

Interview with Gordon Stewart on February 13, 1981.

Room 415 of Old Executive Office Building

Interviewer: Emily Soapes

Soapes: I knew that you came onto the Speechwriters Staff having been a speechwriter for a number of people. How was it that you happened to come onto the White House Staff—was it April of '79?

Stewart: Right. Well, what had happened was that the other thing that I do is I direct plays. I have never been able to make up my mind in my life whether I wanted to work in government or whether I wanted to work as a director in theater so I just kept going back and forth and got used to the fact that I would never make up my own mind. I would just do both. I had been directing a play which I had come back to New York from Los Angeles to work on—a fair amount of work had gone into this production, but in the course of it I had to go into the hospital with a collapsed lung and they tried various things to pump it up again to get me out. And they kept postponing the opening of the play. I would go back into the hospital and they would pump me up and I would go out and it would collapse again. This went on until I finally had to give up the play. By the time I came out from major surgery to correct it so they wouldn't have to keep pumping me up, the play had opened and it was a big hit. It was a play called "Elephant Man."

Soapes: Oh, really?

Stewart: Yeah, I had to give that one up. So I didn't really have the heart to go back into another play and Rick Hertzberg who I had known a bit from other times in New York ; he had worked for Governor Carey, and I also worked in New York politics. I had been in City Hall for about three years and we had a number of mutual friends as well as Jerry Rafshoon, who was a friend of a New York politician I knew, Howard Daniels. Anyway, they were looking for somebody. I think it was the time that Jim Fallows was leaving as chief speechwriter for Carter and that was what happened. Essentially someone had to move up and take Jim's spot and they were looking for somebody else to come in and it was just perfect. I had always wanted to be in the White House since being a small person. I certainly didn't want to be back in the theater after having popped that play and along with everything else, I was feeling a little shaky, so this turned out to be a wonderful coincidence of opportunity. Also, I had worked a little bit in the Convention in '76. I wrote Midge Costanza's seconding speech so I got to know some of the folks and players a little bit. Life was good; it worked out well.

Soapes: It certainly did. Now, then you came as the Deputy Speechwriter. Was that—

Stewart: No, I came as a speechwriter, but there was a lot of changeover going on in the department. Then when Rick got officially—he didn't have the Chief Speechwriter title when I came--there was still, I think, Bernie Aronson was still here. One of them was

called one thing and one another. Once they got settled, and Bernie left, then Rick (Hertzberg) became the Chief Speechwriter and I became the Deputy Chief Speechwriter.

Soapes: What did the Deputy's duties involve? What did you do that Hertzberg didn't do, or that—when you were *a* speechwriter—you didn't do?

Stewart: Well, actually the title really didn't mean that much in terms of administration. What it meant was that, if they couldn't get Rick--or something--that I was the next one who took the heat for something that went wrong or something that needed to be done: the next person in line for responsibility. It wasn't that I bossed people around very much and Rick didn't either. We ran a very collegial kind of organization. It is about the only way to work as a speechwriter operation. The main reason I wanted the title and the main difference it made to me was in doing the thing that I think I like the best about speechwriting, and that is working with the various policy folks in the agencies like the Cabinet Secretaries, the Domestic Policy Staff, the Foreign Policy Staff—trying to hash out an agreement as to what the President will or will not say. By being this person, I went to senior staff meetings and I could function a little more easily with them and knock their heads together a little more. It gave me the extra clout I needed a few times to get people to pay attention when it was important that they pay attention.

Soapes: And at this time, the speech writers under Carter were variously under (Jody) Powell (White House press chief)—one time they were under Jerry Rafshoon (Gerald Rafshoon, head of White House Communications) and they ended up under Al McDonald?

Stewart: Yes. When I came, it was Rafshoon because there was an Office of Communications. He was Director of Communications. Jerry did not ride over us with a heavy hand. It was as much for administrative purposes and technical purposes as anything.

Soapes: Did he not have that much to do with specific speeches?

Stewart: Well, yeah, he did—but he took the view that speechwriters he hires are supposed to know what they were doing—they are competent. He was not someone who enjoyed sitting for hours and hours and hours, pouring over drafts. He was mostly concerned that they be *good* and be *done*—that they be done on time and ready to go. That was more his way of doing it. Then we were in limbo for a time when Jerry left and then Al McDonald came in and we worked with Al. But every speech you take is different. There are some that you can work through a system and process and buck it up the logical chain—but others are so important at that time that they are more important than anybody in the chain.

