CARTER PRESIDENCY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSSCRIPT
INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK CADDELL
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YOUNG: I want to welcome Patrick Caddell and put this reminder on the tape about the ground rules of this oral history session. What’s said in the room doesn’t go out of the room. It is off the record. The only person to see the raw transcript when it is typed will be Mr. Caddell and at that time we’ll ask him to review and edit the transcript in such a way as he thinks necessary for its use as source material for some monographs on the Carter Presidency that would be commissioned by the Center. I’ve asked, and Mr. Caddell has indicated I think, that he would like to have this be a very candid discussion. The specific ground rules he would want to impose on the use of the materials would be made after he sees them. With that let’s begin, by inviting you to tell us a bit about how you got involved with Jimmy Carter and the Carter White House, and a general overview of your role, responsibilities, and functions over those years that you were associated with him and people on the staff.

CADDELL: OK, thank you. I guess the easiest point to start with is just to explain my relationship with President Carter and where it begins. It began actually in 1972. I first met President Carter during the McGovern campaign. I was just out of college and working in that campaign as his pollster. In June of that year prior to the convention we made a swing through the south, sort of show-the-flag-for-whatever-purpose—it seemed like a good idea at the time—and one of the places on the itinerary we stopped was in Atlanta where we spent the night. Senator McGovern stayed at the Governor’s mansion and Governor Carter at that time specifically asked that I come with McGovern to the mansion. At that time, Governor Carter had been one of the leading movers in the sort of stop-McGovern movement so this was some effort at reconciliation in the campaign. I had done a great deal of my thesis work in college when I was at Harvard on southern politics and the change in southern politics. Particularly the Wallace
vote and what it would mean, the long-term and short-term implications of those changes on the south. So I had studied Carter’s situation in Georgia and that whole new face election that took place in 1970 in which so many new faces, Humphrey and Chiles and Askew and Carter and others, came out contrary to the assumptions when that period began politically.

What happened was that the Governor asked me to come, we all talked about politics and the political situation, and then he and I and a few other people sat up in the kitchen until about 3 o’clock in the morning talking about southern politics and his election and the country, and got along very well. That’s where I first met Hamilton and Jody. Later, I would see him at the convention, including when they were running a campaign for Vice President that managed to pass me by. This later became a subject of great humor in ’76 and after. That was really the beginning of the relationship.

I knew the Governor in ’74 when he headed up the campaign project for the DNC. I was one of the people that was contributing occasionally or periodically to that effort. And we had talked. I had started my work even when I was in high school in Jacksonville, Florida. In Florida, I’d spent a lot of time on my thesis work on the Wallace phenomena. I particularly had been involved in Florida politics, and so I started my business. There was a growing assumption in ’75 that Carter was going to challenge Wallace, who was seen as a potentially strong figure in the Florida primary. There was a consensus, which a lot of people later regretted, to let Carter have a clean shot at that. At that time, I had a larger business as well as my political business corporations. They approached us about doing some work for them in ’75 on Florida with the understanding that I was not yet prepared to make a real campaign commitment to anybody at that point. We began to get involved in the campaign in Florida. In the fall of ’75, I spent more and more time with Carter and talked to the other people. That just began to emerge by late ’75
as I was going to be involved with the campaign. By early ’76, I was the campaign pollster. I was the only person in the campaign at that point who had had any experience in national politics whatsoever. There started then what was a very small, and would stay a very small, command structure, not only through ’76, but actually through all of the political decision-making right through 1980. This was essentially Hamilton Jordan, Jody Powell, Gerry Rafshoon, and myself supplemented and complemented at various points by different individuals. That would become the real center of the political decision-making, and I got into it very early. I was the only outsider at that point, or even later I think, who operated at the political level. That was partly because I had an indispensable political role in the campaign in which I was the source of most of the strategic information on which decisions were being made. Secondly, there were a lot of very close relationships that had been developed in that period. I’m originally a southerner—my family is southern for almost 150 years in South Carolina and so forth—so there were some cultural affinities there that would prove to be important. I functioned through the ’76 campaign as the campaign’s pollster and one of its senior advisors.

I think this is important because it becomes a basis for our relationship all through the administration. The President in 1976 ran essentially a thematic campaign or what I would describe at the time much to the anguish of many reporters as a thematic campaign as opposed to a campaign that was simply a collection of issue positions. Those themes really came from Carter. I enjoyed a relationship I suppose that was partly sprung from this shared perception from his two years out in the country and my own survey work and so forth of where the country was, what it was looking for—the sense of these things. I had a very strong and intense commitment to those ideas, as did the President. I functioned, if you will, sort of as a sounding board for him on those ideas throughout ’76, both in terms of the surveys and also in the formulation of how
we would articulate those. At the end of the ’76 campaign I made a decision; it was a mutual
decision. Actually it wasn’t much of a decision; nobody asked for it. I thought about it and
decided I didn’t want to be in the administration. I talked to the President once right after the ’76
campaign about how I did not want to go into the administration. I wished to stay out and
continue my own business, but would be available and involved. So I did essentially two things
with the administration during those four years. One of them was the polling through the
Democratic National Committee, until the campaign took place in 1979, on whatever research
we did, which depended on the flow of dollars that we had and anyone’s interest in knowing
what was going on. The other role that I played was as a political advisor to the extent that the
political structure, the political decision structure, remained in place in the administration. I was
really attached to that and was involved in that. The third role I played in the administration was
being perhaps its greatest internal critic. I sat on a very interesting perch, which was inside and
outside at the same time. I had a very particular relationship with the President and I think this is
important to say because of the way the staff structures worked. I always had direct access to the
President when I chose to exercise it, which was sparingly. Nothing I wrote went to the staff.
Nothing was ever processed through paper. I could deal with him directly. I could see him any
time that I wished. It was a standing instruction to that effect, though I tried not to abuse that.
And so I could deal with him directly as well as with members of the staff, Hamilton and Jody,
in particular.

**YOUNG:** This relationship of access was true throughout?

**CADDELL:** Throughout except in those periods when I was in the doghouse. But that was not
because of any staff interference. That was simply because of a question the President would
have. I suppose you could characterize it either charitably or not, as part of his intellectual
character or at least, I perceived my role to be that way sometimes. This was mainly because I
was in a position both as a political advisor and on the outside—inside to be able to say or offer,
I thought, criticisms with the relative safety of the secured relationship that other people could
not or did not see from their perspectives. I hope one of the things that we talk about is the White
House staff and the way the White House operates. It’s so hard to understand a lot of things that
take place unless you can get a feeling for what it’s like to work inside that bubble all the time
and be influenced by that environment. I think it is one of the most deadly things that happens
both to the staff and to the President in terms of their perception of the world. Not only was this
true in this Presidency, but in past ones and in the current one going on. That is as brief as I can
express my role.

I would be starting in late ’76. I went through a series of periods, but the only one that’s
ever gotten visibly above the surface, was in ’79, in terms of the Camp David summit. Actually,
those kinds of discussions and those kinds of criticisms or approaches or whatever flowed pretty
consistently from 1976 all the way through with the President, but there’s been very little
knowledge about that. My role inside with the White House is a very amorphous and undefined
one. I would come in on particular issues, particularly when there were speeches involved or
large policy movements, for instance on energy, the Panama Canal, and SALT, where there was
issue strategizing that involved the public in one sense or involved the President’s presentation. I
was involved in those. Occasionally, I would be involved in discussion on substance, usually if I
interjected myself—that was most frequently on economic policy or the lack thereof, particularly
during the period ’78–’79. There were, frankly, fairly crass political reasons as well as
substantive reasons. We were being damaged so badly by inflation and the economy, and
secondly, by what became a growing and eventually fulfilled apprehension that we would end up
producing a negative economic circumstance in an election year. I had argued from the beginning that we had to avoid this, particularly a recession, under all circumstances for reelection. So I was in and out. It was a very informal thing, and my involvement would or would not arise based on the issue, the involvement I wanted to have, and the tensions of the time. That was the rough background on my relationship. I don’t think there’s been very much public understanding of that relationship for the particular reason that it was neither in the President’s interests, in my interests, nor was it in the staffs’ interests to talk about it. So it was never really made very much of.

YOUNG: We will come back to this later, but one of the things that I wanted to know and have a preliminary question about is I believe I heard you say that from very early in your relationship with Carter your views of what the country was and what it was looking for were on the same wavelength.

CADDELL: Yes.

YOUNG: Did you discuss this often with the President?

CADDELL: Yes. We discussed it not so much in a formal way.

YOUNG: With the candidate then?

CADDELL: With the candidate. It was easy with the candidate because he was much more attached. In the White House years, it became much more difficult to culminate in ’79 because my feeling was that the President had lost, and I argued this vociferously with him, touch with the country, had lost the understanding of his own mandate, and we were running grievous risks because of his losing focus. This was partly because Jimmy Carter is, as most politicians are, a visceral politician. He always did better when he was out where he could feel people and deal with them. There’s a chemistry that really successful politicians have that really becomes their
lifeline to direction and stimulus. That is, almost by definition, excluded inside the White House, both by the agenda that the President faces, the issues, and the imposed isolation of the office. For someone like Jimmy Carter, that was just deadly because he began to lose his sharpness and the perception of why he had been elected and what he had been elected to do. That became a great source of discussion and division. It wasn’t a great source of division for a lot of people, but from my end that was a point of great concern.

YOUNG: Can you just briefly state what you and he thought after the election. What was his mandate as he was preparing the transition and the move into office?

CADDELL: Well, I think if you go back and look at it, this would reinforce in a sense what he had said in ’76 in the campaign speeches. This is always the problem with retrospect. It always looks simpler afterward than it did at the time. As I said, we ran a thematic campaign, which is very different from the kinds of issues and things that the other Democratic candidates were campaigning on in 1976. Jimmy Carter had positioned himself as the outsider in the field. You have to understand that he had no other choice. My theory all along was that if the country was looking for someone who was best qualified in terms of the experiences of government and understanding the machinery of government, then Carter would lose because he was obviously the least qualified person. He was a one-term Governor from a southern state, a region of the country in which the Democratic National Party was nonexistent. He had no real ties with the structure of the Democratic Party. The national Democratic Party is essentially a northern, Midwestern, and West Coast Party. He had no tie-in with that at all. He was not even in office. He had never held federal office. He had never been involved with foreign policy or most of the issues. In order to win, he had to articulate a sense of what had happened to the country through Vietnam and Watergate. If you go back and look at those speeches that he gave early in the
campaign, he would talk about the damage to the country, its psychology. He talked about what had happened to government and politics and how isolated Washington had become from the people; he, in fact, was going to restore that. Essentially, what he was running on in the campaign was that the country had been psychologically devastated by the previous decade of events. He was offering himself as a healer of that, something that was not inconsistent with his own personal background. He had a very deep feeling about this. This was not a campaign tactic. Jimmy Carter, in my opinion, had the best sense of what the general concerns of the country were in 1975. They were not just about unemployment or about energy or about the economy or any of those aspects. They were about what had happened to direction in the country, what had happened to America’s sense of its own position in the world, and where it was going. In that uncertainty he really moved to fill that vacuum, to reassure people. That’s when he gave these early speeches, which a lot of people felt were quite amusing. I too thought it was a little strange, until the first time I heard him give a speech in which he would talk about giving the country a government as good and decent as the people, and restoring it as a government filled with love, and so on. I mean he was touching cores that were not issue specific, which became very difficult for the press to write about or for people in Washington, who thought this was a very strange sort of thing, to understand. Nonetheless, it was obviously being met with enormous reception, given the difficulties and obstacles he had to overcome in the country.

I had had that sense that that’s where the ’76 election really should take place and really what it was about. He had that sense and so that was where the reinforcement came. I felt that, and there’s a paper that I wrote about it at the end of the ’76 campaign. It was leaked in the spring, for some reasons inside. I’m still not exactly sure why it was leaked. It was an effort to really do an overview, which the President was very fond of at the time it was written, about why
we had been elected and what it meant. The thesis can best be described in this way. I think you can view historically the President’s role. I think it’s based on historical circumstance and disposition. Usually people are in office not by accident, but because they in fact meet some need of the public. A President tends to be either the leader of the government or the leader of the society. That’s the whole duality problem of being chief executive and head of state. There are very few Presidents you could point to historically who could fulfill both roles well. Franklin Roosevelt was an exception to that. But I think if you went through and used that rough rule of thumb, you would see John Kennedy was most successful because he was viewed as a leader of society, which was why I think he suffered so much in retrospect in terms of his accomplishments or lack thereof as a leader of the government. Lyndon Johnson was the exact opposite. LBJ was much more the efficient implementer of programs, and running the executive branch and what have you, and much less of the other. It seemed to me that Carter was elected in fact to lead the society. That that was the mandate that people had given him. He was to make things better, not just in a governmental sense, but in a general psychological leadership sense. He was also supposed to run the government, but it was the secondary concern. And I think the tension began—and what I argued in December of ’76 what concerned me the most—because while we had gotten elected with a mandate to lead the country, we were about to embark on taking control of the executive branch and running the government day to day. That switch in roles was going to be very difficult for the public to accept. My own personal feeling, and I articulated this through most of the time, was that much of what we suffered in terms of disappointment with the public during the first several years of the administration sprung from that lost contact with our mandate.
YOUNG: Did Carter offer you a position in the administration before the inauguration? If not, did he indicate to you that he wanted a continuing relationship, and what were his thought about what that ought to be?

CADDELL: We met in Plains a couple of weeks after the election. I went down and spent several hours with him. I told him at that time that I wasn’t interested in being in the administration, in case he had any questions about that. There was a lot of discussion going on about that publicly and I hadn’t had a chance to talk to him about it. There’d never been any presumption in my discussion with Hamilton or anything about wanting to do it. He is the one that insisted at that point that he wanted me to stay involved with him, to always deal with him directly, to try to continue that relationship that we had had in the country and to keep in touch. He was already very concerned about losing touch with that. He really wanted me to be involved as much as I chose to be involved, and neither of us had any idea what the hell that was about.

YOUNG: But in terms of your having access to him and being a personal advisor to him—

CADDELL: That was laid out at that meeting.

YOUNG: That was laid out at that meeting, and it was communicated to the rest of the staff?

CADDELL: It didn’t have to be communicated much. They generally presumed it, and it was almost unspoken. He and I laid that out then and I assumed he had translated that, so no one ever asked.

THOMPSON: About your relationship with the President, and that of the President with the society at large, did either you or the President have any models for that? Was it ever mentioned that this kind of personal advice to the President could be had from somebody on the outside who had worked for some other President? Was it also ever discussed in general, as apart from
Wilson seeking to go to the country on the League of Nations, whether a President had been able to lead the society as a whole successfully?

CADDELL: You have to understand the circumstances at the time and it’s the kind of hubris that sets in with any success. I’ve seen it now with two different campaigns in terms of nominations and one administration and I’ve been watching this one currently and it seems to me to fit some of the same patterns. First of all, there’s a lot less thought given to sitting back and reflecting on a long-term basis about those directions. There’s so much to be done immediately and it’s done from a presumption that we have been elected and we have been anointed—I shouldn’t say elected. There is a sense that takes place and it’s human nature, really. It’s not unique to the Carter administration. We’re here, we’ve been selected, we know what we’re doing. There is a great lack of using history as a base point in any practical politics to measure what you’re doing. It intensifies incremental movements rather than long-term strategic movements and thinking. We had not discussed whether it had worked or not. I had lunch with some Washington reporters, an off-the-record lunch at the City Club when it still existed, in which we were discussing, in early January, what my role was going to be. They all said that had never been successful. Nobody had ever been in my role. You were either inside in the flow or you were outside and not in the flow. I thought they were overstating the situation. I would think less so later. I would always come back to that conversation because it seemed to me that they had been fairly accurate in many cases about not really knowing, if you weren’t there day to day, what was going on. I often missed much of the decision-making going on. We never really discussed the difficulties of trying to maintain that, first of all, because we had no perception of what the job would actually be like. None of us really understood—none of us had any experience with it—what the White House would be like, what the pressures would be like, what
the day-to-day reality of being in an administration would be like. So we could blithely make these statements without any reference to that.

Now, in terms of leading the country, the problem we had from the very beginning seemed to me that we never did come to grips with that. That’s one of the things that haunted this administration throughout, in my perspective of the public. It really was affected in the staffing of the administration. One of the points that I was always most concerned about can be illustrated with an anecdote, because it’s a good one and it serves this purpose. The President came to Washington as the President-elect several times in the transition and stayed at Blair House just before his inauguration. He was meeting with the transition teams about what we were going to do about the economy. We had a meeting in Plains of the economists. There was a particular discussion that took place. Most of these people had now been appointed to slots in the administration or in the White House. They discussed what the agenda issues and problems were coming up and the President had asked me to participate. The President got very angry in the discussion. People were pushing him in the areas that he had not thought about and was not interested in. It almost seemed to him to be a series of individual agendas that people had been storing up for a number of years that they wanted to get exercised without any master plan. Literally, each department and area people said, “We’ve got to do these ten things. They are now top priority items that we must do.” There was an hour of that. When he came to office—in retrospect it’s hard to remember this—he was a very frightening figure when he arrived in Washington. The fear in late 1976 was that the man was going to be uncompromising, tough, and it was really a question of whether he could get along with anybody. Later, the perception was the entire opposite. But that was the perception coming in. And it was reflected that morning. He was very angry at the discussion. Carter has certain physical attributes that show themselves
when he starts to get angry and one of them is you can see tension in his face in his veins and his neck, and he was very upset by what was happening. I could see all during the meeting these people were digging themselves in deeper and deeper and deeper and they were really not cognizant of that. At the end of the hour the President really exploded. The President-elect exploded.

He and I had a discussion afterward. I said I thought it was a frightening situation because what seemed to be lacking was any sense on the part of the people who were now being brought into the government of why Jimmy Carter had been elected. The bulk of these people were Democratic activists who had been waiting to come to power in any Democratic administration; in fact, they would have been swatted in with almost any Democratic administration elected. There had been no argument or discussion about “why are you here and what are you supposed to do.” It was a set of, “we’re going to institute all these things we’ve been waiting to do for all these years.” The President did not impose his ideas at that time in the discussion. I only bring that up because it was vividly burned into my consciousness at the time, and he and I had a conversation about it afterward. I was just appalled, as I gather he had been, that they didn’t seem to understand what we had just come out of and why we felt we had won or what we were supposed to do. Part of the problem was ours, because we had never developed that either in the sense that you’re referring to, which is exactly how do we translate that into that role of leader of the society as President. We hadn’t given much thought to that, other than the rhetoric and emotional ties. We ran into that difficulty right away, which was one of the hard practicalities of staffing the government.

Through most of the campaign, the decision-making, the major drive, the center of the campaign’s drive and intellect was held by very few participants from the very beginning and
throughout the election. It was not a very expansive group, and did not expand very much even in the general election for which there was a lot of criticism. That group shared a basic sense of why we had been elected, but it was not something we attempted to educate anybody else on. That’s why I wrote that memorandum at the end of 1976. It was really directed to that problem of saying, “Look, you all need to understand how we got here and what our particular political difficulties are on the horizon both short and long-term.”

YOUNG: Who were these people that were presenting him with the government’s and the Democratic Party’s agenda? I’m not asking you to name them, but just to place them. Were they departmental people, Congress people?

CADDELL: They tended to be departmental people.

YOUNG: Not Hamilton and Jody?

CADDELL: No, no. In fact, in the meeting neither Hamilton nor Jody nor Gerry. I was the only person from the campaign core that was in the meeting, and I was self-invited. The people who were there were essentially people who had headed the transition teams. They were already slotted for department jobs or White House slots. They were the programmatic people who had been working through the transition both before the campaign, and particularly intensively after the election.

THOMPSON: Could you say just one more word on the content of this unique personal relation. I have a friend who—we all had him as a friend—who was called down a week or two after the election and he had 20 or 30 items to discuss with the President. On the basis of his long experience, he thought there ought to be somebody in the administration who would keep the President from making a fool of himself, a wait-a-minute man. My question to you therefore is:
was yours that role, a cautionary role or counseling role, or was it an idea role of new horizons and new things to do, or was it some combination?

**CADDELL:** It was probably some combination. I had some responsibility on the political end for raising caution flags to warn against doing things that were going to be destructive, and later to be concerned about the day-to-day specifics, or the drive to do something without any long-term perspective of the impact or perception of that on his consistency with other long-term efforts. But initially it was, and most of the time it was, a combination idea and cautionary role. The cautionary part was grounded in politics. One of the luxuries that I always had in this relationship was unlike most of the people who were in the administration and involved in substance. The real problem of this administration in the beginning was a separation of its substance and its politics. If anything in the beginning pointed to what would be a problem, and it flowed from the President and from the personalities of those involved, it was to separate the political decision-making and perspectives from the substantive perspectives. The political people, or Hamilton, Jody, their staffs, and people related to them, were not deeply involved or interested in the substantive discussions on what his economic policy was going to be. Hamilton, for instance, never really had, and would I think openly admit, that he never really had an interest. The substantive people were not responsible for our political fortunes. I view politics, by the way, not simply in reelection. I don’t mean to simply be crude politically, but my theory had been, as that memo in ’76 articulated, that in order to be effective as a President, we were going to have to maintain a level of political strength and popularity in the country in order to overcome some of the institutional roadblocks—which I didn’t understand and would come to understand a lot more graphically later—that we would face. There was a need to blend the two together, to understand your politics as an expression of your ability to maintain support, and to
educate the country and keep it with you. This was important as a political lever to move your policies through. We never really did address that in a structural way, nor did we ask, “How do you operate that?” Political decisions or political concerns would take place in a small circle of people who would raise concerns about politics and argue with the substantive people, but the substantive people would go on their own when they were particularly charged with responsibilities, and ordered by the President to do what they felt was best without reflection of politics. There was a natural and immediate conflict that took place there as well, creating what I would call a huge vacuum. There was no one who really had a strong foot in each camp.

The reason that I could, from the outside, offer ideas or suggestions or be as outrageous as I chose to be in terms of direction or substance or as a gadfly was because no one could question that I was in a political sense, that I lived in the real world. Nobody could argue that I just had my head in the clouds. I obviously had been through that, I had proven that I was as tough politically as anybody else and could accomplish as much politically when it really got down to it. That is what always blocked up the substantive people. Substantive people, no matter how able they were inside the White House, rarely were ever in the councils of political decision-making because they never came with the credentials or the respect as political thinkers. In some cases, that was a well-deserved understanding. The negative side of that was that there was never an effort to educate or to really mix those together. It is not from a conscious lapse at the time, but again you have to understand the psychology of we’re going to go in there, we’ve been elected, we’re going to do this for the country, we’re all ready to go and boy we’ve gotten elected and it proves how good we are. It is, I think, one of the dangers that overtakes people.
STRONG: Is there some relationship between themes in the ’76 campaign and southern Democratic politics? Why was it in that campaign that Jimmy Carter was the only one articulating those themes?

CADDELL: I don’t think it is and given my study of southern politics, I’ve hardly argued that it is necessarily inconsistent, it was just a reflection of that. Stylistically, it was in a sense religion and Southern Baptism. When I did my thesis work at Harvard on southern politics, what I really ended up landing in was the middle of the influence of Southern Baptism on the politics in the region. Once you got there, at least for what it was worth, it seemed to me you could get in there and unravel a lot of things that related to style. In a sense, Carter was out of that stylistic milieu of being a Southern Baptist, that kind of rhetoric, that kind of belief in relating to a long purpose and goodliness to politics. That was helpful. That was uniquely southern. Most southern politicians didn’t understand it either. Carter was the first one who was really thinking it through as it related to a national political set of circumstances. But clearly he was best equipped because of his background in that cultural background. He was at ease at being able to talk about these things because he came from a background where that was understandable and acceptable.

WAYNE: Moving from the campaign into the Presidency, you noted that you had frequent and increasing conversations with him about the fact that he was isolated, that he had lost some touch with the country by the nature of the Presidency. I’m interested in how he reacted to that comment? Did he react defensively? Did he show surprise? Did he want to know what he should know? What was the reaction?

CADDELL: It depended on the time and the incident. Sometimes his reaction would be defensive and say, “I’m not, I think I understand.” And sometimes it’d be, “You don’t know what the hell you’re talking about,” which was also probably true. But oftentimes it would bother
him a great deal. During the course of this Presidency I wrote a series of memos, for which I became internally noted. It was a series of four or five really long memos at various points in the administration. Usually they ran anywhere from 40, 50, 60, to 70 pages for him in terms of what I thought was happening and why. And each time, one of those popped up and had an impact, at least in the short term. It usually came when we were not doing well, so there was a real concern anyway. It was coming at the right opportunity and he would focus on it. In fact, the first time was in the fall of ’77, October ’77, and the next one was March-April 1978, which would lead to the first summit meeting at Camp David. The first real summit meeting staff meeting took place in April of 1978, when Carter was going to change the way he did business. If you go back and look at it, that didn’t come out of the blue. It really came in response to a long memo that I wrote at the time in which I made some very strong suggestions and quite graphic language that I thought the President was on his way to being a failure and the reasons for it. That certainly got some response from him.

WAYNE: You mentioned also that there were times when you were in the doghouse with him. Did he ever get mad at you because of what you told him, or about how he was doing or how the country perceived him?

CADDELL: Yes. And rightfully so. I always felt that somebody should be for whatever the risk was, and I had nothing at stake. It seemed to me, after watching the White House operating and watching people go into the Oval Office and not tell the President what they all felt, that somebody ought to be willing to throw all caution to the wind and be somewhat more candid with the President. I felt that we had a particular relationship that protected me from the long-term dangers of that, which it did. But like any person, when you’re up to your neck in alligators, it’s hard to remember your purpose was to drain the swamp. And here I keep coming in to ask,
“Why have you not yet drained the swamp,” and he’s sitting there being surrounded by things, foreign policy problems, I didn’t know about. And here I am hammering him. Sometimes we would get into strained situations. That was most evident in the fall of 1978, and in the first couple of months of 1979, in fact.

YOUNG: You had almost a premonition during the transition of the danger of the President losing touch. Was this a view unique to you? Were there others among the political advisors who perceived things the same way?

