CARTER PRESIDENCY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH GERALD M. RAFSHOON

April 8, 1983
Charlottesville, Virginia

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Young: We are all familiar with the ground rules. The session is off the record and the only person to see the transcript of this meeting will be Mr. Rafshoon. We will then ask for his clearance for the use of that transcript for research purposes. Would you like to review the history of your doings with Jimmy Carter and the Carter Presidency?

Rafshoon: Thank you, Jim. Delete all expletives please. I appreciate this opportunity to set the record straight, as they say in Washington. I brought here a lot of my memos that I wrote after January 20, 1981 to prove that I was right on most things. In here you will find my urging the President not to admit the Shah, not to debate [Ronald] Reagan, and to be closer to Tip [Thomas Patrick] O’Neill. So if you’d like to see these lies, they’re open. I first became acquainted with Jimmy Carter in 1966 when he first ran for Governor. I was in Atlanta and had my own advertising agency. I had come back from New York in 1963 and opened an agency. I had never done any political advertising. I had never done any political advertising until 1966. I was at that time doing a campaign for the incumbent comptroller general.

There was a race for Governor going on. There were six people in the primary with Bo [Howard] Callaway over on the Republican side. You all probably know that history. Jimmy Carter had jumped into the race about two months before the primary. Ernest Vandiver, who was the front-runner, had dropped out because of a mysterious heart attack. I didn’t know who I was going to vote for. I probably would have tended to vote for Ellis Arnall, the former Governor who had been Governor in the forties and had a liberal record, and who was the front-runner. We had Lester Maddox, James Gray, Garland Byrd, the former Lieutenant Governor, and Hoke O’Kelly all in the race. In the six-man race I think Jimmy Carter was expected to come in about seventh.

I had seen all the candidates on local television and had made a judgment that I liked this guy Carter. He didn’t speak that well but what he said made a lot of sense and he seemed thoughtful. He could properly say the word “negro.” He seemed very thoughtful, and it seemed like he, of course, wouldn’t have a chance among that crew. I had talked to a friend of mine, Hal Gulliver, who later became editor of the Atlanta Constitution, and I remember telling him that if Carter could use any help I’d be around.
One day I was driving along in a car and I heard a commercial come on the air done by a country singer who was singing, “Jimmy Carter is his name, Jimmy Carter is his name, Jimmy Carter is his name, number one for Governor.” I almost went off the road. I did go off the road. I pulled over to a gas station; I called Hal Gulliver and said, “Your friend Jimmy Carter needs a lot of help. This sounds like Jimmie Davis, who used to be the Governor of Louisiana and sang ‘You Are My Sunshine.’” That wasn’t much better. At least this time it wasn’t Jimmy singing. But people were going to think he was a country singer. Besides that, his campaign was acting like the audience knew who the hell Jimmy Carter was. Hal said, “Well, you’ve got to get together with him.”

I got a call the following Monday when I went to see Georgia State Senator Carter, at the Dinkler Hotel. There was a fellow by the name of Jack Kaplan who worked with me then. He was our creative director at the agency and he is now in Hollywood. I called Jack on the phone and said, “Let’s get together and go ahead and give this guy a presentation. They say they’ve got seventy thousand dollars.”

He said, “I can’t get together, my wife’s out and I’m babysitting.” So we put together a hundred-page presentation on the telephone. We recommended that he put his entire $70,000 on television. And even though that wasn’t a lot, there would be no half-hour programs, which were unheard of in Georgia. Heretofore people had sat in front of a desk with the American flag on one side and a Georgian flag on the other side and had spoken about what they’re going to do for Georgia. They had newspaper ads and all that kind of stuff. I said, “Let’s just put it all into television. Let’s take a camera and go down to follow him around.” It was first cinéma vérité type of advertising in Georgia.

That next afternoon, even though the Xerox machine broke down a number of times, we finally got the thing over to him. We were sitting in a room with him and a bunch of his advisors. His headquarters then were at the Dinkler Plaza Hotel, which is an old hotel in Atlanta that is now torn down. Where most candidates might have a suite or a ballroom for an office, his was a room at the Dinkler Plaza Hotel with the bed pulled over to the side so that when he was in town he could sleep in it. We were all piled in there. It was like the stateroom scene in *A Night at the Opera*. And the Marx brothers were in there, believe me. I suggested that our plan be that there’s a man who “they” say can’t win. There’s a young man coming to your town by the name of Jimmy Carter. He’s running for Governor. “They” say he can’t win. “They” say he doesn’t have the backing, but “they” don’t make the difference, you make the difference. Don’t make up your mind from his commercial. Look for him to come to your town. When he comes, meet him, listen to him, and, more important, let him listen to you.

Well, everybody in the room just went crazy. They said this isn’t the way you do it, that sounds negative, that sounds like you say he’s a loser. I said, “Well, what would you do?” “Well, say he’s number one for Georgia, say that he’s going to be the next Governor.” I said, “The people don’t believe that. Nobody knows who he is. We’ve got five weeks to go before the primary. Nobody knows who he is.”

And we start arguing and arguing, and there was a fellow in there by the name of Bob Troutman who had been Joe Kennedy’s roommate at Harvard, had been close to the Kennedy family. He
liked Jimmy Carter because Carter looked like Kennedy, which is kind of ironic now. And he was going to give his contribution of maybe a whole two hundred dollars I guess. And he jumped up and he said this is wrong. We should be very positive and all that. And I’m arguing with these people. Carter was just sitting there. I said, “What we’re trying to do here is to do the same thing that John Kennedy did when he went in front of the Baptist preachers in Houston and talked about Catholicism.”

At this statement this fellow Troutman jumped up, “Don’t you tell me about John Kennedy. I know John Kennedy. John Kennedy was always positive. John Kennedy would never do anything like this.” And I said to myself, What am I doing here? I don’t need this. All of a sudden I felt myself being kicked under the table and I looked over and there was this smiling face looking at me with a grin and he kind of gave me a look like “shut up.” Anyway, this guy Troutman got up and said, “I wish you luck, Jimmy, I’m still with you but you’re not going to go anywhere with this.” The guy walked out. Finally everybody left and Carter said, “Don’t argue with these people. I need these people. Go ahead and do the campaign. I’m the only person you have to satisfy.”