Soapes: Did Al McDonald similarly not exercise a great deal of administrative control?

Stewart: No, Al exercised a great deal of administrative control—probably more administrative than substantive, but he did do one thing that had not been done here

before for which the President was deeply grateful and we all came to appreciate—which was to do a master scheduling system for all speeches—so you can track where an individual speech was at any given time. It was an elaborate master chart of these things and we hired somebody for the first time, named Tom Teal, to track all that and to make sure that when drafts were sent out for comments that they came back on time. So, it saved me or Rick, or whomever, the trouble of trying to nag someone to read it because the President didn't want to see it until these people had read it.

The President would really hate it—to be given a draft and then have Vance or somebody call him a day later and say: “I have a problem with page four”—and the President would –boom!—just blow up and say “Why am I having to rewrite things after other people? When I rewrite it I want to be the *last* one to rewrite it!” So, Al's system of tracking was very helpful, particularly when there was a crowded schedule where there would be twenty speeches on the calendar. To know where each one was and at which stage and to know who was responsible for getting it back, that was very helpful.

Soapes: You mention “collegial system.” How were assignments made in the Speechwriters Office? Were there specialties that people had?

Stewart: Well, there came to be some specialties. It was handled in the most informal way possible—that is, we would sit down with what it looked like was going to be on the schedule and we'd say, “Well, all right, who wants to do what?” Then people would volunteer, because it is always best to have people write something they want to write rather than stick them with something they hated. There would always be some speeches that are less fun than others—so, we would have to negotiate those out and try to let everybody get a shot at what they thought would be exciting to do, but also accept doing some they thought less exciting to do.

What tended to happen was that we did develop some general areas of expertise and that made it easier to divide them up, and then the major ones that were outside of any one area, like “State of the Union” or the famous “Malaise” speech, or the “Farewell” that Rick and I wrote together. For some reason we seemed to be able to collaborate well; I have thought about myself as more director than writer and I like working with writers, and Rick is a wonderful writer, a far better writer, as writer, than I am. What I enjoy doing is trying to think it through. What are the arguments for this?

Soapes: The concept, so to speak? Where you want it to go?

Stewart: Throwing it back and forth, it worked out fairly well on the major ones. In terms of the policy ones, Bob Radcliff wound up writing a lot of the ones on labor; he came from Labor (department), and he wrote some on the economy. Chris Matthews wrote a lot of the political stuff as well as things on the economy. Achsah Neesmith would write frequently about things about blacks involving the South.—some of the more emotional and ceremonial things. We really do have to have a contact with the emotional center. I wanted to do a lot of the energy stuff because at the time I came in, it was just starting to get hot and it is interesting that when you start to work in public policy you get a nose for which one is going to be the explosion of the year—and it turned out to be. Rick liked foreign policy more than anything else.

Soapes: But to some degree, most of the staff would have some input into the speech?

Stewart: All of it. Anybody who wanted to have any input to it was more than welcome to.

Soapes: It wasn't that when the President was going to make an address on our relations with the Soviet Union that Hertzberg was the only one who was closeted with the speech, in other words?

Stewart: No.

Soapes: He may do most of the work...

Stewart: He maybe did most of the work. It depends. If it were one thing. (Pauses). It varies. For example, the speech to the newspaper editors and the Philadelphia World Council we wrote together. State of the Union staff we did together. There's another one that he did by himself. The Cuban Brigade thing was pretty much his thing. And, I had a couple that were mine, which were the state of things in Europe—the speech in Rome at the state dinner about the Soviets have to behave themselves for democracy is the wave of the future and realize that, and to try to set the tone for the Vienna summit—to kind of lay our cards on the table.

I did it alone but only because the work volume was such that we just had to split it up. Usually, if anybody had anything they wanted to say, we would be very happy to have it. It wasn't: "This is my speech, get out of the way."

Soapes: Yeah, yeah, I thought that was what you were going to say.