CADDELL: There were some general concerns by some of the political people. Never, I think, as strongly felt or at least as conceptualized as I tended to do in that memo. That initial memo in ’76 really became important during the first hundred days. The thesis of that memo was accepted by the political people. There was a general consensus, and the President certainly agreed with it. I argued that we did not have a mandate, that one of the things that was unique was that he was a post-Watergate President. We were the first post-Watergate President elected. Looking at survey data, the automatic benefit that came from being elected was the halo effect that took place from election. The Presidential popularity that seemed to exist with past President-elects was not happening to Jimmy Carter. In December, peoples’ perceptions of Jimmy Carter were basically no different than they had been the day of his election. And this, by the way, also followed with Reagan. I now have a long set of theories. I think something has changed with the Presidency that puts Presidents in an extraordinarily difficult situation of being able to maintain a public base. The first glimpse of it is in that inability to be given that benefit of the doubt or that brand of euphoria. It seemed to me that by January the numbers still were not moving, and that we were going to have to somehow build our own honeymoon. We would have a natural honeymoon coming up that we would have to somehow build that expansion of real popularity
that seemed to be in suspension. That’s when we first came up with the program in the first couple of months. This is when we got into this. It’s very important because time-wise it becomes a real detachment. The day the energy speech is given, we walk away from this. Those first efforts at the fireside chat, the sweater, the walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, the radio show we did, the town meeting in Clinton and so forth, all those were thought out and recommended in that memo basically, except for the walk, which was his idea. Jody and Hamilton, we all agreed that we needed to do these things. We needed to build up that support; we needed to relate to why we had been elected. While it wasn’t all conceptual, I think on everyone’s part, at least initially, there was a perception we had to do that. My feeling was that we essentially had to buy time. We did not know what we were really going to do substantively and that we needed to expand and reassure people and build our own honeymoon and that was in fact extremely successful. Now we faced enormous criticism. Later it would seem to me that that was one of the real dangers. We had listened to the criticism right in front of us without regard to the success we were having out in the country. This was not just to improve our popularity but in fact to assure people that they felt comfortable that he was going in the right direction and so forth. He was getting through as a leader. We got so much criticism about being so stylistic, and that’s the period of time when my memo had gotten leaked. We never know for sure, but there are some suspicions of what happened. As with most things, it was leaked with a purpose, which was to in fact put us in a more defensive posture in the sense of these things we were doing.

But what happened the day the energy speech would be given is a real departure point, in my mind. From that moment on, for the next year or so, Carter would never again do those things or use those tools that he had so effectively brought to bear in his first couple of months in the Presidency. They would totally disappear from the table. And they would disappear because
in fact we went to substance with a vengeance. I mean we literally went from one extreme to the other extreme. It was not a blending. And that goes back to the inherent division between who was running which agendas.

**YOUNG:** You made a statement earlier that seemed to suggest this dilemma or problem about how to maintain public support so that your policies could move forward was in part the difference between leading the country and doing the business of governing. I believe you said, “We never addressed this problem in a structural way.” My question is, how could it have been addressed in a structural way? What means did you have in mind? What means did you advise? What did the President think about?

**CADDELL:** What I’m saying is I didn’t advise any particular structural means any of the time. I was saying here are some things we can do. I think there was general agreement on the part of the political people by the end of the administration. Hindsight is very helpful, experience is a great teacher. One of the problems that we had and one of the advantages we had the day he was elected was that the city of Washington was terrified of him. Remember, he had not been the first choice of his party. Most of the institutional leaders of his party originally opposed him. I was in Washington two days after the election, and I felt like I was in Paris. The day before the Wehrmacht arrived. A Democratic city should have been in euphoria over the coming of a Democratic administration. I was speaking to a consultants group. All the consultants at the end of every election get together. The mood I found was very different, very apprehensive and it was that he was an outsider, he was totally unknown. Remember he had gotten elected by stomping all over the Congress, basically, for which there was real resentment, and the city of Washington. And yet, he was now the President of the United States. It seemed to me that this would affect our relations with Congress. It seemed to me we never made a decision of how to
come in and deal with them. You can see the institutional operations. Do you come in and attempt to? We never thought it through. Jody and I would discuss this later on, this being a real problem we had not thought through when we began the Presidency. We didn’t know. Should we have come in and gotten very tough from the very beginning and drew the line and just used that advantage that we had, which was a fear about him, and drive the thing? Or should we have come in and attempted to coop the city, to coop the power structures of the party and the Congress? What we ended up doing, as we all later agreed, is that we did it in—and pardon the expression—a half ass fashion. We did a little bit of this and little bit of that. But we never had a strategic idea of, look we must come in and take charge, or we must come in and make allies of these institutional leaders. So we would get into the situation of the President getting with the Congress and congressional leaders and promising cooperation, almost giving the store away from Day One trying to convince them that he was going to work with him. And yet, at the same time, from a certain sense of exhilaration and superiority of winning, we were looking somewhat askance at the society and the structure of the city itself, without regard to whether people in Washington liked us or didn’t. We were really working against ourselves in that way.

**YOUNG:** Is it fair to say that the problem was dimly perceived as to how you got hold of Washington, but not sufficiently, clearly perceived or anticipated as to a definite strategy for dealing with the problem?

**CADDELL:** That’s right. It was never perceived as enough of a problem to have a coherent strategy. It was dimly seen and we had these discussions that I’ll give you some of the anecdotes about. But we were so busy filling the government at that point. The President’s time was preoccupied with cabinet selection.
YOUNG: And there was this vague feeling that it may not be such a problem because after all we won the election.

CADDELL: Exactly. Look if we can win this election and become President there is nothing we cannot do. It’s a superman theory of coming to office. You just believe that all things will bend to your desire or to your needs. Eventually, it was like a movie script in which everything would end up and we’d all ride off into the sunset and everything would work out positively. It was that sense of confidence that you need, but I think in retrospect, we agreed it was a little naive. And it was. It was an incredible achievement. Nobody had ever done what Jimmy Carter had done in terms of being elected President, so there was no reason to assume that merely running the government should be a problem. It’s funny now, but in a sense you have to understand how much those opinions really mattered. There was some initial concern about the appointments for instance. I’m saying there are pieces of this you can see whether it’s Carter being upset at his staff people. We said, “We’d better do something about expanding our popularity here, getting in touch with people, giving Jimmy Carter a lot of momentum at the beginning of this before we know we’re going into energy,” while we knew from the very beginning that we were going to be in a position to go with a major energy program.

A lot of problems were over appointments. Now Presidents don’t have to deal with, as their staffs do, this great fight over who would be in power. There was a great discussion at the time because there was a lot of bitterness on the part of the campaign people, as there was in the Reagan administration, over not being given positions and positions going to people who had not been involved in the campaign. Again, there was no theoretical understanding of saying, “What are the trade-offs?” Do you take people from the outside who you think share your perceptions? Reagan has some advantage in this actually because this is an ideological base to the people who
share his ideology. Do you take people who share the direction you’re going who are from the outside but who don’t have the experiences, or do you go into the establishment structure and take people who have the experience?

**CADDELL:** In February we got creamed by what I described at the time in an angry letter I wrote to the President as “resume government.” I said essentially, “I think what happened is that everybody got together in Georgetown and agreed that they would all push each other’s resumes and had taken over the second and third levels of the government.” The fact is we were finding that we were. Hamilton was irate at the time, as was Jim King, who was doing the personnel direction. We could not get our cabinet people and our other people to give any help at all placing our political people. Understand my problem, we were angry because we had a lot of people beating us over the head who had worked for us and were friends of ours and who deserved, we felt, to be in the government. What we were not saying at the time, and it was again only dimly seen, was in my letter at that time. I was the first person to articulate the problem that we had a government full of people who didn’t understand why we’re here, and seemed to be very unsympathetic to anything that was involved in us getting there. It goes back to this. But we had not thought it out as a strategic thing of saying, “Well gee whiz, how are you going to staff the government, where is the line you draw between bringing in people who are experienced and bringing in people who have some instinctual idea of what your vision or your goals are or even why we’re here?” We had that wiped out very early on and we suffered with it. A lot of what would later happen in the administration would be the proverbial closing the barnyard door after the horse is gone, trying to reestablish control of the appointments processes and the political appointees. We allowed department heads to make their own appointments basically. We lost control of the departments.
YOUNG: You say we. Who? The President indicated, consistent with many of the statements he made, the importance of the cabinet and cabinet responsibility and the notion of allowing a fairly free hand on appointees. Wasn’t this the President’s wish?

CADDELL: It certainly was the President’s wish. He was out making these statements about how grand this was that we had never really thought through the implications for actually governing. When we did, we were already too late. I’m saying you never understood where the tensions would come until in fact they had already come and gulfed us.

YOUNG: The opposite swing is the firings.

CADDELL: The firings would come in the opposite swing, but would be rooted very much back to those very first appointments because Joe Califano and Mike Blumenthal and others had gotten themselves in real Dutch with certain people in the White House from the very beginning by taking the President’s mandate to appointments in their own departments. In the view of some of the people in the White House, they ran with their departments without regard to the President. So the roots of the firings go all the way back to that period in January and February.

THOMPSON: In this exchange with Jim and Steve, especially in the beginning, I got a glimmer, maybe it’s wrong, a little flashlight picture of Carter that I think we’ve not quite had before. Let me see if I can highlight the question by comparison. You’ve talked about the anger, about the indignation. We have an unpublished manuscript on Lincoln. Lincoln’s leadership detachment is mentioned as a very central quality, almost without precedent. Here was a President who spoke about the unjustified and unnecessary war; at the same time, he was trying to raise an army. He said when he came to Washington, “Many of you are surprised that I’m here. Most of you were against me. Most of you had different ideas about the issue that is most important, slavery.” You almost had a feeling in the case of Lincoln, for better or for worse, that
he was standing outside of himself looking at this issue. Carter seems, with all the belief and trusting of the people and with all the humility, anything but detached as you describe this anger. In trying to understand him as a leader, is there a different quality, is there a lack of this Lincolnesque detachment that the biographer writes about?

CADDELL: I think so. How much of it is Jimmy Carter and how much of it is that now this is a very different office than it was a century ago? I’m not sure. You have to make that decision. The problem you get swamped in is one of the things that always concerned me and others who were with the President. I never got any understanding when he would ever have time to reflect on anything or to be detached, even if that was his instinct. He had spent two years on the campaign trail, literally going day and night as hard as he could possibly work. There was not a lot of time for reflection. Of course we suffered from it because when we had made all these commitments, no one had had time to really reflect about coming to Washington and being the government. One of the things that happened here—and I never really discussed it with the President because it’s only struck me in recent months—and something that I would really like to talk to him about, is I used to argue with the President that I thought he was a different person than when he had gotten elected. He had changed in the office, and I did not personally think for the better. But you have to understand I was sometimes hysterical in these times. You just generally don’t go around saying these things to Presidents. I’m not sure in retrospect how much the problem was this lack of detachment, and I’m not saying his personality thing. I’m also saying he was driven by the office, the inability to ever sit down and reflect, “We’ve gotten elected, now what do we do?” We had never been in motion before that. Remember the transition planning that Jack Watson headed up, which caused an enormous problem the day after the election. He was off in isolation at the President’s instructions, totally separated from
the campaign. These people are supposedly planning his government or doing his work, in the meanwhile the people who are in the trenches, who are in fact living daily with what’s working or not working or that sensibility, are totally isolated from that process. All this was the President’s own decision exactly to do this. But nobody ever challenged it to say, “Mr. President, this is crazy. Some day you’ll end up elected, then you’ll have this transition, and it won’t have a relationship to your election and it’ll be the beginning of a problem.” Now if I saw someone doing that, I would make that case. But none of us had the time or the experience to make those kinds of reflections. We were desperately concerned every day with getting elected.

Having gotten elected, the President woke up and realized that the whole world had really fallen on him. It’s one thing to say for several years that I’m going to be President, I can handle it, I’m confident and so forth and then to wake up and have it in fact put right in front of you. The President began to become much more cautious in a lot of his own appointments, in a lot of his own actions. He was different from what he had intended to do partly because that force and the battering of demands that were going on at the same time were out there. You make this appointment to do this foreign policy, what are you going to do about the economy the minute you get here, and so on. All during the transition, you could still see the flares where Carter would not want to go along. For example, we had the meeting with the economists at the pond house in November, which became an all-day session most noted for the fact that the President did not serve anything except water. Those of us who been through the campaign understood that ahead of time. But we had all these people who were on display, if you will. The President was extremely interested in these discussions. I again invited myself and did a lot of work on consumer studies, so I had a real interest in the economy and consumer behavior and attitudes. I was very intrigued by what happened. We had a consensus meeting in which everybody spoke to
the President, all summed up by Charlie Schultze. This went on for six hours. His attention never wavered, which I could not understand. Bert Lance and I were in the back ready to fall asleep. And at the end of the meeting I remember everybody left and the President asked me what I thought. It was the Vice President and myself and the President, and the President said, “Well, I’m glad you came. What did you think?” And I said, “Well I just thought it was terrible, I thought it was long.” But I said, “My major concern is I don’t agree with him. The economy seems to be falling apart at this point. I just don’t see what they’re talking about.” The President said, “I don’t either,” and he said, “I’m really reluctant to go along with what they’re all advocating,” which was eventually what we would do, but to a lesser extent than was then being advocated. These were the stimulus packages for December. A month later, the Vice President said, “Well, that’s why you don’t make it. Policy in this administration, that’s why we have these experts,” which is something that I would constantly remember as we would go on down the road on the economy.

In December, by the time we had made a decision to go with the stimulus package because we had consulted everybody in Congress, all of whom agreed to do it, it was clear that we were not in a recession, that things were not as bad as they had said, that the indications I had been seeing before had turned out to be exactly right. Charlie got up and gave an explanation that was 180 degrees different than the consensus we had had a month before about the economy. I thought Stu was going to fall off his chair, because Stu and I were the only two people at this meeting with the cabinet who had been at the meeting, other than Charlie and some of the participants. I was there to brief the cabinet on why we had been elected and had stayed through this discussion. I remember saying to Stu, “Can you believe that this is what Charlie said a month ago and what we’re seeing now.” But again, we became anecdotal. The President’s first
instincts were not to go the route on the stimulus. That was his own gut instinct; this was not followed. He would get beaten down. He got beaten down in December by his own people, in a sense who said that he must do this. And we ended up doing it and got in the embarrassing position of having to withdraw the thing by spring. Then again it was because we didn’t have a strategy. I had argued in December, for what it was worth. The thing I was writing about most was inflation. There some were some people in Treasury, as I now find at the end of the administration, who had in fact argued a strategy that we in fact sit very tight on inflation. We weren’t expected to solve every unemployment problem in the first two months. We ought to protect ourselves and work slowly, because then we would be able to point to progress, but protect our flank on this inflation thing. Those kinds of discussions never came up for strategic discussion about administration policy. These are all anecdotal because nobody ever sat down and said, “What are we going to do?” We were under such pressure, the Vice President, Stu, people inside the Democratic Party, the speaker and so forth saying, “You’re a Democrat, you got elected, now we’ve got to do something right away about unemployment and stimulate the economy.”

YOUNG: It was a united front on this—the congressmen, the advisors everybody.

CADDELL: It was a united front. That’s right, except for the President, who did not want to go along. The President kept saying, as he said to me, “I don’t think it’s that bad.” Carter’s instincts were much better on that, but he did not feel confident, in my opinion, to override every economic advisor, every cabinet officer, and the political leadership of his party on this point. He and Bert Lance were the only two people who basically didn’t want to go along. Lance did not want to go along for ideological reasons and the President didn’t want to go because instinctively he didn’t think things were that bad. And I know because I was in the middle of that
conversation saying, look at this consumer data, this does not show the consumers are sluggish. In fact, it looks like we’re going to have a very strong Christmas. We’re going to have a big Christmas buying, which is what we had. But that model of what happened to the President began to repeat itself time and time again.

I would really like to ask him a question. I’m not going to bother him while he’s writing his memoirs. I thought I would wait until he got them out of the way. Later I want to ask, “How much did you feel and at what point did you feel as President,” which I’m sure he’s felt later. He’d been that way in the campaign, I understand. In the campaign, when Jimmy Carter did not want to do something, come hell or high water, he would not do it. The fight we had with him on ethnic purity, to get him to retract the statement about ethnic purity was just incredible. It stands as a marked contrast to some of the earlier actions that took place. On the ethnic purity thing, the President knew that he had not made a racist comment, knew that he never meant it to be a racist comment, and was outraged that anyone would think to the contrary that that’s what he had meant, particularly given his background. We had 72 hours in which everything that all of us had, including his wife, was thrown into that fight right to the end of the line until Andy Young finally convinced him he was going to have to do something about it. That was a relatively easy matter. Contrast that with following his instincts. All through the campaign he would follow his instincts when he decided he was right. That’s why people said he was too tough. He could really be a tough taskmaster that way. He would listen to advice and make his own decisions. We begin to see a different pattern start to emerge, when he would just get weighted down with all this advice. Part of it is the character of the President, and part of it is the inexperience of being President-elect. And another part of it is the lack of long-term strategy, not coming in with a
sense of what our problems are going to be, what we are going to face right away, and so on. We were doing it all in a relatively ad hoc fashion.

**MAGLEBY:** Pat, I’d like to go back a little bit to the nature of your administration after the ’76 election, and then get a sense of how you organized your business with your involvement in the administration. You’ve made clear to us in a concise way the need to have independence, which was a primary reason you didn’t want to take an official staff job in the administration. I’d be interested first in knowing if there were other reasons that prompted you to not want to join it in some official way or as some full time staff member.

**CADDELL:** Well, the major reason is that I wanted to go back to my business. I had things I wanted to do with that. There wasn’t anything I particularly wanted to do in the White House at that point. It was essentially a personal decision. I wanted to get to things I wanted to do.

**MAGLEBY:** From the discussion this morning it’s clear that you were involved from time to time quite intensively. Was your degree of involvement or level of involvement sporadic or rather constant?

**CADDELL:** It was sporadic. I suppose it was, at a low level, constant and then occasionally sporadically came into very high volume, so I’d be doing nothing but work in the administration. You had to be careful or you could just work daily and end up being sucked into doing all sorts of things that were not very important or really meaningful that would take away from all the other things that you had to do. I would say it tended to be more sporadic involvement. I’d go to the White House at least a couple of times a week, unless we were really involved and I’d be there a lot.
MAGLEBY: In your negotiations or discussion with President Carter about your providing him with survey information and playing the role you’ve described for us a bit, were there any discussions or conditions that he had upon you? Was it a sort of two-way street?

CADDELL: Well, no. It was very informal. It’s not like we were negotiating anything. I wanted to let him know that I didn’t have any interest and he didn’t indicate that he had any either so we weren’t having a big problem. Then he defined what he wanted me to continue, which is more of a reassurance. There wasn’t much negotiating. In retrospect, I wish we had, but it was just an understanding. All he was reaffirming was something I perceived already and that most other people perceived.

YOUNG: Did the President give you specific assignments that he wanted you to survey?

CADDELL: Sometimes. He rarely paid attention to what we were doing on the surveys. For someone who had shown such a consummate interest in the ’76 campaign, it’s always one of the things that I felt was the great irony in the administration. We were always being attacked for doing surveys, which we did not do as often as I would have liked. I certainly wouldn’t like to do as many as my friend Dick Worthy is doing now. It was really the President’s overriding interest in ’76, which stopped after ’77 once he got into office. It was as though he had left that behind. It was a curiosity, but he rarely asked about that unless he had some particular thing. There were a couple of times involving things overseas when he was very interested in my finding out from source material what was involved in public opinion. Those would come to the NSC and through Zbig, or he would call me and say, “I want you to do something for me.” Otherwise, he would wait until we were in a real issue like energy for instance, when we were really trying to figure out how to convince the country to do something that it was not going to like doing and how much room we had and how successful we were going to be at convincing them that they should
make these sacrifices and do these sorts of things. There it was a tool, then he was interested because again it was part of his policy operation, which was, “How successful are we at doing this?” The Panama Canal, for instance, was another one. But rarely did he show much interest in the polls himself, until 1980.

WAYNE: Did you do polling for other units in the White House with poll results tied into what Anne Wexler was doing?

CADDELL: Sometimes. When we would do a survey, or when there was a need for something usually. Various people had inputs in things they were interested in finding out or had some relevance to what they were doing. So if we were conducting a survey, we would try to include as many areas as we could that people were interested in. I would end up having to referee, giving them what we could do and the cost of what we could handle.

WAYNE: When you say “when we were doing it,” were you doing it for the DNC or for the White House?

CADDELL: DNC was paying for it; it was all going to the White House.

MAGLEBY: And how would those reports be circulated? Was that at your discretion, or Hamilton’s?

CADDELL: Generally it was at my discretion. Well, Hamilton and I would decide. People who wanted specific information usually got that. The analysis was done of the numbers and so forth. There were a lot of public polls going on too. In terms of political analysis, that was generally tightly held. The decision would then be made as to whom to include or not include on the issue. For instance, the Panama Canal had a lot to do with the State Department and Secretary Vance and some of his people. They were essentially the clients because they and the people in the White House were working on the Panama Canal with the clients.
MAGLEBY: Would you or someone who works with you who was knowledgeable about survey research provide some synthesis for the White House or the public polls on a regular basis?

CADDELL: No. Not really, I did occasionally. I would occasionally; usually I would never get a chance to. Someone would call up about a poll and be moaning or groaning.

MAGLEBY: Polls about popularity ratings?

CADDELL: Yes, they came so frequently. Sometimes I would synthesize it because there would be something in there that I wanted to get across. Most of the time this became a topic of conversation. Probably we could have done that more systematically, but the resources weren’t there to do it.

JONES: You did synthesizing across polls?

MAGLEBY: Yes. Elements that might come to the attention of Pat that he couldn’t translate for the administration on a regular basis, maybe weekly.

CADDELL: We didn’t do it that frequently. I did it when I thought it was necessary.

YOUNG: I was interested in this point that you made a moment ago that after the ’76 election the President really did not focus a great deal of his attention on the polls. Did that surprise you?

CADDELL: A little, because he had always had such an interest. It didn’t surprise me very long because he was dealing with everything substantively. Political decision-making and the substantive processes were usually haphazard. Usually they came too late into the policy formation. So it stopped surprising me. He really wasn’t interested. He was interested in being President, in substance. All of us on the political end began to live with that frustration. Hamilton, Jody, and myself were unaware that that was the kind of President he was going to be. So I was a little bit surprised. As I said, the irony was that everyone kept saying that he was
running the country by polls. Either I’m a very bad pollster or this analysis is wrong because clearly he’s doing a lot of things that are clearly unpopular and he’s doing them with malice and forethought.

**YOUNG:** How do you account for that recurrent image of Carter while he was in office that everything he was doing was being driven by his popularity ratings or by electoral considerations? The picture you seem to be painting is that he was paying very little attention to that. How do you account for this?

**CADDELL:** Well I think partly it goes back to ’76. He was viewed to be a master politician. We were all viewed to be. You have to remember in the early days we were the master politicians, later we would be viewed entirely differently. But it seems to flow with the seasons. It was a real campaign operation. The press had that sense that he was always concerned that way, so they felt that that’s in fact what he must be doing. I suppose it was something that was left over from that. Also, when Gerry came about to do image stuff, which I think in retrospect was much too ambitious given how much could be done, it tended to be, well, that’s what he’s trying to do. I was always amazed by the fact that the political press in Washington particularly wasn’t more cognizant of the fact. Clearly there wasn’t any real political direction. The politics was ancillary to most things being done. That’s why President Carter was going to be a substantive President, which I was all for. I just didn’t think you could totally abandon your ability to have that leverage politically.

**MAGLEBY:** Let me pursue a specific example. Panama Canal. Would you have done, fairly soon after the signing, a survey on something like that?

**CADDELL:** Well, we started with Panama much earlier.
MAGLEBY: OK. There was a whole lot of tension as I remember between the administration and Senator Byrd about the timing of the vote. His analysis of the polls was that if we bring it to an early vote, we’re likely to lose. “We’ve got to wait for opinions to move on this, so I’m going to sit.” Remember the President said he wanted a vote by Christmas? What role would you have had vis-à-vis congressional liaison, Anne Wexler on that kind of survey?

CADDELL: Well, what we were trying to do at that point on the Panama Canal treaty was very simple. The first thing you have to understand is that we knew that we could not pass the canal with the numbers as negative as they were. This is the first time I’d even seen a public issue, except for Watergate, which was really more dangerous, which the polls resolve. In the Senate, some people were not going to move until we had removed some of the political pressure by getting those numbers up. No one was asking us to get the majority or 60 percent, but they did not want this thing losing 3 to 1. This is the first time I can think of where survey research was intended to affect public measurements as a directive of strategy. I was to find out which of the best case arguments we had in terms of putting together the case. From testing, we’d know what would most move public opinion in the short term and what would have the best impact at raising those numbers so we could reassure some of those Senators and get us in the ball game to carry the proposition. I didn’t have much to do with the decision or the vote, but I understood that we needed more time because we had to wage a campaign. There became an understanding that we had to wage a public campaign, we had to get these numbers up.

MAGLEBY: But then why wasn’t that communicated to Carter so that in his public statements he wasn’t pressing for an early vote, which only antagonized Byrd further?

CADDELL: Mainly because again it wasn’t until after that, as I remember. I don’t think it was until sometime after that that we really began to sense how difficult the public selling job was
going to be. That’s when we began to evolve the strategy of going out and doing the grass roots thing, using Landon Butler’s and Anne Wexler’s operations.

**MAGLEBY:** Ford and Kissinger endorsed this.

**CADDELL:** We had the Ford and Kissinger endorsements, the President’s fireside chats, the speeches that people were giving, and all the pressure on businesses to mount a concerted effort. It wasn’t until we realized how bad the initial impression in the White House was on Panama. Maybe the opinions weren’t very strongly held and they’d just move overnight. Once we got a sense that that was not the case and that it was going to take a lot of hard work, then the strategy changed. The President sometimes operated under the illusion, as many of us did, that on these important matters people would be voting strictly on the merits of these propositions.

**YOUNG:** Do you know of any instance where the President was dissuaded from a course of action because of readings of public opinion?

**CADDELL:** Well there are small things where surveys had a bearing on not to do something more than it was to do something. There were incidents, usually small things, putting off initiatives. It generally was an infrequent thing; it was just one of the tools in what usually was a major political case being made.

**YOUNG:** Would it be fair then to characterize the White House or the President’s behavior in terms of his policy initiatives, the substance and timing of them as being relatively little influenced by readings of polls?

**CADDELL:** Absolutely.

**YOUNG:** Was that true throughout the administration?

**CADDELL:** It was basically true throughout the administration. I would talk to Stu or I would have some discussions with him, but the White House and government policy machinery was
being driven in relative isolation from political concerns, except as they were brought into the
table. One of the problems was that when they did tend to pop up on the table, the substantive
rather than the political people would make the political analysis to decide what the political
arguments were. They would often miss the real political implications in some of their political
judgments because their political focus in their own policy formations tended to be interest group
focused. It tended to be the people they were hearing from that would overwhelm their
perception. The constituency group lacked any ability to step back and say, which is what I often
said, “Whatever these groups are saying, most of their members and most of the country could
care less about this issue, or the impacts are general, not specific, and your popularity is not the
sum of all of the specific groups and actions. You deal with the interest groups from the top
down, not from some of the bottom up.” But they would tend to exercise their own political
perceptions. Their political experiences were limited, and they tended to come from the interest
groups that each of them dealt with, or the pressures that they had.

