

**Interview with Jack Watson, White House Chief of Staff
December 13, 1980, approximately 10:00
West Wing Office of Jack Watson**

Alsobrook: Jack, the first thing I want to do is to hear about your first involvement with Jimmy Carter. Where did you first meet him and what were the circumstances?

Watson: I went to Georgia in 1966 as soon as I graduated from law school. I joined a law firm there called King and Spaulding in Atlanta. At the time I went to Georgia and Atlanta, in the summer of 1966, on June 1, which as a matter of fact was my first day with the law firm. Jimmy Carter was then running for governor of Georgia. He had entered that race quite late in the gubernatorial primary because, as I later found out, he had been very seriously considering running for Congress, from his district and had decided, I think when Bo Callaway¹—I've never know, I've never asked the president, if this was true—but I have been told by reliable sources that when Bo Callaway whom the President had known for a long long time and who was a Republican in south Georgia, when he switched from there into the governor's race on the Republican side, the President switched into the gubernatorial race. I'm not certain that story is true, but it is what I believe.

In any event, as everyone knows, Jimmy Carter lost that Democratic primary by just less than two percentage points. It went into a runoff between two other men, Ellis Arnall, a previous governor of Georgia, and Lester Maddox. It is also widely believed that if Jimmy Carter had edged into that runoff in 1966 by beating Lester Maddox by the two percentage points that he lost by, he would have been elected governor of Georgia in 1966. As it turned out, of course, Mr. Maddox was elected. This is a long way to tell you that I did not know him during that period of time.

After he lost the governor's race, Charles Kirbo, who was one of my senior partners in the law firm said to me that he thought it would be very worthwhile for me to seek out Jimmy Carter and get to know him. And I said I would like very much to do that, because Mr. Carter in his public appearances and public persona had greatly appealed to me. I think probably early in 1967, I did not meet him throughout the calendar year of 1966, but some time in early 1967 after Mr. Kirbo, as a matter of fact had mentioned to me two or three times whether or not I had actually gone down to Plains to meet Jimmy.

I really concluded that this request or suggestion by Mr. Kirbo to me was more than casual, and he seriously wanted me to do it. So one Saturday morning I drove down to Plains, Georgia. I called ahead, asked Jimmy if I might come down, told him who I was. To my surprise, he already knew who I was, because Charlie Kirbo had said something about me to him, I think, and I spent the day in Plains. I met Jimmy, I met Rosalynn, I met Billy, I met Sibyl I met the boys--I'm not sure I met Jack—but I met Chip and Jeff. I'm not sure I met Jack--no, as a matter of fact, I did meet Jack. Miss Lillian, at that time, was still in India with the Peace Corps so I did not meet her but she was to return soon after and I met Miss Lillian subsequently. That's the way I met him.

Subsequent to that first meeting, which was extremely enjoyable and, I might fill in a little bit there, I went down, I drove into this little town of Plains where I had never

¹ Howard H. Callaway, Georgia congressman (Republican) and US Sec. of Army 1973-75.

been before. I drove over to the Carter office near the warehouse where Jimmy and Rosalynn were. Rosalynn was working on the books, I remember. I introduced myself to both of them and then without detailing the day's activities, Jimmy and I spent the rest of the day together in the most informal way. He showed me his operation there. We drove out to the fields and looked at the fields. We had lunch together. We spent a very casual and informal day talking--not a great deal about farming because that was not either an interest or a subject on which I had a great deal of knowledge-- but about politics and about ourselves and about the governor's race and about what we both liked to read. He was then as he is now an avid reader. I also like to read very much so we had a great deal of common interests. I think he shared that feeling.

Subsequent to that, over the period of time from '66 to '67, from time to time, not with great frequency, when Jimmy would be coming through Atlanta going into north Georgia or into Atlanta or the Atlanta area to make speeches for this, that or the other purpose, because he was in fact during that whole four year period of time running for governor of Georgia, though of course not as an announced candidate.

He would call me and say, "How are you, what are you doing, what's up?" On a couple of occasions he would ask me if I would just drive with him in the car. I remember once in particular we drove up to Rome, Georgia; he gave his speech to some March of Dimes group up there, to a group of friends. We went by some friends' homes—friends of his—homes, then we drove back to Atlanta. We did that on several occasions, that kind of thing, had that kind of contact with each other.

On one occasion he asked me if I would write out some thoughts or a speech or a speech outline for a speech that he was going to give, I think, to the Atlanta Bar Association or it might have been to the Atlanta Kiwanis Club, but it was on the occasion of Law Day USA. I have forgotten the audience. He mentioned that to me casually, but I took his request very seriously and spent one whole Saturday in the law office in Atlanta writing out in longhand thoughts that I had for him to consider about such a speech, including some language that he might use and some thoughts specifically, or ideas that he might elaborate on and I mailed it to him.

To my great pleasure and somewhat to my surprise when I read the paper the next morning after his speech, a phrase or an idea that I had given him was the lead headline as to what he had said. I even remember what it was, which will show you how important an event it was to me. Those were the days in which everybody was talking a great deal about law and order; "law and order" had become a kind of catch phrase which meant different things to different people, but to the minorities in the country and to a lot of people who were more the objects of law enforcement and the subjects of it, it was a sinister phrase. And I was sensitive to that and knew that he was and wanted him to be sensitive in his remarks. So, in the speech that I gave him, I didn't give him a fully narrative speech, but I said this is the kind of speech it should be and these are the kinds of things that I think you ought to say.