It was so refreshing to find somebody who was that confident of professionals and let you do what you thought was necessary. I really became enamored of him. We shot the stuff and got it on the air within a few days and almost got into the runoff. This made a big sensation. Carter had come up from nowhere. It made a big sensation, but he didn’t get in the runoff. Lester Maddox went on to become Governor. Probably if Carter had gotten in the runoff he would have been elected Governor in 1966, and he probably would have gone home to Plains in 1970 to be in the peanut business because Richard Russell was still the Senator, and because Carter was never that popular a Governor when he was in. Immediately after losing in 1966 we went to work on 1970. Again in 1970 he was a distinct underdog against Carl Sanders. We had one-seventh of the money that Sanders had to spend and we beat Sanders 60-40, and went on to be elected in a general election.

In 1972, without twisting his arm too much and after the Democratic Convention in Miami, Hamilton Jordan and I and a couple of other people talked to him about running for President and we started working on that campaign then in ’72 without ever having any thought of anything but winning. We never thought we would not win. The times were right. There was the Watergate mess. We felt that there was a vacuum there that only Carter could fill, and we knew what kind of campaigner Carter was. So we put our minds to it. And of course the rest as they say is history. He became President.

I handled the advertising for that campaign. I did not go in the White House. Didn’t want to. I stayed in my advertising business. I did open an office in Washington. And contrary to what people said, I didn’t make a killing because I didn’t take any foreign governments as clients. I didn’t want to sell access, couldn’t have and wouldn’t, but I did plan to help him get re-elected and was an unpaid consultant to the President.

Young: After the election and inauguration, did you continue as a consultant?
Rafshoon: Yes. But not formally. There was no arrangement. I had a pass to the White House and talked about politics. I met a lot with the President and Hamilton Jordan, Pat Caddell, and Jody Powell. I did some work in Washington for some clients. I worked for some clients but nothing that had any bearing on the government. I did no lobbying or anything like that. In ’78 the President asked me to join the White House staff and to come into the White House as Assistant to the President for Communications. The idea was that I would be responsible for long-range communications. I would try to communicate some of our programs and help the White House staff to get legislation passed, to communicate our goals to the public, to work on the President’s public appearances, press conferences, television, and speechwriting. I would do that from inside the White House.

It got to the point where I was always giving advice, but like consultants, you go away and come back and get frustrated because it hadn’t been followed. One day Hamilton said, “Well, if you feel that way come on and jump in, the water’s fine. And the President called me in. I didn’t want to go in the White House, I really didn’t, but actually I was flattered. The President called me in and said, I remember his words at the time, “I think there’s a flaw in my character, but I like having you around. I don’t know why.” And so I came in the White House. That was the closest he came to giving a compliment.

As soon as I came in there were a lot of stories about “Jerry the Image-Maker.” I’m not an image-maker. I used to say in the campaign, and I believe this in political advertising, that 90% of the advertising was Jimmy Carter and 10% was technique. It was my job not to screw up the 10%. In the White House I felt that what the President needed more than anything was to follow his own instincts. I could see that he had been pulled in a lot of directions after he went into the White House. And as best I could I tried to get some order to our priorities, to our public statements, trying to get the administration to speak with one voice and to focus on long-range communications.

Jody had his hands full on the day-to-day press activities, so I tried to take some of the other stuff off of his shoulders. I had always considered long range as being about three months to a year. In the White House long range might be this coming weekend because as soon as you get started on the big picture, you have a GSA [General Services Administration] problem or you have something happening in the news or the Ayatollah becomes uncooperative. So it was difficult. I was involved as an interpreter of our policies, communicating the President’s goals, trying to set the agenda, perceptions, developing material for the President and other people on the White House staff and the Cabinet to use in speeches and in selling our programs. I have some of that here. I proposed press plans for the administration’s upcoming anti-inflation program, a set of questions and answers for inflation, on energy, civil service reform, and a wide range of subjects that are just really the nuts and bolts of running a communications operation, whether it be in the White House or in corporate America.

McCleskey: Did you have any discussion at the beginning of the administration about joining it, or was that something that was never broached?

Rafshoon: It was never broached. It was obvious. In retrospect it might have been better to have somebody in that job from the beginning so that those things could be done right away from the
day-to-day business, but he didn’t. I thought that I could help. Hamilton and I talked it over. I opened an office in Washington because I was bored with the advertising business in Atlanta and I thought it would be kind of fun to be there in Washington; I would work on several commercial clients up there, but I would have a chance to help on speeches, on television appearances, and on selling of programs. Before I came in the White House I worked with them on the Panama Canal business. But if you’re not there, with offices two blocks away up on Pennsylvania Avenue, and something breaks so there’s a meeting, well, you may be doing something else. You may be off someplace else making a living, maybe out of town, and it just wasn’t working.

After a few months I really even pulled back some because there may have even been some appearance that Rafshoon was running in and out of the White House and some may have said, “Maybe it’s going to help his commercial business.” It never did. In fact it hurt because a lot of people thought, He’s spending all his time in Washington with President Carter; he certainly isn’t giving us the time he’s supposed to. But that’s okay. I had more fun. So that’s why I came in the White House later. If you’re going to do it, you can’t be half-pregnant. I sold my advertising agency when I was in the White House.

Young: I want to ask what changes you introduced when you got there. We can get to that in a moment. But will you just carry us through the period, and then when you left, and to do what. You got there in ’78—

Rafshoon: I joined in May of ’78, officially I started July 1. I had to finish up some of my commercial projects so I said I’d work closely but I wouldn’t go on the payroll. As it turned out I still was there all the time. But I left on September 15, 1979. I wish I had brought that note the President wrote me at that time. I left to work on the campaign. So I moved to my office two blocks from the White House and took on one client, which was the Carter/[Walter] Mondale re-election committee, and worked on the re-election until November 4, 1980. And during that time I still spent a lot of time in the White House. I was out of the White House, but I still worked at the White House a lot. I worked with the White House a lot because we had a re-election going and I had specific things to do.

So I was sort of a hybrid I guess, although I was not on the White House payroll anymore. I still helped with speeches, with statements, with overall strategy, because naturally strategy then became re-election. A lot of the strategy was aimed at re-election, and we tried as much as we could to coordinate what was going on in the re-election campaign with what was going on in the White House and were hoping it was happening vice versa. We had some things that interfered with our game plan, namely the Iranian hostage crisis. In the campaign I was involved with doing all the media of course.