**YOUNG:** Which means a Washington bias.

**CADDELL:** That’s right. Which meant that we were usually being pulled to and fro because
when you did x, then you angered y and you would hear from y and then someone would want to
do z and that would anger x again. I kept saying at different times that the most important thing
we should have done is decide who we were not going to win. We tried to appease everybody,
which is what policy people always try to do because it’s not nice to have people yelling at you.
You lose the perception of what’s important, and we never made a decision in the White House
to decide that, unlike Reagan, by the way, who made that decision. Unfortunately, it’s gotten
beyond his definition. But we needed to make a definition of who we planned to alienate, so that
it wouldn’t have bothered us when we did it. We used to have this problem with farmers. We
spent an enormous amount of our effort trying to appease farmers whose votes we would never be able to get in the farm bill. We would always justify it by being concerned about farmers and states that in fact we had advantages in, and then we would do things constantly for the farmers at the expense of our position with consumers. You should make policy on that basis, but you always need a factor of where your base is going to be, and where you are going to get support. I don’t see how government can functionally operate or elections can have any meaning when in fact you do not have parties or constituencies that are rewarded or not rewarded by success.

YOUNG: One of the rather striking things about the Carter Presidency is the investment of human and staff resources in the marketing or building of issue coalitions. Wexler’s operation was a major investment of energy that doesn’t quite parallel things you’ve seen in the most previous Presidency. The picture I’m getting is that for reasons independent of receptivity to the country of a policy initiative, policy was decided and legislation was developed, and then after that the coalition building began. Is that a fair model?

CADDELL: Yes, basically that’s how things worked.

YOUNG: And what you’re saying is that you made calculations of who your enemies were and what your constituents were.

CADDELL: What your long-term goals were in a world in which so many things you’re doing are competing against themselves. What prioritizes your decisions on issues? We ended up with these massive issue agendas that the Vice President would put together and was responsible for, which I’m sure you’ve seen or heard about. These things would be very thick, with all the initiatives we were going to do every quarter. They were insane. They were insane because most of them were in conflict with one another and there was a laundry list of every possible thing that you could possibly want without any consideration of what is the cumulative impact of all of this
and what are you really trying to get accomplished, and that’s why by the summer of 1977 we had managed to put ourselves in a position where we had done three things. We had walked away from the stylistic tools that we had been utilizing to hold public support. We had a massive energy program on the table that we were very much tied in to, and then we had managed to also inundate the Congress with proposals in a whole raft of areas until the point where everyone was screaming at us. People who had screamed in March that we weren’t being substantive, by July and August were screaming, “You’re burying us and inundating us in a blizzard of proposals.” The Reagan administration is no different in that it would cue off of what its noise levels were in its own environment. In fact, I was giving an explanation to the House leadership Monday, and used as an example to them the time when we had made some promise that we would have a program for which there was literally no interest in the country, except it was a program that putting it in was going to cost us politically a great deal because of who was not going to be satisfied. The reason it was driven in the White House, and this is a true story, is that every day somebody in the press room would get up and say, “Jody you promised that by now you would have x program done, where is it?” So we came back saying, “We’re under this enormous pressure to have this program done,” and that’s what drove it. That perception in the press office came from the press, because that was the environment in which we were hurting. Jody’s coming back saying that’s the driving thing. In fact, there was no interest in the country at all. What I’m saying is that there is no perspective outside of that to say, “This issue doesn’t really matter outside of Washington. And this is what we ought to be moving toward as goals.” Our goals were all substantively short-term. They weren’t in the sense of saying we want to get the country from point A to point B and where do things relate, where are the trade-offs and what do you in fact do, and what are the costs you’re willing to pay and so forth. That we never did.
YOUNG: But it does seem to me that a lot of the things that Carter was talking about looked rather long term.

CADDELL: There’s no question that the substance we were dealing with was long-term substance. That’s the difference. In fact, that’s the irony. The President should be commended for feeling very strongly about one of the most important things in this administration, which was not just to simply deal with issues and their short-term problems substantively but to deal with and to come to grips with long-term problems. One of my arguments in the energy thing was you’re going to have to deal with long-term substantive solutions instead of these incremental things that will blow up in your face five years later or in fact cause another disaster in some other sector. You have to find a framework if you’re going to bring the country with you on programs from which they are not going to see the immediate benefits or understand. You have got a real educational problem, a framework to in fact hold and enlist the public support because once you’re doing something long-term, your enemies will all be institutional short-term groups by definition. They’re obviously out to maximize their short-term gains. Therefore, your only real support is going to come if you can get the country to follow in the direction you want to go and that requires some constant education. You just don’t do these things in a vacuum. You must relate them to some approach. That’s what I’m saying we were not doing.

STRONG: There are a number of questions that are raised by the way you described the political advisors and the substantive advisors. Was the circle of people from whom Carter received political advice unusually small? Did it change during the course of the administration?

CADDELL: It essentially stayed very small. There is both a yes and a no answer to this. The answer was that essentially its heart was very small and stayed small. Just prior to the Camp David period in April or May of 1979 we had a meeting on the Truman balcony, which was the
first time in the administration. The people in the room were myself, Rafshoon, Jordan and Powell, the President and his wife. It was limited to those participants, who were essentially the campaign participants in ’76. That was the first time since Election Day that that group had operated alone and had a meeting alone in the course of the Presidency. I think that is in itself rather striking, given that was the most candid level of discussions. There were always independent political pieces being brought in or out, and there was an enormous number of people who took it upon themselves to also offer the President political advice, which in some ways is healthy and in some ways I thought was counterproductive, since their political advice wasn’t worth much. All it served to do was confuse matters. There was a legitimate criticism that there was not enough input politically from other people. But that can be exaggerated. In fact, there were very few other people that, frankly, had good political judgment and that I thought had a lot to bring. But even when you could get those people down, we didn’t include those people. We didn’t include them in a way in which they could have a real impact. There’s too much fury about, well, there wasn’t enough political advice. Some of that is self-serving. What it did cost us, however, was the ability to really have some political inputs from some people that could have been meaningful.

**STRONG:** Did the political advisors have some sort of agenda that was different than the substantive agenda? Was there a continuing commitment, for instance to the themes of the ’76 campaign?

**CADDELL:** Well, my argument was that there was not and that’s what we were paying the price for. I had become an extremist on that matter by early 1978. The political agenda of the political people was not to become overwhelmed. It was one thing to stay in office and to be reelected. The second thing was to help Jimmy Carter to do the best job he could. The people
who criticize Presidents for bringing their political advisors with them are extremely naive, because in the White House you ought to have somebody who cares about your success as opposed to carrying their own agendas around. Almost everyone else in the White House had a separate agenda other than the President’s, except his political people. It seemed to me that, if anything, they wanted to help the President and stay in office. The problem was they were being buried by the everyday things as well. Jody, in particular, was involved in a daily battle with the White House press corps plus holding all the other pieces together he was involved in. So Jody’s ability to function deteriorated. I am talking about the more general political direction of the administration to serve that way. Hamilton was a short order cook in that sense. Hamilton’s job through most of the administration was whichever crisis that had popped up that day, trying to keep it from blowing out of hand and trying to organize that. Either you had to have more political people whom the President trusted and whom we all trusted and would allow into the circle, or if you were going to keep the circle small in terms of the confidences, remember the confidence comes because it has been hard-won inside of there. There’s a trust and a confidence in their ability and how they handle pressure, which comes from experience there. You’ve got to relieve them of some of the duties so they can be able to be involved with political issues.

**STRONG:** Was Carter trying to any significant degree to synthesize those two sides?

**CADDELL:** No.

**STRONG:** Why not?

**CADDELL:** Well I think he was interested in what he perceived as a good President. The President believed that if he did a good job as President, he would be rewarded. He tried to do the right things. I always liked that. I used to be most critical about not addressing our political things. The thing that I really thought was admirable in the President was the fact that I never
had a doubt in my mind that when he made a decision, he did what he believed was right for the country. He would invest a great deal in making that right decision. I don’t know that you can ask a lot more of someone in that job. But it seemed to me that he did not worry about the synthesis problem, as did many of us, including Hamilton, Jody, Gerry, and myself. The second level people in that area were for long periods frustrated by not getting the President to deal with his political problems or to deal with just the ones that had to do with dealing with the Congress or the amenities of politics.

YOUNG: You did not name Bert Lance among the political advisors, and I wonder if as you think back on it whether this problem would have been as acute for the President if Bert Lance had stayed? Was he serving some kind of political advisory role?

CADDELL: Well not so much a political advisory role. Bert was serving a role in my opinion whose loss was very difficult for the President and for the White House. He was the bridge. If there was a bridge, he was it. He bridged the political people, the President, Rosalynn, the substantive cabinet, and the substantive policy machinery. It may well have been the case that the President should have made him chief of staff from the outset. He probably wouldn’t have gotten into the trouble he got into. Jody and I once talked about that. In fact, when Jack and Hamilton were having their problems throughout the election, Jody once said on the plane when we were flying back to Atlanta that maybe the solution was to make Bert Lance chief of staff and end all of this mess. I certainly identified Bert early on as a supporter in that. I always had a good relationship with Bert because of that and it seemed to me that he was sitting in a critical slot. He was sitting at OMB. They had the budget and the reorganization and the President’s confidence. His loss was really great because then there was no other bridge.
YOUNG: How should one evaluate the following kind of comment we’ve heard from several people in the course of these sessions? The one thing that you did not do when you went in to see Carter was to talk to him about the politics. How should one evaluate that as a commentary on Carter? He was not amenable to political advice.

CADDELL: When he was making a substantive decision, there’s a limit. I take the view in politics that 90 percent of the substantive decisions you can make without reference to politics. When I talk about politics, my greatest concern was communication. It seemed to me that in a sense as long as you could keep the country understanding what you were doing and where you were going, and try to address that and relate in fact inside that structure to your substance, the country would give you great running room. This is the irony of it. As someone who was involved in the political end, I would always say to the substantive people you have more political running room than you imagine, because they would be very interest group oriented. In fact, on many of these things people don’t know and they are not going to follow the intricate details. The great mistake is trying to take every issue and weigh it politically, saying, “This is going to upset these groups and that group.” Most of the time it has no impact on them whatsoever. It’s a little bit more into the stream. But the real question is how you are controlling an overall set of perception. About 10 percent of the problems that you deal with, and I’m obviously probably exaggerating the percentages some but not by much, are things in which there are real political prices, costs to be paid because they reach across constituency groups. They reach across the perception of your direction. They have real heavy political connotations. You could get away with the first 90 percent without regards, and I never made a political argument to the President on substance, on those things. It seemed that we ought to do what was right. That’s what we were there for. We were supposed to get something accomplished. My
question then was once we were doing this, what are we also projecting, what kind of leadership are we giving, what’s the purpose that we’re saying all of this is for? On the 10 percent where we ran into problems, it was the issues that were highly political or that had highly political implications. We had to struggle to get any political attention at all directed to those issues.

YOUNG: Could you give us some examples, illustrations of this, such as a major initiative that had heavy political costs?

CADDELL: Well, I’ll give you an example. Back in the spring of 1980, all of the decisions were being made about economic programs. These policy programs were again a little bit after the barn door had closed, and in which we were already in a campaign. We were under enormous immediate pressures in terms of the impact on the economy and people making decisions about the economy. This had begun in the fall of 1979 for the first time in the administration. Around November or December, we began to have Saturday meetings in the White House. The Saturday morning meetings were chaired by Hamilton and included Miller in the Treasury then, Duncan in energy, and Charlie Schultze and Stu. They would sit down with the political people to discuss where we were going because we were now in a campaign and we were terribly frightened. I had suggested the meetings initially because I was terribly frightened that we were now heading into 1980 with all the possibilities of real economic reversals in an election year. And by late 1979, more than a few people cared about coming back. So we had these meetings to discuss substantive agendas we were facing, the kinds of problems we were seeing coming down the line and we tried to make them more sensitive to what we thought our political concerns were. Those got knocked out for a while because of the Iranian situation. We tended to have those with less frequency and they tended to be less dominating until again in the spring when we faced
problems again with the economy. That was a first real effort to have an input and it was because in the past we had had none.

In the inflation program of ’78, I had written one of my less than restrained memos to the President one day, which was titled, “The Making of a Quagmire.” It was how we were about to walk into a quagmire on inflation and economic issues. Mainly, I felt the President was being badly served. It was an example of the problem with politics being self-serving, but it was one of great frustration to me. We had this program and we decided we needed to do something about inflation, so we were going to do something about inflation. The problem was that none of the people who were working on the plan at the second or third levels believed it would work. I know that because I went and interviewed every one of them personally. When it was clear to me that they did not believe it would work, the only promise that I made to them was I would not quote them to anybody, including the President. They were, to a person, negative about it. I then started raising questions, and although I was not invited, I interjected myself into the process, screaming that we could not have another failed policy. This is again a political concern. What the hell are you going to do, come out with an economic policy that you know is going to fail and then down the road make us look like political incompetents, which is what we’re already facing? The argument inside the cabinet room the day I made this case by somebody was that, look, we’ve got to do something because we have to look like we’re doing something, and later on we’ll change it and anyway we all need to just stay on board on this. At that time, I pointed out to the person the irony of that comment since I’m sure that those same kinds of comments are what had permeated the first quagmire. That’s where I got the idea of the title of the memo. I wrote the President a piece saying you’re doing this, none of your advisors believe it’s going to work and you’re being led this way and why are we doing something that we know is not going
to work? Why spend the Presidential capital at this point when we don’t have an answer or even a modicum of confidence it’s going to work? The President went right through the ceiling. He called a meeting of his senior advisors and asked them point blank did they believe this was going to work and referred them to the fact that I had this memo. They all reassured him that this was what he had to do. And they all sat there, the senior people. My argument with the President was, “Mr. President don’t ask them, ask the people who work for them if you really want to get to the bottom of this.” But what had happened was that the machinery was in motion at that point. We were several days away from a speech, an announcement when I got into it. Then I went to Hamilton and said, “Hamilton, you must do something to stop this.” Hamilton said, “You go talk to Charlie Schultzze and whoever else and the President. I agree with you, but I don’t understand this enough and I try to stay out of those things.” This was a very candid comment by Hamilton. The problem was that I didn’t have enough power or stature to stop the thing in its tracks. All I could do was appeal to the President. I mean, talk about throwing the grenade through a window. There he is calling everyone while you have no comprehension. You have to see it to see what the machinery has done, the whole government is in motion now to produce this package and somebody’s saying, “Why don’t we turn it off?” One of the things you learn is once a program is in motion, the momentum gets a life of its own, such that even a President has a hard time turning it off or stopping it. Everybody told Carter, “You’ve got to do something because everybody’s worried about inflation.” I kept arguing, “Why do something you know is going to fail?” In the end, they assured him it would be OK and that he’d better do it. We changed it later, but we in fact did it. That’s when the President and I didn’t talk for a while because I really made a scene, frankly.

YOUNG: So you got in the doghouse.
CADDELL: I got in another doghouse because I had really pushed the issue probably beyond the way it should be pushed. But I’m trying to give you an understanding of the politics, the problem of politics in the sense that the substantive people were right that the business people and everyone was clamoring for this. They were right in the sense that it was the best they could think of in the short-term. There was no process in the decision-making to say, “If we do this in the short-term, what gains will be made if we don’t protect our long-term credibility? If we can’t find long-term answers, we will only pay the price for the country substantively down the road.” There is no forum that overrides those short-term pressure points that we’ve got to do something. The birth of long-term disasters over time in the White House comes from decisions that take place in these very short-term environments. All for the right reasons, it’s only when you apply them against long-term.

JONES: An organization can’t learn from failure. You’re saying you also can’t stop failure once it’s underway.

CADDELL: I think that’s a really great question, whether you can or not. Part of the problem that was so apparent in our economic policy was the stake that people begin to have. I don’t know whether Fred Kahn discussed this, I know Michelle did at the time. The stake the people begin to have in policies that have failed. It’s a product of Vietnam in the sense of my college experience. It became easier for me once I’d been through the administration to sympathize and learn about the human qualities that go into people who’ve invested so much in programs, how hard it is to get up and say, “This is all failed and let us execute ourselves.” Instead, you keep going. It just wears the people down. It eats them alive. It’s a very distressing thing to observe on a personal level with people, because people suffer from it. It’s also distressing for the President, because everybody’s got stakes now in programs and the last thing anyone wants to hear is
somebody jumping up and saying, “Boy, have we all failed. Let’s all learn from this.” The only thing you can do is to make surgical strikes. I really became an advocate of staff people and policy people being held with the President accountable for their successes and failures. They would be much better served that way. I’m sure there are a lot of other problems to it, but that problem would be overcome.

**JONES:** My question really is a variation of one that’s been asked about substantive politics. Some time back you said that you were certain that in most and perhaps even all decisions the President, in his mind, was doing what he thought was right for the country. One test of what’s right for the country is a political test. A lot of politicians use that as a test, that’s their experience. What are other tests, and what tests did the President rely on as regards what’s right for the country? I don’t think it comes from above. Maybe it does.

**CADDELL:** It’s as good a place as any. Most of my experience with politicians is that most of them will make every decision they make on the basis of politics, with the country be damned. One of the things that I will always feel good about, having worked for Jimmy Carter and for which I think he deserves credit over time, whether it’s in energy or the Middle East or whatever, was born out of a sense of doing what was right and not worrying about the politics. His basic decisions were made out of what he felt was right. In domestic policy, it was obviously a healthy economy, but also an equitable one. That was a real driving force that I think all of us shared. In foreign policy, and I’m sure the substantive people have articulated it even better, there was a great belief in trying to take a complicated view of the world, and serve US interests particularly in the Third World and Africa. Carter’s goal is to work for peace. Carter came in at his inaugural address and said he wanted to end nuclear arms, and in fact that’s what he still believes today. If you want to understand what his goals were in the administration, read his farewell address
because that really goes to the points. That was perhaps one of the best expressions we ever had of what we were about, and it was on the day we were leaving. He discussed the nuclear arms race, the environment, and human rights and their relationship. He was guided by those principles. By the way, we didn’t have to worry about where they came from because I think most people shared them inside the administration. I think there was some consensus about them. And I think they’re ones that most Americans shared as well.

YOUNG: There was it seems to me in that farewell address an example of the priority policy agenda.

CADDELL: But understand how the farewell address was written. It is the only address other than the Camp David address that was written without any substantive input other than ideas from people. It was essentially Rick Hertzberg and his staff, Jody and myself writing the speech.

YOUNG: And Carter.

CADDELL: And Carter. We did not go through the normal processes of speech writing. It’s an irony because it’s only one of a couple times that you could say that about.

YOUNG: But it seems to me as though the President knew what he said in that speech all along.

CADDELL: That’s right.

JONES: I’m still perplexed, I guess. It seems to me that a certain number of principles that are set down as guiding policy decisions at one point were also accepted by the American people. That to me is a political test. But there’s got to be some source by which at some point the President says that meets the test, that meets the standards in my mind or it doesn’t, and convinces himself that it isn’t political.

CADDELL: We never came to grips at the outset with the setting of intellectual structures or tests for our real goals, what we were trying to accomplish, where the trade-offs would be, and
what was more important. Both in casting the administration and then in fact in implementing policy, we were initiating policy, plus dealing with all the events that were happening to us at the same time. We did not establish those tests. The failure of those of us involved in the campaign was that we never really educated our own government to what we in fact wanted to do. We had a lot of talented people who had built up expertise in areas. They would understand the environment. The President was in favor of the environment. What we had never done was really educate our own government to whatever we arrogantly perceived to be our own mission. And a lot of people were left to their own devices.

**YOUNG:** There are some historians who would say it’s rare when any President can educate a government to what he wants to do.

**CADDELL:** I’m sure that is. But it seems to be in retrospect. I haven’t been in many governments, but it seems to me to be worth the effort. Reagan may do this. He came with people who share with you an ingrained idea, which tells you what you’re going to do.

**YOUNG:** Right. But that’s a declaration of war against the government. That’s what Reagan’s doing.

**CADDELL:** I’m just dealing with the model, not the substance.

**JONES:** I just have one other reaction, again on this substantive political thing. You made the statement that 90 percent can be decided on substantive grounds, and 10 percent were much more conflictual. The problem though is that in that split, in knowing and making certain in your own mind that you know the issues well enough, that you’ve got a 90 percent rather than a 10 percent or that what seems like a 90 percent. That is a substantive decision for which there should be no major political implication. But that’s going to have a lot of political implications.
For that kind of advice it seems to me the political people ought to be there to help, not only with the 10 percent but also with the 90 percent.

CADDELL: They’d say, don’t worry about the 90 percent. That’s right. As I said, the substantive people would often, because they were reacting to interest groups, claim they would build a molehill of politics into a mountain of politics on substantive decisions that were being made, when in fact the political people could have said, “Gee whiz don’t worry about that. Let’s not worry about it.” So the President, to protect himself, said, “Don’t bring politics in,” but that didn’t stop it before it got to his desk from being worked out that way.

JONES: In your experience, was he aware of the number of substantive people as you describe them who were in fact making these political decisions?

CADDELL: I don’t know. I suspect sometimes he did because the discussions would come up. I think he was, probably because of where he sat, less aware. Nobody had the job to do that back when policies were being devised. That’s why you said economic example. By the time it got to the President in the cabinet room there had been several days of long meetings on what the economic policy was going to be, there was so much that had already been resolved below or factored in. He was being presented with the arguments and the substance. I don’t think that there had been anyone protecting those political tests at that level when it was first being formulated.

WAYNE: You painted a picture of a very political man who performed the political miracle, and then conducted a nonpolitical Presidency. He had a stake in the maintenance of its nonpolitical character for whatever reasons. I’d like to ask a short question, and then an open-ended one. I assume that the stake he had in maintaining his nonpolitical character affected his own judgment
of how others would react. In other words, he would underplay the political motivations. He chose not to see the politics for himself. Is that correct?

**CADDELL:** Well no, I think he was sensitive to the fact how much they were politically driven. I think the President began with a concept, that he’d articulated to me on occasion, that everybody was interested in helping the country and doing what was right. His instinct was to give people more credit for their concerns on merit than perhaps some of them deserved. And he would often give them the benefit of the doubt and in fact a lot of times when he lobbied or argued with people, often successfully, he would argue with them on their obligations to the country. It seems to me that there are people who make the same criticism about his view about foreign policy, that he tended to see more good in the people he was dealing with than perhaps he should have.

**YOUNG:** He also sort of made a public issue out of not doing politics as usual, as he put it.

**CADDELL:** Yes. He was trapped by his own rhetoric.

**WAYNE:** Can I just follow that up? My open-ended question is this: There obviously was one time where at least there was a built-in institutional mechanism for politics, which was when Rafshoon came on board. Could you tell us a little bit about that time and your relation with Rafshoon and whether you used any polling to help him in image creation?

**CADDELL:** Gerry’s coming on board really came from a very lengthy memo I had written to the President in the spring of 1978, suggesting that we were in for some very severe problems that I had predicted some months before that, in fact, had come. It was about this time in the administration. I had argued they were in the works several months before they had come to fruition. The public polls reflected that we were now in deep political trouble. I went through a number of reasons why I thought they were both conceptually and structurally in. the White
House in that case. I had written this memo with Hamilton’s and Jody’s blessings on this problem. Gerry was still outside then, and we shared offices, so he knew I was doing this. This cause started that time. We had some meetings. Mr. Kirbo came up from Atlanta and we had a big meeting in the cabinet room. Essentially, the family, if you will, on this thing and the President were obviously quite startled by what I had said and it led to Camp David the first time, with the staff trying to straighten out and to encourage Hamilton to take on more coordination. We ended up trying to deal more with the structural, conceptual problems.

One of the problems that was delineated in that memo was about communications, the inability to utilize the government well to get messages across. And in some meetings some discussions that Gerry and I had with the First Lady, the subject of Gerry’s going was raised in the White House. She took that and went to the President with it and basically that’s how it all came about. Gerry went over to handle that. We did use polling very much. Gerry and I did not have as close a relationship in that period as perhaps we should have. Gerry also got immediately inundated with being inside. There is the danger of being absorbed in all the day-to-day problems. He had the speechwriters say these things. He got dragged down the whole tube of the crushing day-to-day work. You know, it’s the “if you live through today it’s a real accomplishment,” mentality that exists in the White House staff. So he was trying to construct some instruments that would help us communicate better. In retrospect, I still don’t think we had addressed the conceptual need that no matter how good the structure was, unless we in fact addressed this large problem in fashioning a good instrument or weapon, it wasn’t going to be helpful unless we had some ammunition to put in it. It ended up being more a part of the White House bureaucracy over time than anything else. It really never served to do what we had initially all hoped it would do.

**YOUNG:** You’re referring to public communication?
**CADDELL:** Public communication, yes. “Getting our message across” is the term we kept always repeating. I’m sure you’ve heard that phrase more than once. Our problem was that we kept wanting to send little messages, and you have to send big messages to support them, but we didn’t really address that.

**WAYNE:** Is that why Rafshoon left?

**CADDELL:** No, he left because of the campaign. It was always scheduled that he would go out to get ready for the election, and by that time he was more than ready to leave, having been ground up in that place.

**YOUNG:** I’m going to want to ask you some more about the White House and life in it and that staff system.

**MAGLEBY:** While we’re on this, I want to sound you out a little bit about the general problem of perceptions of Carter as the President and perhaps a politician. One of three groups would be Washington elites. One of them would be the media and perhaps media elites. And the third one would be the mass public. You’ve given us some insight into how you viewed it. I may have an incomplete list here, but some of the raps on Carter, maybe bum raps, were that he was a political incompetent, at least in running Washington; that he was ineffectual and unsophisticated. There may be a whole litany of others. I was just starting to think about how he was being depicted. To what extent do you think his view of Washington, which you talked about earlier, and the question of co-opting or fighting set him off on a bad track perhaps with the Washington elite and in the media, which may have reinforced or perhaps even informed the opinion that got started about him being ineffectual?

**YOUNG:** But all of those messages came out of Washington.
MAGLEBY: Would you speak to this general question of perceptions, which later on will carry us into the ’80 election as we talk about strategy? I’d like to get your sense about what you were telling him about how he was being perceived and what kind of evidence you were getting.

CADDELL: Nobody had any problem figuring out how we were being perceived in Washington. All you had to do was pick up the Washington Post every day and get a good dose of that. And you’d get into this psychology. It goes back again to the problems of co-opting or being tough. I should say for the record that I really do believe that we should have come into the town and torched it. We would have been much better off. Given my choice, that’s the one I would have chosen. Inevitably, we were going to be up against some very real problems. I wrote a memo to the President in October of ’77 that first started delineating that Gerry side with me, saying that we’re really headed for big trouble here. One of the arguments was about the institutional problems that seemed to me to be arising. We had a situation where the Presidency was a much weakened office because of Watergate. My argument was that we were maybe making this too personality oriented, when, in fact, it wasn’t that at all. There may have been an institutional problem here, which was that you see power, even if you can’t exactly quantify it, but you see it as a finite situation. Presidential power had slipped off in recent years both to the Congress and to the press. The role of the press had changed enormously. They had become much more participants now. They were, in a sense, warlords, as was Congress, Washington and others. To think that because everyone liked Jimmy Carter, which they did not, that they were going to gleefully hand him back that Presidential power would be a mistake. Power having left him, they would fight hard to retain it if they could. One of our problems was that we were not, as the institution was not, as; strong as we had been traditionally. It was complicated by the fact that we had alienated a number of people in getting to the position. Remember there was an
undertone from the very beginning of bitterness on Capitol Hill and among Washington society that should not be underestimated. In the sense that we were the Georgians who had come here and had walked over them and stomped on them on our way to Washington. He had run against the city and done all these things. I did not think that could be underestimated. Then you went to doing what Reagan did very well, in learning that lesson that we had, which was to go right in and co-opt everybody. A lot of it is symbolic. It’s to go to the parties, it’s to see people, it’s to consult with these people. We did not do that, and it made a lot of people resentful.