In that long letter that I wrote him, I sent something like this, "When people talk about law and order in the country what they really mean, though they don't say it, necessarily, is that we want law and order within a framework of justice, because laws can be oppressive and unfair and order reaches its zenith in a totalitarian society where everything is heavily structured from the top, so we don't want simply *law and order*, we

want law and order within the framework of justice.” And it was that phrase that became the central theme of his speech and it was that phrase that was recorded in the headlines.

This is a very long answer to the first question but I thought some of that might be of some interest. On the basis of those kinds of contacts, we became friends. He is 14 years older than I am, almost to the day. Our birthdays are in October. He is 56 now, I am 42, so that our age difference, of course, was reflected in the nature of the relationship that we had, but it was a good relationship and a close one. I supported him in his 1970 bid for the governorship by raising money and giving speeches for him and doing whatever I could to be of help and he then subsequently asked me to perform several duties for him while he was governor, including appointing me to be the chairman of the Georgia Board of Human Resources which was the largest department of state government in Georgia.

He had in fact asked me to leave my law firm to become the Commissioner of that department in the state government. For personal and professional reasons, I did not think that it was wise or timely for me to do such a thing so I regretfully had to turn him down on that request. He then came back and said, “Well, be chairman of the board, the policy board for the department, which will not require you to leave your law firm and your partnership with the law firm, but which will put you right in the center of this thing.” I did that and I in fact served as chairman of the board not only through the balance of his governorship but also in George Busbee’s governorship until I came here in 1977.

Alsobrook: Was that really the first time that you began to have contact with the federal government? In terms of--

Watson: As a matter of fact, it is. And from 1972, from April of 1972 when Governor Carter appointed me both to the board and then the board elected me as chairman, because it was clear that the governor wanted me to be the chairman, from that time forward I think I had one of the steepest learning curves in terms of government that I’ve ever had.

I was dealing as chairman of the Board of Human Resources with a wide range of problems, human welfare, health, social service, vocational training problems, problems of the mentally ill, problems of the mentally retarded, because all of those functions and responsibilities lay within the jurisdiction of the Department of Human Resources. I might add as you might suspect that many of those programs, particularly the welfare programs, were programs of tremendous controversy and objects of a great deal of derision as well as misunderstanding in Georgia as well as in other parts of the country and being Chairman of the Board of the department which administered those programs was not always an easy task and also required a great deal of articulation of in fact what was going on, what was being done, what were the needs and problems of the state and how were those needs being met or how were we trying to meet them. One of the things that Governor Carter had said to me when he asked me to be Chairman of the board was that he wanted me to spend a great deal of my time helping to sell the concept. It was a newly created agency, consolidating what had been a lot of other agencies before into one human services or human resources agency. It was by far and away with a doubt the most controversial aspect of his entire state reorganization plan, and though he won the

reorganization plan, as I recall, by one vote on this particular subject, it remained for major constituencies in Georgia, including for example the Medical Association of Georgia, whose Board of Health had been abolished and merged into this new Board of Human Resources. It was the subject of great controversy.

So, I spent the next five years, almost five years, from April of 1972 until basically December of 1976, although I didn't resign until January or February of 1977 from my chairmanship officially, giving speeches all over the state of Georgia, talking literally to hundreds of groups of every description: men's clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, talking to human services agencies all over the state, beginning to deal with the federal government, trying to understand the relationship of the federal system between state and federal and local governments and all these kinds of assistance programs and trying to put together in my own head some rational for making things work better. But, it was one of the best experiences I ever had, as I say, it was one of the periods of my life when I was most engaged in learning about subjects that were new to me. However, it was never necessary for me to leave my practice of law. I continued to practice law fully, vigorously--in other words, I took no partial leave of absence in fact or in theory from my law practice. I was a full time lawyer doing more than my full share of law practice and billable hours and so forth, but at the same time I was also recording more than a thousand hours a year on my time sheets for this responsibility of Human Resources Chair. I might also add what is perhaps obvious; doing that job during his governorship brought me into a very close working relationship with him.

Alsobrook: Because obviously he was vitally interested in all these things the Department of Human Resources was doing.

Watson: Extremely so. Rosalynn, I might add, was someone whom I had gotten to know somewhat separate from Jimmy because of her great interest in mental health issues. In 1971, I guess, '70 or '71, right along in there, I was elected president of the Metropolitan Atlanta Mental Health Association which covered five or six counties in Atlanta. It was a very rigorous, very energetic board and association which had some superb people on it and took a great deal of my time. That was another subject I was learning a great deal about. I had gone on that board perhaps in 1967 or '68----'68, I suppose it was. Then, in time, I had been elected chairman of the board or president of the association and in that connection I had frequent occasions to work with Rosalynn on something of a mutual interest. Interestingly enough, I think that probably the main reason that Jimmy thought of me in the human resources context to begin with is because he associated me with the problems of the mentally ill and the mentally retarded and the human service in that particular area.

Alsobrook: I think that is a key point because I think a lot of people don't understand that Rosalynn Carter had this *long* interest in mental health----for a number of years. It is not something she has picked up after she became first lady.

Watson: Oh, *indeed not! Indeed not!* I don't know how early her active interest, her visible interest in the subject began, but I can testify in my own knowledge that as of the last of the sixties, the late 1960's, even before she was first lady of Georgia, she had a great interest, showed a visible interest in this and took a very active role. And, of course, when she became first lady of Georgia in January of 1971, although she did many things and spent much time on a variety of subjects, I suspect myself that the subject with

which she was most identified in Georgia was dealing with the problems of the mentally ill and the mentally retarded.