Stewart: The only thing that one of us might do, occasionally, would be to apply the typewriter test or the yellow legal pad test. Or if you think so much on this subject, you have so many ideas on this subject, *here's the typewriter: you write it.*

Soapes: Yes, yes.

Stewart: That's one way of emptying out a room pretty fast.

Soapes: You mention that some speeches were more *fun* than others. Or you came at a difficult time in April of '79. Were there any that you worked on that you would rate as *fun*?

Stewart: I guess what I meant by *fun* is—

Soapes: Challenge?

Stewart: Yeah, the scarier the situation, the more that's riding on it, the more "fun," quote, it is. It is a bizarre definition of fun. But all things like that really are.

Soapes: Which would have been, of all of them, your most challenging?

Stewart: Well, the SALT stuff. The first really challenging were the SALT signing statements in Vienna.

Soapes: In the spring--

Stewart: We tried to get some emotion going that would hopefully carry back here to give some aid to the passage of these things. It didn't work out that way, but I tried. Then, not too long after that, we went up to Camp David and wrote the Malaise Speech, (Crisis of Confidence speech) and that was obviously a very, very exciting thing to do, as well as the Kansas City thing the next day. The two worked well, back to back--probably our most successful time of speechwriting in the White House. The only time, where as a result of the speech, things got better; about 20 points according to the polls. People were excited, were ready to go along with the President's diagnosis and the suggested cures for some problems inside the society and his working out *true* energy, which was solving energy problems, problems of mistrust and mutual suspicion, and general breakdown of the collective feelings that exist inside the country. By working together to solve this we might be able to overcome the larger problems. People seemed to accept that and be willing to do that.

Soapes: That one did fire a great deal of imagination.

Stewart: Unfortunately, we didn't then go ahead and do that. We devoted ourselves onto other things, personnel matters—

Soapes: That's right, the Cabinet shake-up.

Stewart: Cabinet shake-up, imported cars, whatever. And what had been a national story or a national idea became, once again, a Washington gossip business and the insider stuff in a technical tale rather than some kind of goal that—

Soapes: Instead of *crusade*--

Stewart: We very much hoped that this crusade didn't fall through, and that we could have had simple energy targets and a sense of goals and week-to-week accomplishments and replacement of foreign oil and this and that. And largely the organizations were ready to do that. The National Association of Counties the next day out in Kansas City all sat up and endorsed it and pledged individual county energy programs and—it was there if we had just kept leading it as a cause, I think. And it degenerated into something else entirely after that.

Soapes: Since that was the speech that caused the greatest influx of mail that came in during the administration—now you said that you worked on it up at Camp David—did

the president call you in and say, “Now I want to tell the country that there is a malaise a foot”?”

Stewart: No, no!

Soapes: Can you remember something of the anatomy of that speech?

Stewart: Of how that came to be? Pat Caddell had been working on this idea of some deeper problems inside the society that were paralyzing the ability of the democracy to get anything done. All of us had the ability to say “no” and very few people have the ability to say “yes” and they can block anything. There is a general sense of unfairness, of each one trying to get their own and hold onto it and to hell with anybody else. It’s just silly since nobody else will give up anything. We’d been working this idea to bring people in to see the president—a number of writers—he [Caddell] had done a long memo about all this also, so the philosophical background of it was there, but I don’t think there had been any intent to use it for anything specific. These were ideas of how it was working out and trying to explain why things were just so darn difficult. Carter had a feeling more like fighting molasses or wading in sludge, trying to get anything done.

Soapes: That’s right, this was right after he had cancelled the touted energy speech.

Stewart: That memo and this background stuff predated all that by several—by many weeks, if not months. It had been going on in the spring. That’s when, when I think about it, Pat was trying to get a handle on why the presidency was having a hard time getting anything done. It did feel like going up against the tar baby all the time. He was beginning to read a bit of contemporary analysis that Daniel Bell, etc., did and talked to the president about this and on why the presidency seemed to be such a difficult institution, but with no practical thought of using it. Then, when the gas situation exploded, people were enraged and full of anger.

It was at that point the president was in Tokyo for the summit and we were working away on an energy speech back here, with increasingly depressed feelings about it, because it was pretty clear that without something pretty strong and bold that would catch the imagination and be convincing to people, that the president would not be well-received. By the time that he came back, he decided not to stay over in Honolulu or wherever it was, because that would look terrible with everybody waiting in gas lines, and rushed back to do something. So he got back and had a day and then he went up to Camp David. And with a very heavy heart, we dished this thing up at Camp David—and I really felt completely inadequate.