MAGLEBY: Why did they do it, though? Was it conscious or accidental?

CADDELL: Well, a little of both. Part of it was we had a lot to do. There was a lot on the agenda to do. People were busy; you’ve got to allocate your time. The real things in front of you looked a whole lot more important than going to Georgetown and hobnobbing with folks. Jody and I much later agreed that if we had a second administration we really ought to make an effort at redoing this.

YOUNG: Party going never got you anything?

CADDELL: No. Not at all. When I say parties I suppose I mean working parties. When the Carter administration wanted to party, they tended to want to party. Too much of a literal understanding of life. On the other hand, the President would tend to bend over backward to prove initially that he was not going to be intractable. We ended up sending these conflicting signals. It now seems to be in retrospect that a lot of the cake was in the making already, and we only accelerated the cooking process by not making a choice about these things.

MAGLEBY: Or by not sending out countersignals. Several people in these sessions have indicated that the Carter record had gone basically unrecognized or poorly communicated. If you
could do it over again, how would you have tried to correct the question about effectiveness or sophistication?

**CADDELL:** I raised the effectiveness thing, which is an important thing, early on in the first memo I did. I said, “What we need to do is win some very little victories here. We need to convince the country that you can, because if you’re going to have a long-term set of programs in energy and all these other things in which the pay-offs will not come for some years, then we must find ourselves some winnable battles initially. We must say this is something we’re going to do and we should go out there, and remember we’re following Ford, who didn’t exactly turn the country upside down in being effective either.” We’ve got to get them accomplished, and then going back to the country and say, see, we told you this would happen, we can do this thing, it was effective, it got done, and now these things that I said we really need to do have been done. We need to do something like that in order to buy some credibility with the public, so we can say that gee whiz, now we’re engaged in these longer term things that are going to take more time.

**MAGLEBY:** But that requires prioritization.

**CADDELL:** That requires prioritization, it requires saying, “You’ve got this list of 800 things, let’s just take about three of these at the moment and realize that there’s a schedule for how we’re going to get in these other things, but you must crawl before you walk.” We didn’t do that. We just inundated everything. That goes back to the prioritization problem. The reason was it is clear now that given what I think was the institutional biases and the personal biases involved, the first opening that people got, we would get hammered pretty hard. The press did not like the President personally either, and he didn’t have much use for them. He’d made that clear in the campaign. He expected them to do their jobs the way they were supposed to and did not
understand why he felt that he should, frankly, kiss their ass to get along, that he probably had to do that. It was not until much later that he went back and said we should have done this and that. That’s why I said I was for torching the process. People react much more favorably and cooperate much more if they think they’ve got something to fear from you, particularly when power is at stake. When people think they’re going to lose a power struggle to you, that goes back to my institutional argument. If you’re dealing over Presidential power or some finite power and someone wants to keep what they’ve gotten, and you want to take it away, you will not get it by being nice. It’s that simple.

**YOUNG:** I have three subjects I’d like to ask you about. One, I’ve been rather struck that you haven’t particularly made a point of talking about the Democratic Party as a problem for Carter in terms of where he was on the spectrum of the party. You have talked about his lack of electoral connection with the party, but not so much in terms of the Democratic Party in Congress. Was this a Presidency regardless of the questions of technique, style and all of that? Was this not a Presidency, given its major legislative program, that wouldn’t have had easy going in Congress anyway, even with the best of style and technique? The second thing I’d like to ask you about is the Carter staff or the staff system. You’ve pointed out one particular problem. Substantive people and political people lacked bridging. What do you see as the distinctive characteristics of the Carter staff, and its strong and weak points? The third thing I wanted to ask you about was the genesis of the crisis-of-confidence speech and the Camp David process.

Let me put the first part of it, the Democratic Party issue, in context. One of the interpretations that others have offered us is that a main source of Carter’s problems with the
Congress and with his image stemmed from the nature of the Democratic Party at that period of time in Congress.

CADDELL: Well yes. You have to point to that because in fact the Democrats were very fat in Congress. They had stayed in power even when the Republicans were winning landslides, unlike today. They didn’t institutionally have a lot to fear from the President, much less a Democratic President. They have their own institutional prerogatives. Our problem in the Democratic Party was that, as I wrote in a memo at the end of 1976, our problems are not with the Republicans at this point. Our problems are in the Democratic Party. First of all, it is so diffuse and we are going to be forced to the agenda that the Democratic Party instinctively is not going to like; which is you’ve got a lot of problems with inflation, you’ve got real limits to what the government is going to be able to do and so on. We have come pledged to do things that are outside of this normal run of things that emotionally interest Democrats. Government reorganization and efficiency have never found a Democratic platform. We had seen that in the primaries, we had several real problems. All of our long-term political problems would be decided within our own party. We faced a real contest there, particularly with the liberal wing of the party. Carter had a couple of problems with it. One is that he had a real cultural problem that could not be underestimated. It’s not as nice as it is being someone who arrived in the Carter campaign from Massachusetts. The truth of the matter is there were a lot of people who did not particularly like southern Democrats and people with southern accents, particularly people who were extremely religious. Stylistically, if not culturally, that grated against some people. Not the least of which to mention was their own ambitions having been overridden.

YOUNG: Particularly those Southerners who won.
CADDELL: Yes. Southerners who won. Southerners were wonderful, as long as they just knew their place. You could not underestimate that problem, that cultural difference. We had seen it all during the primaries. I pointed out that we had won the general election not because we had carried Democratic voters in Democratic cities as heavily as others had done, but because we were able to cut the suburbs and particularly because of Carter’s performances in rural Ohio and Pennsylvania and New York, which offset the lack of margins that we got out of traditional Democratic cities. A real danger point here was that after four years of being in power as Democrats, it would be unlikely that we would ever be able to repeat our showing in those areas, which meant that we had to enhance our performance by definition in Democratic areas. That problem it seemed to me ran smack into this problem of prioritizing the things that Carter was going to have to do. I had seen it with Michael Dukakis in Massachusetts, who had gotten elected in ’74 and beaten in ’78, but who had upset a lot of liberals. He had been basically liberal, but having to really tighten the budget, work for economic growth, and hold back some of the spending that was going on in Massachusetts was met by an enormous opposition. Then I predicted in that memo that in fact if you look at it, it’s public. We were likely to have some of the same kinds of difficulties if we were not attuned to understanding this and this was central to our problems with Democrats. Those reasons were foreseeable. They all came to pass. There were some others I listed. I said you have other power bases in Congress, totally independent of any view or anything else in the Democratic Party. They were fiefdoms, and they’ll operate this way. They assume they will be here when you’re gone. The irony is of course now they’re gone too. That’s why, by the way, it is a positive development, because it means that if the Democrats come back to power in a Congress, you’ll find the Democrats probably for a period of time operating with much more coherence as a party for the first time that they didn’t have to since
World War II, between a President and Congress in the same party. They now know that if a President fails, they may get swept right out with him. That lesson had been lost after ’68.

**YOUNG:** When you said that if you’d had your way you may have torched Washington first, did that include the Democratic Party?

**CADDELL:** No, not particularly. I just thought that we were going to have to; in part, we did. It meant that we were going to have to be tough with them, to say, “I want to cooperate.”

Symbolically, the President went to see the Democrats in caucus when he first got elected. First, he had a meeting when they dragged him down to Herman Talmadge’s house down in Georgia, where they all proceeded to tell him where to get off, so to speak. Then he came up to Washington to see the membership. I remember he was addressing the Senate caucus. I remember the President’s reaction. He was very nervous about what to say to them, and said this to one of his Senators who had been one of his supporters. The Senator said, “Oh, you shouldn’t worry about that, they’re scared to death of you.” Rather than going in and just being conciliatory, it seems to me he was simply offering to turn the cheek. He should have played on those apprehensions. He should have first of all gone in and said, “I was elected, this is what I plan to do, we are the same party, we share the same goals, I need your help and I’m going to work with you but I’m going to be President.” He should have made that clear from the beginning. The carrot and the stick would have been better than no stick and a lot of carrot. We gave a lot of carrot and a lot of surprise. This is not any different than human nature it seems to me. There’s going to be testing and pushing and pulling of a new guy. And even if he’d come from the Congress, there would be that.

Democrats had been out of power presidentially since 1968. A huge number of people now in Congress had not been there under a Democratic President. In the House, something like
40 percent or 50 percent of the Democrats had never been in office with a Democratic President. There was going to be some “warlord” feeling out there. Carter should have understood very early that he needed to show that he was going to be strong and tough; that he had been elected President. At the same time, he had to offer to cooperate and to mold that relationship together. But you couldn’t do it by simply turning the other cheek or by giving carrots. We just didn’t approach it as a strategy like that. That’s what I’m saying. So we dealt with everything that came up on its merits. Some things, on their merits, you turn down and anger people. Other times you give them what you shouldn’t have given them because it only incites their appetite. There was no coherent thought out approach to say again, “How are we going to deal with these Democrats in Congress? How are we going to make this party work as a party, given that we’re going to have to ask them to do a lot of things that traditionally they’re not going to like to do?”

YOUNG: Congress had gone through a decade of reform unparalleled in its history so that there were not only new members, but there were new members who had played a more important role in the structure of the place.

CADDELL: That’s right. It’s very important. One of the things that we did not do for a long time, and I always thought we should have, was to spend a great deal of time trying to rule the leadership that had very little ability to deliver. Some of the young congressmen, like Chris Dodd, made this point to me very early. Dodd is now a Senator; he was a Congressman in the Watergate class. He’s a good friend of mine. He said we should have gone in and co-opted the younger members. They basically had a very similar view; they were far closer to Carter in terms of understanding the reality of the new world of politics. Most of them came from suburban districts and had to live on that tightrope. We should have made an extraordinary effort to go after those people and bring them in the White House. The President had no allies. We needed to
identify them first as potential allies. That strategy, when it was first raised, was ruled out of order by those people handling the decisions on the Hill who had influence on that, because of a fear that it would upset the leadership who would fear that we were trying to go and run them.

We should have gone ahead and done that. We had a lot of potential guys there who were anxious to participate, and we could have made them allies if we had had sense enough to give as well as to receive.

YOUNG: But the leadership’s wishes were deferred to.

CADDELL: That’s right. The leadership was deferred to because no one wanted to alienate the leadership. That was a mistake. The leadership, as I learned just this year working with them in terms of the Reagan thing, is impressed by power. They’re impressed by getting the hell knocked out of them if necessary. They don’t like it, but they understand the barrel of a gun.

JONES: Did you have reason to change that Democratic Party analysis that you’d done early on?

CADDELL: No. By 1979-1980, a number of people, Dave Broder among them, had gone back and referred to that thing and said, look how stark and true this is. This is in fact where Carter tends to be at this moment inside of his own party, not the Republicans.

JONES: Had you drawn the conclusion along the way that it may very well have been inevitable that the President would lose in 1980?

CADDELL: No. I never thought that was inevitable because I always assumed that we were very good at politics. All those people who thought we were politically inept had not run against us. Those that had tended not to make that case. The second thing was the ’76 election. The reason that we almost lost it was that somebody else would have to beat us too. There’d be a lot of pressure on the challenger. It seemed to me that the real question was, could we get through
not having a bloody primary? What had always been my fear was that a bloody primary season, against particularly a Ted Kennedy, would tend to split the Democratic Party along it’s natural contours and begin a civil war, the likes of which is not nice for the Democrats.

JONES: Highlighting the exact points in your memo?

CADDELL: Yes.

JONES: Weaknesses of the party?

CADDELL: Yes, of the party. We were going to try to walk the middle ground as a President. We found a lot of support in that middle. That’s not bad general election politics, because we always assume in general that we would do enough things, that we would have some appeal in the suburbs. We assumed that we could push. We were very flexible in the ideological movements to be able to hold the center in a Presidential election. But that created its own grave dangers inside the party primary process, as well as challenges, particularly from the left.

YOUNG: One of the judgments pronounced upon the Carter Presidency is that it suffered extraordinarily from something wrong with the kind of people or the kind of staff system that comprised the President’s immediate organization. Can you give us your thoughts on not just that allegation, but on the strengths, the weaknesses, the nature of the outstanding characteristics, negative or positive, of the Carter advisory system in the White House? And second, if it had been different, would it have made a big difference?

CADDELL: We may have to get into some specific pieces because I’m not really sure how to address it in general.

YOUNG: Just remember as you saw it, looking at it from the outside, what did it look like?

CADDELL: If you look at the White House staff, I’ve already made the case about politics and substance, which I think is the heart of the problem. The second is the makeup of the staff, not
only in the White House but in the government, since they tend to be interrelated. First of all, I want to say this because I think it’s true, there were exceptionally talented people. You’ve met a lot of them. They are extraordinarily talented people and worked very hard. Despite all the accusations of being incompetent, I don’t think you would find a brighter, more able group of people. Let me go to the questions of the system, which more than anything else is maybe more relevant here, because certainly the material here is not a problem as it was in some White Houses where I think you could point to lack of quality. Particularly the second and third levels in the Carter White House were often a lot better than given credit for. David Rubenstein, for instance, was just a terrific person. I don’t know that you find many better. It seemed to me that we start with this political-substance division first of all.

The second problem was again this problem of the President’s coming in with stated purposes and visions, and having people who are part of that, share that and support that, and particularly when it’s not ideological. One of the things, as I said earlier, that bothered me was what I came to describe very quickly as a resume government. A lot of the people that we had put into positions in the government, who were very talented, were people who had spent better than a decade in Washington getting ready for the moment when the Democrats would return to power. As a new generation, they would naturally rise to positions of power and authority. One of the cruel ironies of history was that, in fact, they probably should not have spent that decade in Washington. There was a great deal going on in the country. Because they had been in Washington, they were in a much more isolated arena, and they tended to lose touch with the things that bothered the country. Therefore, they came with a set of perspectives that would have been the same no matter who the Democrats put in office, except probably for Scoop Jackson.
The people who were contenders in 1976 were noncontenders. They would have been relatively comfortable working for any of those people.

This is somewhat the President’s fault and somewhat their fault. I referred earlier to that anecdote about the meeting in December with the transition team. They all had agendas in their own areas of expertise, and they tended to be people with very narrow focuses of expertise, and not with the general perception of the agendas that they thought the Democratic Party, when it came to power, ought to undertake as agendas. Because of the highly specialized nature of those preparations, I don’t think they had an ability to see a larger, more general, and more intangible overview of where we were going. They could see their own agendas and what they wanted to do. In Carter’s case, because those intangibles were critical to his election, they always operated with that deficit of not knowing and not understanding that piece of it. The President and those around him had a not commonly recognized problem. From the beginning we went to say, “Gee, we have a lot of talented people here, but we’d better explain to them why we’re here and what we want to do and integrate them into our way.” In fact, we did the very opposite by giving the cabinet secretaries control of their departments, which sounded terrific on paper. Within about 60 days everyone involved and the people who had come from the campaign realized what an unmitigated disaster it was; everyone except the President who, in his stubborn fashion, refused to acknowledge it. It started a battle, that would then last until 1979, over control of the departments. We had, in fact, given cabinet secretaries carte blanche basically in choosing their subordinates. They chose them out of this pool and would, of course, have gotten massacred in the process, and I used to use this example. There was no way that someone from the University of Virginia or the University of Iowa who had a background we might find compatible with our own thinking or shared some of the instincts that Carter had of what had happened in the country
and their view of it in some area specialties, that that person who wanted to work in the White House or come to work in the government had a prayer of being selected when put up against somebody in Washington who had worked on the Hill or worked in a law firm and had all of these things on their resume.

One of the failures of the transition that I considered enormous before the pre-election transition is not Jack’s fault. Jack was doing what we were asked to do. We were all looking around, dealing with the departments. Now if you were asking me what to do, I would have said, don’t worry about how we’re going to run the government, go out and find people who understand what we’re about all over the country, who normally wouldn’t come to our attention afterward so that when we go into the selection processes we have a pool of people who meet these criteria of ability and talent. They may not have Washington experience, but they’re going to share a similar perception, they’ve got some real talents. You must understand that in Washington there is an enormous prejudice against people who are outside of Washington having any abilities whatsoever to help operate the government. This is very interesting when you realize that those prejudices were being fully exercised for a President who in fact was totally outside of Washington and in fact it failed the tests those people began with. We shouldn’t have had those people. We should have been much more reflective of the need. We tended to restrict the kinds of people we would bring in.

It would not be until later that we would find some of the more successful cabinet officers. Neil Goldschmidt, for instance, who came in to be head of transportation, or Moon Landrieu, who came in to be Secretary of HUD. Not only were they more politically conscious as cabinet secretaries, they came from someplace far away and they had a sense of it. They tended to share a perspective more similar to Carter’s at the end than a lot of the people we
brought in at the beginning. But we did not make an effort to search for those. Those people were considered in the beginning and they were rejected because the tests we used failed them in the selection process. If you go to look at the staff structure before, you can look at how it operates. You have to address that problem of who you’re getting in the selection process in terms of their political substance.

**YOUNG:** What you’ve said I find interesting in view of the criticisms of the administration in terms of its Washington relations and the criticism of bringing in outsiders. What you’re saying is if you look beyond the immediate circle, what you find is an administration that not only gave license to cabinet officers, but got surrounded by young Washingtonians.

**CADDELL:** That’s basically right. You look through department by department, slot by slot, and I guarantee that 85 percent of the people fall into that category.

**WAYNE:** Was the difficulty that you’re pointing to here a difficulty in cabinet-White House relations down the road? Or are you saying something more than that?

**CADDELL:** I’m saying something more fundamental. By not making the decision, by not addressing the problem, you will have problems, particularly if you believe, as I do, that the President was elected for particular reasons. Much of what happened to him with the public over the four years until last year, when he became very personally disliked, and most of the unhappiness with the President in the first couple of years was due to disappointment. People really still liked Jimmy Carter. They were baffled by the President that they had elected and the one that they saw. That, when we get to Camp David, will have a lot to do with what we’re headed toward. In my opinion, a lot of the frustration was the inconsistencies of these signals with our President. We’re not running the government, we’ve got all these people. The other problem that’s inherent with that is that the relationship between the White House and the
cabinet became more exasperated because of the cabinet being independent. Literally, there was in some department not a person that you could call from the White House who we could be assured was the President’s man.

**JONES:** That has to be fought even if you’re able to originally place your people.

**CADDELL:** That’s right. And what I’m saying is that literally there were departments from which there was no one who was the President’s man. This drove the White House political people just up the wall. When they would call and say, “We’d like such and such done,” and the answer would be, “no.” This directly leads to what happened with the firings. There was more bitterness and more time spent inside the White House staff on the political operations fighting with Carter over this problem of getting cabinet secretaries to do small things at the direction of the White House. I don’t consider our requests onerous by any means. They refused to do them because they perceived themselves to be independent. So now we had a Congress who was independent and departments who were independent. And you want to talk about having a problem of looking like you’re in control. You’re asking for that once you think that through, particularly with the people that are being recruited who don’t realize that this is not Hubert Humphrey who is President. It’s not like they’re all starting from the same agenda. They’re in fact pursuing numbers of things that are important and that the President would probably agree with, but as I talked about that meeting in the transition there were agendas that they had and that they were not necessarily worried about whether they were the President’s agendas. I don’t believe it’s conspiratorial by any means, because most of those people wanted to be loyal and effective members of the administration. But when you leave people abandoned out there on their own, you take those second or third level people and you give them no sense of participation or direction or being involved in it, they’re going to fall back on what they know,
which is what they think they ought to do. They’re going to do it from the perception of isolation, which is what they often did. We had the worst of all worlds, is what I’m saying. And we were always on the run later trying to correct that or deal with that problem. We never ever got ahead of that problem again. That’s why I used to argue that we lost much of the administration before it had gotten sworn in.

YOUNG: Would any of the problems have been better if there had been somebody designated as a chief of staff at the outset? It perhaps would not have helped with the departmental problem but it might have helped with some others.

CADDELL: It might have helped with some others. Probably, in retrospect, there was no reason. We overreacted to the precedent in front of us, just as Reagan overreacted to ours in not doing that. But you have to understand, the reason there was also no reason for a chief of staff is we had never operated with one. Hamilton was the campaign manager in the campaign, but he was the first among equals basically. And we all ran the thing by consensus. That was Hamilton’s style; we were all very close personally. As I told Carter in ’76, having been to the ’72 campaign and viewing some of our opposition campaigns, particularly the Udall campaign, the Carter campaign in ’76 was an unbelievably smooth working operation in the sense there was almost no friction at the top. There was no jealousy, there was no friction, there was a real camaraderie. Of all the internal back-stabbing fights that generally go on in campaigns, not an iota was involved in the Carter campaign of ’76. Then there was an assumption immediately that, well, that’s the way life was, so you were going to go to the White House the same way. It was not born out of a sense of what we were going to do differently than the Nixon people, it was just the way we work and this is the way we work well. But it’s a difference when you’re only trying to run a campaign and when you’re trying to run a government.
YOUNG: This brings us to Camp David.

JONES: I had one more comment on this matter of the staff system. Did I understand you to say that some of the problems that you’ve mentioned in regard to departments and the second and third level appointments there existed within the White House staff as well?

CADDELL: Yes. In the White House staffing operation, it got better later. There was more cross fertilization. But for a long time the spokes of the wheel also represented isolated facets of the White House operating style. What there was not was a large sense of purpose. Talk to White House people and look at some things, look at Fallow’s pieces, which I think are very instructive with some exceptions to some things that he said. There was no larger sense of purpose being viewed to people inside the White House in the sense of why are we here, other than we’re trying to do a good job and do the right things, such that you could use that tool politically, particularly since so many of these people are new to you. Strangers don’t move well in concert and unity. That sense was not there. So we had problems, and the staff system worked that way. Everything was papered out.

YOUNG: Also, weren’t the principle staff people given more or less a free hand in recruiting their own staffs?

CADDELL: Yes. In recruiting their own staffs. Everything was very hierarchical in that sense. You did not have enough cross-cutting operations in the White House to begin with. You did not have enough in the sense of what I would consider intellectual cooperation, and that was a great frustration when you have so many bright people. There was no mechanism where people felt like they could get together and talk about what we ought to do. I saw that a lot. And one of the things that I would later recommend at Camp David is that we really needed that kind of planning or that kind of place where ideas could be fermented and debated. If you find that
people had good ideas, they had no way of ever getting them to anybody who would decide on them. This only breeds frustration inside the White House. And I’m sure it has to go on when you’re dealing with something as big as the White House where you are dealing every day with Iran or getting this vote on the Panama Canal, or what have you. There is the propensity to want to sit around and have skull sessions or chat with people about where we’re going. There just isn’t any time. Hamilton and Jody don’t have any time for that, or as much as they would want to, or even the people running the individual efforts. It was never perceived to be a problem, everyone was assumed to go out and had a job and to do it.

Fallows talks about this so well in his second piece, which got far less attention than his first piece, but was far more accurate. It was about the way people are in boxes. You did your work and no one cared whether you did anything more. There was never any sense of excellence beyond that or sense of commitment beyond that. That seems to me to be a staff structural problem and it’s not simply isolated to this administration. From what I understand it goes on in the Reagan administration and it went on in the Ford administration, the Nixon administration and before that. It may have to do also with the White House. Interestingly, the place that does not seem to have the problem is the Kennedy White House. The difference there is in talking to some of the Kennedy hands who were in the White House. I was shocked to hear how small the White House staff was relatively and how cross-cutting everybody was—always in everybody else’s business. That’s the way it was run and it was small and I think this may indicate an organizational problem of size.

**YOUNG:** I have the impression that not only was the same free hand given to the staff people in recruiting their own staffs, but in a number of instances, the feelings and attitudes of the second
and third level staff toward Carter or toward its purposes of administration did not figure large in the recruitment. Is that correct?

**CADDELL:** Exactly correct. I will tell you as a reformed good government person that that’s a real mistake. I don’t want blind loyalty, but we had people in there who didn’t even like the President, but who were working for him and who eventually found it in their interest to leave. You can’t expect the White House to operate like that. There’s got to somehow be instilled in people a sense that they must come with it, a sense not of only shared purpose but a sense of what the President wants to do. A sense is necessary where you’re thinking that I know what the President wants to do on that, and by the way, I’m generally in favor of what he wants to do, at least in the general direction you want to go. What are the tests that get met when the individual is sitting there and they’ve got a call in making a decision? I used to get infuriated and people used to call me. One of the roles I used to serve was when people had real problems and they couldn’t get through, they would call me because I was easily accessible and I didn’t answer to anybody; so I would get these calls. I would get many calls from people who were just frustrated because they had an idea, they had something they wanted to do and they thought the President would be for it, but somebody else killed it and yet they knew that that would be the right thing. I’m certainly not the person they should be coming to.

**JONES:** There’s not only a need for a loyalty test, but following that, having people on board with a kind of continuing translation of what it is the President wants so that they can be loyal.

**CADDELL:** Let me make sure you understand that loyalty does not mean intellectual rigidity.

**YOUNG:** The types of comments that are noticeable in this context are those about how it was the staff people below the senior level who would make a particular point of mentioning how useful it was for them and for their principal to be close to the President and communicate to
them something about him and what he wanted. Those people sensed that closeness with what
the President was up to and what he was like.

CADDELL: One of the things that also bothered me about the government, and I used to make
this claim at Camp David, was the idea that the world takes place inside the White House. It’s so
important to understand, and the people who were there can’t even explain it, because they didn’t
come to record their own behavior since they were living it. That place is just a very, very
dangerous place in the sense that the things that become important are tangible. People believe in
the White House and the government, and this is from a very different perspective of the
President in the sense of the election and what we were trying to do. Reality in the White House
was always tangible. It was never the intangibles, and that’s why I talked before about the
Kennedy example. Power in the White House was a piece of paper, particularly if it had a
number on it for a budget. That was power, that was decision-making, that was moving the
country. People reacted to paper and related to it in budgets and made decisions. There grows up
in that world a really myopic view that, in fact, what you were doing was moving the country or
moving it in some ways, but really doing it a lot less than you thought. The insulation gets
around this, not around ideas. What begin to not have currency are ideas. Bureaucracy dominates
inside the White House. I used to get driven crazy by it because that was reality. I talked about
the President’s role as leading the society and how you do it.