Alsobrook: Now that you have had the chance to work in the White House for four years, you have really seen this idea of aid from the federal government from an entirely different angle. Cities and states...you're dealing with mayors and governors.² Have you changed your impression of the whole idea of aid to cities and states? Do you still feel the same way you did when you were working for the Department of Human Resources?

Watson: You change some opinions because you learn more. You begin to see ways in which, on both sides of the system, things can be done better. I must confess that because I spent five years viewing the federal government and federal system from the perspective of the state level, that that influenced greatly the way in which I came into the federal government—or the attitudes I had as I came into the national government and federal system. For example, without going into a lot of detail, I felt for a long time, and still do feel, that to the extent that it is feasible to do it, there ought to be discretion, latitude, at the state and local levels, within broad parameters or objectives, goals that are stated by the federal legislation, to make choices about how money should be spent. I'm not a believer, a total believer, in the proposition of what are called "block grants" to solve every problem, as some argue. But I do believe that the federal government can be unnecessarily and overly restrictive or *prescriptive* in directing state and local governments in exactly how to do something, whether it has to do with urban development, economic development, or rural development, or in fact, whether it has to do with health care systems.

At the same time, I also think that in a fair number of cases the establishment of national goals or national directions within a particular area is something that can best be done at the national level. I am skeptical once those basic goals and directions have been established, for whatever the subject-- urban policy-- for example, I am skeptical about the devising of formulas, rigid prescriptive formulas, that say to every county and every city or town, this is exactly how we will achieve objectives A,B, and C. So, I think it is a process in which there has to be a tremendous amount of give and take. One of the things that I think we have done best in the last four years--and I regret that we will not have the chance to continue because we have learned so much about it--is both the conceptualization, the design, and the execution of a series of policies which are all gathered together under the rubric of a national urban policy. The way we have been dealing with cities and towns for their economic development, the way we have been creating connections, synergistic connections between transportation programs, and the various departments of federal government which have the money and in some cases the expertise, to develop those, or execute those programs, is one of our proudest accomplishments.

I think we have done more cross agency, interagency collaboration and execution, than has ever been done by the federal government. I don't say that with great bravado because it's been hard to do and it can be done better even still that we have done it. We have only begun. But I feel fairly confident, based on my experience and my readings, particularly my experience over the last 10 years or so, that there simply has never been

² In addition to serving as Cabinet Secretary, Watson also served as President's Assistant for Intergovernmental Affairs.

an administration which has done better than we have done in the terms of bringing agencies together around common broad objectives such as urban policy, creating mechanisms that are basically guided, designed and guided out of the White House for the collaborative execution, so that the governments, the local governments (this is something I learned on the local side) do not have to deal with the federal government through 15 different channels every time. One example--I don't want to tell you more here than you want to learn--but one example of what I'm talking about is that in the President's urban policy he created something called "the Interagency Coordinating Council." He appointed me as Secretary to the Cabinet and the Assistant for Intergovernmental Affairs as Chair of that council. He created that council by executive order, he gave it a broad mission which briefly stated was to coordinate the execution of urban policy across the major domestic agencies, and in some cases not even the domestic agencies. The Department of Defense has a role and can have a role in the execution of urban policy.

Well, this is not the time or place, I suppose, to go into a description of what the ICC did, but I will tell that when the evaluations of these four years are written by thoughtful people who go back to see what in fact was done, what in fact was designed, what were the concepts, I think that the concept as well as the execution of the ICC with its bringing together, not to be altogether inclusive with HUD, housing and community development aspects of HUD; the economic development aspects of the Department of Commerce; the EDA, the Economic Development Administration; the Department of Transportation with all of its elements both highway and rail; and Urban Mass Transit Authority; the Department of Labor with all of its manpower and training programs; the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency which has profound impact on the way cities and towns develop and whether or not they sprawl; the Farmers Home Administration of the Department of Agriculture, to name another. Those that I have just named, those six or seven major programmatic elements of the federal government, I pulled together as a kind of executive committee of the ICC. We met regularly. We designed an agenda as to what we were going to have to approach and over the period of about 2 ½ to 3 years we did some things that were unprecedented.

We also changed in some significant ways the way people in the federal establishment regarded their roles relative to each other. I do not mean to suggest for a moment that we did this perfectly. I do not mean to suggest for a moment that there are not still problems everywhere in terms of this kind of coordination and collaboration. But, I do mean to suggest specifically that in the Carter administration from roughly 1978 when we really got this underway through 1980, there was more collaboration in the execution of those kinds of policies that I'm talking about, more synergism, more coordination, more pooling of resources, more marshalling of this element from *this* department and *that* element from another department, more interagency agreements on particular subjects than has ever been done by the federal government.

As a footnote--another historical fact, which my word does not have to be accepted on here--is that the President's support, political support, among mayors and governors and state legislators, by and large, and county officials across this country and the organizations into which they are organized, the National Association of Counties, though it is bipartisan and does not officially take some partisan role and indeed as it should not, and the US Conference of Mayors, and the National League of Cities, and the

National Governors Association, and so forth; his support among those state and local elected leaders in political terms, in the opinion of many people, was the strongest single base of political support he had in the country. It was the base of support that held at the lowest points of his popularity in, for example, the summer of 1979 when everyone was saying virtually every commentator on the national political scene was saying “The President is finished. All Senator Kennedy has to do is to announce his candidacy and President Carter has only to fold his tent and take his flag home.”

