

Exit Interview with Laurie Lucey, Confidential Assistant to Hamilton Jordan

Interviewer: Keith Corona, Office of Presidential Libraries

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Transcriber: Lyn Kirkland

Corona: OK, Good Morning Laura. What positions did you hold while working at the White House and how long have you worked here?

Lucey: I have worked here from the beginning of the Carter Administration in January of 1977 and I've always worked in the office of Hamilton Jordan as a confidential assistant to Landon Butler.

Corona: By whom were you hired for your White House position?

Lucey: By Landon Butler and Hamilton Jordan.

Corona: OK. Did you have any previous job experience that more or less prepared you for your White House duties?

Lucey: I worked on Capitol Hill for Congressmen Les Aspen for a year before joining the Carter campaign in 1976.

Corona: OK. What are your duties as a confidential assistant...secretarial type duties?

Lucey: No, no secretarial duties at all. It changed over the period of time that I was here. The first few months it is hard to describe neatly because our duties were vast. Initially Hamilton had personnel matters under his jurisdiction and so I did a lot of work in personnel, sometimes calling individuals for recommendations or information about other individuals who were under consideration for administration positions. Some of it was purely administrative, handling the papers and making sure that there was proper coordination between various White House offices when an individual was under consideration because Landon always worked with the labor movement even in the campaign. I also did a lot of work with the labor movement, going through their list of recommended candidates for various administration positions, so initially a lot of the work I did related to personnel.

As time went on that changed. As we got into the Panama Canal treaties, for example. I did a lot of work there in coordination with the State Department on public affairs, setting up briefings and speeches, and handling materials. I did a fair amount of writing at that time, drafting memoranda and other public papers that described the Panama Canal treaty and the reasons why it should be supported by the American people, so as we moved into the Panama, the period of

time that we worked on Panama, I did a lot of different things that I did initially on personnel. The personnel function really dropped out eventually. It was not something that we had much to do with at all and, of course, by this time it was transferred to Tim Kraft and it was something that we didn't have anything to do with, but it was what we worked on initially. We moved into Panama and there was a lot of planning, political planning, for what our strategy should be for getting the canal treaties through the senate, so I did work on that in terms of memoranda—again, described the congressional process, calendar, political assumptions to consider in devising our strategy, etc., etc. So, really for nearly a year, until the end of June in 1978, I worked on the Panama Canal Treaty.

Corona: Right.

Lucey: At the end of June 1978, I was asked to work with Landon as his deputy for liaison to the labor movement and from that time until now I have been involved solely with labor issues, labor politics, the relationship of the administration to the labor movement. That has, again, involved a whole variety of things. I have been the primary liaison to the political and legislative directors of all of the unions and AFL-CIO departments. I have worked with them on legislation, I've served on White House task forces, for example, on hospital cost containment, a piece of legislation that all of the unions have supported, so as a member of the White House task force and as a labor liaison from the White House, I have worked with the labor movement with the political directors and legislative directors of the unions, on hospital cost containment. That is one issue. I've done that and I have taken the same role on other issues the White House has been involved in. I have also worked with the new administration on issues where we have not yet taken a position, on issues of interest to labor; for example, before the President set up an interagency task force study on maritime policy. I've worked closely with the maritime unions to find out their views of positions, their views on various issues that we were considering and I've worked with the domestic policy staff in communicating to them the issues of concern to labor and their positions and I have been sort of a middle, not a broker, but a person in the middle who helped to communicate to the White House and back to the labor movement our positions and questions regarding various issues.

Corona: Based on the way you have answered that, it sounds as if it would almost be impossible for you to describe a typical day.

Lucey: It is impossible.

Corona: Very long hours? Usually.

Lucey: Usually I would say from 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning until about 7:00 at night. Not beastly, but long enough.

Corona: How was your office organized in terms of like supervisors and subordinates? Did you work closely with Hamilton Jordan?