Young: It was clear by ’79 that there would be an Edward Kennedy challenge?

Rafshoon: Oh it was clear to me and to those of us in the White House for a long time. He announced about the time I left to do the campaign. Remember Kennedy’s mother had given him permission. In August of ’79 he had been on, taken some time out, and decided that the country was ready for him.
Wayne: Are you doing two jobs now at this point, from September ’79 up through the campaign?

Rafshoon: No, I’m doing one job and that’s the re-election. You say two jobs, but when I left the White House, it was in my capacity as media director of the campaign.

Wayne: No, I understand your capacity, but I’m really getting at the kind of advice that you’re giving him during that time. You’re not just projecting advertising for the campaign; you’re still making recommendations with respect to how he should present himself and what issue should be stressed. So you’re maintaining that old job but you’re just not getting paid for it.

Rafshoon: Sure. That’s true but I’m not maintaining the job in the capacity of being in charge of the speechwriters or of press advance. I was not then responsible for that. I didn’t then have the authority to do it. I was a consultant in that respect. And in that respect it’s as a campaign advisor, and possibly as my personal friend.

Young: As a personal advisor but having no line responsibility.

Rafshoon: That’s right.

McCleskey: From the time you first joined until you went to the campaign operation, what was your relationship with the rest of the staff members? How did you integrate yourself into the system?

Young: First I’d like to make sure that I understand just what activities came under your wing, and how they got in your wing. You’ve mentioned the press advance.

Rafshoon: Yes. When I was going to come in and when I agreed to the job with the President, I thought it would be all right. I would be in an office; I had [Richard] Nixon’s old office in the Executive Office Building. But anyway, I came in there and I thought it would be me and a secretary and maybe an assistant who could help me, and I wouldn’t have any line responsibilities. Well, Jody was real smart. He said, “I think you should have some line responsibilities so that you can have people to call on to do the things.” I said, “What do you have in mind.” He said, “I’m going to let you have from my department the speechwriters and the press advance.” I said, “OK, that sounds good to me.” I didn’t realize what a gift he had given me.

Young: Now you’re pulling our leg.

Rafshoon: No.

Young: An Assistant to the President for Communications has got to be concerned one way or another with all those things.

Rafshoon: I did. I think I envisioned consulting while somebody else would be supervising the writing of the speeches.
Young: But you just told us you can’t be a consultant and get things done.

Rafshoon: No. But actually I hadn’t thought of it until he said, “You ought to really make the speechwriters be responsible for getting the speeches out. I’ll still be involved.”

Young: Were all these gifts freely given?

Rafshoon: I was given the speechwriting department and the press advance. I had press advance administratively. They still had to work more with Jody. I could have them so that I could weigh in on types of events that we would have on the road and on trips. I had the television office. Actually the television office was me. Barry Jagoda had been working with Jody in doing television, and so I took that on.

Young: Would it be fair to say that the large preponderance of the appearances outside Washington when the President would go take a trip were principally just to make an appearance?

Rafshoon: Those are set up by the scheduling office under the appointment secretary. But the types of trips we ought to take was not my area. If you ask if I had the authority to authorize a trip, no. That would be done by a group of people. They decided if the President ought to go here or ought to there.

Young: But if he is going to go to a town meeting or to make a major speech—

Rafshoon: The setting up of that is done by the scheduling office but the—

Young: Under you?

Rafshoon: In conjunction with me. The press advance, of course, would do their part. The town meeting and the press conference preparation was mine. I coordinated the statements that he would make at a press conference. I prepared his book that had to be to him the night before the press conference so he could study. That was my responsibility. I guess all these things were being done before I got there, but nobody had the time to execute them expeditiously. One of the first things I did was kind of threaten the death penalty if you didn’t have anything the President wanted to see on my desk by five o’clock the night before. I said, “I’ll throw my body on you if you walk into his office the day he’s got to prepare.” So I had that responsibility.

Wayne: Did you have any responsibility that related to trying to control the information flow beyond the White House?

Rafshoon: That is a good question. Yes and no. One of the first things I said when I came in was that the Cabinet people are just talking too much and with so many different voices, and I would really have liked to be able to coordinate them. The President said good luck. It was wonderful at the beginning to have that confidence. I did have that. One of the things the President brought up in a Cabinet meeting the first time I was there was, “Jerry will coordinate our appearances on
television and before you accept a Sunday morning talk show, check with his office. Have your public information people check with him.”

There were several reasons for this. We weren’t trying to muzzle, we weren’t trying to censor, but before that you could have Mike Blumenthal on Meet the Press and Charlie Schultze on Face the Nation and saying two different and contradictory things. Not for any malicious reason, but the press sometime could elicit an answer that the other person hadn’t heard about, and the two programs might not be back to back. The questioners may be watching Face the Nation from eleven-thirty to twelve, getting one answer out of Schultze, and then when Blumenthal went on at twelve o’clock not having seen it, they’d ask him something. Our plan worked with a majority of the Cabinet. There were some that were irrepressible; you’d have to kill them. You’d have to shoot them to keep them from talking anytime a camera was within a hundred miles of Washington.

Wayne: Did you clear speeches?

Rafshoon: No, we did not clear them. That’s something that was said that really didn’t happen. We didn’t clear speeches. We asked that you let us know, but there was no clearing of speeches. Every 90 days I would write the President a memo, a 90-day memo on communications with some recommendations. Most of the recommendations were nuts and bolts things, like in this three-month period will you do the following interviews and the following appearances. He’d check some off, wouldn’t check some off and he’d write some things like, “I’d rather lose the election than spend another afternoon with this person.” But okay. I remember writing him that as of July 1, “…it will be my responsibility to see that you and your administration communicate effectively with the American people. This is a memo in an attempt to outline how my department and I will go about trying to meet that responsibility.”

The first part was a description of my operation, specifically what we would try to do and how we would try to do it. The second part dealt with the specific communication strategy for the duration of the first term. Then I went on to describe what we would try to do, and it dealt with tone, themes, priorities, strategies, implementation, how we would operate, internal communication, initiating public-Presidential activity. To answer your question, I said at the time, “We will suggest trips, public appearances, media activity, including fireside chats and speeches which enunciate, develop, or reinforce the theme, and priorities.”