Soapes: The proposed energy speech?

Stewart: Both rhetorically, but more importantly, it was completely inadequate substantively, for there had not been time to put together a strong policy on it. Most of the economic types were over there in Tokyo and we were still kind of patching together our energy policy at that point. He had made some of his announcements in April and decontrol was going ahead and there were long range things there, but there was no real

front to move on. And we sent this thing off, trying to pull together odd bits and notes that had been used in it. But the feeling was, when the call came back Carter had decided not to give this thing that was *ungivable* and it wouldn't do at all---- "No kidding. Whew! Good! Saved!" Now what? I guess he was quiet for about three days. I don't remember the exact chronology of it—I think it was about three or four days.

Soapes: No news out of Camp David?

Stewart: Nothing. Zip. Then the procession of folks began. And we went up, I don't remember which day—I'll have to check the diary—and started to put something together.

Then, Caddell had—and Wayne Grandquist was also there--Pat and Wayne were friends. They had started to work on something that was very much based on the earlier memos and earlier discussions that Pat had been having of the general philosophical nature. Pat wanted to give a speech that basically was not an energy speech at all, a speech on the nature of our society and our place in it as individuals and what is happening to us. And, as you probably know, another faction of folks wanted to give an energy speech, since that was what was particularly bothering people at the time.

So we were kind of whipsawed around between various factions that were swirling around up there, cranking out drafts and revising them, then giving them to the President at the crack of dawn, because he gets up, as you know, at hours the rest of us are fortunate enough not to have to see most of the time, but would be going to bed about that time. So, we would dump that on him and go to sleep and he would play with it, rework it, throw it out, whatever—shred it up (laughs). Then we'd get up and start on the whole thing all over again, argue and carry on. I guess what finally made the thing happen, as we were trying to give it the form that it had, were two major things that did it. One was we finally hammered-out a forced meeting where everybody was present so that instead of everyone "end running" the other, which is a favorite thing to do—

Soapes: Yes, with power, any time.

Stewart: Right. One of them would come to us and say "we have to do this and this and this" and then they would go away and then the other one would come. Make them face each other in a meeting and agree. So, finally, in a long session in the lodge there, they hashed out an agreement and agreed to this long argument which by then we were pretty positive of, which was, as I indicated earlier, we would talk about the general nature of these problems within our society and come to the point of—because these problems are so big, so ingrained, abstract, and difficult to get a handle on that you can only get a handle on them if you have a specific challenge you're attacking—repel an invasion, whatever, whatever, whatever—in this case, energy. If we can solve this thing, since it does involve the distribution of resources, it does involve redirecting priorities; if you can do that it is a way of building cohesion and collective spirit and a sense of accomplishment and self reliance that could begin to rebuild those kind of muscles inside a society. They bought that argument and Stu was able to reduce this veritable outburst of passion, these energy ideas, to six points which he thundered out, one after the other,

by way of saying: “It is *too* exciting, it can *too* be dramatic! See, listen!”—as he delivered himself of this remarkable thing—

Soapes (interjects): This extemporaneous speech on energy—

Stewart: It was the boiled-down result of what he had been working on for a long time. So finally a meld of that side and the Caddell side was achieved. And we went down to the President’s lodge and laid it on the President who said okay and then we went off and wrote a draft based on that. That was the first major breakthrough. It was not something that had individuality about it, as a speech, that it needed to have to measure up to the individuality of the ten days. If something is quirky enough and unusual enough--and unheard of—to shut the federal government down for two weeks, you need something more than that—and we weren’t sure what to do. And, lo and behold, the President came up with the second major thing, which was these quotes. He had been taking all these notes during the sessions. What he did was, he just wrote them down. “This woman said this to me, and this woman said that, and that man from such and such said—.” And that was a wonderful report, a wonderful way to do it—because it essentially shared back with the public some of what he had been doing up there. It gave people a sense of: “Oh, so that’s what this guy’s been doing here for two weeks. He hasn’t been nuts or whatever.”