Well, in the late summer of 1979 at their various annual meetings that began to occur, the governors, the mayors, the county officials and so forth, there began to flow starting with the National Governors Association meeting in Louisville in July 1979, a series of endorsement statements endorsing his renomination, endorsing his re-election, calling attention to his approach to federalism and to the operation of the federal government with state and local governments that caused a lot of commentators to step back and say, “Wait just a minute here, there may be more support, there may be more being done right and being done competently here than first meets the eye. Let’s look at it again.” I don’t want to overstate that case, but I think it is a case that needs to be examined in the light and with the distance of history.

I think one of the reasons that he had such an extraordinary breath and depth of support among those local and state elected leaders was that the way in which he was making the federal government work with them and the way that he was permitting them to work with the federal establishment, both in formulating the policies that it would propose and in executing them once they got passed, those were the grounds upon which they were basing their support. And, I think again in the light of a little time and space to evaluate these things, the President is going to get high marks in those areas.

Alsobrook: You know this, it seemed that most--as time went on began to reach out even more, you know, for support from others, people like mayors; like when they brought in Moon Landrieu and Neil Goldsmith so that not just the work at your office but seemed like the entire administration continued to reach out to the cities and to the states. Is that a correct assumption?

Watson: Well, it is a correct assumption and it is well documented by what the President did. You are right. His reaching out for two of the most important cabinet secretary positions in terms of local government, urban policy, transportation policy, local government. To two men who had been extraordinarily successful mayors in two large or medium sized cities in this country—Moon Landrieu from New Orleans, Louisiana and Neil Goldschmidt from Portland, Oregon-- simply underscored the President’s interest in having those perspectives incorporated into both the way we thought at the federal level and the way we acted, as well as his insistence on opening up the federal government to people who had not had an opportunity necessarily to serve in the federal government but who had been important leaders in other parts of the federal system.

I think though this is a biased opinion, since they are both very good close personal friends of mine, that Neil Goldsmith and Moon Landrieu even though they were here for a relatively brief period of time, less than a year and a half, I suppose, in the case of each, did as much in that year and a half of time to set attitudes, to create positive attitudes within their respective departments and even beyond their departments about what the local interest was, what’s the city’s perspective on this, what will work, actually

work for a transportation or housing or community development or urban mass transit policy in a local government. They brought to their jobs not only keen intelligence in the case of both of them, but also a great practical sense of what is feasible, what is not, what is politically doable and what's not. They are both also great spokesmen. They know how to use and they use effectively the art of advocacy and that too helps a great deal. So I am so proud of the President in what he did. I regret more profoundly than my words can convey that he did not have a chance to go forward for another four years, not because he or we in his behalf, in behalf of the his presidency, had all the answers--God knows we did not; we even know we did not--but because the President himself was so committed to taking new approaches. Not in many cases, not even in most cases, radical new approaches, because we in these kinds of jobs, starting with the President in his unique job, must be political. And I say political in the most positive sense. There is nothing sinister about that word. We have got to understand; the President above all, must understand what is doable and what is not doable. Within time frames that politicians and people in government have to work. How much can we get done? How fast can we take the people's understanding? How fast can we move the people's grasp of this or that concept?

I think that '76-80, 1976-1980, again in historical reflections, will be viewed by many people as a period of transition in which the Democratic Party was itself in--the first word that came to mind just then was turmoil--and that's not far off the mark, but in a time of trying to adjust and adapt a set of new economic realities, a sense of limitations in economic and other terms, both national and international terms to some old and abiding principles and values. A lot of people thought that what the President was doing in some of his policies was moving away from some traditional Democratic values, moving away from long-standing and revered Democratic Party principles--aid to the poor, protection of the vulnerable. They thought that about him, or at least some accused him of that, because what the President in fact was doing was saying the government cannot assume the whole burden. The government cannot pay for everything. We the people are the government. We the taxpayers at every level are the government. We must decide--to be sure in a compassionate way, and in a way that takes into account endless competing interests and which is not afraid to make trade-offs--to make judgments, quantitative and qualitative judgments, that we can do this but we cannot do that. Or we can do this much, but we cannot do more and we should not do less.

It was those kinds of qualitative and quantitative judgments that the President was making in area after area, trying at all times, in my judgment, to be true to Democratic Party principles and values to which he is committed--has been, is now--but committed to those principles and those values in the context of changing times. New limitations. Inflation. Trying to also gradually move, as quickly as possible, but necessarily gradually, move people's concept of the role of government and the relationship of government to the private sector, into a new kind of conceptual framework. In the 1960s, without belaboring this point too much, even starting with the New Deal, I suppose, the New Deal of the 30s and 40s, moving into the Great Society 20 years later roughly, of President Johnson, one of the apparent tenets of the Democratic Party approach to government was the bigger the government, the better--the more government programs, the better. The more the government can do to protect the vulnerable and to help the poor and to rebuild our cities; the more the government can do almost unilaterally. Generally

speaking, the federal government was the government being talked about or thought about in those statements I've just made in terms of the traditional Democratic Party philosophy. This is another interesting thing.

In some respects which time doesn't permit me to go into at length here, the Democratic Party had moved in the middle twentieth century, starting with President FDR, to a stronger adoption of centralized government, the old federalist position. Though the Democratic Party has always been regarded, generally speaking, and still thinks of itself as the more populist of the two political parties in the country and the more people oriented. And, indeed, I think that is a fair characterization. Nevertheless, it was also the party that had moved into this strong, predominating concept of central government, which in earlier generations was a little bit more of the other party's view. These things have moved back and forth into vogue between the two parties.