Lucey: Well, that varied. For example, during the time that we handled a lot of personnel, Hamilton asked me to oversee the creation of the Presidential Advisory Commissions for the selection of appeals court judges. One of the President's promises during his campaign was that he would select judges on the basis of merit rather than political considerations, and so when he became President he signed an executive order that established a commission, a presidential commission, for each circuit court district, each circuit of the US Appeals Court, and we had eleven member commissions which selected candidates for the circuit court appointments, and then of course, the President selected candidates from those few individuals recommended by the commission. So, I worked closely with Hamilton in that stage as I was setting up those panels, working with the Justice Department and the counsels' office here, and with others to develop names for those appointments. I worked directly with Hamilton at that stage. As I moved into labor I worked more closely with Landon and more often through Landon to Hamilton. Again, there were other situations that arose where I would work directly with Hamilton on something, but most, by far, most of the time was spent more directly with Landon.

Corona: OK. You have described to me in detail the projects you have worked on. What projects to you were most significant or those that gave you the most personal satisfaction and are these, and I hate to ask you a compound question, and are these projects well documented in your personal files?

Lucey: To answer the last question first, probably not.

Corona: OK.

Lucey: I have gotten the most satisfaction out of my work with the labor movement; getting to know the individuals, getting to know the history of the movement, its historic purpose in our society and the issues that are of the most concern to the labor movement. It is hard for me to describe any one particular project, but I think certainly working with the labor movement has been the most rewarding and getting to know individuals, the union presidents, and it's almost historic figures.

Corona: I assume people like George Meany would be people that you would have, you know, frequent personal contact with, I guess, or occasional.

Lucey: The only person, the only two people in the administration, probably, that have had frequent personal contact with George Meany have been Jimmy Carter and Ray Marshall. [Corona laughs] I have met George Meany but I always worked with his assistants rather than him.

Corona: OK. Would you handle many of your assignments differently as opposed to the way you handled them at the time when you were working on them? Take, for example, your workings with the Panama Canal issue or with labor, the way you carved out your work

assignments would it be different from the way you would handle it now or do you think you would do things pretty much the same?

Lucey: Well, I guess there are always ways, when you look back, that you would have done things differently. By and large, I would say no, but I'm sure that is not true across the board.

Corona: OK. Were there other White House units that worked closely with your office? For example, maybe Ann Wexler's office?

Lucey: In labor, yes, we worked fairly closely with Ann Wexler's office. In the early stages, of course, when we handled personnel, we worked very closely with Jim King and Jim Gamble in the personnel office. As we were working on the Panama Canal treaties, we worked very closely with Frank Moore's office as well as, of course, with the State Department.

Corona: OK. As you leave the White House what new insights have you gained, I guess you could say, in terms of governmental process, being so close, you know, to the center of it all? Has it changed your personal life in any way?

Lucey: I could talk about it for about two hours, I think I could answer that question.

Corona: [Laughs] OK. Did you meet Jimmy Carter?

Lucey: Yes.

Corona: I assume also obviously other celebrities, or people who would be thought of as celebrity like you mentioned George Meany.

Lucey: Yes.

Corona: OK. As you have already stated, you worked with the presidential campaign of '76. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

Lucey: I worked here in Washington, directly for Joe Duffy who is now the national chairman for the Endowment for the Humanities. He was at that time the head of the Washington Carter office and I worked on, again, various projects beginning with Catholic issues: abortion and tuition tax credits ---issues that were of concern to Catholics, I worked on in my first few weeks of my work with the campaign. As time went on and as we got closer to the election date, I worked much more with political organizing, grass roots organizing. I, at Landon's request, organized the Peanut Brigade, as it was called from Washington which was busloads of individuals, volunteers who went out to various states, to Pennsylvania and Ohio and Virginia and Delaware, and elsewhere for periods of four days or more, to campaign for Jimmy Carter.

Corona: Did you get to do much traveling yourself?

Lucey: I did not do much traveling myself. I did some but I stayed in Washington for the most part. The last month, I guess, of the campaign I spent in Atlanta working for Landon on miscellaneous projects that he assigned.

Corona: OK, Laura, you have touched on this briefly, but in terms of the official records created by your office or by you, what sort of disposition has been arranged? Central files or, you know?

Lucey: Most of the files in my office, if not all of them, will remain in my office for whoever takes my place just as reference material for that person and I suppose that at some point they will just go to Central files .

Corona: All right. That basically covers all the questions that I wanted to ask you about your duties here. For the record, could you please state for me your forwarding address and phone number?

Lucey: 4839 South Twenty Seventh Rd. Arlington, Virginia. Phone number is 931-8577.

Corona: OK. Thank you very much.

Lucey: You're welcome.