Soapes: There were questions of the President’s sanity at the time—

Stewart: He was genuinely trying to think his way through a problem from beginning to end. I remember a great feeling of relief rolling over me when I read that stuff he had written out on a legal pad and I realized that this was going to work. So we had essentially with the beginning a three-part thing to explain what he had been doing there: talking to these people, sharing some of those conclusions, then moving to a larger generalization from these discussions about the nature of the society, and then move to a proposal about how we might attack it through expanding energy. The next day that was finally done and then a pretty good draft got done and they all went back and we stayed on one day to finish it. Finally, the President got a bit perturbed at that, and just as we all agreed and had a good draft, the President said: “That’s it. I want to work on this thing with the speech writers and kicked everybody off the mountain”. We stayed another day and –Saturday, I guess it was—and finished it, polished it, rehearsed it. Then I stayed on alone Saturday night because up to that point no one had anything to do about the Monday speech. The speech was for Sunday night, to the nation. Then next day he had to go to Kansas City and talk to the National Association of County and State somethings. I thought, “Oh God, so we get to write another one!”

Soapes: Got to write another one!

Stewart: In that one, we can spell out more of the details of the six points and make it a battle cry and give some of the strategy and tactics on which fronts will move and how we’ll do it. So it wasn’t too difficult a speech to write once the concepts are in place. So, I stayed up there all night—Saturday night—and wrote and came back Sunday and then

we rehearsed Sunday--one of the few times we did a lot of rehearsal and it did seem to work and he did it Sunday night. It went better than anybody had ever expected it was going to, went over really good at that point. It went off the charts. The main effect is that we had to stay up all night *again* and rewrite the Kansas City one because it had to come up about 50%. It was a pretty decent speech, I would say, up to that time, but there was no way it could follow *that*, so we had to stay up and do it all over again. It worked. It was one of the few times where a speech has been able to make that great an impact.

Soapes: Yeh. The Farewell Speech. I realize that what the critics rave about is not always what the person who is involved thinks, but the Farewell Speech got pretty good reviews too. Did you work on it?

Stewart: Yeh, yeh, Rick and I did that one together, with help from Pat, and the President weighed in on that one heavily. The ones in which he involved himself the most deeply were invariably the ones that went the best. I don't know of any exceptions to that and, of course, it sort of stands to reason.

Soapes: Yeh, yeh.

Stewart: That one, in fact, we kind of closed the loop on pretty tightly on pretty early and we got suggestions from a lot of people and he said, "no, this is mine." He held it pretty close and worked on it with us more directly than he had with most of the other things. Some others that went well, the Kennedy Library Speech which Rick wrote, the same sort of thing finally happened. The President just closed down and focused on it and went to work—and went to work on it.

Soapes: Was that an important ingredient for success? Because I remember hearing Jerry Rafshoon talking about some speech and he said if you would have walked by in the hall, they would have brought you in to consult on.

Stewart: Everybody wants to have their say but everybody should, in a way. The problem is that at a certain time, they have to then give up and go away and accept that whatever happens happens. It is very hard to get them to do that because many of them are very powerful people within the place. It hurts with getting emotional content into a speech. By definition, anything that's vivid is likely to have something a little bit alarming in it or it would not be vivid, and then when they see this, they say, "Uh-oh! That is going to be alarming or that's going to cause excitement." And you say, "yes." "Well, you can't do that"-- because of whatever. And then they all have very good reasons why it would probably be a bad idea to excite anybody. As a result, a great number of the President's speeches never excited anybody. All the exciting content had been taken out and once that is taken out and the draft he's got doesn't have any in it, it is very hard to expect him to put it back in and if he participated enough in an individual speech that he saw the better stuff before it got removed, then that stuff had a greater chance of surviving. A lot of it had to be taken out just for diplomatic and brokering reasons. If somebody actually goes to the mat who is the Secretary and says, "I can't have this said about my area," then you're probably going to have to give in, except in

the non-policy speeches. A lot of it is fighting to try to preserve an emotional center or an emotional core and a level of gut reality, and these were usually losing battles in the major policy area speeches, which was too bad.

Soapes: And yet a one speech writer--who was once on the speech writing staff-- felt that the President himself was not a theatrical enough person. He referred to the president as “passionless.”