An example of that is on energy. It’s one of the few times I ever had anything to do with
substance. This was after the Camp David situation. One of the things the President wanted to do
was something to motivate people and give them a role in this conservation thing. He asked me
to meet with some of the people who had been at Camp David. Bob Keef was a political and
business consultant, Jerome was the president of MIT, David Freeman was the head of TVA, and
Sol Linowintz at that time was in between being Panama and Middle East negotiator. We all met for a couple of days, about three or four intense days talking about how you get people involved and so forth and then I produced this memorandum that had these ideas of how we activate people, not by using the White House but by using the Presidency and getting people involved. We were all very excited by what we had produced. The President loved it. He went through and talked about some things, I won’t give you all the details of it. But really the thesis was how do you motivate people out there to feel like they’ve got a stake in the government and that we become a support level. We started with the principle that you’re never going to conserve by just ordering it; you’ve got to do something, where people feel that they have a role. The President went through about 15 options; this was the only time I ever wrote a paper with options on it. I usually refused those on the basis that they offended my sense of disorder for the President to check off on decisions. The President signed off on the whole thing and then brought in his White House staff and said, “Implement this. I want no changes and I want this implemented.”

Well, by four o’clock this afternoon there was a revolt in the government. I got this call from Hamilton saying, “What is going on? There’s a revolt going on over here in the department, in the White House, and staffs.”

There were two things. One is that now when Carter wanted to do something, he went totally outside the system of involving anybody. But secondly, it also was the resistance to these conservation plans. Eventually, it was given out to some of the people in the White House and some of the areas. For months later we still had no plan to deal with conservation. It was to have 18,000 government programs. If I could show you the difference between what we sent out and an idea of those people—that’s a pretty eclectic and very able group of people. We got in the White House months later still without a conservation plan, and we saw what was being
produced. That’s what I’m saying, there wasn’t a sense of let’s really do something or let’s reach out. We could do it in that meeting because I could say, “Let’s do it and write it up and give it to Carter directly and just blow the bureaucracy apart.” I’m saying that’s no solution to it. That’s a problem though. When you don’t get your people to think that way and to feel like that, they can be innovative about what their purposes are.

YOUNG: That’s a little essay on the nature of governance nowadays. Reminds me again of your desire to torch. All of these agendas, or many agendas, came together and got wrapped up in this Camp David meeting. Could you talk to us about that, about what was sought or what happened that wasn’t sought? How did this whole thing come about? What were those agendas? The result was an ostensible change in the way the White House staff was organized. Subsequently, there were changes in the cabinet. Third, there was a new kind of way to approach consensus building on energy programs and some substance of changes in the energy proposal.

CADDELL: Well, let me start by saying that you’ve outlined some outcomes. I don’t think any of the outcomes you outlined ever had much to do with the initial purpose of the Camp David thing. They just happened to be the end results without regard to purpose. That’s important to say. Now I’ll explain the agendas because we now get a resolution of several agendas by the time we get to those decisions. The genesis of this Camp David process first of all goes back to a series of discussions and memos with the President whose outcome had generally been, as in ’78, several days of very intense activity. We asked, what the hell’s wrong, and some efforts were then made concerning structural change in the White House or in the relationship between the departments. Never did we really come to grips with the conceptual problems. Some of my friends in the White House reacted to that by saying they wished I had come over and dealt every day with what they had to deal with. Then I would stop talking about those things. That’s
probably a fair criticism. As I then said after this economic show took place in ’78, I went into the doghouse for some months, except for elections. We had elections. I was off doing elections in ’78. They had Camp David. All the problems that we were having were helped immensely by the Begin-Sadat summit, and the Middle East peace initiative. Everyone was jumping up and down saying, “That’s just a wonderful situation here and we’re going to be popular again, everything’s going to be OK.” This served to put off any real coming to grips with real problems. The outcome of that would be that we would soon end up in the same trench that we had been in when we had been so miraculously lifted by the events at Camp David.

By the end of 1978, I was doing some surveys. I had been doing survey work on a regular basis and had become gravely concerned, particularly after that election. I was immensely surprised after the election to find that this ’78 election was unlike any other election I had seen. It tended not to contribute to an increase in belief in efficacy. In fact, if anything it seemed to contribute to a decline in belief in efficacy, which is unusual. I’ve been tracking this for some years as other colleagues in my profession had. Usually, elections tend to make people feel better at least. They got to vote, they had a say, and people got elected. We began to see some numbers that we’d not seen on personal and national confidence, and I was concerned about it, having seen so much of that concern translated in the ’76 campaign with the President. I raised a very serious alarm at the end of ’78, at Christmastime, in relation to the State of the Union address, and made the case that I thought that we really ought to get back to dealing with our problems. You have to understand this is not out of the blue. It’s simply a continuation to a heightened degree of the concerns I had had now for two years, over our lack of direction for the country and the lack of the President’s ability to lead the society. I thought he was not fulfilling the mandate, which was leading the people, thereby making them feel very frustrated with Carter.
He was not doing that which they couldn’t articulate well, but that which they sensed he was going to do as President. The reaction to that particular memo and the data presentation was not kind inside the White House.

JONES: Kind is a four letter word.

CADDELL: Yes. Exactly. Interestingly, I heard not a word from the President. I heard from the staff comments like, “Why don’t you just go away for a while and leave us alone,” which is way overstated and so forth. We were having these discussions about the State of the Union and there was a decision made to do the New Foundation speech, which I’m sure many of you live with yet today, remembering that great piece of work. I then really cut the Gordian knot on it by getting up and making a case that I thought it was not a very sound idea to make this case for the new foundations because simply a slogan was not a theme and this was clearly an effort to throw a slogan on a bunch of mush and we were going to be ridiculed for it before it was over. It was going to look like a pragmatic gimmick, which is, in fact, what it was. It emerged from some of our P.R. people in exactly that way. They too said that this is what was going to happen. The President liked it and Stu liked it and off it went and all of a sudden this became the speech. At that point, there wasn’t much to do, so I just sat on my own for a while. Of course, what began to happen was the President sunk lower and lower; things began to deteriorate more and more during this early period in ’79. The President had given this energy speech with his energy proposals, which had been met in April of ’79 with an overwhelmingly negative reaction. There was an overwhelmingly negative response from the country, from the press and from Congress. What happened beyond that was of course we had had the peace signing of the peace treaty when the President went to the Middle East and affected that. What really began to open the window again for my purposes was that, shock among shocks, the President’s ratings did not improve in
the polls more than a couple of points. Here he had gotten this treaty and pulled this great event off and they all came to Washington and it seemed like the American people could care less.

When you deal with the White House staff, if you sit around the table and there are 13 people and I say this is a glass and they all say it’s a cup; then this is a cup. If you understand that, you understand the problem that exists in terms of the psychology inside that place of what the world is. There’s no perspective there. “You can’t see what people are saying and it’s only if they’d listened to our message or if they knew what we were doing.” This was a constant refrain. That’s what I was constantly barraged with from inside the White House. They said I was just a naysayer. That poll really did cause some concern, because no one could explain that away.

There was no easy explanation for the President accomplishing this and it having no impact on his rating. At this point, I continued to find some of the numbers I had seen, and I felt there was a relationship between some of those moods we were seeing, which were very particular to that period and which we had not seen since, and the President’s failure to move. I sat down and wrote this memo to the President, which was really a very long document about where I thought we were and what was happening in the country. It was not an effort at solutions at this point, it was intended merely to get his attention, and to suggest that something more fundamental was at stake and involved with his Presidency.

Rather than send it to the President, I sent it to the First Lady first. I sent it to Rosalynn first because I hadn’t seen the President for some time. I saw him at the dinner and he was very nice to me with Sadat so I figured he was listening to me. But I sent this memo to the First Lady to look at. When you become fairly unsure, there’s nothing like being a leper for a while to make you wonder about your own judgments. I also sent one to Jody, who was always intellectually my closest friend inside the White House. Jody had always been very combative. Jody was
always like the guy who is out there being the machine gun. He’d be the last guy there on the Hill with his machine gun. That’s how he lived, and it was really eating him up. I was trying to get him to refocus and he was resisting that. The First Lady read this and was very, very bothered, as she had been very bothered by the lack of movement in the polls. She called me over to the White House and we had a meeting. She told me that she thought I was right and that we ought to do something about this and that I should go ahead and give this to the President. I said, “No, I think that’s a mistake because the last time we did this, we got his attention for two days, nothing happened, and then it all went back to normal.” I said to her, “There’s got to be somebody else to help out on this, and that person’s got to be Jody.” So she called Jody and said, “Jody I want you to read this thing that Pat has done. I want you to pay attention to it.” He did so, and we talked about it some, and Jody began to come around.

Our problem was not incremental. It was not going to be solved by some small thing, but by really readdressing the question of what purpose and in what direction the administration was going. There is a meeting that takes place on one Saturday in April with the President in the Oval office that the First Lady had scheduled with Jody, myself, and herself and the President. She was to give him the memo, he was going to read it and we were going to have a discussion that morning. Instead, Stu went in in the morning. He had not read the memo. Stu went in before that and started making the case for the need to make Hamilton chief of staff. The White House is falling apart, the government is falling, it was a very pessimistic view about the structural problems, with structural solutions. The irony of that is that begins another line of movement that will all culminate at Camp David, but it’s just ironic the two lines were born one right after the other.
There’s some real disturbance about that. The President comes in, the President was in not a very happy mood. He at this point had gotten tired of being beaten over the head, as any one of you would be if you had spent the time doing your best on things. Particularly in doing things like the Middle East and then getting nothing but the hell knocked out of you for it. These people are human. I sit there as an analyst for politicians. You all sit as historians. The tendency is to forget that people are real people and that they’re affected the way we all would be. It is overwhelming. He had gotten tired of hearing bad news and no solutions from everybody. He had not read this, but we went through it. Jody really laid part of it out. I laid part of it out. Rosalynn made a strong case about needing to do something. The President came around and said, yes, he really was unhappy and he didn’t know but he was tired of all these negative solutions and maybe this was something to consider, and that he would read the thing.

The President did read it, and decided that in fact he wished to pursue this. He showed it to the Vice President who was very unenthusiastic about it. The President and I later were at the theatre where there’d been a movie. I knew I was OK because I got invited back to the movies again. That shows how things were going. Walking out of there, he told me that he had shown it to the Vice President who didn’t like it. “Fritz really thinks it’s crazy, but don’t worry about that. I think it makes a lot of sense and I really want to pursue this.” Meanwhile, Jody and I had been spending a lot of time talking because it seemed to me that you had to have somebody inside as an ally, and Jody was the right guy. I got Jody out of his day-to-day thinking to this larger question. The result of all this was that the President expanded the circle of people who had exposure to this initial memorandum, and the extension was to Gerry and to Hamilton. And that’s all. He was going to include Stu, but he decided for some reason not to at that point and would later. We met on the Truman balcony and spent several hours. It was the first time I’ve
ever done it, sat up there and had a drink and talked about what the President thought about the state of the country, what everyone else thought, what everyone thought about the memo, where we thought we were, why we were there. And it was the first candid political conversation that we had all had together really since we had been in the White House. It was first time it had been limited to those participants.

**YOUNG:** There was no memo yet?

**CADDELL:** Not at that point. That simply was to state what I felt. It seemed to me that would detract at this point from getting attention. The President made this decision. The President said, “I’m going to go off now,” and he wandered away for God knows how long. We agreed we would get together with some people. I had been reading a number of things and getting the President to read a numbers of things. We would get a meeting together of some intellectuals and some people who had been doing some writing and some reading, and have a get-together and talk about these concerns. He would then go off on this trip, which was going to last for most of the month, and I would then be charged with really sitting down and writing what I thought we might try to do.

**YOUNG:** This was before he went to Vienna?

**CADDELL:** This is before he went to Vienna. Remember he was going to go to Vienna and then Japan and Korea. He was getting ready the next week to go to Vienna. The decision was we would have this couple of weeks before he went to Vienna. I’d have to look at the calendar again in between the going and the end of the road. We would have this get together, and he would invite these people to come. I would begin work. Someone was supposed to tell Stu about this, which was not done. He would go off and we would reconvene when he got back, and I would have something on paper about what to do. Under no other circumstances was anyone to know
that any of these discussions were going on. It was to be essentially at that point a secret. He had said he was committed to doing something, he felt strongly about it and he’d been quite bothered by things. It seemed like the Carter I was familiar with in other times. We had the session that I described late in that month, whatever month it was, May, I guess. It was an interesting evening. The problem was that the President kept asking everybody about the country and everyone kept wanting to offer him political advice. He brought all these thinkers in, and all of them wanted to tell him how to write letters to the editor. I’m sure you all will appreciate this. They had all been invited and the President says, “I think the country is in trouble, I’m very concerned, very concerned about my Presidency. You’ve been writing these things. I’ve read all of your works on this and I’d really like to talk to you about this and what you might think we ought to do.” And he’s getting answers back from people like, “Send letters to the editor.” The only people that were allowed to come were myself, Jody, the staff and the First Lady. Jody got particularly annoyed. Jody couldn’t believe this. He finally got up and said, “Goddamnit, we know how to do all the politics. We came here to talk about the country.” I just thought it was one of those great ironies in life.

JONES: Who were the heavies?

CADDELL: Well, the list has been known. The people: Moyers was there, Dan Bell was there, Christopher Lasch was there, I think Bella was there. I’d have to go back and look. Charlie Peters was there because he’d written some things in the Washington Monthly that were interesting and the President liked him. It was really kind of an interesting group. We mixed it up on purpose to get some fire going. We decided not to have any more of those after that. After they had all left and we were doing a postop on the thing, my reaction was that, “They helped us to identify the problem but certainly not on how to get us out of here.” It was our problem. But I
think we all felt better at that point that we weren’t missing anything. We weren’t going to be left alone or isolated on this.

WAYNE: Were you polling all along?

CADDELL: I was polling up to that point. Yes, I had been steadily doing work on it because these numbers had become intensely worse and bothersome, which, by the way, stimulated some discussion with some of my colleagues afterward about the basis of data that we were arguing about. Nonetheless, there was never any adequate explanation for those numbers, including the economic ones. Public opinion was pointing it out. In fact you could not chalk it to that. What happened then is that they went away and I began working on this. Meanwhile, the gas line struck. We had, you remember, the shortages. The President was away. People in gas lines, are screaming and the White House is screaming. When the President leaves the country, it’s like you used to see in the cavalry movies, you know the troop leaves and whoever’s left handling the fort has to defend it. Literally the fort is being besieged and the troops are gone on the other side of the world. They have no idea what to do in the crisis; they’re in Seoul and Tokyo. People are calling back and forth and they make a statement. They’re out there issuing statements, in the middle of the night our time, trying to get some focus on these problems. But what was clearly happening was that the President by now, being physically away, increased whatever problems he was having of holding the country’s attention. Their relevance when he was here was increased, now because all of this was going and he wasn’t there. It was just adding to that sense of being irrelevant. I felt the President was being seen as being basically irrelevant, and that things were just sort of out of whack.

The President returns. I returned early, which screwed my schedule up. I had been working pretty much day and night the last week or so writing this thing, and then they cut off
the trip, which really intensified getting this document ready, which now had some suggestions and plans for his consideration. They returned and while they were coming back of course the gas line problem eased up and things then kind of worked out. People went to even and odd, and it sort of worked out. But they came back having been gone almost three weeks.

The traveling White House decided that there was still this massive crisis that they had been told about every day while they were on the road and had resolved to come back. They were all exhausted, but they had this meeting. They had had this meeting to decide if they were going to have a speech on energy. Nobody knew what was going to be in the speech because there had been no decision on substance, but they were going to give a speech. Prior to leaving, the President had had a meeting to talk about this other track with Hamilton and the Vice President and Stu and some other people in which it was decided that Hamilton would become chief of staff upon the return of the President. This meeting took place just prior to his leaving. The decision was that Hamilton would be chief of staff and Hamilton was going to stay behind and lead the White House basically for the next several weeks and work on what the White House would look like. You have to understand the incongruity of the problem. I am there trying to work on supposedly a memorandum on approach and concept that involves the Presidency and the country. Hamilton, totally separate from me and totally not speaking to each other on this, is out working on what the White House is going to look like structurally when he’s chief of staff.

YOUNG: Did you know that he was doing this?

CADDELL: Yes I did. And Hamilton knew what I was doing. I was more interested in what Hamilton was doing at that moment than he was interested in what I was doing. There still was, on some people’s part, a sense of not understanding what Carter and I were up to, but, so fine you’re over there doing that. So Hamilton was off working on this thing. We’d talked about
getting together before they got back, but we didn’t. So they come back and it’s a decision that they’re going to give this speech and it was a meeting that I did not attend, which upset the First Lady enormously. She just went right through the roof and got all over Hamilton about it.

YOUNG: You weren’t invited?

CADDELL: Well, see again this is the problem. I wasn’t in the White House. They came off the road. I wasn’t around. Nobody said, “Let’s invite him.” So they’re having a meeting on the energy speech. Rosalynn called me and asked me what I thought about giving an energy speech. I told her I thought it would be a serious mistake. We didn’t have anything to say. Meanwhile, I finished all this work and things were bad enough that we were going to make a clean break. This certainly looked like it couldn’t get any lower. It was the time to make a break. She got upset, which I did not know until afterward, and called Hamilton and just beat all over him for my not being at the meeting, which was unfair. Nobody told Hamilton to assume that I should be at the meeting. I came over to this other session they had on the speech in the White House. Nobody’s had any exposure, other than Hamilton and Gerry, about any of this. Jody’s been away. The meeting is in Stu’s office and Stu, Jack Watson, Hamilton, Jody, Gerry, Rick Hertzberg and I wander in. Meanwhile I’d been working on the draft of this speech with Wayne Granquist at OMB, a friend of mine, who had been very helpful around the State of the Union time when I was trying to put some of these ideas in a speech for him. He had been working with me on that. He used to work for Ribicoff as a speech writer. He was another one of those talented people who was never in the loop. I just found him when we worked on the statistical project together. We had this session in which the decision is that they’re going to give this energy speech, but there’s no energy program. Really. And then we’re going to give the speech and at the end they were going to take these themes that you’re developing and we’re going to tag them
onto the end of the speech. And I said, no you’re not. I was somewhat more emphatic than that. It struck me as ridiculous at the time. Everyone was tired, I’m tired, they’re tired, everyone is and they’re going to have this speech. They didn’t understand that you just couldn’t stick that at the end of the speech, the nonspeech, you had on energy.

I made my little case and they wanted to know where my thing was and I said it was over at OMB and that’s where I was going to finish it to give to the President with my memo. Their reaction was that they would like Jordan to go over to get it so that he could incorporate it, and I said, no he wasn’t. Anyway, Hertzberg was going to go over with me. Rick—who as you know is very bright—Rick’s first reaction walking out the door was, my God, you’re not talking about giving the speech are you, about doing something much bigger. I mean he had picked up right away on that, and so it was not a nice night. We went over there and finished the speech. They had finished the energy speech, which did not include any of this because I had just said it’s mine, you can’t use it. When you don’t work for the White House you can say things like that. It helps. What basically happened was I finished the memo, which was about 110 pages at that point, with some detailed ideas and the speech draft and gave it to the President. He was going to Camp David, this was July 2. He went on the morning of the third with the document, everybody else got copies at that point. He went off to Camp David, I went home to bed, and they still worked on the energy speech. The speech was set for July 5. Then on the 4th of July, Jody called to announce we were not having the speech. The President had canceled the speech. That was the first time any of us knew anything had happened. We did not know why, other than that he had canceled it and some reference to his having read this thing. Then it was announced that we were all going to Camp David the next day. Which is how we got there at that point.

JONES: You weren’t in on the decision about not giving the speech?
CADDELL: Nobody was.

JONES: Nobody was. That was the President’s decision?

CADDELL: I’d written a letter to the President with his copy basically making the case that I conceded the speech at that time was going to be made. I’d made two points in the letter, saying not to try to do something conceptual unless you’re committed in going the whole way, which you cannot do half-assed. You can’t sort of do it and stop. You have to really think through the idea when you’re doing something conceptually. The second thing in the letter was I was concerned about the speech. I felt it was a mistake, but one that we were not committed to. I was hoping that he would just use it to buy time and say, look, I’m going to deal with this. I’m back and sooner or later we’ll do something more interesting. It was sort of the end of the line, literally. What I did not know and would know later, was that he had read the letter twice and just picked up the phone and told Rosalynn, “I’m not going to give the speech, I don’t want it, I didn’t want to give it to begin with.” At the meeting they had with the President, he had said, “I don’t want to give a speech, I have nothing to say.” And they kept saying, “You must give a speech.” Finally, he got talked into giving a speech because Jody was the only person there saying, “If you’re really uncomfortable maybe you ought not to do it.” That got overrun too. Anyway here he was giving the speech. So he never wanted to give it in the first place. Just did not want to. That’s why he canceled.

JONES: One other detail. You were working on a speech, and you were working on a memo—

CADDELL: And a speech.

JONES: And a speech.

CADDELL: To go with the memo.
JONES: I see. But the speech that you were preparing had to do with the general problems in the country.

CADDELL: That’s right. It was a draft of the sort of the crisis-of-confidence speech. It was a piece of the draft. It was just an idea actually.

WAYNE: Can I go back to the meeting that you had when you were all tired, before you went over to OMB when they decided to give that energy speech. Was there a mechanism set up where people had stakes in things and you just simply couldn’t stop a decision?

CADDELL: Yes. That’s what I thought it was. That’s why I assumed that the speech was going to be given. It was announced. The mechanism was there. Everyone was at work on it. I’d never seen anything stopped before. I was very pessimistic at that point that we were going to blow any opportunity to do anything differently.

WAYNE: And they all felt that the nature of the prices, the gas lines, simply required the President to go out in front.

CADDELL: They figured the President needed to go out and calm the country. In fact, the country was already calmed down. But again, they’d been away. Even worse, the White House had been in that tube.

WAYNE: Was this before or after that Eizenstat memo was leaked, the blame OPEC memo?

CADDELL: I think that memo was leaked; I don’t know when it was leaked. I thought it was leaked when we were at Camp David.

WAYNE: I think that’s right.

CADDELL: It was leaked when we were at Camp David. It had already been written and it was not leaked until we were at Camp David.
STRONG: At the meeting when the topic of appointing a chief of staff came up was there a discussion at that point of cabinet changes?

CADDELL: I wasn’t at the meeting so I don’t know. What I understood was that it was a very secret decision. Hamilton finally agreed, after resisting all this time, that he’d be chief of staff. There was already building up a hope to make some changes in the cabinet. That was an understood feeling among some people in the White House. One of the things that Hamilton was supposed to work on was the idea that he was going to do something about restructuring the White House. While the President never said anything about making changes in the cabinet, there was a great hope that that’s what it was. In fact, when the President canceled the speech, there was on the part of some participants immediately before we went to Camp David a hope that what the agenda would become was a change in cabinet. Consistently what we had always had when we had these times of reflection was some kind of structural change. Now we had the big ones, but no one knew what was in the President’s mind. For some of the participants, the feeling was that the big test for them would be whether or not the President was willing to make changes in the cabinet.

STRONG: But that’s another agenda that was being followed?

CADDELL: That was on a parallel track because of my memo and the canceled speech, which now were obviously going to come up. If we were going to go up there, something was going to come on the table. It was unclear what that would be. There was a lot of pessimism about whether the President might change it, but it was clear that some people felt that was now the most critical priority.

YOUNG: In the memo with the speech draft, were you also thinking about changes in the mode of operating in the White House or in the government?
CADDELL: Some. I’d addressed that before. I made the case in there that obviously what was being outlined here would require changes. Some other kinds of functions would also have to be added to deal with this. I had it because I knew it was on track, the chief of staff thing. You had to address structure. Structure was incidental to the major thrust of what I was proposing.

YOUNG: So there were three main agendas here that you’ve identified. Hamilton’s project on the chief of staff business, and parallel to that some cabinet changes, the crisis-of-confidence idea and things that you were working on, and then the energy agenda, which was the speech without a content.

JONES: And Stu’s concerns. Ham was working on that.

YOUNG: Stu was the principal on the energy speech, I imagine.

CADDELL: Well he was, and Schlesinger was going to be in the energy message.
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YOUNG: It sounds like there’s much more to say on this, getting us through the mountain and down again. I wondered if you’d like to continue that fascinating story?

CADDELL: OK. We arrived at Camp David. The President, as the rest of us, did not quite know what was happening. Most of the people there were the Vice President, Hamilton, Jody, Gerry, Stu, and Mrs. Carter. That was all there were there at the meeting initially. The President let everyone make their own expressions one way or the other over both his decisions to cancel the speech and over the work that I had so far done, which some people had just hastily read really the night before once they had decided he decided it was worth reading. He made the point that he was going to attempt this effort. He was quite convinced by the whole thing. He also indicated at the time that he had been convinced more than anything else. He’d been scheduled to give the energy speech when we didn’t have a program yet, we were still working on that. The energy speech he had given in March or April of ’79 would be an even bigger dud. People would not pay attention. It would not have any impact. He believed it was not worth giving at that stage until he knew what he was going to say. One of the suggestions in the long document I had sent to him was that there was the need to be able to understand the use of dramatic tools in the Presidency to focus attention. There’s not been much, but there’s been some writing about Presidential conduct. The President said that there were some suggestions in this document for getting attention for the speech. We knew we would have to do that, because he had tried out some of the themes in that speech on his own at the Democratic Jefferson-Jackson Day speech held here in Virginia. It got absolutely no coverage whatsoever. It clearly went over all the reporters’ heads, even though it was very effective.

YOUNG: Had you helped him on that speech or provided some ideas for it?
CADDELL: Yes, we had provided some ideas, but he had been playing with it some. We had come out of a long conversation. He said, “I think I’m going to go there and try this.” We weren’t sure what he was going to do. He had had some ideas. Jody called and said, “My God, you wouldn’t believe the speech he gave, it’s crazy down here, interesting things.” No one on the staff knew what was going on. People on the staff were really fascinated by the speech and by the reaction. Tim Kraft and some of the political people who were at the speech were just amazed. They were all excited when they came back.

YOUNG: What kind of reception did he get from the audience?

CADDELL: Apparently pretty extraordinary. I wasn’t there, but Tim Kraft and Phil Wise, who was the appointment secretary, and some of the people who had been there came back and had a session in Hamilton’s office in which they were all just jumping up and down about the response to the speech. They didn’t have any idea that it was anything other than the President simply taking it off the top of his head. Nobody suggested to them it was anything different. But we got no coverage of that whatsoever. It was so far out of the traditional mainstream of a definition of a speech because it wasn’t over any particular issue per se. It got almost no coverage, even though you could later see this emphasis.

The President felt that he had in fact created attention himself and perhaps some sense of drama himself by canceling the speech and straying at Camp David. He certainly had done this. There is no question he had done that. He had successfully focused attention on himself. He then asked that some of us stay for a while at Camp David. There was a decision to expand it into a domestic summit sort. I think this idea got carried away with itself. He decided he wasn’t going anywhere. He canceled all of his events. He said, “I’m not going any place. We’ll have people come here and I’ll talk to people. I want to work on the speech, I want to work on these ideas and
we will do it here and then we will go down.” There had always been a suggestion in the speech that we do it on the fifteenth of July partly because Wayne Granquist, who was involved, had gone back and checked and realized that that was the fourth anniversary of Carter’s nomination. Since we really wanted to go back to some of those things, it seemed to be an appropriate spacing. So we seemed to have a tie hook, which was a Sunday. If you want to really give a mass audience speech, you do it on Sunday. Then we spent the next period of time at Camp David starting with discussions in the President’s cabin that night after dinner. We’d had this earlier discussion in the afternoon, and went through most of the week. We were trying to come to grips with a number of things. There were of course the day-to-day dealings in Washington with the country, to give the reassurance that nothing terrible had happened. The beginning of the summit was unfortunate, as all of us would agree later. It got so expanded, as things often did in the Carter administration. We had gobbled so much of the President’s time on talking to people and going through the ritual of not offending any groups that we were running out of time for him to really have time to focus on some of the substance. 