Limiting extraneous Presidential activity I thought was important. By initiating public activity by administration figures, we tried to coordinate but also to really get other people in the administration to go out and carry some of the water and not always depend on the President to walk out and deliver the good news or the bad news. I’m afraid what was happening and what happened a lot was that this President did decide to deliver a lot of the bad news and then Cabinet members would deliver their good news, which is a reverse of what is happening with this administration where Reagan does not ever deliver any bad news.

Some people have said that if James Watt were Jimmy Carter’s Secretary of the Interior they’d have impeached Carter and Watt would have testified. Avoiding conflicting signals within the administration—I remember dealing with that. I worked on other government communications.
We had support from outside the administration. I worked with Anne Wexler’s department to encourage and coordinate public and editorial support for administration priorities from members of Congress, etc.

**Young:** This is a projection of what you will be doing, written right at the beginning when you came on?

**Rafshoon:** Yes. White House media planning, White House camera crews and photographers.

**Young:** How was that worked out? Was that discussed with the President?

**Rafshoon:** Not really.

**Young:** Is this what you had in mind when you came on?

**Rafshoon:** Yes. And I sent this memo to him and Hamilton and Jody.

**Young:** So that you had an already well-developed sense of what was wrong in this field?

**Rafshoon:** Yes.

**Young:** The trouble the White House was getting into and the President was getting in for failure to do these things?

**Rafshoon:** Yes.

**Young:** And that’s really what you intended to do all along?

**Rafshoon:** Yes. See, Pat Caddell and I shared offices, and we used to talk about it. I’d see his polls and of course I would talk to Hamilton Jordan and Caddell every day, and then I talked to the First Lady. It was obvious what was happening. We thought maybe this could help.

**Wayne:** Was this proposed before you were brought in?

**Rafshoon:** Yes. Just sort of an amorphous decision, just in general. I’d come in and then I sent him this memo.

**Wayne:** You shared an office with Caddell when you were there or prior to going in?

**Rafshoon:** In Washington, not in the White House. Caddell was not in the White House. He shared an office with me and shared a house, but I got married to get away from him.

**Young:** Was it necessary to discuss any of this with the President? The criticism or the thing that was wrong?

**Rafshoon:** Oh sure, sure.
**Young:** Was this discussed with him before you were appointed, or was it just the flaw in his character?

**Rafshoon:** If you remember, they had that thing at Camp David. I’m talking about the Camp David Cabinet meeting. It kind of jelled then that some things had to be done. That’s when Anne Wexler came into the White House from the Commerce Department. [Tim] Kraft was moved to doing political, answering Hamilton’s phone calls with politicians. I didn’t go in then. We’d meet with the First Lady and we’d meet with the President and I’d always make a plea to discuss a lot of things that we were not communicating.

**Young:** How did the President react to that criticism?

**Rafshoon:** He certainly took it. He’d tell us sometimes, “You know it’s easy for you to say, but…..” We’d say, “Mr. President, you’re spending too much time on foreign policy when the country’s priorities are inflation and energy.” He’d look at you and say, “Okay, well tell me, do you want me to forget about the Middle East?” Sometimes he’d get defensive about it. “You want to say that the Middle East has nothing to do with energy. If you knew what you were talking about maybe you’d know these things are interrelated.” But what we meant was that there was just too much.

This happens to all Presidents, except with the one we have now. Foreign policy becomes paramount, it’s more fun, it’s easier, and you don’t have to deal with Congress as much. So here when you had the Americans seeing Carter dealing with [Menachem] Begin and [Anwar] Sadat for very good reasons, it wasn’t helping us that much because they’d say, “Why the hell isn’t he doing something about the price of gas at the pump or about inflation?” So we had those kinds of meetings and he would try to accommodate us. After those meetings, I’d leave and then go back to making money.

**Young:** I guess what I’m asking is did the President really have to be convinced that this was a problem to be solved, or to be remedied by bringing somebody on and organizing the staff?

**Rafshoon:** I think it evolved. Hamilton talked to him a lot. Rosalynn [Carter] talked to him.

**Young:** But his first response was not, “We need another staff person to do this.”

**Rafshoon:** Well, he said let’s find the right person. It’s funny because I said, “You need to get somebody to take a load off of Jody. He’d always say, “Talk to Jody and work it out. Talk to Hamilton, he’ll work it out.” I said, “You need to get somebody who’s going to do this, let me look around.” In fact I talked to a couple of people in Washington to sound them out. They wanted to do the job.

I think that the main reason that it became me was because it would have been difficult for somebody else to come into that job. In retrospect, it might have been better for someone who didn’t know the President very well. I guess maybe the only thing I’m an expert on is Jimmy
Carter. I could hit the ground running and have enough confidence to make some changes since he knew me well enough. Maybe somebody new would have to find out more about Carter.

**Young:** What that sounds like is that anybody else would have a certain level of resistance to this President, and if not admitting this was a problem, at least devoting a lot of energy to it.

**Rafshoon:** Possibly. Yes. Not so much that he wouldn’t want to, but possibly because I have a relationship with him and I really don’t give a damn about a prior problem, about the propriety of barging into his office and saying, “You’ve got to do this.” Maybe if somebody else, a great communicator from the outside came in, he might stand on protocol and possibly also have a little resistance, and be hesitant to always tell Hamilton or Jody what was on his mind. We all knew each other so well.

A lot of people have written that it was a mistake to have all these Georgians—well that’s overstated. Certainly in the Cabinet it’s overstated. But it’s also the strength that we had. There was no backbiting among the Georgians in the White House. You haven’t seen that in any other administration. It goes back to the campaign. I can remember in the campaign; anything that would happen, I’d do my thing, Hamilton would do his thing, and Jody would do his thing without consulting. We never had a meeting. You’d see something on the morning news or in the paper and you’d say, “I’ve got to do so and so without trying to get up to speed.” And nobody ever worried that the other person was usurping his territory. Maybe if somebody else had come in he might have had that problem. On the other hand, he might have been even blunter with the President.

**Young:** What was the basic sign, the basic evidence that convinced you and Hamilton and Jody and Mrs. Carter and all the rest who were involved in developing a corrective strategy that there was a big communications problem?

**Rafshoon:** Well I think one of them was Caddell coming in and showing some figures.

**Young:** The approval rating?

**Rafshoon:** The job approval rating showing Carter losing some of the things that had always been the hallmark of his success, such as being closer to the people, being an effective manager, things like that.