In any event, my point, though belabored, is a simple one. It is that Jimmy Carter was a president dealing with all these transitional forces—the changing grounds on which we were operating. He was caught at a confluence of concepts and conflicts. He was trying to take the Democratic Party not away from its principles, not away from its values, but to a new framework for implementing those values, being true to those values. He was trying to use the federal treasury, the tax payers' money, if you will, because that's what the federal treasury is, in a way that didn't pay for every thing but which stimulated private sector investment as much as possible.

The stimulation of private sector development is as central a proposition of the President's urban policy approach as any other program like the Urban Development Action Grant Program, referred to as UDAG—has as its central premise the notion that the best way to use federal dollars for economic development in local governments in cities and towns is not simply to have those dollars pay for the downtown development, the urban renewal concept of the 60s, but to take the dollars in a competitive way, leverage them as highly as possible with private sector investments. See if you can get 6 or 7 or 10 or 12 private sector dollars for economic development and job creation and hotel building and whatever. City council persons and governors and others really began to pick up on this thing and understand and apply it and to work with us on expanding it. In fact, I think the people in the general public who had any knowledge of it also understood it but it was not an approach or a subject on which the President got the widespread public credit that I think he so richly deserved. That is one of the prices of politics.

Alsobrook: I was going to ask you a little more about the politics of the urban policy. Did you run into problems because you may have had some mayors who wanted to support what you do but they had such massive unemployment that they were caught in a squeeze----with all the pressure from their people?

Watson: Unemployment during the 1980 election was a problem. In my opinion it was not one of the major problems. Mayors all over the country knew that the President had put more money into youth employment and adult employment and job training programs than any other president in history. They knew that. They knew he had taken the CETA program (the Comprehensive Employment Training Act) which is called CETA. They knew he had taken that from a funding level of less than five billion total when he came into office to over 11 billion in his 1977 first year of office economic stimulus program. They knew that he had proposed the largest youth employment

program in the history of the country and, as we have been discussing, they knew all the efforts he was undertaking to connect those programs, principally out of the Department of Labor, with other job producing programs out of the Departments of HUD and Transportation and Commerce, and so forth.

So, though the recession of 1980 did begin to edge up the unemployment rate again, it never reached the levels that it had been when we took office. It was too high. I don't mean to suggest for a moment that it was at a satisfactory level. It was too high. It was at 7.5% or 7.6%, at the highest point perhaps 7.7% in 1980. But, they knew what we were doing and how we were dealing with the problem. They also knew that we had put out more effort. I don't mean to take full credit for that. It wouldn't be fair to. But, the country under Carter's presidency had put more people into the work force in a 3 ½ year period of time than had ever been put into the work force in any 3 ½ year period of time in history. They knew that. Your question is specifically directed at mayors. The president sustained, even through our dark days and difficult times of the recession and the election of 1980, by and large, the darn near unanimous support of Democratic mayors. It was almost unbelievable how well that coalition held, even in hard times.

Our greater problem was inflation. Our greater problem in political as well as in economic terms was the fact that the population at large---not the folks who were running our governments, not the folks who were really well informed about this or that government issue. In the end, they don't need to be, they don't have to be. They're not required or expected to be. Those people who were paying more for a loaf of bread and to go to the movies, and for a gallon of gas, and for a mortgage rate or a prime lending rate---those people in the country, voters, said--I think in the final analysis—"let's change leaders. We don't like this particular set of conditions. We don't know exactly what can be done about it, but let's change and see." I also think that the election was much, much closer right up until the closing days of it, and by closing days I mean the last 72 hours, than it turned out to be on Election Day, November 4, 1980.

I'm not sure exactly why. I've got some ideas about that. One of these, I think, was that the President and his administration had done a reasonably good job under difficult economic circumstances, and other circumstances in carrying the burden of explanation, the burden of persuasion in what in fact was causing inflation and what we were doing about it and were we on the right track. We hadn't broken the back of it, but were we on the right track?

I think we had done reasonably well, but then, beginning on Sunday, November 2, as we approached the one year anniversary of the hostage taking by the government of the people of Iran, or at least of the people of Iran, all three television networks began to do dramatic retrospectives, reprises, if you will, of the whole year of that ordeal with film, taped film of the hostages being taken on November 4, 1979, of their being walked out blindfolded and shackled into the various places where they were being taken. Pictures, film of the Ayatollah Khomeini talking to raging mobs of students about how they had brought the US to her knees and other ridiculous and demagogic statements. And without putting too much weight on that, I do want to suggest that what happened there in that 45 hour painful reprise of the whole ordeal on national television was that a scab was torn off of a wound and the bleeding started, even a hemorrhage and the hemorrhage had to do not only with that particular issue but people all of a sudden began saying, "By God, inflation is high, too, and I don't want to be confused by the facts. I

don't want care what the causes of inflation are, it's too damn high, and I don't care to know that President Carter has exercised his office and his power and his judgment as to dealing with the hostage crisis with firmness and restraint. By God, we don't have the hostages back."

So, I think there was a transfer of feeling there between the hostage situation and the inflation situation and perhaps other situations which took its serious toll. That is, of course, only a theory. I do not mean to suggest by that theory, though I believe it, that it explains our loss. I think that there was a variety of other factors and forces which contributed to the outcome of the 1980 election, but I think that's a factor.

Alsobrook: I want to touch on that and also go back to an earlier statement where you talk about the turmoil with the Democratic party and lot of people, probably on the left of the party, who were still leaning toward the really just straight New Deal principles. Did you also have a problem during the primary season with a lot of civil issue constituencies, too? Did that cause any special problems for you?