YEUNG: Could I ask you just at that point whose idea was it, if anybody’s, or was it just something that happened, to bring in all these outside people? 

CADDELL: The President did. 

YEUNG: What was his idea in that? Was it genuinely to learn? 

CADDELL: Yes. He said he would genuinely like to talk to some of them. He was concerned, he would like to do it in Camp David, where we thought people would be more relaxed, and where he would be more relaxed. He could also see the parallels between what he had done with Begin and Sadat, which had been the high point of his administration so far. He was trying a
similar domestic move. So it was really his idea. The germ of it was his idea, and then it got expanded in the discussion.

**JONES:** Your earlier reaction to that initial meeting, where you’d invited in Moyers and some others, was that it wasn’t worthwhile. Why then was it worthwhile to have lots of people coming up to Camp David?

**CADDELL:** Well I shouldn’t say the first one wasn’t worthwhile. Actually, it served a great purpose in one sense.

**JONES:** You didn’t learn a lot.

**CADDELL:** I didn’t learn a lot. But the question here was to really involve the political leadership to attempt to build particularly with some governors and mayors. But that’s a good question. That was one of my questions, which was, why do we want all of these people here. It was also, in part, obviously to build some support for where we were headed. We knew where we were basically headed with the speech. The President wanted to try that out and get some support, which he did. It was a constituency-building effort. Remember that energy was still very, very important and was a big factor in these discussions. This was a chance to discuss some of the substance of the things and how do we rally the country. It was really to involve people in that discussion. As I said, I think it got a little bit away from us in terms of time.

**WAYNE:** When he presented the speech, he began by noting a lot of criticism of him. Was that the gist of what was going on when people were coming up?

**CADDELL:** No, some of it was. The President asked people to be very candid with him. He would in fact say that he thought there were real problems, that he had had some difficulties. He would tell people that many often did not tell the President what they felt, and that he would welcome it and understand. It was in the spirit. The only ground rule he ever laid down at Camp
David to any participants was that whatever advice they gave the President would remain between them and the President. It was a privileged situation. With that stipulation, he would like them to be extremely candid with him. The reason for that was that he wanted to be able to be candid to them and not have somebody run down the mountain and start quoting him. By the way, what’s interesting is for a whole week I think most people followed that. There was very little of people running down and giving out quotes of what the President was saying.

WAYNE: Were you people present during those sessions with the visitors and him?

CADDELL: Sometimes. I attended some of them. Some of them for a little while, some longer. Some people attended all of them. Stu was up for all the substantive ones. It depended on your area. We were very conscious of turf. Depending on whose turf was being trampled on, people were brought up from the White House to sit in. I sat in some of them but there were also a number of other discussions going on. There were things having to be worked on both in reference to the speech and at that point also the follow-up, if any, in terms of what we were going to do. That was a floating debate. It floated from one place in Camp David to another, whether it was from the lodges to the bowling alley to the various other sundry places. Some of those meetings got very heated. That’s why I said earlier that what you discovered very quickly was that there were several tracks going on. There was a track where reorganizing the White House was a prime concern. There was a track that had developed for some time about the need to replace people in the cabinet that would now have reached full flourish once the President opened this up. Some people made very strong cases on the need to make these changes. Part of the theory was that these changes were necessary to prove that the President had changed, if he had changed. There were also discussions going on about the substance of the follow-up. Those were somewhat more difficult, because what began to dominate were structural questions, as
well as the speech. The speech was the driving vehicle. The problem of follow-up was given attention in the first few days. We were clearly not going much further than that. So structure began now to dominate, and there were some internal struggles going on over how to proceed. People were tired, tempers were flaring, the environment was very emotional, and feelings ran very, very high. Some people felt totally threatened, some people felt totally challenged, some people thought the whole thing was a ridiculous exercise. You had all of those mixed in the debate. The focus toward the end was really coming down on what would happen after the speech. No one knew if the speech would work, or if it would have any impact. There was a lot of skepticism about that, so the follow-up was very hard in retrospect to understand.

The speech turned out to be very successful in terms of its impact initially. It’s very hard to plan a follow-up, to get everyone on board when you have no idea if your triggering event is going to be successful. You have to understand how that influenced the nature of the debate or the lack of focus on coming to resolution. By the end of that week at Camp David, the real focus was, as I argued strongly, the need for substantive follow-up. This was a substantive effort. We needed a substantive follow-up. It needed the President doing that, versus those who say that this was an opportunity to prove that the President was in fact changing the way business was done and could affect some changes organizationally both in the White House and in the cabinet. That was the two trains that had been starting off on parallel tracks some months before and were now coming head to head. They were heading right toward one another, and that became the cause of the greatest conflict.

**THOMPSON:** If these ideas were fairly well formed and had already been put on paper in the speech, what influence did the intellectual and moral leaders you brought, like Father Hessberg, have?
CADDELL: They had probably the most influence of any group that came. They came at a time when the President had been being barraged mostly on substance, trying to move political leaders with some of the concerns he had. We were desperately concerned about logistics. They were one of the last groups to come. It’s the one everyone attended. It’s the one that, I think everyone that was there to a person thought, was the most interesting and helpful. It was a very interesting and very powerful session. It ran for hours and hours. They were very articulate and very strong and there was some real discussion about society and the country, and the President’s role in that, their role in it and what was needed. It was reinforcing at the time when that became very important. The last thing that happened at Camp David essentially was the great debate over what to do with the speech. The President went on these little trips to visit with town people, which we had always anticipated doing. Some of us felt very, very strongly that he really needed to see some real people.

YOUNG: This is the visit to Pennsylvania?

CADDELL: This was the visit to Pennsylvania and the visit to West Virginia. The idea was really to go to a very blue collar area, sort of middle class area. But not to do it in a sort of town meeting thing, which is just really a showcase. The President gets Q&A and does very well, but to be able to get into discussions is better. So we organized those, and decided not to take the press, which would create its own interest. It helped really focus attention just before the speech. It really increased interest in the speech again. The real debate at the end of the week now was about the speech, because the President from the very beginning had said he was not going to address energy at all on the Sunday speech, and would discuss this on Monday morning in Kansas City with the county officials or municipal officials. He would make the speech on energy the whole energy substance program. You have to understand by the way, that while all
of this is going on at Camp David, both the domestic staff and the energy department are
developing separate energy plans and options for the President to choose, and he is making a
decision about the energy program absolutely on his own without any discussion with any of the
other people involved in Camp David. He is making whatever relationship it has. It was not put
into the pot as part of the discussion. He was holding those decisions and making them
individually. Frankly, those people weren’t really interested in that at the moment. There were
some other things that were really much more intense on people’s platters.

There became at the end of the week that decision not to speak about energy in the
Sunday speech, which had always been met with some skepticism on the staff because the
President was always supposed to originally give an energy speech. He had strongly said
originally what he thought about anybody who cared that he didn’t talk about energy in the
speech. But as the week wore on, that became more and more a focus of contention. Also, we
began to bring in the White House people. There was a big meeting on Friday that culminated in
a meeting in Aspen Lodge, which is the cabinet lodge and cabinet room that has a very large
room. It seemed like there was a cast of hundreds attending, all of whom at the last minute all
wanted to now rewrite or re-offer what we were going to do in two days with the whole
Presidency hanging on it. I had indicated to Hamilton that that was always one of our problems.
We would get to a point like this and then throw the door open and begin really to wonder about
what we were going to do when we had very little time. But there was a whole discussion, and
Stu articulated very strongly that the message ought to be on energy. My reaction was it was the
President’s decision. He’d made a decision initially. If he wished to speak about energy, he
could, but I thought it was very difficult to put the camel together. If you weren’t careful, you
would have two different speeches just tied together for the purpose of simultaneously having
two different speeches. I thought that the energy part of the speech anyway would be
overwhelmed by the first part of it. The reason people wanted to do the energy part is they
thought no one would pay attention to the first part of the speech. That’s again depending on
one’s premise of what the impact’s going to be, and no one was sure. The President sent
everyone home by Saturday, except for the speech writers and Gerry, who was working on the
coaching. He worked on finishing the speech himself and ended up producing the speech that he
did.

**YOUNG:** How should the speech be thought of? As Carter’s personal product?

**CADDELL:** Well, I think so. I think that basically it should be seen as his personal product. I
mean he is the person who wrote it.

**YOUNG:** Did he design the speech in other words?

**CADDELL:** He basically designed it. He’s the one who decided to put the quotes in for
instance. That was his idea. He took some other things out of the drafts that I would have
preferred in. Some of it was used the next day on Monday at the communication workers. It was
a piece that I thought was important. But he made the decision that he was going to do that. He
shortened it some. He decided to make a decision on the two pieces. More importantly, it doesn’t
really matter who wrote the words in that speech. He is the one that decided this is how he felt
and how strongly he felt about it. It was a very unconventional thing for a President to say. His
decision to give that obviously demands that it be seen as his speech, it really was. It was his
effort and his decision, more than most Presidential speeches I can think of. Because it was such
a departure, it had to be his.
YOUNG: The meeting you referred to when you brought up the White House staff in the Aspen Lodge. What went on there? Was the staff at that point informed that there were going to be some changes in the White House and possibly in the cabinet?

CADDELL: No.

YOUNG: They were just informed about what the President was going to say?

CADDELL: That we were going to give this speech. Many of them had only been peripherally involved in the discussions going on that week at Camp David, and there’s a lot that can be discussed about that. Many of them, only for the first time by that Friday, were beginning to get a sense of what the speech was going to be.

YOUNG: Weren’t they rather paranoid, those who were left behind?

CADDELL: Yes. It was causing enormous problems at home in the White House, to say the least. The senior people, you have to understand, did cause some initial resentment. This street ran both ways. The day that the President called everyone to Camp David and canceled the speech, the senior staff people did not appreciate some of the junior staff people at the White House going around saying that maybe the President cracked up. They thought that they might have given their boss some benefit of the doubt for a few hours before they went running off at the mouth. So that did not help. That, in fact alienated the senior staff people, who were already there enormously. The feelings began to rise among some of the senior people not to involve the White House because of those factors. But the problem, of course, was then meanwhile the White House was there floating along on its own and nothing much was happening. For all purposes, the White House had moved to Camp David and the staff had been reduced to about ten people. Zbig came up with a paper on foreign policy every morning, and literally, the White
House operation was being run out of Camp David with about 20 people and lots of troops keeping everybody else out. That did cause enormous problems.

I remembered at the time Kennedy’s decision on the missile crisis when he finally informed the Congress of what he was going to do, since they had not participated in the discussions, everyone was upset at the idea of the blockade and wanted everything else but that. And that’s understandable. People had not been through the process in making the decision so their first reaction was, “My God, you’ve got to talk to energy, do this, what is this?” Rather than being an informing session or an educating session, which we were in fact working on, we were getting ready to do one the next day with the press. It was really more of an effort to say, “Here’s what we’re planning, what do you all think now at the last minute?” That may not have been the best way to do that.

**YOUNG:** After the speech was given or when the President returned to the White House, was there also a meeting in which he called in all or a large portion of the White House staff to inform them about the decision concerning Hamilton?

**CADDELL:** That was done after the speech. That was done after he got back off the road. He gave the speech on Sunday night, left first thing the next morning for Kansas City and Detroit for the two speeches and then came back off the road. And that again had been the big question of contention over the schedule. That week there had been the big fight over do you call the cabinet in and the White House staff and shake the stick, or do you in fact continue on some of the things that you’ve done. Now that you’ve given the speech and opened it, where do you go from there? That was a source, without naming the players, of the greatest and frankly the most verbally violent arguments that I ever participated in in the Carter White House. There was a great deal at stake. I saw that as a real question of whether we were going to go on. The President really was
not involved in that process at that time. At the staff level, that was being fought back and forth with enormous emotion.

**YOUNG:** Sorry, could you clarify what it was that was being debated?

**CADDELL:** The question over the boiling down of what all this was going to mean, as so many things do had come down to a question of what the President’s scheduling would be afterward. Would he in fact spend his time the first week with the cabinet and with the White House staff, shaping it up and dealing with the cabinet and get rid of some people in the cabinet and shake up the White House staff and announce the new job for Hamilton? Was that the course you wanted to follow or did you leave that aside at the moment and go instead of following up the themes of the speech? What ended up happening was atrophy. I shouldn’t say that, it’s not fair. It was due to exhaustion probably, and also because there were some people who had control of the schedule who strongly felt what was going to happen. The President was not involved in that decision. The decision was laid on the schedule. The President had decided originally after our stay at Camp David for us to work out the follow-up. That was difficult to do since he was the person making the decision to go this road. He is the person who felt comfortable with it. I would not have testified that a lot of people even understood the concept of what the President was trying to do.

**YOUNG:** Some were against the whole idea?

**CADDELL:** Some were against the idea to put it mildly. Some were threatened by it. This really had a lot to do with turf. He had left it to us to decide what the follow-up would be, which meant that given those feelings, there was going to be no real resolution unless he stepped into it. By his not stepping into it, there would be no consensus on what would happen. Thus, these staff things were scheduled. That decision came on Monday. This was because it was being planned prior to
knowing of the impact of the speech. To put it mildly, there were very few people who believed the speech would have the impact that it did. When you would argue that the speech was going to change things, it was going to change the environment, the attitude was that can’t happen, that’s not possible, so we will go on to what we want. And of course that’s in fact what the speech did. The speech just got lost, and frankly it got lost partly because of what happened later that week. Frankly, some of the people who were covering it didn’t want it to do well anyway. I went back and looked at all the polls of Presidential speeches. I dealt with the *New York Times* on that because they are the only people who had done a survey just prior to the speech and then after it. The President had jumped about 15 points in his approval rating in the basis of four or five days, which was the single biggest jump a President had had, certainly for a speech and also for any single event in terms of events in a four- or five-day movement. A lot of mail had been generated. The statistics were unbelievable in terms of the kinds of response it got. This was evident when the President was on the road. By the end of Monday, it was clear that this speech had caused an enormous positive impact. It had gotten the country’s attention and had focused it intensely on the President. He had become the central figure and it had caused a great reaction and response, and he was getting that on the road.

**JONES:** Well, before we get beyond this I just wonder in these discussions about timing and schedule and follow-up whether there was a discussion specifically of juxtaposition, of the best scenario from the speech, that is a really good positive impact for and against the impact of the cabinet shake-up and that kind of thing. Was there an analysis, of what if we get a really good positive response to this speech, what would happen if we followed that up with a cabinet shake-up, given the content of the speech itself? We say let’s bring people together, it’s time to do these kinds of thing, and then turn around and whappo. Not only the juxtaposition of those two as acts
but also the second being a headline-grabbing thing that would immediately move the press on to something else and off the speech. I just wondered if that was discussed or not.

CADDELL: There was not a great deal of discussion on that topic. Even by Monday the question was to keep it going. The decision had been made to have these meetings.

YOUNG: As I understood from the preamble to going up to the mountain, it was already implicit. That there was going to be, quite apart from the speech, a cabinet shake-up.

CADDELL: No, no. There was no assumption there was going to be a cabinet shake-up. There was going to be a change in the White House staff. There were people who strongly felt there should be changes in the cabinet, but the President had never indicated what became the great purge.

YOUNG: Had it been decided when these conversations took place, just to get the sequence of these things, that there would be cabinet changes?

CADDELL: No, this is one of the holes. Nobody knew, including Mrs. Carter, whether or not the President was going to make changes in the cabinet until he got back down and decided to make the changes.

YOUNG: After the speech.

CADDELL: After the speech. There was discussion, he had been talking to people, and talking to McIntyre and some other people looking at the whole government. That was a missing factor. There were individuals who felt so strongly about it being the central test of his commitment, that that lack in knowledge of what he would do was always a missing link in all the planning. There had been a scenario in writing from the original plan that really suggested different things that could happen in the wake of a successful speech. But again those were juxtapositioned against the question of do you announce the chief of staff of the White House. It was decided
that we would make the cabinet changes if the President decided to have any. It was going so fast that the schedule was set at the meeting with the White House staff or, the cabinet on Tuesday or Wednesday. This is always the case of bureaucratic fights. There were people who were against everything involved in it, so you had people and parties supporting different things. You had some people who were against the firings at all, and those who were not against them because they were going to step on the speech but who were against them for other reasons. Only at the last minute did they try to link it to the speech, but by that time their credibility around the table of debate was questioned. Others had already identified them as not being in favor of that anyway. All of these things were in the mix. What was lacking was really stopping and assessing the impact it had made, which we should have really done on Tuesday or Wednesday, and then rethought where we were, because certainly the speech had exceeded almost all the expectations of the people who had been involved at Camp David.

**JONES:** Part of the unity of purpose may have been in the President’s mind. I should put that in the form of a question. Did he see the cabinet shake-up as consistent with the message in the speech?

**CADDELL:** Well, he was asked that question in the press conference on Saturday after the firings, and he answered that question then. He said that he thought it was consistent in the sense that he needed to make some changes in the government. Whether that was a retrospective thing or whether in fact it was simply going from one track to the other, I really still don’t know. The pressures were so great internally to move.

**YOUNG:** Were you a part in any of the discussions with the President about changes in the cabinet, or did he hold this fairly close to his chest?

**CADDELL:** No. He held it very close in terms of who he would change.
WAYNE: I’m not exactly sure how this fits in. But one of the things that really impressed me about the speech was the extent to which he seemed to benefit in one way or another by posing self-criticism. I just wondered to what extent that this whole experience was for him something of a catharsis. Maybe this is just too way out, but I recall what happened when he lost that race for Governor in ’66. He saw Ruth Stapleton and they had a walk in the woods and he was able to put himself in some sort of perspective. Was this happening again?

CADDELL: I would absolutely not use that analogy to explain that. I would reject that out of hand. I think what happened to him that week was due to that he had been frustrated for a long time. I had known for months, since we first started this discussion, what he thought was happening in general with the impact of his Presidency on the country.

He had felt that he had gotten bogged down in a lot of details. Many of us felt that he was. He seemed somewhat released during that week. He was being far more assertive about what he wanted and how he wanted to do it and where he wanted to go. In that sense, it had been a process of reevaluation for him. It is probably helpful for Presidents to reevaluate sometimes, and he had felt pretty strongly about where he had come down.

YOUNG: I want to ask you if you attended the meeting, and if so to tell us something about when the President presented Hamilton’s new role back at the White House.

CADDELL: I absolutely was not there. At this point, that was really out of the question. I wasn’t going to be anywhere near that discussion.

YOUNG: What was the general staff reaction to the speech and to the announcement?

CADDELL: Well, I don’t really remember. I think some of it was positive and some of it wasn’t. One of the arguments had been on the table that what we ought to do was to announce Hamilton’s selection as chief of staff as a way to demonstrate the restructuring and getting tough
in the White House staff. There was also some discussion about whether that was not a better opportunity to try to educate his own staff to what he had been trying to do and try to engage them in that process. The decision became much more a statement about shaping up and using very tough talk about shaping up. The changes had very little to do with the idea of educating. On one hand people were happy to see the President taking charge; on the other hand it was a little mixed in terms of it initially being the focus.

THOMPSON: I wondered if there was discussion on the themes of the talk, pro and con. When one looks back, I’m not sure. Some of the points seemed to have enduring value. Others seem to have been more urgent at the time. If one had to weigh, for instance, the nuclear threat against the role of single interest groups, I don’t know which would seem to have most enduring value. I have my own opinion. I wondered if somebody said, “We’ve got to pick out,” as he did in his farewell things, “what he thought are of most fundamental importance,” or was it a fire engine speech?

CADDELL: The basic thrust of the speech was to what were larger questions, whether it was special interest or a sense of community in the country or the way the government worked. He felt very strongly about the special interest thing. He had talked about it for a long time without much hearing from people about it. He found that one of the most frustrating aspects of being President was the bargain pit, every time a proposal or a substantive proposal came up, that’s what he said. If you look at those remarks in Virginia, which he adapted into the speech, they were really the things he felt very strongly about. It was originally imagined to be a speech with a much larger, more enduring theme. The heat of the moment in terms of energy had pushed for things of immediate concern. I should say though, one of the things I frankly was not all that enthused about was moving so much energy into the speech. The impact of the speech itself on
attitudes about energy is very important. The President would get the desired level of support for the energy proposals. They were very long lasting. Even long after the speech was done, most specific proposals in public or even in private polls maintained 60 percent, 70 percent, or more support for each one of those proposals for a very long time. The answer is probably in serving a short-term function he had been effective in long-term goals.

**YOUNG:** He was really sort of killing several birds with one stone.

**CADDELL:** It got to be that.

**YOUNG:** In terms of the follow-up, as an inside-outside observer in the White House, what was different if anything after these staff shake-ups occurred and Hamilton was appointed? Was it any different?

**CADDELL:** Well I think in the short-term there was still a lot of chaos. Once the cabinet changes were made, the firings took place and the agenda changed, the public reaction was strong, which all of us, including myself, had certainly not gauged. It clearly derailed a lot of the substance of the other initiative. It’s inevitable that the struggles become intense once you decide to have reorganization. Peoples’ time gets taken up reorganizing; designing whose role is going to be what and where this is going to fit. There was little debate or discussion over the substance of what the direction was supposed to be and the substance that was to follow that, some of which had been laid out initially by the President at Camp David. In some cases, the reason that it was not was because there was just so much attention having to be given to the immediacy of restructuring. Secondly, a lot of people were fundamentally and ideologically opposed, not on a normal liberal-conservative spectrum, but essentially ideologically opposed to what the President had said. There was real resistance to even dealing with the question of that.

**YOUNG:** Question of what?
CADDELL: The direction that the speech had suggested or some of the things that had been discussed to follow up. So much of the consumption rate was then of the cabinet people who was going to be gotten, and then the re-staffing of the White House. The initiative, if there were substantive initiative that the speech was pointing to, disappeared.

YOUNG: Was there in fact a chief of staff, or only one in name?

CADDELL: No, there was a chief of staff. Hamilton tried to grab the reins very, very quickly in the White House.

YOUNG: But he soon got diverted to other things.

CADDELL: He got diverted to other things. Then there were some restructuring things that took place.

YOUNG: Al McDonald.

CADDELL: Al McDonald came in to be the organization person. So there was a chief of staff. There certainly was not a staff process that was much stronger. We still never did address the fundamental problems of the staff in terms of concepts and operations.

YOUNG: This is the politics and the substance dichotomy?

CADDELL: Politics and substance had never been integrated. That division had never been addressed. The problem of hierarchical areas of involvement, versus a more cross-cutting approach, was not resolved.

YOUNG: Could you elaborate on that a little bit? What do you mean by hierarchical?

CADDELL: The identification simply of advisors who were to be involved in energy and economics who would in fact develop policy without inputs from other people who might not have been in the primary area of their responsibility was a problem. In other words, we still did
not have a situation where we had people from all areas really dealing with the various initiatives. The various initiatives were still being dealt with singularly, rather than together.

**YOUNG:** You mean energy plus all the others.

**CADDELL:** Oh, yes. In that sense it was a cross-cutting between policy areas. That’s exactly right.

**STRONG:** What was the role of the First Lady in this whole reevaluation of the administration, and more broadly what role did she play throughout the four years?

**CADDELL:** All of us who were involved had very strong feelings positively about her and her involvement. She was someone who generally did not get involved in specifics of decisions that were being made. She seemed to have a very good instinct for whatever problems existed on the outside and for the perception problems that existed. She had a great concern for the President. She would always argue protecting the President’s images and prerogatives. She was always willing to accept criticism. She didn’t like criticism and she didn’t like what was going on inside, but she was always one to say, “We’ve got to do things and you really ought to do things.” She told us and the President that we ought to address problems. She was a product force. Since she had no particular axe to grind, certainly no bureaucratic axe to grind, she was exempt from the normal suspicions that come from that, so she could be an honest broker in the sense of saying, “Look, I think we’re wrong. These problems are very serious outside or the President’s having problems and I want him to be perceived differently and I want people to understand what he’s doing.” All through the four years she was that kind of force, and I think a positive one.

**WAYNE:** Just a quick follow-up to that. What was Walter Mondale doing during this period, particularly at Camp David? Did he and/or his staff play any role?
CADDELL: He and his staff were involved in the discussions that were going on at Camp David. He was also on the road for a good deal of that period, filling in for the President at some of the events scheduled to sell SALT that the President canceled and on the campaign swing. When he was not there, his staff was involved. He was on the road for a long time.

WAYNE: Did he have a discernable impact on what went on, even though he was on the road?

YOUNG: You mean at Camp David?

WAYNE: At Camp David.

CADDELL: The President continually consulted him.

YOUNG: But was he opposed in general?

CADDELL: If you read some of the accounts, there seemed to be some suggestion that he was.

YOUNG: We needn’t go beyond that.

JONES: Could I just back up on the First Lady discussion here? Did she ever take the initiative with either information or analysis?

CADDELL: Yes. She would call when she was disturbed by things and say, “I’m really concerned about what is going on. What do you think is happening?” She would reach out, not just to me but to other people, when she was bothered, and she would do it to get people’s assessment of what was happening. I always found it amazing because of the nature of the White House. It’s such an insulating bubble, particularly if you live there. Still, she managed during most of the four years probably better than anybody else to instinctively keep some kind of internal gyroscope that gave her balance and understanding of how things outside were being perceived.

YOUNG: She spent a fair amount of time going outside.
CADDELL: She spent a fair amount of time on the road, and she’s talked to a lot of people. She spent a lot of her time talking to people. She was very sensitive to that. That’s really where she saw her role. She never was really involved in policy or personnel decisions. She was always involved in prodding, in saying, “Are we doing the right things? Are we getting across, why aren’t we, can’t you all come up with something, don’t you think you need to do something?” And that’s really how she viewed her role. It was very helpful.

CEASER: There was the opposition, not only to your suggestions about the basic problem but to the content of the speech. Afterward, was there a vested interest on the part of some that this campaign should fail within the White House?

CADDELL: Yes. In my opinion, yes.

CEASER: It was also directed probably at you. Just in hearing you describe it, it seems like the senior staff politically had the President’s interests in mind, but that you were one of the few people who had some theory of leadership. There was a group, let’s say centered around maybe the Vice President, that saw leadership in terms of distributing certain things to the Democratic coalition. What you were offering was completely different. It reflected what you said about the campaign. How did this fall out afterward? Were people hoping that you would fail, that this notion would fail, the campaign would fail, as a way of vindicating their understanding of leadership vis à vis you?