**Young:** It was from reading outside Washington?

**Rafshoon:** Yes, reading outside Washington. Then we can see things happening such as having legislative successes that looked like failures. We had as good a legislative record as anybody as far as in the percentages. But what you would see happening was that the process of getting something passed was so bloody that the press would focus on the process and not enough on what actually happened. Every President from [Dwight D.] Eisenhower or from [Harry] Truman would sweep the Panama Canal problem under the rug. Carter got the damned thing passed. He gets so little credit on that because the right wing was very unhappy and the liberals said so what, it’s only right.
Civil service reform. For better or worse we had the first energy program. But so much was always not about what the energy program was all about, but the process and the ball scores on it, Carter not being able to work with Congress to get the energy program through.

Wayne: I thought you knew that. I mean you knew the way the press covers the campaign—they were going to cover the government in the same way.

Rafshoon: I think we underestimated the fact that government wasn’t done that way. And I often thought that you have 435 members of Congress, each one has a press secretary. You have more people covering the Hill than you do the White House.

Young: So does each agency head.

Rafshoon: So does each agency head, right, and they’re supposed to work for you. Exactly. I came in to be an extra set of hands really. We didn’t have enough of a media operation with the competition we had. Carter came to Washington not particularly as the favorite of the Democratic establishment or the people in Congress. He had run against them and I think he had a lot of people in our own party backbiting from the beginning. We took a survey of news in the second year of the administration, about the time I came in, and found that 850 of the negative statements in the Washington Post about Carter were from members of his own party. It was really kind of ironic that Howard Baker was our best public supporter in the Congress from the day we came to Washington.

I’m not making excuses. I think Ted Kennedy’s decision to run for President was probably made on November 2, 1976. Any time a Democrat is elected, Kennedy will be watching and saying he’s going to run against him. He specializes in running against an incumbent member of his own party. [Henry] Scoop Jackson jumped us on energy and the Middle East.

Wayne: But by the same logic Ted Kennedy’s decision could have been made in that first Congress, because if all those Democrats were bitching against you for whatever reasons, they may have said, “Hey look, we can’t have this guy.”

Rafshoon: This guy’s vulnerable. Not, “We can’t have this guy” particularly, because there were opportunities. Politicians sense opportunities. Carter certainly could have done a better job personally with Congress, but substantively he had a good working relationship with Tip, with [Robert] Byrd, with several members of the House and Senate. But he didn’t like the give and take, that’s very true.

Young: I’d like to go back. I asked you what was the sign that convinced you that you had a problem with communications. When you first saw Caddell’s low outside Washington approval ratings? When you saw that was happening in Washington on the Hill?

Rafshoon: Oh, we saw that too. We saw problems on the Hill. See, I have a different role.

Rafshoon: The bad press in Washington, that was a factor

Young: That might have taught the public.

Rafshoon: My problem was always Johnny Carson. He could make a lot of Carter jokes and get a great bit response on the laugh-meter, and we were in trouble. That means it’s gotten out of Washington.

Young: It’s very hard to disassociate the two. Washington was saying he’s incompetent and he’s not doing a good job. Then people ask what kind of a job he’s doing, and get this feedback. It seems to me very hard to separate the teaching that comes out of Washington from the public reactions.

Rafshoon: Yes, but sometimes how Washington handles a substantive story is different from what the perceptions are out in the country. The personal feelings about the President usually are in tune with the country. There’s maybe a lag time of about six weeks. When I say a lag time of about six weeks, it happens in the country first and then of course the Washington press jumps on it because now it’s okay to kick somebody when he’s down. The press is just beginning to catch up to Reagan because the public is just beginning to catch up.

Thompson: As you prepared this July 1 memo, did you give any thought to the relative way to give a larger communication effort as against coordinating the existing effort?

Rafshoon: That’s a good point. I think there was more concern with coordinating than enlarging the effort. In some areas the President was overexposed, jumping out and making a statement on every issue, which I thought was just awful. It showed he had no priorities. The importance was to focus our efforts on the economy—I called them the “Three E’s” at the time: economy, efficiency, and energy. Those were the three things the public was interested in. To always have a semblance of disarray by always having the President out front on every issue was unhelpful. They were spending too much time out there.

I had a different view of the Congress, the relationship with Congress. I think that was one of his biggest problems. Certainly the give and take and the socializing with Congress should have been better, but I think that he did certain things when he got in early and he was pushed by certain people in the White House who didn’t let him follow his own instincts. He got away from the Jimmy Carter they elected. Frankly I think he was too accommodating to Congress at the beginning. He backed off the first public works veto. It was said, “He was elected to get up there and kick ass and he isn’t doing it.” He was doing it in a style of being somewhat of a supplicant to Congress.

A few days after he said in his first fireside chat that the energy program was the moral equivalent of war, somebody got to him in the White House and said, “You’ve got to give them something up in the Congress, everybody up there has told us that, ‘I can’t go home to my constituents because you’ve painted a picture that looks like everything’s going to fall apart.’” And he made a statement to the effect that “it wasn’t as bad as I said it was the other night.” He
shouldn’t have done that. There were some traditionalists in the White House and in the Congress who could get to him and get him to accommodate a little bit. And that hurt.

**Young:** Outside you mean, in the public. It may have helped a little bit with Congress.

**Rafshoon:** No, because they’re like kids. You give them a little bit and then they say, “Well, the next thing now....”

**Thompson:** Who were the traditionalists?

**Rafshoon:** I think the Vice President and Stu Eizenstat, who was one of my closest friends. We always used to argue about that.

**Young:** Mondale of course was connected with that wing of the party, and a lot of Stu’s people were from the younger generation.

**Rafshoon:** Stu had worked for Hubert Humphrey, remember. To answer your questions, we needed more of some things and less of other things. But at least we needed to have a plan and a sense of order. I used to spend a lot of my time just running around trying to keep things from happening.

**Young:** What did you need to do less of?

**Rafshoon:** Well, I’ve already said, less appearances by the President.

**Young:** Does that mean fewer press conferences?

**Rafshoon:** No, not at that time.

**Young:** That came later.

**Rafshoon:** That promise was one we lived to regret.

**Young:** How was this managed?

**Rafshoon:** Stepping into the press room and making a statement, having to prepare a two-minute statement so that the President is on tonight talking about civil service reform, but tomorrow he will talk about the Middle East and Thursday we will have him talking about energy.