Watson: Of course, of course, that in fact, is one of the great problems of our government, of our time. It will remain, it does remain, as one of the central issues with which we as a people must deal in the decade of the 1980s and in fact an issue which if we don't deal with it effectively, will cause us to be a government that is operated somehow and a set of politics that is operated somehow by free-for-all more than by common consent. What I mean by that is to urge a special interest, to advocate a position on behalf of a particular minority in the country is one of the privileges, one of the rights, indeed, not a privilege—well, it is a privilege because we have the kind of political system that we have got, but it is a privilege which we have as a matter of right in our system. If you are black, or Hispanic, or if you like to hunt, or if you are a woman who wants the Equal Rights Amendment passed, or if you are a farmer who wants 100% parity, or whatever, you have a right under our system of government to advocate that interest, to press it. And, I wouldn't take away that right for anything.

But to handle that right, David, imposes a responsibility in our system that I think is not being fulfilled in current-day America. Because the responsibility is having that special interest, means having the wisdom that to understand that you are part of the larger fabric and that while you must in your own interest and the interest of others that share that special interest with you, advocate that because you think it to be right, you must also do so in a context of other interests, and you must have as an individual or as a group, both the ability and the willingness to subordinate that special interest appropriately to their values, to other interests which are competing.

Alsobrook: In the interest of the nation, the overall good of the nation?

Watson: Absolutely, for the common good, for the public welfare as it's called and I think that we are suffering because we do not have that to the extent that we need to have it. There is no way that I can think of--and this is one of the subjects that I would like to think about in the future, because I think it is so central to our ability to govern ourselves effectively under our system of government--I cannot think of a formula by which we can make that work. I cannot think of some way in which we can *enforce* that sense of responsibility that I have just described. It is something which must emanate from the minds and hearts of Americans. It is something, it is a responsibility which must first be *perceived* and then *restored* and then *acted upon* by Americans who care about their system. Yes, we were hurt by the proliferation of special interests which

simply would not give sway to any other interests. Gov. Reagan is also going to be hurt by them. And what is more important than President Carter or Governor Reagan being hurt by them as individual presences is that the country is being savaged by them, and that is the interest which we must protect above all. I don't know how to do it. I don't know how to do it except by, as I suggest, an increased speaking of the truth about it, an increasing articulation of the prices we will pay if we don't understand that principle or responsibility.

That's one of the responsibilities of political leadership, but it is also and I must quickly add this, David, it is also a responsibility of leadership beyond the political realm. We're counting too much on the President. I don't mean to suggest by that that we need to convert our system of government to some government by committee. In my judgment, stronger held now than ever before, our country is served well by a strong presidency, by the institution of a powerful presidency, and if anything, we are suffering right now from having limited that institution--limited it, placed restrictions and restraints on it that do not serve the public good in terms of our system. I believe in a strong presidency, I believe in a powerful execution of the responsibilities of the executive branch—not, to be sure, without the checks and balances by the other parts of our system-- but I submit to you that we have checked too much the power and authority and the prestige in our hearts and our minds, of the presidency and we have not created a balance. We have created an imbalance and we are suffering from it and the fragmentations, the disintegrations, that are rampant in our whole society--the breakdown of authority, the disintegration of authority and responsibility, the proliferation of special interests without regard to the common public interest. All those things are at work in our society. Until we understand that we can't even begin to do something about it.

Alsobrook: Do you feel that Watergate was obviously one major factor in the problem with the presidency now?

Watson: Of course it is, of course it is. And it will suffer from that for a long time. Think of it in very basic, personal terms, David. You have a friend whom you love and trust and respect and with whom you would confide almost anything as a person, and then all of a sudden that trust is betrayed. Your confidence is betrayed. How long is it before you trust that friend again? How long is it before you can have a friend in that sense again? Well, that's what happened with the American people and the presidency. I don't mean to over simplify that, but what has happened is a very human thing.

Yes, we're suffering from it still and we will continue to suffer from it for some time to come, but we are hurting ourselves by continuing with that skepticism. One of the problems that we've got, David, is that for the last four years --let me be personal for just a moment, but, what I'm saying here reaches far beyond President Carter. We've had in the White House, as our President for four years, a man who almost by---I won't say universal judgment because there is no universal judgment in politics, least of all in our times, but in fact never--but by overwhelming majority view, we have had a man in the White House, who still sits there who is honest and decent and trusted. There are allegations made about whether he is competent. That is a separate issue about this, that, and the other aspect of his leadership, but a subject upon which almost everyone agrees about that man is that he is a man of integrity. He is a man who has not violated his public trust and yet somehow--somehow--we really didn't put that at the top of our

agenda. We took it for granted, we took it for granted. We ought never to take it for granted. That's point one.

Point two: it is almost as if, in this country the moment we elect a person to public office, as of that moment, we never again give him or her the benefit of the doubt. Never. As of that instant, as of the instant of that investment by us, of responsibility and leadership and authority, we say "I'm not going to believe anything you say, Brother". And I'm going to put a cast on everything you do and everything you say which is negative. I'm going to be skeptical about you. I'm going to create a burden or proof, if you will, in legal terms, which assumes you guilty until you prove yourself innocent. That is so powerful a destructive force on our leadership. It is so powerful a restraint on effective leadership; it is such an albatross around the neck of this county in terms of getting anything done. Indeed, it is a limitation of almost incalculable implication in turning worthy people away from public service. If we are going to treat our best people, people who before they were elected to public office were trusted, people who lives, whose public and private conduct made us admire them before they were elected to public office, if we are going to take those people and at the minute we elect them to public office do this other thing to them that I have just described, how many people of that kind are going to continue to submit to it? That's a serious question, David. It is a very serious question.