CADDELL: I don’t take it personally in that sense. I always saw it as an ideological thing. The one thing I never thought about was a personal division. This is the one time of all the four years when emotions ran the highest, because what was being put on the table were far more fundamental questions than simply whose role was going to be that day or who was going to have to lead or whose turf was going to be decided. There were people who in all honesty
believed very much from what they understood. I think this was always a problem, because I don’t think that we had the kinds of discussions about what the President did, saying, “Look, this is why I want to go here, this is what I’m about,” in the sense of educating the staff. Before we got to any outside opposition, the first trenches were manned by the President’s own people or groups of the President’s own people who felt that this was ideologically very wrong. Therefore, the sooner it disappeared and failed, the better it would be, and we could go back to business as we should be conducting it in terms of leadership and the Presidency. I don’t think that there was an appreciation initially of if this was going to be a change as the President had envisioned it at Camp David or that the resistance would be that great. We really had this philosophical problem. It strikes me in retrospect that our initial issue about restructuring the White House should not have been simply over the question of mechanical functions or over the efficiency of those mechanical functions, but essentially back to questions of direction, vision and purpose. That should have been more speedily addressed, because otherwise it was not going to move.

YOUNG: Would it be fair to say that the Camp David affair and speech was really an attempt to get the President to move over the heads of Washington and reestablish some kind of touch with the country outside?

CADDELL: That’s true in a communication stance. It would be terrible to miss the point that essentially this was always to be a matter of substance, not style. It was a constant line I used about this question of substance. This was a question of substance in the larger sense of direction of the Presidency. Just communicating, and going over the city of Washington, and the move to the country was part of it. But it was also the philosophical direction change, or return, on the President’s part to a philosophy that he had had or a view of the Presidency.
CEASER: If you assume that this conflict went on, what really may be seen to take the place of the conflict was Iran or the Iranian event, which put the whole conflict on the back burner. This then seems to become the overriding concern of the Presidency, which was neither the view you were articulating nor the opposing one, and yet it turned out. Is this completely wrong? The way the President responded in the early part of the campaign was by implication contrary to what you wanted, because he had moved from being the leader of the people to asserting this view, “I have to stay in the White House and run the government.” Maybe that’s inevitable in a crisis, but it seemed to conflict with his entire message.

CADDELL: Well it certainly did, but by that point whatever had been envisioned to begin or to happen at Camp David was long dead.

CEASER: It had already dissipated.

CADDELL: Long disappeared. Even prior to Iran. We were then in a campaign, and the engines to drive the campaign were very different than any of these others.

CEASER: When did you see the whole thing losing momentum from your point of view from what you wanted?

CADDELL: About the second or third day.

CEASER: That soon?

YOUNG: As soon as he got back to Washington.

CADDELL: As soon as I got back to Washington. Then very quickly afterward. Every attempt to revive it was stillborn. The price that would have to have been paid internally. None of us, including the President, had ever really understood that to impose this direction on his own government would entail such a price that he could not pay it this late in his administration without making changes in a wholesale nature, not on the basis of competence and efficiency,
but in philosophy. It was not practical. In the face of that, the President essentially realized that
this could not really function that way.

Secondly, because he was very fond of it we would always have people saying, “We’re
really sticking to what we set out to do here,” as we would continue to go on and raise
propositions that in fact were much more centered on more traditional behavior, decisions, or
approaches than we had had. It would become a throw away. After a while, even that stopped
happening. There was an internal discussion for a while, questioning how to institutionalize the
kind of approach. That became an institutional conflict inside the White House during August,
which eventually was resolved in the idea being strangled to death slowly but surely to the point
where it disappeared from the agenda. By September everything had disappeared because
Edward Kennedy had decided he was going to run. That redirected all attentions.

YOUNG: Could I ask you to give us some specifics, not about who was doing what to whom,
but what would you have liked to see and what were you pushing for, beyond the projection of a
purpose and a direction in the government by the President? What specifically does that mean?
Getting rid of all the White House staff and starting a new crew? What would have been a
fruitful outcome of that in your view?

CADDELL: Well let me just say, let me just caution, I’m not going to be as specific as you
would like. I will try to be somewhat more general. I wrote a 109-page document on that
question, and the one agreement I made with the President is that I would never discuss what was
in that proposal. I made that pledge to him, and I’m not going to break it at this point.

YOUNG: Without the specifics, could you talk just in general about the kinds of things you
included in that proposal?
CADDELL: In general, the kinds of things that we were talking about doing, some of which he had included in the speech is worth going back and looking at. The remarks that he made to the communication workers on that Monday were essentially remarks that were originally part of the crisis-of-confidence speech, but excised out to make more room for the energy component, although there was some logic problem there. That part really addressed the question of how he described what he thought the future would be like and what his approaches would be. He said in that speech that he would be coming to people with something different on some of the problems we face. His solutions were nontraditional and encompassed a larger participation in the community. Some of the matters that he was going to take on and be concerned about with the Presidency were going to be more intangible than tangible.

One of the areas that he was most concerned about was the question of how, if the pit of special interest fighting in Washington was what is dominant, do you meld a coalition or some efforts from groups in a partnership particularly on economic matters to get beyond that and the trade-offs? What kind of mechanisms could you begin? Some of the issues you could do that on. In the larger sense, how could you expand in a country where most people felt they had very little impact on the country or its events? How in fact did you at least expand some involvement in discussion of trade-offs in the society that we would face on some of the issues, whether they were energy or economic or environmental. There were a series of very specific ideas and things posed. There was also an agenda of issues that did not need a definition of our agenda books as issues. One of the things we were interested in was the whole question of communications. Our communications strategy was being executed at the FCC quite skillfully by Charlie Ferris. It was meant to deregulate communications and television. In a very minor way, that’s an area where you would begin to ask the question, “To what extent do you want to weigh the impact of
exploding communication technology on the country?” That, in fact, should be a legitimate concern, other than just regulatory policy per se. We had not really focused on these attentions in our society. Maybe we ought to give some thought to that before we institute policies. The issues here were not simply regulatory or nonregulatory questions over the airways. It always got pushed away because we really hadn’t gotten to that. The question was initially viewed as if you could make a breakthrough or hit the beach, and quickly if you could consolidate a position from which you could then move. We got on the beach all right.

**YOUNG:** This is a larger order. It seems to be that what you’re saying is that the President was, in the communications workers speech, talking about reforming our ways of thinking about public problems and our ways of handling those problems given the nature of the system with which we deal. I was quite struck by your use of the question about how did one engage in a partnership with all these elites to solve problems. I’ve been reading fairly methodically everything Carter said. It’s very interesting that that is a persistent theme that goes way back from the very beginning when he was talking to small groups of employees in the Department of Labor, to whom he said, “We are partners in a process.” He goes on to Albuquerque and talks about the nature of public service and problems.

**THOMPSON:** Maybe this gets too personal, but the two- or three-day life of the effort, and some other things you said, make me wonder about one question. Every now and then when we’ve had visitors and we’ve asked about Camp David they said, “You’d better talk to Pat Caddell.” The specific question is, along with these people and other ideas, did you have allies in this effort and who were they, without mentioning any of the critics? Were there others who had some of this same vision that you talked about?
CADDELL: Yes. I think the most prominent person who probably shared the approach was Jody, who had been involved from the beginning in this and who would come around the struggles himself as I described yesterday. Initially my need for finding someone on the staff who would have some simpatico with this. It was impossible to move it without that. Jody had generally supported it. He had struggled himself through some of his own feelings about having been literally in the firing line day after day after day in the sense that we couldn’t move that way. But Jody was in all of this time so consumed in part by having the whole press relations, the forces for which he directed to the point that he did not get to participate in as much of the substantive discussions that were going on. I think either Jody would have liked to, or I desperately would have liked Jody to participate. There were other people in the staff that were second level positions and some at the first level positions who in fact had sympathy for some or all the parts of the approach. Some would admit that they really did not understand it. They liked the feel of it, but they did not understand and therefore exempted themselves on that basis. Some of the people at the second level were very excited by it, but were not in a position to necessarily have much impact, except on trying to argue with some of their principles in some of those discussions. So it wasn’t like I was all by myself in this, but it was a problem because again it was very different and very new. If you had had to vote, the process would not even have begun. It did run against the disposition or the experiences of a majority of people who were in positions on the staff. I can appreciate that, and they could at the top.

CEASER: The issues at Camp David as you describe them are really the same issues that took place between the election and the inauguration. You mentioned just now that maybe it was too late. It strikes me that what you personally had in mind, as did maybe the President although maybe from a lack of confidence he withdrew, was an idea of displacing the traditional
Democratic elite and building a new kind of Democratic Party by creating a new constituency. You suggested a different sort of cabinet, especially at the second level leadership in the cabinet, which would have been drawn from outside of Washington, an entirely different group that would have formed the kind of new Democratic Party addressing the issues that you had in mind.

CADDELL: Jim, I think you’re overstating now. I certainly do not want to make it appear that that’s what I was suggesting. First of all, that would have been highly unrealistic and not very productive. The effort in my mind from the beginning was that you would reach far beyond what we had reached, not that you would exclude the traditional elements of the leadership coalitions in the Democratic Party. I don’t think we were really talking about redesigning the Democratic Party.

It was always, as I said in the memo in ’76, that the events and the issues of the time had forced the Democratic Party into a position of either moving and adjusting incrementally to deal with that, and positioning itself to deal with those issues, or in fact being slaughtered if it did not. It was in part the victim of its own success. The issue agenda that was rising from that success and some of the things of the ’70s were such that the party had to move to address those to some extent, and change some of its direction. It needed to change its values, not its purposes at all, but to go through the metamorphosis it had always gone through. I was suggesting not that you displace entirely the Democratic elite but that you find a way to enlarge it. It seemed to me that Franklin Roosevelt had attempted this successfully. He managed to always understand the frictions of blending the Democratic elite he was left with or inherited when he became Democratic nominee and the President, with a lot of the forces that he brought into the system. The directions he went were very different for the party. It was a process with more development
and blending and eventual evolution than it was displacement. It always seemed to me that that’s where we were trying to head, if we were going to move to the future.

CEASER: Few people even thought about this once things got going.

CADDELL: I think that’s a fair statement, that that was not a topic of many conversations.

YOUNG: Reforming the Democratic Party?

CADDELL: Where you want to take the party, and where it’s going to be, and what you are doing; what’s the impact of what you’re going to do with the Democratic Party or what it’s going to be as a living entity.

THOMPSON: Did you ever discuss that with Strauss?

CADDELL: Sometimes. Strauss and I actually had a couple of conversations about that. Bob was very sympathetic, just seeing the pressures that we were under because he had been under the same ones as chairman. He, perhaps more than anybody, could appreciate the forces that worked there. They were real events, pushing you in the constituencies and where the traditional base and direction and party was. So he had some interesting things to say.

YOUNG: Perhaps the stunning defeat will do more to reform the party.

CADDELL: It always does. First of all, it leaves less people around to have to deal with. It’s sort of a Long March.

JONES: The question about Strauss, but also your discussion of the party more generally, triggers this question. Did you ever meet, in regard to the points that were raised in your memo to the President leading to Camp David, with members of Congress, specifically on briefing them on the kind of evidence, meeting with party leaders or people in the party structure otherwise?
CADDELL: I had had some informal conversations with some of the people on the Hill, particularly some of the younger members of the Senate and some of the younger members of the House, people who I had relationships with, who were clients and/or friends of mine. During this period I had had some informal conversations with them in discussing this thing. There was never any formal process. In fact, one of the things that I think was the most natural second step once the speech had made a breakthrough would have been once we had shown everybody that there was a great response in the country and that this was the President who was both starting internally in the White House and then reaching out, to move to those people that you needed on the Hill to educate them as to where he would like to go, and bring in those people who would have been potentially the most natural allies of those ideas, of which there were larger numbers on the Hill. That priority of education was never realized. Always understand this, in the White House ideas versus structure, ideas always carry or always have the most minimal importance for most people who participate there. They’re activists, they’re people who get things done, they see themselves as managers. Education generally meets with not a lot of enthusiasm.

JONES: Was this a conversation you ever had with the President? Did he say, “Others in the Democratic Party particularly got to see the evidence, and at some point we’ve got to educate them and make them see it in the same way that I see it.”

CADDELL: Without getting into those conversations, which I don’t want to do, it was an extremely long document that a lot of thought had been put into, and that was certainly one of the areas that we naturally addressed.

THOMPSON: Would you say that one of the failures of the Carter administration was in widening this coalition? One of the things that strikes me, and I may be completely wrong, is that little clusters of people that I’ve known something about who ought to have had some natural
and common interests with the administration one by one seemed to peel off. One little group I know about who in a way with your President more than any other should have had common interest were people influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, and except for Jim Bingham or one or two others, they all peeled off. Similarly, some of the IR people peeled off because they thought Cy Vance and Brzezinski drew on too narrow a constituency. These are just a couple that I know about, but I’ve heard comments about others. You compare that with Richard Allen’s 99 advisors in foreign policy more or less of common viewpoint of Heritage Foundation, Hoover, AEI, and all these groups. I wondered whether you lost a battle fairly early to bring some of these people of different viewpoints into the effort?

CADDELL: I think you can look back and say that was a problem. We were much more mechanical in our view of the office, issues and problems than about groups and coalitions. We despaired over special interest and on the other hand we did not intellectually pursue a coalition, a permanent coalition, of interests on our side. To engage and involve them in a way would have given them a stake in this sort of thing. You would have to really think from the beginning as you enter the Presidency that that’s what you were going up against, particularly when you’re a President who has no real allies built over time. You don’t have people that you’ve gone through battles with and have been related to. There was a vacuum of experience that was so great that you would really have to make an even stronger effort to very quickly build and nurture some bonds. We didn’t develop them or realize down the road that was going to be very important. It was worth that investment and to make initially a decision, “This investment can be important.” Instead, we assumed that people should support what we were doing essentially on the merits, and that they should be for it because it was the right thing, and that people should come and help us, as the issues changed because they would know we were right.
YOUNG: It’s almost inherent in the nature of the discussions about the Carter Presidency, and in trying to figure out this puzzle, particularly in the light of the fact that it was defeated, that the discussions center on the horrendous problems, the weaknesses, the failings, the things that might have been that weren’t done. That is very instructive. I think there’s another side to this, and that is that these discussions probably should get balanced by some conception of what the particular strengths or accomplishments of this President were. What his positive side was, because I think we’re all aware that the nature of the politics is not quite like that of the ’30s and the standards that we use for judging and evaluating Presidents that are derived from the Roosevelt model tend to be rather outdated. I’d like to draw you out on that. What was Carter’s perception and conception of the Presidency as you saw him cope with these problems? What, if any, kind of vision did he have of what was needed of the Presidency, beyond the redemption of confidence in government? Could he get these imposed on the government, could he direct it, what direction was there in him?

CADDELL: I don’t think any of us can speak for the President directly.

YOUNG: What would you say about him from the way you saw him work.

CADDELL: One of the things that impressed me when I first started work for Jimmy Carter was his nature. It’s important, and I think it will be important after we get through the Reagan administration. One of the things that always appealed to me was not only Carter’s view of the country, his vision for the country in the sense of confidence in the government and the society at large, but also the idea of how he related the relationships that existed between the host of problems and the short-term solutions that were not going to be significant. He thought you had to move to long-term solutions. That started with an understanding that problems were related, and these issues were related. Everything that he did in his Presidency except for those things...
that swamped us for the moment tended to be efforts in the long term, particularly if you look at energy, which was something in which there was no great political outcry in 1977 to do something about. The first discussions we had as we moved to substance in ’77 were how to concentrate attention to gather support in a public that was not all that interested in that issue. How do you mobilize a society that was not sitting in gas lines at that moment to deal with a problem that you believe is going to be great, not only for the next few years but for ten or 20 years beyond that? The problem of energy and its relationship to security, the national health, was something that the President always saw and was concerned about.

In foreign policy, he thought it was important to consider the relationship the United States had in the Third World, particularly in Africa, Latin American and Asia, and building those relationships beyond simply the kind of initiatives that you normally take in foreign policy, which are dictated by what happened today in El Salvador and yesterday in Iran. He had that sense of long view that we had to go to them. That’s why he so much insisted on leaving politics out of the calculations, as though politics per se would always tend to make these things short-term or incremental, and not deal with long-term solutions. The President struggled with that.

A lot of what Camp David was about concerns the long view of coming into the office that since Watergate has become much weakened. You have three factors: you have an office that is institutionally weaker, and you have a public whose level of patience and confidence has decreased greatly, making its automatic acceptance of governmental leadership less likely. The kind of support that people will give to any President is not of a long duration. It has to be constantly won. In fact, the impatience accelerates. That is a reaction to the fact that people don’t believe the government. The leaders say they’re going to do things, but things don’t get solved. The people become unhappy, and rather than being marginally unhappy and having patience
with it, what has happened to them, and I think it’s very provable from the data, is that their
willingness to support immediately moves off to something else, in search of something. That
also comes in that third area. The issue agenda that the country faces has an enormously
 technological nature. The issues are complicated. There are issues that are in some ways different
from what people have seen before.

They don’t seem to lend themselves to easy visible solutions or even particularly short-
term solutions. It comes at a time when people perceived decline, whether they like it or not.
They sense that things are not getting better, but in the measurable things, things seem to be
quantitatively less and less and less. Inflation is something that’s had enormous impact on that.
Those of us who engaged in looking at public opinion would make the case. I certainly would be
among those people who argue that inflation can be very debilitating to a society, to a
psychology, to community and purpose. There is now abundant evidence of what a double-digit
or persistent inflation and the fear of inflation does to a society. Lump all of that together for a
President who has got a very short time frame in which to accomplish something, and you can’t
solve the highly complicated technical issues that you have to deal with in the long term. You
have a public that is restless, if not to some extent more cynical than it has been. How do you
lead or get somewhere with such a public? We will now see the prospect of one-term Presidents
being the rule, not the exception.

**YOUNG:** Do you think that President Carter saw it that way?

**CADDELL:** Yes. I know for a fact that in terms of some of the discussions that I had with him,
that he saw the situation much that way. He could reflect and see it. Yet, there were also the
enormous demands that came every day to him, which required that he make decisions, to make
the government run, to decide things, to deal with this issue and that issue and that problem. The
period of Camp David itself in the spring of ’79 was when he had become frustrated about those things and the need to find a framework to lead the country as he had promised.

YOUNG: We’re not getting anywhere, there’s frustration.

CADDELL: That’s right. We’re not getting anywhere, we’ve got these bills, but we’re not really getting there, people are not following, we’re not headed somewhere. Place that against the day-to-day demands taking much of the President’s time. It seems to me that the size of the White House, the government and the bureaucracy by its very size drives a very large daily agenda at the President. The number of things that come to him grow larger, not smaller. If you have more people to solve more problems, what ends up being thrown up are more decisions to the President, and more day-to-day decisions. The whole place becomes a crisis center of one kind or another depending on which day of the week and what the crisis is. The President had those frustrations and in a sense Camp David was a desire on his part because we weren’t getting anywhere, to go someplace, to pull this out, to find high ground on this.

I think some of the things that were said about leadership of the American Presidency were very instructive. The problem is of transactional leadership in a time of the problems of transcending leadership, if you accept those definitions. I think that the President will do better as time goes on. People will see, particularly if you look at post-Watergate Presidents. Let’s not go back and compare 20 or 30 years, but look at his immediate predecessors and his immediate successor. There were some real things done, some progress made, there were some efforts at this direction. He will stand up well against those others Presidencies as time goes on. There’s a larger question involved here, which is, what is the lesson for another President? I have thought about that a lot. It seems to me that there’s a lot to learn positively from the Carter experience.
There are some things to avoid that show up, but in this new kind of environment, with the factors that we talked about, there’s a lot positively to learn about some of the things you can do and some of the pitfalls that will immediately overrun you. We will discover that the Reagan solution is another effort by the country to find some other answer outside the mainstream which has been the American public’s instinct for the last decade. Ideology without reference to any of these other questions is not going to serve us very well, and it will disappear relatively quickly. If we would all do it over, it would be much, much different. That difference would come not from saying, “We really wanted to do something, we tried something else but we come from it having learned about things.”

One of the problems that the President had goes to elites. This is one of the difficulties with Camp David. It’s a difficulty today. The President’s own instincts were always, if you look at the campaign, the speeches, the talks he gave on his own, the things at Camp David, to break out of the institutional constraints and to move in bigger conceptual directions. The problem here was the lack of experience and, for good reason, the need to depend on people who were experts and advisors. This is a very critical job, a lot depends on it. Those people had a role to play. The lack of experience would allow you to say that I know my instincts are right, in fact I can implement my instincts. It is a problem for anyone coming into the Presidency. My central concern about elites in Washington is related to the premise that the office is weakened, that a lot of that power has slipped to other players and to other war lords, whether they are special interests, Congress, or the press, and if you accept for the moment the premise that the public attitudes are characterized by impatience, frustration and cynicism. What is in their mind has been the constant failure of the government to do those things that the government was supposed to be able to do and effectively to solve the problems. Problems would not only not be solved,
they seemed to always expand into something bigger and worse than what you started with. It seems to me that there is in Washington and in the party among its elite structures an unwillingness to come to grips with these larger premises. You could see it in the emotional reaction inside of Washington to Camp David, as though Jimmy Carter had stood up and personally attacked each of these individuals not in a political but in a very personal way. If you go back and read what they said, even in the first few days when the response from the country was very positive, they had a sense that somehow he had impugned their motives or patriotism, which is a natural human response.

**YOUNG:** You would think that they would have had a little bit of a tough eye.

**CADDELL:** Yes. Some say on this one they almost had none at all. It was like they were all amateurs.

**JONES:** Who are we talking about here?

**YOUNG:** Washingtonians.

**CADDELL:** Generally the political leaders of the country, its political and press elites. If you want I could give you a list and we can fill the room with them. They reacted very, very strongly to that, as they had in the campaign. I think they reacted, in part, because Carter struck something very deep in the country with these feelings, but not with the same impact on those Washington people because in a sense what you’re saying is if things are in decline, if we’re not managing these problems and these are longer terms things, whatever all is, it all points to the fact that it’s happened, folks, on your watch. You have been on the bridge when this has happened. So the accusation of failure is far more fundamental than just politically saying, “You’ve screwed this up, let me have it in among the players.” It was something beyond that. Carter was the product of a national belief that that is what had happened. That is the basic
fundamental reason, in my opinion, why he had become President. He was the ultimate outsider at that point, who had said that these people have failed. “They have failed the country. Send me because I am going to change this; I’m going to restore the country.” President Carter’s campaign in 1976 was not a radical campaign. His greatest thing was a campaign of restoration of values, direction and purpose. He is a man who is extremely intelligent and could talk from the very beginning about the substance of big problems, big issues and long-term consequences.

JONES: Do you think this might be interpreted as almost a missionary as a President, as perceived by others who didn’t see themselves as natives?

CADDELL: That’s right. Well they had been doing it. It was there, they were the people who attended the functions, whichever party was there. Yes, they thought, *Here’s this missionary coming, and he’s here because he is convinced we natives out there are bad or have failed.* It is bound somewhere along the line to cause friction. All actors are still humans and that psychology has an impact on these people.

YOUNG: It seems to me that you thought the campaign was one aiming at restoration. What you’re describing is the purpose in office or the aspiration of Carter was to be some kind of transformation leader, to use Burns’ terms, who would think about the long-run. Some in Washington had powerful difficulties in accepting that kind of transformational leadership. There also were some difficulties on his part as an outsider in implementing these transformations, resulting in a good deal of frustration. If you look at Reagan a moment you see also another transformational leader, also an outsider who it seems is looking for long range, structural solutions to the problems of government and its role in society. Should one pair—contrast and compare—Reagan and Carter as two outsiders both finding themselves in a confrontational posture with Washington? Does that have something to do with the mood of the public?
CADDELL: I think so to some extent. You can make those comparisons and contrasts. Yes there are similarities there, but there are also enormous differences. I think Carter was always a much more future oriented individual. He was a man who was not afraid of the future. He was excited by it, and that was always his background. To be harshly partisan about it, I think that President Reagan’s long view is essentially backward. His futures are past. It’s an attempt to restore not just a sense of your values and redirecting them to new challenges and new problems, but in fact to somehow stop the clock and go back to restore a past that never existed structurally. YOUNG: That’s also a transformation. CADDELL: It’s a transformation, and it’s interesting. But the important point here is that the public, to the extent that this is their country, which I have kept having to argue to this day with the elites in Washington, this is not the elites’ government, but that it belongs to the people. They have constantly searched for someone who was transforming or outside the structure since Vietnam, if you look at the out party and its primary processes. In each instance, the Party has turned, for whatever reason, to someone who is not the candidate or the representative of the institutional middle ground of that party. Its institutional structures. George McGovern in 1972 was hardly the institutional figure. He was an ideologue in a way that Reagan is, in a different way perhaps. In ’76, the Democrats turned to Jimmy Carter, who really was very stylistic, as well a number of other things, and very far away from that mainstream institutional view. If you consider Gerald Ford as a half President, as I do, even in that party Ronald Reagan almost took the nomination away from him, and it was a tightly disciplined minority party in which challenges are rare even at the state and local levels, much less at the Presidential level. And then in ’80, Reagan triumphs. In each case when the public has had a say, they seem to search out beyond Washington. This parallels, of course, the reason for the one-term Presidency. It seems to
me that if you step back, somebody is trying to send a message here. They search for someone who will transform things and will make government effective, give people a sense of purpose, a sense of movement, and avoid the frustration of incremental decline in the country. I believe that firmly. They sense that sort of declining incrementalism.

**YOUNG:** Well now does this program any Presidency for failure?

**CADDELL:** Given the nature of the problems we have building up and the forces at work here, we have an inability to solve a lot of them long-term or even to undo some of the efforts of the past years. Many of the Carter initiatives are somewhat being undone. Any President coming in faces very grave odds of being successful. An example of this to me were some things that happened when Gerald Ford was President that had never happened before, at least since we’d had survey data. People gave Gerald Ford very high personal ratings and very low marks as President. Traditionally, if you go back and look at Presidential ratings through the ’50s and ’60s, particularly in the postwar period when we had developed more sophisticated tools of measuring popularity and doing public opinion research, the President’s personal popularity and job popularity seemed to be totally integrated. Their ratings were very similar. You would not see great divergences in those ratings. Ford was the first person to whom this happened. It was just a phenomenon. It was related to Nixon, because of who he was. Carter was not in office six months before the same phenomenon began to hit him. I first started writing memos in October of ’77 about that it was going in that direction. I wrote a memo in December of ’77 based on a survey we had done. It was a survey report. It used the analogue of, “Mr. President, we are really in a bind here. You are like a skier with one ski pointing uphill and one ski pointing downhill. Gravity is going to pull down that one pointing uphill eventually. You cannot maintain this posture of high personal popularity and enormous suspicions about your job.” This is what
caused the first Camp David in April. We took about a 27-point dive in the President’s overall popularity rating between January and April of 1978, when really there was nothing much going on. The Panama Canal was in debate, but we weren’t even being driven by events.

YOUNG: Except that there were all kinds of negative assessments of Carter’s competence coming out.