**Young:** Was that his natural instinct?

**Rafshoon:** Oh sure, he’s a natural at that.

**Young:** He wasn’t being gulled into making statements?
Rafshoon: He was. And it played to his natural instinct. He saw how counterproductive some of that was.

Thompson: Who encouraged that part of his nature?

Rafshoon: Well everybody. I used to tell this story about walking down the hall in the EOB [Executive Office Building] and running into somebody who had this responsibility. When I first got over there everybody wrote to me and said, “The President needs to make a speech on this.” Some guy came up to me and said, “The President needs to make a speech on stopping the drug traffic from Mexico.” I said, “It’s interesting.” He said, “Really, everybody out there is talking about it.” I said, “We don’t have time for a speech.” He said, “It’s only about a fifteen minute speech.”

I said, “Why don’t you write it? You write it and I’ll take it.” I would never say “no.” I’d say, “Write it and I’ll take it into him; get it over to my office.” Of course you never see him again. Sometimes you did. And everybody figured that the shortcut to get something done was getting the President to make a statement.

Young: Do you feel you were successful on cutting down on that?

Rafshoon: Yes.

Young: At what point? While you were there?

Rafshoon: While I was there. And then after I left, after the Iranian crisis started, it wasn’t hard to keep other things out of the way. In fact then it would have been nice if we could have done that with some other things.

Young: Were you aware of the correspondence on this point with Margaret Mead?

Rafshoon: No, I’m not aware of that. Did he get a letter to that effect?

Young: He’s got many letters from her talking about the communications problem.

Rafshoon: I do remember that he got some letters on this.

Young: It’s rather interesting because her analysis was much the same. I’ve just come across this.

Rafshoon: It’s interesting that he never shared that with me.

Young: She even drew diagrams on how communications could be improved.

Rafshoon: I remember that. That was during the campaign.
Young: Well, she came out for him in the campaign. But she was corresponding with him when she died actually. And this was in office.

Rafshoon: I had gotten him to sign off on giving Margaret Mead the Medal of Freedom, and when I called she was sick. He said, “Let’s arrange to do something.” I remember calling her daughter and she came to the phone. I said, “I’m calling from the White House.” She said, “My mother just died.”

Young: I was just wondering if this kind of correspondence ever came to your attention because it was rather interesting. She was lecturing Carter about his communication problems and how he needed to put himself in the center to show that everything was emanating from one center. It’s rather interesting. I was going to bring it back to your areas but go ahead.

McCleskey: I’d like to go back to what we were saying about the signs out there that things were not going well. You mentioned specifically Johnny Carson’s jokes and that sort of thing. This is a question that I don’t know the answer to, but as a specialist in mass media I wonder if you have any insight into the forces that shaped that kind of public reaction. I think it’s pretty clear that Carson can’t create that kind of mood. But what determines whether people early on start laughing or not?

Rafshoon: There’s a cynicism in the public. There’s a cynical press. The people are skeptical of all politicians. They’re certainly skeptical of someone like Carter. It happened here. I think we made a mistake. Carter made a mistake when he ran and when he first got in there of saying so much of what he was going to do. There’s the old saying: tell them what you’re going to do, do it, then tell them you did it, and tell them again you did it. He would say what he was going to do, then he would say what he was going to do, and he would say what he was going to do, and he would do it, and then he would get on to doing something else. There’s a difference.

So we set up certain expectations and we say we’re going to do certain things. Some things didn’t happen the way he said and I think we were probably a little naive in thinking that they would. The press was very cynical when Carter came to Washington. I’ll never forget when I first showed Charlie Kirbo a television spot in 1976 and the five-minute film that ended with, “I’ll never tell a lie, I’ll never make a misleading statement. I’ll only be as good a President as I am a candidate; listen to the radio, watch the television, if I ever lie to you don’t vote for me. I want us to have a government as good and as honest and as decent, that’s confident, compassionate and that’s as filled with love as are the American people.”

I went through the whole thing and when it was over Kirbo looked at me and said, “We’re going to lose the liar vote.” I laughed too. He said, “I’m serious,” then he walked out. And I think Carter saying all those things hurt him. It’s like why you never attack another candidate for adultery. He said all these things and the press said, “Okay, there’s a contract. You’re going to live to regret that.” That’s what, of course, made the Bert Lance thing so horrendous. As soon as he got within six months, Bert, who as a country banker had done with his customers what City Bank and Chase Manhattan had done with Mexico and Bolivia, became a real red herring, a red light for the press to go after him. It was a cynical press. The public became skeptical.
This may sound superficial, but it’s Carter’s style. I was saying something the other day looking at Reagan. If Jimmy Carter had been three inches taller and had a better voice, he’d have beaten Reagan. Or he’d have done better in the general election. Jimmy Carter’s a gentle man and I don’t have to tell you what he’s like in a room like this. One of the great ironies in my life with Jimmy Carter is when people used to tell me he wasn’t tough. He’s a tough son of a bitch. He’s always been tough with us. He wasn’t tough on his staff. But his manner is not that of a macho strong person. And I think it has a lot to do with the way people perceive things now. That gentleness probably hurt him.

Thompson: Did the opposite hurt? The press seemed to pick up the fact that there was a twitch in his steely blue eyes. They played that against him.

Rafshoon: He treated them that way. He came to have a little bit of contempt for a lot of members of the press. He did not understand enough why those things happen. There was nothing personal in it. I think another bum rap was the meanness issue. Carter’s not mean. It’s funny that the press talked so much about the meanness issue in 1980 after spending three years complaining that Carter wouldn’t get tough and wouldn’t play the game and didn’t do what Lyndon Johnson did. Carter didn’t use his meanness in the Presidency, if there was any meanness. He might have been too strident in ’80. He may have grasped too hard to be combative. But I don’t see a meanness in Carter.

Young: I wanted to get to the job description. In the memorandum you just read from, one of the things was to work with Anne Wexler’s operation. Was that one of the things for which you were responsible?

Rafshoon: That was one of them. One was working with the speechwriting department. The speechwriters worked for me.

Young: Could you talk about the Wexler thing first? She had already organized that shop.

Rafshoon: We coordinated the information, the packets, and the written material.

Young: Could you give us an example? She would set up the task force and get the East Room?