Alsobrook: It goes to the root of a lot of things. You know, you are traveling around the country. I would be interested to know, did you ever have any young people ever come up to you and say, "I have dedicated my future career to the service of the federal government or the foreign service" or something like that? Did that ever happen?

Watson: Oh yes, it does happen. It doesn't happen enough, but it happens, but I realize this is an oral history about the Carter administration and presidency, but let me interject a personal note because I cannot separate myself on personal grounds from President Carter or from the experience of the last four years. I wouldn't trade the experience that I have had, not only for the last four years here in Washington serving the President or indeed the experience of the preceding five years which we talked about serving in a vastly different kind of role out of the private sector but the clear shot at Governmental responsibility that I had in Georgia for anything in the world. I mean that literally and indeed in making the choice to do these things, particularly over the last four years, I have, as many others have, necessarily excluded the doing of other things. The making of a great deal more money than is possible in the public service which is a limitation not only that I accept but I think is appropriate, for one. For another the just dealing with exasperations and the frustrations, some of which we have been talking about of public life versus the quietude and greater calm and I suppose in many respects, greater prestige of a civilized life in the private sector.

I now find myself as I approach departure from this job which is now slightly more than a month away, January 20th, as of approximately noon on January 20th, when Gov. Reagan becomes the President of the United States, I will be unemployed. I do not fear for that prospect by any means, but I shall be unemployed and the question then becomes for me, as for serving the others, and I say this not so much because it is important to me, but because my situation is so representative, I think. I must then decide among other questions whether to pursue a political career for which the last ten years now have so well prepared me, I hope that does not sound immodest, I don't mean

it in an immodest way, the simple fact of the matter is that I have had extraordinary experience and extraordinary preparation and extraordinary learning over the last several years, including specifically the last 4 or 5 and the highest and best application of that experience and learning is in, I believe, public leadership, political leadership, governmental leadership, not necessarily for the rest of my life or the rest of the lives of other folks who are my colleagues here, but for significant portions of it. And the relevance of what we have just been talking about in terms of the way our political leaders are perceived and treated to that decision for me is quite great. In your weak moments you say, "I don't need this agony. I have choices to do the things far more comfortable and indeed I can do these other far more comfortable things and still make contributions which I harbor aspirations to do in terms of public service without putting myself into that arena, that blood, muddy, dirty, and I don't mean that dirty in a sinister sense, but messy, messy public arena of political elections. I am not suggesting for a moment nor do I mean to be interpreted so, that politics should be easy or that it should be an easy road; Harry Truman was right, "If you can't stand the heat, then get out of the kitchen." If you don't want to deal with all these slings and arrows and don't have the will and determination and the capacity to deal with it, then for God's sake don't deal with it. And I don't mean to disagree with any of that. I am simply saying that as a people we need to assess just how hard we are going to make it, how hard we are going to make it, because God knows it is hard enough without our exacerbating it all.

Alsobrook: I probably want to come back in a few months and follow up on that question. One last thing I want to get into very briefly with you is, for example, this is Saturday morning, you are here in the office in the West Wing, what have you been doing this morning that you can tell me about?

Watson: I have been working on papers, memoranda, signing letters, directing work assignments to other offices within the executive office of the President, reviewing status reports of various works in progress. I have spent some time this morning on the transition and by that I mean reviewing some matters that Ed Meese, who is the director of Gov. Reagan's transition team, and I discussed. I did a rather lengthy memorandum to him. I finished a rather lengthy memorandum to him on a variety of transition topics and subjects. Generally speaking, what I use Saturdays for is that kind of work. My regular week, that is to say, Monday through Friday, is so consumed by meetings that the amount of time that I have to do any sort of sustained paperwork review is limited. I do it every day, of course, but Saturday I use as a kind of catch-up day of the sort that I have just described. Sunday is the day that I try hard to take for personal and family purposes, but on Sunday I typically do some reading, not the kind of paperwork that I do here on Saturday, but reading that I want to do or need to do usually that is directly related to something that I am working on here but little bit less urgent.

Alsobrook: For example, can you think of a couple of books you have read over the last six months or so that really stand out in your mind?

Watson: Yes, I can. I have just completed the second of two biographies of Teddy Roosevelt. The first that I read was in the last couple of months, the first one I read was

one called *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* by Edmund Morris. The one that I have just completed is *The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt* by a man; I think his name is Harbaugh.³ I enjoyed those two books immensely. I have also read in the last month the book, a fascinating book, that was given to me by a friend which I never would have read had it not been given to me by this friend, called *The Memoirs of Hadrian* by Marguerite Yourcenor, a French writer, the only woman to ever be accepted into the French Academy and I think that happened just this year. That is a fascinating book about the Emperor Hadrian. He was the emperor of the Roman Empire in the first century after Christ. I also am reading a book right now that is written by a friend of mine in New York on *How to Win An Election in 1980*. (Alsobrook laughs) I obviously didn't get that read soon enough, but

Alsobrook: What is the title of that book?

Watson: Well, let's see. The title of that book is, I think, *Politics in the 1980's*, subtitled *How to Win An Election in 1980*. It is a practical and somewhat humorous, but very utilitarian book about politics which I am very much enjoying reading. I just began it. I'm sorry I don't recall the precise title. I have also complete a book recently, this is about two months ago, called *Roosevelt and Hopkins* which is a book on Harry Hopkins and Franklin Roosevelt, a fascinating account of their relationship and to that period of history. I also read a book which was a wonderful account of what's called the secret war of World War II. It's called *A Man Called Intrepid*. It is a fascinating account of the man who directed the entire British OCS operation, but it was not called OCS.