Stewart: Yeh, which I think is not true. Passion is not something expressed in the traditional northern democratic ways. We have a tradition of northern democratic political rhetoric which has its own rhythm still, which is like certain types of Broadway humor have their own kind of rhythm still—the technique of the one-liner which is all about timing. The words can be anything. The people laugh because they know.

The political rhetorical equivalent of this would be these litanies of repeated words and phrases followed by applause and more repeated words and phrases followed by applause and that’s what we take to mean emotion from our own experiences. President Carter’s own emotional sense would be very different. It would be very quiet, almost narrative, as opposed to rhetorical. He would be appealing to emotions in a direct, straight-forward, almost under-stated way. In the right circumstances, and when he could hold attention with it, it could be very emotional and very moving. The problem is it doesn’t transfer easily to vast halls. He never did seem to master or do very well at the technique of the traditional big hall political speech.

Soapes: The stem-winder, as some people say.

Stewart: Yeh, yeh. Those kinds of things.

Soapes: Podium-thumpers.

Stewart: Where you stop and wait for a lots of applause and then you go on and use a lot of rhetorical devices of rhythm and repeated phrases and questions that people shout answers to. I think that he always felt very uncomfortable with that kind of appeal to emotions but that’s not because he’s a man without emotions. I think it was the technique of it that offended him. I guess it may have been that he felt it was not entirely ethical and he would recoil from it. In fact, they would over react and remove things that might lean in that direction and have struck him as “stagey,” offensive. Somehow you could almost feel the shudders that ran through him as they would cross them out.

The problem is the people expect a certain amount of that and when they are denied this expectation they don’t know what to do. But those speeches when he did, such as the Farewell or the “Malaise” speech, allow emotional stuff to come through because he worked on that stuff personally, exhibited a great deal of emotion. A lot of the SALT stuff had a great deal of emotion, as many things of the civil rights have a have a great deal of emotion, but they are not always expressed in the way that people who go to a lot of political speeches are used to and come to expect. As a result, a lot of people don’t

think Carter has any passion. He has a great deal of it. You can see examples of him emoting. He has cried on several occasions. You see him laugh. He expresses pleasure in music. Nobody who likes music as much as he does is a man without emotions. Somehow he never found ways of expressing that emotion.

Soapes: I was going to ask, as a speech writer, what then becomes your task for a person who resists slogans, labels, the normal expectations in speeches?

Stewart: You have to try to find an equivalent or smuggle through certain things or hope that the situation will be such that we can get something that he is more comfortable with where the emotional content will survive or try to write things that he will accept that still convey a fair amount of the emotional charge necessary, or hope that the situation itself might be great enough and might be the charge itself so that whatever he said would carry it across, and most of the time that didn't happen. It only happened when the situations were up to "10" and then saying something that he was comfortable with would be sufficient. We just kept battling with it and trying with it and being frustrated with it and mostly failing.

Soapes: Were the speech writers close enough to the President so that they could know his rhythms and his likes and his dislikes?

Stewart: Well, two actual parts to the question. Well, we were close enough to know those things. Rhythms and likes and dislikes are fairly easy to figure out. Especially if that is your main job, to figure out what the President likes and doesn't like and what he thinks about all day and the slightest expression of the Presidential favor or disfavor is magnified as though it were on loud speakers; close enough to define those things that he did like, but not close enough to help him shape those things that he really did not like. He did not seem to enjoy sitting down and going over speeches, at least not with us or other people.

Soapes: Up until he came to the White House he had been his own speech writer, I think I read.

Stewart: I gather that's true, and no reason why not—and he probably always believed and probably still does, with some justice, that one should be. My personal guess is that he probably always felt that what I did was wrong in some way and that he was probably wrong for having someone there like me doing it and this was some way, if not evil, a deception being practiced on the American people. I think that hurt us, but the schedule imposed such demands that there was no alternative.