CADDELL: That’s what I’m about to say. That there were no real events that were dominating the headlines. It was a set of perceptions that were beginning to come. Some of the doubts had persisted since the campaign. When I watched the first ratings for Ronald Reagan after he was elected, I was struck from the very beginning, even prior to his inauguration, by how similarly the pattern that we had seen with Carter was duplicating itself with him. There was no real movement in popularity prior to inauguration, there was no halo effect. Even though Reagan had won a bigger victory than Carter, he was far less popular than Carter had been in ’76. In 1980, both candidates were relatively unpopular with the American people. In 1976, despite all of the discussions about the choice, both candidates were fairly popular with people. People liked both Ford and Carter in ’76. And it seemed to me that what you were perhaps getting was an early burst upward for a President and then an inevitable decline back to whatever his real electoral base was in popularity. Carter seemed by the end of his term to return to whatever his fundamental base had been in election. Reagan has tracked Carter, as I gave a speech in April on this for the National Journal where I made the point. I was already seeing this and suggesting that if this continued, we might see the same duplication. I have been amazed at how much these two Presidents, in terms of their popularity, have graphed in terms of the declines. They track almost perfectly, except that Reagan is always lower than Carter because in fact he had a lower base. He now reaches 50 percent at the end of the year. Despite his successes, his popularity was not
improving in a fundamental way. Last October-November I predicted he would go through an enormous decline in February and March. You can see this now because of the economy and unemployment. After a while, you have to be struck by the patterns. I think you would have to say there’s a long answer to this, but I want to get this point out because it’s important.

It seems to me that when Presidents come in, the initial forces are stacked against them. The office has not been terribly strengthened. Even Reagan’s successes in the summer were not because he had ideologically moved the country, but because the country had said, “This guy’s going to get a chance, we elected him, now give him a chance even though we don’t particularly know that what he’s doing makes sense.” There were grave concerns about it. It seems to me that Presidents are going to have to come to that, which is why I think the Carter Presidency is so important. It has a lot of positive messages here to draw from, either from its failures or from the things it did successfully. If I were running someone for President and I were relatively confident that that person could win, I’d use this knowledge. Given the electoral structure, it’s easier to elect a President if you’ve got the right person fitting the right mood at the moment than ever before. The kinds of institutional and intellectual barriers that have been constructed over the years have been seriously eroded. The right person at the right time can move much quicker if he can control some mistakes and the press. Then he can succeed. Instead of spending 18 months on his campaign, he should really begin to think through what you do when you get there, because the clock starts running, it seems, the minute you get elected. How are they going to conceptually approach these problems? The odds seem to be that you will meet with disappointment and perhaps more likely even failure before the end of the term. That can all change by events. I almost think that if things got really very bad, as opposed to just marginally worse and worse, someone might actually have a better chance of turning that flow around. But it seems to me that
the challenge for someone who is going to be President is much greater because now you have this problem that Carter ran into. Not only must you administer and be an executive and run the government day-to-day and struggle with the forces in front of you, somehow you’ve got to find a way in which to effectively transform the country and not be ground up either by the frustration of the public or by the other forces like elites and institutions that you deal with. That is going to require a lot more strategizing on the part of the person who’s going to be President. We now ask for a lot more than we normally would of Presidents. That may all be wrong, but I think there are some elements of truth there.

**YOUNG:** One of the things we have always talked about, usually in a fairly undisciplined way, is that the President gets caught in an un-closable gap between expectations and performance. But is what you’re saying here that there are two sets of expectations that are not convergent that confront any President from Day One, the expectations of the Washington community and the people there and the other the expectations of his electorate?

**CADDELL:** That’s right.

**YOUNG:** And that is more accurately described in the kind of bind, particularly with outsiders who can be quick winners in the media election campaigns? Is that one of the fundamental problems that caught the Carter Presidency?

**CADDELL:** I think it is one of the fundamental things that caught the Carter Presidency. What we attempted to do was to keep giving full attention to one or the other.

**YOUNG:** But mostly to Washington.

**CADDELL:** But mostly to Washington. And without a whole lot of satisfaction necessarily there because there were some inherent difficulties. A couple of times we tried to jerk back to our larger public.
YOUNG: Like Camp David, and then that dissipated?

CADDELL: That dissipated, and later we went back to a campaign that was in fact directed to them, which was what the government in 1980 is basically about—finally, his reelection. I think you’re right. Those are some very dangerous shoals to sail through.

YOUNG: One of the pieces of conventional wisdom is that if only a President pulls the right levers, massages the right people, and does things in a Washington way, and knows the fine print of Washington, this problem will evaporate. If he has the right technique, the right savvy and political finesse, he can manage Washington. Is that your view?

CADDELL: Yes, I think that’s a mistake. The conventional wisdom that’s put out there is a siren song for an executive who comes in believing that. In the short-term it might work nicely, as it did for Reagan in Washington. The problem goes back to the first point I made about the office. People are not reluctant to challenge the President. They’ve never been reluctant to challenge Presidents. Since ’77, you’ve got powerful forces there, and it’s not a question of what they like or that you’re going to stroke them properly or whatever, you’re really talking about power here. People do not yield power voluntarily if they can help it. If they yield it, it’s because they are forced to yield or it’s in their interests to yield or they suspect something’s going to come from that. A Washington prescription that says, yes, push all the right levers, is false. In fact, they say, give us even more power and control in the decision of your Presidency, and that’s how you succeed. There are Presidents who can sit in that office and say, “I’m going to share this or voluntarily give this up.” They come there elected, and remember their real constituency outside sent them, so they feel some responsibilities. The public is constantly sending people. If the country bought that prescription, Jimmy Carter would not have been the nominee of the
Democratic Party in 1976 and Ronald Reagan would not have been the nominee of the Republican Party in 1980.

YOUNG: Maybe it has something to do with this phenomenon you noted beginning with Ford, about outside popularity being disjoined from evaluations of job, most information of which tends to come out of Washington, I think.

WAYNE: That’s exactly the point I was going to make. If the press that shapes public perceptions is keyed on the Washington view of how government works, then how are you ever going to avoid Washington without having those negative press perceptions?

CADDELL: If I were sitting down and working on a memo and was 18 months out from the campaign that I thought I might win, one of the first and most critical questions that you can address is this. It seems to me that, and this is where I think Burns is right, once you make a commitment to essentially operate in the transactional pit of Washington, you have doomed yourself because other participants in the pit will now be the filter through which what you do or do not do reaches people. If a President’s ability to move Washington involves gathering power or coalitions of power or support, it seems to me that you require a certain political adroitness, which powers the heart of all this in the end. Reagan’s proved this in ’81 because that’s what really frightened Washington. How popular, how can you maintain, so that the perceived support can mobilize the country? In fact, your big stick, although he may speak softly, is there on the table. How do you manage that, how do you strategize? That seems to me to be the real issue, because the danger is once you are willing to accept the game on the institutional level with Washington, then you run the risk that they will also be the judgment and the filter and that in the end they’re going to filter out only things that are not going to reflect positively on you. That’s why I said that thinking you’re going to charm people or other power centers is a great mistake.
JONES: But you’ve also said there is no other option, because the recent example, at least with Carter and as we’re observing it to this point with Reagan, of the transformational approach also fails, and may even contribute to one-term Presidents. That sustains the view in Washington of, “What’s the point of paying any attention to this person? He’s there for such a short time.”

YOUNG: He’s very useful as chief clerk.

JONES: And if he has the audacity to try something else, we surely will portray him as a failure.

YOUNG: And his program as a failure.

CADDELL: It seems to me that the way you have to break that, and this is why I said you have to strategize it before, is that the President does come with certain assets initially. He starts with the public on his side. It seems to me that he has got to, in setting his agenda, deal with this question of power. The only way to hope to break that is in fact to somehow deal with this head on. I don’t know what the answer to that is. I’m not there yet, or I maybe never will be in thinking that through. But it seems to me that you have got to approach it, you can’t simply throw up your hands and say, “This ain’t going to work. Let’s enjoy it while we can.” That’s not effective either. It seems to me that you’ve got to find a way to challenge it so that you can maintain some kind of support levels, and use those support levels, while you think through what is your short-term agenda that allows you to prove effectiveness and allows you one to maintain your popularity base, but secondly win over or defeat or bring into coalition or what have you these other forces. How do you break them apart, how do you do that, how do you begin to? You’re running headlong against the odds, but that’s the only game it seems to me you have, because otherwise, the other route would be certain failure.

YOUNG: This is quite a dilemma, isn’t it? How do you do it? The short-term and the long-term solutions both need success.
**CADDELL:** Events may in fact change this for you. The other factor here is that if events move, instead, as incremental declines and negative, then we in fact have a much more serious crisis that someone who is coming in to address them. Therefore, you’ve been given extraordinary grants of political power in the sense of affecting solutions that the person then may have that opportunity to affect.

**YOUNG:** The magnitude of catastrophe that may produce is remarkable.

**WAYNE:** You’re still making the judgment on tangibles. You began yesterday by saying the thrust of the campaign concerned a lot of intangibles. Even if you have a Napoleon Reagan, or someone like that coming in with a tremendous kind of crisis, a judgment is still going to be based on what he has done to help us out of the problem.

**CADDELL:** In fact, this is what I meant talking about the filter. If, in fact, that’s the only thing being filtered, that’s where they’re getting their information, they will then be making the judgment over specifics. What I said was the President has got to go to the intangibles and make some kind of linkage where the public can make its own direct judgments and feelings about those things. That’s because he’s positioned the filter in an opponent automatically, so he is discredited. He has got to establish some direct linkages on those grounds so people say, “Yes I’m being satisfied, yes I like that,” and essentially what he’s doing with those intangibles in the short term is buying time to prove that his long-term solutions work.

**YOUNG:** And may benefit his successors.

**CADDELL:** And this may benefit his successors, and benefit the country even. In retrospect you can almost see how that might have worked if he’s going to get all the clutter out of the way in terms of energy. Jimmy Carter in the last year or so seemed to make a very strong case to the country that, “Boy, we really accomplished something here. Something has happened. It’s a
change, it’s a difference and it’s effective and we got something out of that.” We have some ability to go to the country and have the satisfaction of saying we really accomplished this. This is what we thought would happen, and this is what everyone said could not happen, and look what we have in fact done. We have done it together, and now it’s helped us to feed this other problem. There are things you can solve: problems. What you cannot do is approach the government as saying that “there is nothing you can solve, no problems you can solve.”

It seems to me that if, in fact, your real problems are longer term—two, three, four, five year kinds of problems—then you have got to maintain a way in which somehow you can keep credibility, even if you implement those things that you’ll get results on so you can then bring to the table.

**YOUNG:** A little while back you talked very briefly about something that might have happened during a second term. Would this problem that we’ve just been discussing, which visits itself on any incumbent in the Presidency, have been made less acute after a reelection of Carter, or would Carter had been reelected had we seen more of the same?

**CADDELL:** I don’t know. I didn’t know that in 1980, and I kept having that question myself. At one point in 1980, in May, the President called several of us together in the cabinet room on his own initiative and just the government, what was happening. Again, he reached a high level of frustration. In the campaign we were winning, but the kinds of solutions he was getting and the kinds of things he was opposed to when he was dissatisfied and uneasy the year before made him angry now. I would not care to repeat what he said. I’m sure it would come as a shock to a lot of the people who worked for him at the time and did not hear this message. There was some talk about when it came down to a political decision involving some boldness over whether he’d debate Kennedy or not in June, and at that meeting the President said, “Damnit, I’m tired of all
this. I’m going to debate him and get it over with and go ahead and do this.” And eventually he
did. I, frankly, didn’t get overly-enthused at the moment over the thing happening anyway.

What he would have done with a second term: there were things he wanted to tackle.
There were problems that were extremely unpopular politically that needed to be addressed.
Maybe in addressing those you would seal your political fate but he wanted to do some things.
Entitlement is one of those questions. We were all bothered by that. The President had gotten
another lease on this and was not interested. I just don’t believe that he was interested in going
through another four years like the four years he had just had. And now the one advantage he
would have had is in fact he had been through it. It would have been a break.

YOUNG: Was there, beyond the general dissatisfaction you’ve talked about, any discussion that
you knew about or were privy to planning for the second term?

CADDELL: There were some discussions going on. Some people were working on agenda
items, but in the campaign we kept insisting at these endless meetings we would have on the
subject. Government people would say to us, which I thought was simply an irony and enjoyed
immensely, “You must show the country that the President has vision.” I would keep saying
back to them, “Thank you very much, now you tell me what the vision is and I will be glad to
communicate it.” Then the meetings would simply break down. Not once could they come up
with something that could be described as coherence. By the way, the President was part and
parcel of those conversations on some occasions. I think that’s one of the things that he was
frustrated about. It was a recognition that when you turn to the middle managers, the bureaucracy
of your government and your White House, and when your life is at stake politically, they have
no vision of where they’re going. More of the same was what was being promised. And there
was nobody at the table who with a straight face thought that was acceptable. I always thought
that was a poignant moment in the course of this process. I don’t think the President knew the answer to that. He would have felt remarkably free.

**YOUNG:** If he had had a lot of experience in Washington, do you think he would have been more able to cope with this problem, which was experienced rather than foreseen?

**C ADDELL:** Yes. Here again is the trade-off. The problem of having been experienced in Washington might have well meant that the terms of the psychological linkage he could make with the public would not have existed. He wouldn’t have the same framework in ’76 to have articulated the campaign he did. Certainly there wasn’t anybody else coming out of Washington who came anywhere near understanding that. On the other hand, experience, if he could have still maintained that, would have been enormously valuable in understanding what he was walking into. We walked into it with the confidence that comes from victory, but without any kind of experiential standards, including people who had been in Washington before; they didn’t really either. The Presidency was something very different. But certainly the President didn’t have that.

**YOUNG:** Did this May 1980 expression of frustration and anger infuse the 1980 campaign with any communicated spirit of that or anything else? Do you want to talk a little bit about the 1980 campaign?

**C ADDELL:** I was a major architect of the 1980 campaign. We’d already been through Camp David. I was certainly not going to be the advocate of simply trying to go out now and boldly state to the country that we turned over a new leaf in the course of the campaign. That did not seem to me to be strikingly creditable. Our first problem was there by September, even before Iran. My argument was, and it became I think the guiding decision of the campaign, that in terms of the primaries with Senator Kennedy, we had to force the choice away from a primary choice
to a general election choice. I kept saying, “If you let this campaign be waged in the arena of the past, we will lose. And you must keep it away from that. If we keep it in the arena of the past, of what’s happened, we will lose. What we’ve got to do is keep it to the personalities and try to keep it to the future, regulated by the decision of who would be a better President.” One of the things that we knew from general election campaigns, and it’s somewhat thinner now but it still exists, is that the public enormously doubts challengers. That’s in my memo about the threshold problem. The challengers face the problem of being seen as credible or safe enough to be President. We knew that Senator Kennedy had particular problems with that and that that issue would get joined very quickly. My problem with the primary was that I believed that we would eventually triumph, that it would be a victory because in fact it would be the most violent campaign you ever saw. It would divide the Democratic Party between its northern liberal labor base and its essentially southern small town rural Protestant base, its Catholics and Protestants. It would divide along those things.

Iran interceded in that. It gave the President an enormous boost of popularity. It’s ironic that in November and December when we were rising in the polls we really began to rise not because of the event, but when Carter started to take strong actions, to expel the students and to put on sanctions and freeze assets. That’s when his numbers skyrocketed. He had finally taken strong action. Since that was the great claim against him, that he was not decisive and action-oriented, that certainly seemed to be an end to it. My concern at the time, which I raised in the treaty room early on at that period, was that I thought this was a grave, double-edged sword. Through most of the three years, personal feelings about the President had remained positive. People were disappointed with his performance, but they still liked him personally. They still hoped he would do better. Now with this rise in popularity, and it wasn’t just a superficial rise, a
lot of perceptions about decisiveness and competence had been affected positively, in a fairly substantial way. My fear was that later down the road it might become a perception again that he was not all of these new things. I said to the President, “You have to understand there’s got to be some way in which people have some cognitive route by which they’ll get to this decision that you are now competent, strong and so forth, where for the last several years they thought you were not. They can either walk through the door and say, ‘We were always wrong and he has always been these things and we just didn’t see it,’ or they can walk through the door and say, ‘This crisis has changed Jimmy Carter, he is a different person.’” I said, for sure they will take that route that you have grown in the crisis. If you revert in their eyes back to what you were before, we will now have the problem I suspect of very great anger. People will say, “I was tricked, I was fooled, I was had.” That’s a very dangerous thing. In fact, that is what happened to us in 1980. As the Iranian thing wore on and there was no solution, and when the economy hit in the spring, and we ended up with a recession, one of the things that happened to Jimmy Carter was the attitudes about him, not only did his job ratings plummet, but a level of personal hostility to the President began to enter our surveys that had never existed before. And we tried it in the primaries. We had Iran, we had Kennedy and when it came to a judgment about a general election judgment in a primary arena crucial to the Presidency, President Kennedy failed that. Carter at least was viewed as safe. Constantly through the campaign we wanted to hold that test to Reagan, once we saw that he was going to be President.

Our problem was that we kept wanting to have a campaign about the future but we had two problems. One was that the government, which we kept counting on politically to help the incumbent make people want to vote for us, was constantly turning up bad news. It was not turning up good news. Things weren’t happening. We were desperately trying to orchestrate
some effect to play on being the incumbent. We weren’t getting much out of that, and secondly we were having a hard time with shaping the future. I happen to think the 1980 campaign was a far superior campaign than the ’76 campaign. It was a campaign that started with no chance at all to succeed and came within a whisker of victory. I used to describe it with DeGaulle’s comment about the Germans that when he went to Moscow, he was not amazed that they lost. He said the miracle is how far they came. I often had that feeling, that just a few more winter uniforms and things would have been OK here. But we had gotten ourselves to a point at the end where we had pressed Reagan hard and things were not moving very much. But we had created enormous doubt about Reagan. The only strategic mistake we made in the entire campaign was to debate Reagan. It was a decision we had never intended to make. We let ourselves make a tactical short-term decision which when we realized we should turn it off, events moved literally within hours. When we made the decision to turn it off, the Reagan people started to move to accepting it and we had trapped ourselves. It was the only mistake in my opinion, the only real strategic mistake in the campaign. The campaign could afford no others if it was going to succeed.

JONES: How did that happen?

CADDELL: The case was initially made very strongly not to debate in September. I did not see this campaign as an educational process, by the way. Understand that from the very beginning, I mean you can see it reflected in my June memo. This was not going to be a great education campaign. We were not going out to win a mandate. In a perfect world, I would have liked to have been able to use the campaign for the President as a vehicle in fact to get the appearance of support from mandate for a set of programs and positions for the future that he would come in and do. It was clear to us, given the problem we were having with the economy and Iran and so forth that that was not possible. We had to win the campaign strictly on the basis of holding
people’s judgments, as other elections in the past had proven to be almost effective or effective. It almost cost us in ’76 to make the challenger unacceptable, or at least at a level of risk too great for many people to accept. And it seemed to me that one of the lessons we had learned in ’76 was that debates were the vehicles of challengers, it had served us well. Some people drew the analogy then because we did well in ’76 that we should then debate. I always viewed the analysis was because that was my arena of responsibility for the analysis of ’76; it was the challenger who was benefited. It was not just due to our skill. People don’t use debates as a conversion place. People use it to reassure themselves, particularly about a challenge. People who want to vote for a challenger look to the debates to reassure them that everything is o.k. It puts them on an equal footing. After the debate in Baltimore, when Reagan debated Anderson, Reagan got a boost. He was in real trouble already in September, and I thought heading to what looked like fatal trouble. That first debate really bailed him out. He went up significantly, not so much in his vote but in some of the perceptions of his risk and competence. It took us weeks again to wear that back down. I became convinced after Baltimore that we should debate under no circumstance, whatever confirmation we needed. Confirmation would only help Reagan. The Reagan people continued to cooperate. Sometimes when you look brilliant, you look stupid because we make simplistic judgments. I always thought the Reagan campaign was utterly unbelievable. They had not agreed to debate us head-to-head from the very beginning. They started saying they weren’t going to debate us. I wished at that point frankly to close the door. Accept it and say, o.k. there won’t be any debates we’re going to schedule. There were forces inside that kept saying well, we don’t know. Some people felt that the thing is so dull we may want an event to stir things up, or that Carter can handle himself well and do this. There were arguments that made a lot of sense in a vacuum but not if you went back and made a careful
analysis. We went for days and our field people would contribute to this. We had a meeting with all of our state coordinators who came in at a point where I thought we had nailed the decision down not to debate, and they all came in and some of them said that they were getting a lot of people who were commenting about the fact now that Reagan wouldn’t debate Carter, how it was helping us. To which I made the case if we got away with so blatantly refusing to debate in Baltimore, I mean just outrageously and gotten away with it with no damage, how in the hell could Reagan be hurt by not debating us at this point? There was no congruity to that argument. Campaigns are very strange things. They are not rational arenas, but people kept wanting to hold it open. The President never wanted to. I think he instinctively never wanted to debate, even though he said he would. It goes back to that May decision, if we had debated Kennedy we would have in fact never debated Reagan. We could have debated Kennedy without loss and it would have helped us immensely in certain parts of the party. You suffer for decisions you make early. When we decided not to debate Kennedy, we came out and did say we would debate Anderson and we would debate Reagan and we would work out some format if we could debate Reagan first head-to-head. We had stayed in our position and we would accept a head-to-head debate. So understand we couldn’t get up and say no. What we had to do was turn it off. And we finally reached the point of decision when the polls started to move in mid-October.

Let me tell you that if you’re involved in looking at Presidential polling, in every Presidential election since 1948 in the last week of the campaign the incumbent party, whether the President is running or not, gains in the polls without exception. The reason for that in my opinion is people who by the end of the campaign still had not decided what to do and had been in conflict, normally resolve for the status quo, which is very different from other elections. So we knew that we had this incumbent boost coming. We knew we had weakened Reagan fundamentally on the
war and peace issue, which was far greater than all the press screamings about meanness.

Whatever they were saying, we had inflicted real damage and doubt on Reagan, particularly in the suburbs. Reagan had helped us a little bit himself with that. The numbers were clear to me. It was moving in our way. If you look at the public numbers before the debate, all of them now reflected Carter moving into a lead, the structure of opinion seeming to move toward him. We made a decision on a Monday or Tuesday morning finally to cut off the debate. By the next day the Reagan campaign was already in motion to accept a debate. That same afternoon we started getting the first inkling that they were going to accept a debate, and the League of Women Voters kept rearing its ugly head at the worst possible moment to decide they would allow a two-person debate and that they would be willing to sponsor it. We found ourselves hoisted on our own spear. We had moved 24 hours, 18 hours, 36 hours too late in shutting off the debate, saying there wasn’t going to be one. Therefore we had one. Now we had what I proposed earlier in my first memo, we had a debate when we least wanted it, late in the campaign. The latest debate in Presidential history. It was going to come right in the middle of interfering with that last week of incumbent movement. So that’s what I’m saying was the only real strategic mistake we made.

We had created all these doubts about Reagan. Reagan desperately needed a forum, where he could prove not that he was more competent than the President, but simply where he could stand up and say, “Hey listen, I’m not going to blow up the world. Do I look like the kind of guy that will destroy your country and your future?” He is very good at that. That was the reason for that debate.

One of the things we did not do, going back to the larger issue of ’80, was to evolve a plan for the future, since we had to keep it pressed to the candidates. We had very little running room. We really did not have an ability, except we tried to a little bit but not much in the convention
speech, to really dwell on the future or to build a mandate. The election I thought was going to be a very ugly, mean, and certainly an uncivic process. All that it would do for us as a President was to get us reelected. I held that view with enormous vehemence throughout most of the campaign fairly successfully. We just didn’t have any other room to move in. So I don’t know what we would have done. We didn’t have the opportunity to build a mandate out of it. If he would have been reelected, it would have been up to the President then to fill that. One of the things that was frustrating him and bothering so many of us deeply was the sense that the government didn’t seem to have an idea of what we would do for the next four years, other than what we had already done. And that was certainly not a message we could take to the American people. That seemed to me to be a sure prescription for defeat. But in saying that internally, a lot of us, including the President, were coming to say that something is fundamentally wrong if we can’t come up with something we really wish to say and that we know is attractive to people. We couldn’t promise a future to people in a way that would appeal to them.

WAYNE: What kind of impact did the President have during the campaign on the substance of the campaign, or was he simply programmed around by your polling and targeting, by the speech writers and by the small groups that ran it?

CADDELL: He was part of the political process. Remember the President was a pretty skillful political operative when you get down in the political arena, even if he had been someone a little rusty from being in the White House. He participated in those decisions of what we were going to do. They were very much dictated as campaign decisions, driven by the data, the circumstances, and the election we were facing. Remember, we were dominated by two big, substantive issues that the campaign turned to the President hopefully for resolution. One was Iran, which we thought could help us, and the second was doing something about the economy.
The campaign could not carry the substance. This is an incoming government. The government had to carry the substance in the campaign. You could not hope to substitute that. What the campaign could do was run a campaign well, and if you didn’t have the substance, try to obscure it. That’s the best it could do in the circumstances. It couldn’t invent substance because you’ve got a record and you’re also in power; people are watching you every day. You could try to take the focus off of that. If the substance is going to come it’s got to come from the President and the government.

WAYNE: Are there any targeting decisions that you made, any resource allocation decisions that now in retrospect you think were wrong?

CADDELL: No. I think we all felt we ran a much better campaign in 1980, partly because Presidential politics is amateur politics. There’s nothing like going through one to really learn a lot of lessons about what not to do. I think that we had been very skillful in those decisions we made all the way through. Let me just say my opinion was always that it was going to be an election that was not going to be close. It was clear to me structurally that either we would win by a fair margin or if we lost we’d lose by a fair margin. The resolution hung on a group of people who were essentially weak Democrats who were very angry about the economy and about what they perceived as Carter’s failures. But they were very cool to Reagan’s ideological disposition as a very conservative person and to Reagan personally. The whole campaign was attached to a lot of independent suburbanites. There was nothing to suggest that they would divide by any particular reason. If something moved them, it was likely to move the majority of them in one direction or the other.
WAYNE: What I’ve read of your statements and others, you say this movement occurred only in the last few days? It became pretty clear. When you told the President I guess on his own plane, how did he react to this?

CADDELL: Jody was supposed to tell him first over the telephone. It’s not the kind of place, 3,000 miles in distance, that you wish to deliver a message quite like that. I was talking to Jody, and the President and Jody were supposed to confer the minute they got on the plane. We’d already told Jody at the rally what was the situation. We were in Hamilton’s old office, Jack’s office now, at four o’clock in the morning. The President, instead of going to his cabin, went back and talked to the press for a while. He walked into the cabin when I was talking to Jody and realized that Jody was talking to me. He took the phone out of Jody’s hand. He was very up from his rally, a great rally. He said what was going on and that’s when I told him. He was really unprepared. He wasn’t exuberant at the news. He was very quiet and just said, “Thank you. Talk to Jody about what you think we ought to do. I’m going to get some rest and I’ll talk to you when I get to Plains.” I mean he never questioned it, he never did anything.