be involved in it. My agreement had been with him: "If I am going to do this, then I'm going to run the show, which means hiring and firing people, which means I don't want you to be bothered with it and I don't want you bothering me about it." And one of the things I discovered was that there is no ideal. You had to tailor it to the member and to whoever the top person was, if you had that kind of arrangement.

The White House is the same way. It has got to be set up to meet the particular needs and styles of the players—clearly the President being the preeminent one in that mix. So, you know, I think what we have done, I think the task force approach on issues has proved to be successful and it is compatible with the organization of this White House where you have units of roughly equal stature. One of the things I have learned is that you don't just make decisions. In a political arena, a political atmosphere, it's not just as simple as making decisions. What you have to do is that you negotiate decisions; you mediate disputes between individuals or units or whatever. Out of that process, decisions come. People on the outside think if you just decide to do A versus B then it will get done. Well, that's just not true. If the parties to that decision don't believe in it, it won't get done. There are just too many ways you can screw it up. So what you have to do is bring people along. I mean, it is a lot of negotiation. That's really what it is—certainly mediation.

Alsobrook: In other words, you are talking about the human factor. People tend to leave that out when they talk about management and decision making.

Francis: Yea. It is the human factor compounded by politics. You've got to remember, you've got 350 some odd people on the White House staff, right? I don't know how many of that 350 whatever,—but my guess is it's about 340—consider themselves to be political wise guys. Everybody's got their own answer. Some of them may be right and some may not be, but they all come with that orientation. They've all got a stake in that decision. Many of them have their own constituencies. They didn't come to these jobs

without a background. They bring not only experience but they bring allies, sources of power, interest groups, interest group ties, campaign experience, all these things, and you don't ignore that. I mean, you have to deal with them as political powers in and of their own right. I'm not talking about all of them, but clearly the major players at the Assistant to the President level and also at the deputy level and right on down the line.

Alsobrook: Didn't you find that was also true when you worked on the Hill too? You had all these power centers?

Francis: Yea, but as an administrative assistant in one member's office, your main concern is just the operation of that office and politics back in the district. It's not nearly as complicated. I mean, there your job is to please one person—that is the member.

Alsobrook: Is that really one of the most overwhelming things about working in a job like this in the White House—you know, having all these various factors to balance?

Francis: Yea, yea.

Alsobrook: Are there other pressures or problems that stand out in your mind as you think back about the last 2 ½ or 3 years?

Francis: Oh yea! Well, I'll answer that question but I would want to say something else in addition. Let me answer the question first. The pressures of time—there is never enough time to get everything done, number one. I have never worked as hard as I have worked in this job—including the campaigns I have done. My work week was never less than seventy hours a week. I would get to the office at 7:00 in the morning and rarely if ever left before 8:00 or 8:30 at night—and most every Saturday. Plus, I would take work home on weekends and never be fully caught up. The place is a pressure cooker—I mean, you are making decisions or you're impacting on decisions which are (and I don't mean to sound melodramatic) but, I mean goddamn monumental in terms of importance and if you make an error in a judgment call it could mean the difference in winning and losing on an issue on the Hill. I was never involved in life or death type decisions, You know what I'm talking about—I mean, look at what is going on in Iran now. The stuff I am talking about is minuscule in comparison, but have a lot to do with the record of an administration, so you are constantly aware of the stakes. I don't think anybody who hasn't lived through this and worked it can really understand it. That's why I would go on to say it was without a doubt probably the best job I've ever had in that regard. It was the most exciting. If you enjoy being at the center of activity, there is no place like the West Wing of the White House to be. So, I don't have any regrets whatsoever—at the time spent or the tolls exacted or anything else and I think we probably made a contribution.

Alsobrook: Les, in addition to your work with the task force groups, are there certain things that were exciting and stand out in your mind and maybe these would be just events or occasions that you recall? Trips?

Francis: Oh, yea, gee. One of the regrets I have is that I didn't have enough discipline myself to keep a journal or a dairy. Not because I want to write a book or anything like that, but you know, I've got three kids who at some point it would be fun and they got a chance to do things and come in here but there would be a time at some point in my life when I would like to recount some of those experiences. You know it's exciting to be in a meeting with the President. It is exciting to have the President call on you and ask for your input on something. When I moved from Legislative Projects Coordinator to Deputy Assistant for Congressional Coordination, when the President announced that in a meeting with the Assistant Secretaries, I mean, you know, that's heady stuff for a kid from San Jose, California. To go to bill signings, like Civil Service Reform, which I felt I'd had a fairly major role in accomplishing, was exciting. The signing of the Middle East Peace Treaties on the front lawn of the White House. Getting to know the President a little bit, getting to know the Vice President very well, and traveling with him. My first flight on Air Force One was a thrill.

Alsobrook: Where was that?

Francis: To California—two months after I was here. I advanced the Vice President's trip to Sweden in the spring of '78, which was exciting. So, I mean, those kinds of things are the symbolic, superficial sorts of things, but they're still thrills.

Alsobrook: Is there a side of this President that the American people really have never r seen?

Francis: Yea, there is—and it's to his disadvantage that they have never seen it—and probably to theirs as well. There is absolutely nobody more impressive than Jimmy Carter when he sits down with a group of people to talk about a problem and try to work out a solution—or to hammer away at something he wants to get done. He is without a doubt the most persuasive, committed, and intelligent person I've ever—I mean the guy is just incredibly bright. How he can keep a grasp on all the information he does, I'm just constantly amazed. He is very good in small groups. I know that's been reported before but he's phenomenal. I've never seen anybody better. He really does command the attention of whatever group he's with. The American public also does not see his sometimes severe cases of anger and frustration. When he's mad, he's mad. I mean he doesn't throw things [Laughter]—but you know when he's upset with something; the legendary icy stares are real.

Alsobrook: After the campaign would you like to come back and work in the White House again?

Francis: No.

Alsobrook: One term is enough?

Francis: Well, one is I don't know what I would do. The other is: it's hard enough walking away from this place once. I mean I'm going through this process with you

which is part of the checking out process—turning in this , turning in that—and that’s not an easy thing to do, to walk away from this place voluntarily. I wouldn’t want to do it twice. Personally, I don’t know how I would top what I’ve been able to do.

Alsobrook: Do you want to stay in government or do you want to go back to California? Have you given any thought to that?

Francis: I’ll probably stay here. I’ll probably stay in Washington. There’s a whole world out there which pays a lot of good money to which I’ve given some thought to.,

Alsobrook: For the use of the future library, can you give us the most permanent address and telephone number that you have right now?

Francis: I can’t because I’m in the process of dissolving my marriage and I’m living like a gypsy so I don’t know what to tell you in terms of a way to get hold of me. I guess I could always be reached through Congressman Minetta, wherever he is. He will always be able to find me.

Alsobrook: Through the re-election campaign, what number or address could we reach you there?

Francis: The headquarters at 1413 K Street, Washington, and the phone number is 202-789-7267.

Alsobrook: OK and that will take us through the end of ‘80 and after that we’ll work with the congressman’s office?

Francis: Yea, yea.

Alsobrook: Well, Les, thanks very much for all your time. We could have talked another three hours and I probably wouldn’t have touched on everything that you’ve been involved in with this administration. I appreciate your time.

Francis: That’s quite all right.

END