Rafshoon: I’d have somebody from my department sitting in on her task force meetings on, say, rousing the public and corporate support for civil service reform. I would see that there was enough material for what was needed. I or my department would pick the people who would be on the morning shows to talk about it. We were the booking agency. Not that the media doesn’t elect it themselves, but they found after a while it was a lot easier to call us. If there was a statement that the President was to make at a meeting, I’d be responsible for that.

Young: Out of your speechwriters?

Rafshoon: Either speechwriters, or my deputy Greg Schneiders is a writer. We’d get her a statement. Then afterwards we could see out of that thing if it would be worth him sitting down with [James] Scotty Reston or somebody we knew who might be interested in this issue or what
the process was. And then I would try to clear a half hour of the President’s time for him to talk
with that person or persons. Then we’d prepare talking points for that interview. Sometimes we
wouldn’t do a statement for an appearance.

Wayne: But she was the one who would designate the initial issue or the initial area?

Young: It was basically the legislative agenda that I think determined it.

Rafshoon: It was the legislative agenda. She wouldn’t determine what would be the issue on
which we would do something particularly.

Young: And it really was a kind of a regular elaboration of what happened, as I understand, on
the Panama Canal public campaign, the Congressional effort and getting all the interested groups
and programs coordinated. Actually there wasn’t anything quite like this intensity and system
that I’ve been able to discover in earlier Presidencies.

Rafshoon: Nixon had a similar office?

Young: Yes, but it didn’t do all this, I don’t think.

Rafshoon: No, it didn’t. Well, of course, just the famous [Charles] Colson operation. Two
hundred thousand telegrams saying the President was right in mining Haiphong Harbor.

Young: There were, somebody has counted these things, just interesting that there were four
hundred and eighty-three Presidential appearances with prepared remarks at a White House event
during the four years of Carter’s administration.

Rafshoon: Four hundred and eighty-three?

Young: Four hundred and eighty-three as compared with sixteen such events under FDR
[Franklin Delano Roosevelt]. Every President has some. These were public activities just at the
White House, basically for small groups.

Rafshoon: There were maybe too many. There’s a chance of overexposure. In running an open
administration—and God, we had an open administration—you’re giving four hundred and
eighty-three press opportunities. Well, you’d have a situation and a press opportunity like that
where all of our planning would be for naught in the public sector. You’d have a situation where
you’d come into the East Room and you’d been briefed by everybody, everything was going
well, you’d have Carter make his statement and as he’s walking off, Sam Donaldson would say,
“Have you talked to Bert Lance lately?” Carter would say, “Talked to him the other night.” Then
Sam Donaldson would report: “Bert Lance has had regular access to the White House since he
resigned four years ago. In fact an ABC news source says Bert is in the White House tonight.”

Let’s change that from Bert Lance because he’s such a good friend. I don’t mean that Bert was
such a negative, but let’s say, something like that would be, “I understand you had an argument
with Begin.” Carter might say, “He’s tough, Sam.” So Donaldson would say, “President Carter
admitted tonight that he has significant differences with Prime Minister Begin that are on the brink of boiling over into a full dispute. This has been confirmed by a member of the National Security Council who will be nameless, but was at the vending machine.” You can always get somebody who’s out of the loop to speak knowledgably when you have just any kind of lead from the President.

Wayne: At these sessions, did you have any difficulty when you prepared the President’s remarks with him of changing or altering those remarks, or going off the cuff? Was he pretty good at taking this? What he would say?

Rafshoon: No. He was pretty good at that. He liked to work on those things quite a bit. Too much. I think one of our problems—and I told him this—was that he spent more time on preparations of the speech and less time in preparing his delivery. He’d get into the text too much sometimes. We had a lot of problems later. I did make somewhat of a difference. That was a never-ending fight of keeping other people out of the speechwriting area. Everybody wanted a piece of the speech. And we’d try to enforce discipline, and after a certain point you could not come to the President on that. But it was difficult.

Sabato: In preparing these speeches, he didn’t spend a lot of time with the speechwriters though?

Rafshoon: No, he didn’t. He liked to tell us what he wanted to say and then he’d want a first text. He didn’t spend enough time with the speechwriters, that’s true.

Thompson: As you coordinated these events, were you concerned about things like the Annapolis speech where there was a piece of [Zbigniew] Brzezinski and a piece of [Cyrus] Vance?

Rafshoon: Well, the Annapolis speech was my first. The Annapolis speech was just a few days after I agreed to come to the White House. The only thing I had gotten in the Annapolis speech that I think was included was given to him two nights before it was delivered. It was about a couple of days after I had gone in there. I was concerned with that. I didn’t have any impact on that because I didn’t know what was going on. I was concerned constantly with speeches. We’d decide there’d be a speech on a certain day. If it were on foreign policy, Brzezinski, NSC [National Security Council], and State would come and deliver the material and work with the designated speechwriter. Sometimes they’d even come in with a draft. Then we’d get a first draft and it would be staffed to the permanent people.

Let’s forget foreign policy because it wasn’t bad in foreign policy because there aren’t as many players. But let’s say in domestic policy such as energy, you’d have Stu Eizenstat’s shop, you’d have Energy Department, you’d have probably Treasury because of something to do with taxes, OMB [Office of Management and Budget], and Charlie Schultze. And by the time everybody got in with what they wanted you would wind up having a laundry list of things.

State of the Union speeches were just horrendous because everybody had to put something in and they all wanted a laundry list. I can remember Landon Butler coming in the night before the
State of the Union speech and he said he’d looked at it and he’d talked to Lane Kirkland and Lane Kirkland said that the one thing that Mr. [George] Meany said on his death bed was would the President mention labor law reform in the next State of the Union speech. And, God, the President just put labor law reform in and added it to a list with Mideast peace—peace, prosperity, and labor law reform. We shouldn’t have gone to Congress with a laundry list. We were always fighting to keep it thematic. Reagan’s very fortunate that he doesn’t get into that. The speechwriting part I think is a lot of Reagan, it’s a lot of Reagan rhetoric. It doesn’t mean that people don’t know where he stands. They certainly know where he stands. But the public is not interested in a speech that is a laundry list of initiatives. So that was always a horrendous chore.

Thompson: Was there any Carter rhetoric on which you could build with the speeches that would counterbalance the engineer’s approach, other than human rights and a few things like that?