But, here is the "malaise" thing. His best speeches were, in fact, the State of the Union--the last State of the Union--where the situation was so great that that became irrelevant and it doesn't really matter whose word, which word is. It doesn't really matter. I don't care. They don't care. I am not going to walk around to Gordon or Rick or whatever and say this is my phrase or their phrase. It is beside the point. The point is to get the very best possible speech out and we never really developed a close collaboration, although it

was better at the end or over the last year than it had been earlier. I know Jim [Fallows] was talking about some of the staff had never even seen him. You know, that dumbfounded me. We didn't have that. It got better. We did have more access and spend more time, depending on the situation. Everybody wants to spend time with the President. That is the number one thing, and he is right to sort of build a moat outside that office and to some extent fill it with crocodiles or he would never have any peace and quiet at all. On the other hand, something that is as intensely personal as a speech has to be, and for a speech to work it has to be emotionally valid for the person speaking, and it has to be earned emotion, genuine, there really is no other way to do it. You can't do a great speech, finally, through the decision memo. It will not work.

Soapes: Yeh, yeh, it has to be the speechgiver's.

Stewart: You really have to go into the tank with these people and scream and yell and read it to each other and rip up stuff and try it out and do the equivalent of hotel rooms in New Haven for that to work, for it is, after all, an emotional performance. And that's what it is---and it has to be faced as that.

Soapes: And the contributors have to be not only in the background, but practically anonymous. It reminds me of the other night, there was this Japanese Living Treasures show on TV and they showed these *Buntaku* puppeteers. The puppeteers are hooded in black and the audiences are to believe they are not even there and for some reason that metaphor struck me.

Stewart: It's not a bad metaphor. It can be like that, but that, I think, right there, even that metaphor, conveys some of the problem that somebody like the President would have with it. The very fact of thinking of that, that manipulation, is already starting down the wrong road.

Soapes: As far as Mr. Carter would think.

Stewart: Yeh, yeh, because of the idea, he would absolutely be repelled-- and recoil and be furious at the thought of puppeteering going on--and have every right to be. My point is that it never occurred to me. I don't look on working as a director as manipulating the actors or writers. It is not that they dance to my will in some sort of cosmic drama of my ego or that I walk around thinking I've pulled the President's strings because I write words that he says. Once you start thinking about it that way it is all over. It will never work. But I think you're required to think of it with that kind of puppeteering imagery, where the opposite is true, where you think all of us are in this tank or this soup together. These people are all out there, as in the case of Theater 2000, having paid \$25 or whatever, or in this case the more than 200,000,000 Americans having paid considerably more than \$25, and they want this performance to be something that they can feel good about it, and that's our main problem and all this crap about who pulls what string is irrelevant and beside the point. How do we make this work? How do we find something we believe in that we can do about this situation? How do we find the emotional center of this? How do we pull them into that? How do we move them to support his course of

action? It should have nothing to do with this business about who is inside of what or who's manipulating whom, that kind of stuff. Very rarely were we able to get to that kind of ground zero to start. A few times, but they're the ones that worked the best.

Soapes: I read an article where you had been quoted. Something about the speech writer serves as a mediator between the speaker's emotions and personality and it's very much like directing a play.

Stewart: Hmm. They kind of botched that up. The mediator they got right, as opposed to directing, as opposed to controlling things.

Soapes: Yeh, yeh.

Stewart: And I guess the analogy would be if the policy or the action that you are proposing to take, or that you want to take, that that is the play--and the person speaking is the actor. Somewhere in there you have to find an emotional base for all that. By emotion, people think of tricks again. Then people start getting off on a tangent. There is a difference in earned emotion and unearned emotion, between cheap theatrical tricks and things that are genuinely of the moment, and the job is to try to evoke and try to make it true and genuine and honest, but also as full as it possibly can be. The President was concerned, above all, that it be honest and he succeeded in that and they were.

The opposite extreme is someone who will stop at nothing to theatricalize anything and will abstain from no cheap trick and be abhorrent. Somewhere down the main center of that, what you are really looking for as the director, as the writer, is something that arises from an action that you believe, in which the emotions of that or the means of that fulfilled, are genuine and honest and earned and which finally lifts people up. When really done well, all these things come together as something greater than the sum of their parts; the actions, the ideas, the policy, the emotions, the words, the rhythms. And you can feel the roof kind of lift off the ceiling, maybe three or four inches off the wall there. You can feel the ceiling kind of come off the wall and hang up there with the pure energy of that *rightness*, of that focus. Sometimes we got it; most of the time we didn't.

Soapes: That was a very good description you have given.

[End of Tape]