Alsobrook: Stevenson

Watson: Yes, yes. Mr. Stevenson who was a Canadian, by the way, and his relationship with Churchill, his relationship with Roosevelt, he was a kind of go-between in fact for purposes of the secret war. He had a very---between Roosevelt and Churchill.

They operated interestingly enough out of New York. The British undercover operation, its "spy" operation world wide, that network was operated out of New York City in WWII and in fact before WWII. He had a very significant role in the creation of our OSS in WWII. That was a fascinating book, but those are some of the books I have read in the last couple of months.

Alsobrook: This really leads me to another question, Jack. Is one of the difficulties of working in the White House just not having enough time to think about other things like that---maybe perhaps just not having enough time to think about what you have to do next? In other words, it is just coming in that you just have to fight so many fires that you don't have enough time to....

Watson: Yes, of course. You ask that question and more or less anticipate the answer. The answer is yes. One problem with this life is that it has an almost irresistible overpowering tendency to be one-dimensional and by one-dimensional I mean government politics with relatively little time, precious little time to do anything that is

³ William Henry Harbaugh.

not either directly or closely indirectly related to that subject. On the average, in the last four years I suppose my work week, my direct work week, has been something between 80-90 hours, I guess, and that obviously leaves precious little time for anything else, and that's the limitation. It is also dangerous, not to a person's health, necessarily, because I am in good health, thank God, and I have thrived on this. I have enjoyed it immensely, wouldn't trade it, but the danger is, David, that you do become too one-dimensional. I want to do some other things and read some other books. I would like to reflect about things not political, not government, though that's my first interest. I think I will have a greater capacity to be of some value as a public servant of some description if indeed my life is broader. One of the interesting things about Teddy Roosevelt, take one example, about Churchill to take another example, indeed there are many other splendid examples to make this point. I believe that some of our best and most productive and most effective and wisest public leaders have been men who have refused to be one-dimensional. They have just by sheer force of intellect and self discipline and interests and curiosity, kept themselves in a variety of subject areas and in a variety of pursuits. And, I frankly think that the people who do that turn out to be far more effective over the long haul than the people who just consume themselves being a United States Senator or Chief-of-Staff to the President or President of the United States, or Governor of a state or something.

I regret very much that generally speaking I think we have moved into this one-dimensional approach to life in our time, in a period in which we live, in the mid twentieth century, for more than we have to do. I think the concept of the Renaissance person is a concept that is still valid. It's only pursuable by the people who have the energy and talent and the intellect to do it, but my point is that far more of us have that energy and intellect and talent to do it than do it. I think one of the consequences of the increasing technological aspects of our time is that we have adopted an attitude that says "You've got to be expert in something" and we can only deal with experts on a particular subject and if you're not an expert, that is to say you're not totally devoted in depth to a topic, then you're not going to do well. Well, the proliferation of information, the sheer volume of things to be read and things to be learned in specific subject areas is so great that if you're not careful it does become consuming to do it. I think we ought to pull back from that a bit and particularly those folks who are not going to be a technical experts, who don't need to be a technical expert in some subject, ought to be generalists--and a good generalist, which I think would describe our best political leaders, for example, is a person who has both an interest in and some knowledge about and takes some enjoyment from a wide range of topics and subjects and sources and not just one or two.

Alsobrook: You know, this really fits with a quote I saw attributed to you about three years ago that said that you and your wife would like to talk to someone who has written a book about poetry.

Watson: That's true. Our political leaders would be better if they read more poetry. (They laugh.) I mean that. We'd all be better if we read more poetry, not just our political leaders, but being a political leader, among other things, means if you're good, if you're worthy, means being in touch with the flow of life, means being in touch with the

richness and the diversity of people, of human struggle, of human emotion, human success, human failure. It means having an appreciation for all the things that are going on in society because our best political leaders, which we need so desperately, are people who have a reverence for all that, who don't understand it all, necessarily, and we don't understand it all, and don't know about it all and aren't experts on it all, but who have a sense of wonder about it all and a sense of reverence that is one of the reasons why it is good to move in and out of government, I think, because if I were going to be the Chief-of Staff in a second Carter administration, the amount of time I could spend doing these other things would, as it has been in the first term, limited. More limited than it should be for my own good and for the good to be of the maximum use to the people who I want to serve. But, I will say this, I am guilty as I can be of having not made the kind of effort to free myself, to spring myself, from the constraints of this job and, if I were going to be here for another four years, it is easier to say this than do it, but I mean this devoutly, if I were going to be here for a second four years in this very same job, I would make a very great effort do more of the other things because I think it would make me a better Chief of Staff.

Alsobrook: Lastly, Jack, could you give me a permanent address and telephone number in Atlanta or.....

Watson: No. (Laughs—Alsobrook joins in.) I have no idea where I'm going to be or what I'm going to be doing, but I'll be happy to do that when I have a decision.

Alsobrook: Yeah, we'd like to come back and contact you and have a way to get in touch with you over the next 6 months to a year. That's the main thing.

Watson: I'll let you know. I have no idea where I'll be.

Alsobrook: But somebody in the President's transition office would probably be able to help us with that, don't you think?

Watson: Oh yes, no question.

Alsobrook: Well, thank you very much and I'll be back to ask you more questions over the next year or so. I appreciate it.