Rafshoon: Not much. When he’d go off the cuff he was so good. When he ran for Governor and when he ran for President so many of those speeches were without a text. Impromptu speeches were usually good because he internalized the subject. Especially, as you said, on human rights, civil rights. I’ve got so much film of Carter in black churches that would just bring tears to your eye—even when he was President, when a lot of the fire was out of him—when he talked to a group like that or he talked to a group of senior citizens or handicapped you could see that humanity come out. This was not the case if the speech had the programs that I am going to deliver to you people. But when he talked about the time down in Georgia when he met somebody who had a handicapped child.

Young: I think it wasn’t only that. There is one thing that really quite surprises me. I have just been going through all the papers of Jimmy Carter, and reading all the statements. One of the things that I’ve been very surprised by is that of all of these speeches to groups, and a place in Florida, the town meetings, the public officials of Albuquerque county or something like that, all over. You don’t see these human concerns in these, at least I don’t. What I remember of the set speeches on national television, most of the time, are mostly extraneous talking points. It’s not usually about an emotional issue about which he feels deeply. It’s really quite extraordinary.

Rafshoon: He had so much knowledge, even if it was on an emotional issue, his knowledge came out.

Young: And also the ability to handle the troublemakers in the crowd. It was just extraordinary. I find it very difficult to figure out the communication problem.

Rafshoon: He could not stand to work with the text. He did not do well with the text.

Young: The press conferences he got good grades on, and people said why don’t you do more?

Rafshoon: I tried to do more town meetings and Q and A’s, about which one never had to worry with Jimmy Carter. Speeches were different. There was something about a teleprompter and about a list of details that made him so boring.
Young: Or nervous. He’d get that high-pitched voice.

Young: Yes, nervous. And yet when I did spots with him where I’d say, “Don’t worry, these are our cameras; I’m going to cut out what’s not good,” he would be so relaxed I wouldn’t have to cut out much.

Thompson: Did you ever think of pairing Benjamin Mays and Carter on civil rights? One of the most moving events that’s ever taken place in this room was Mays’ evaluation of Presidents who’ve done most for civil rights, and he explained why he put Carter at the very top of the list. I wonder whether that kind of thing would have helped.

Rafshoon: We did in our campaigns. People like Benjamin Mays, Andy Young, Martin Luther King Senior—we used to use their commercials. And we would orchestrate a lot of statements by people like Mays, but they were so much more eloquent in their talking about it than we were.

Wayne: Can I follow up a short question on what Jim said because this troubles me also. I guess I’d like more thoughts that you have on this. What was it that turned a man who was very confident, who had a lot of material, into someone so nervous? Was he thinking that he wouldn’t come over very well?

Rafshoon: I can never think of Jimmy Carter as nervous. I think nervous is a bad word. It’s not nervous. Talk about his speeches. I think there’s a disdain of orators by Carter. I think he thinks that the time for rhetoric is over. I think he equates it with a Kennedy, with a Humphrey and with the traditional politician. This is really doing more for me than it is for you. I imagine a lot of you find that happens when people get here. You think about it, all his political life his adversaries have been much better orators. It really caught up with him with Reagan, but think all the way back to George Wallace. Carter couldn’t do with a crowd what George Wallace, or Lester Maddox, or Ted Kennedy could do with a crowd.

Clinton: How did he distinguish oratory from what you say he did in the black churches?

Rafshoon: Because he lived that kind of life all of his life. Read black Baptist churches. Carter’s a preacher. One of the things I used to say to Carter was, “More preacher, less engineer. Follow your own instincts. When you’re a preacher, you’re great. When you’re an engineer you put me to sleep. You put yourself to sleep.” I think he did put himself to sleep in some of those speeches. And that was our fault in the White House by giving in to the thought that you had to start policy in those speeches. Reagan does it with thematic speeches. You don’t have to give a list of regulations you’re going to cut when you say, “I’m going to get the government off your back; there are too many regulations. I’m going to cut red tape.” Carter did not like metaphors. Maybe he thought it was dishonest.

Thompson: Was there any insecurity that kept him from being the Baptist preacher? Was there a feeling that as President he ought not to show his religion?
Rafshoon: Be more Presidential. I don’t believe Carter has insecurities, but I think a lot of people would say that. I can’t see Carter thinking he needs to be more sophisticated. But there is something in Jimmy Carter that goes back to his childhood, although I’m not a psycho-historian. He was the smartest kid in Plains, Georgia, growing up. This also is relevant to the fact that Carter would always say things to please an audience in a campaign. When you’re growing up as the smartest and most affluent kid in Plains, Georgia, you have to get along. And therefore you either become a good old boy kind of like Billy [Carter] or you have to show how smart you are.

I think when he became President he felt, I’ve got to show southerners are not dumb. I’m going to defend the South by showing every time how much I know. I’m not going to use metaphors. I’m not going to be folksy. That would come across sometimes. I always used to give him a speech that would have a lot of elements, and I could see the things he’d cut. For example, he’d always cut repetitive phrases. And he’d write on the side “too much repetition.”

Young: On the other hand, some of the speechwriters have said on the few occasions where they really did work closely with their client—

Rafshoon: The Knesset speech. Did Rick [Hendrick Hertzberg] tell you about that?

Young: Not about the Knesset speech, but Rick Hertzberg mentioned certain others and those which Carter himself had a personal stake in. They all turned out very different.

Rafshoon: When they weren’t for a particular purpose of selling a package, where really Stu or the Cabinet members couldn’t get in to say you had to say this or we’re going to legally get in trouble, you’re going to start a war by saying such a thing. The Knesset speech is a good example. There was no time to staff it. We got over there. We knew we were going to make a speech before the Knesset but we couldn’t write it until we saw how things were going in Egypt and the first meetings with Begin. So the Knesset speech was supposed to be done Monday. Sunday, while Carter was in, everybody was in sessions. Rick and I were in the hotel room and we got this speech done.

We ran it through Brzezinski and Vance, who were too busy to talk to us, and we said, “You’ve seen the speech.” They’d look it over and they said, “Yeah, yeah.” We wouldn’t push them. We’d say, “If you have any comments, get back to us in the morning.” In the morning you’d see them going off to their meetings. “Any comments on the speech?” “Yes, I’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

Too late. We’d go give it to Carter, he’d look at it, and it was a home run. But he didn’t have time to play with the language a lot. He inserted a couple of things. The most memorable line—of course it drove Begin up the wall—was that our leaders are more timid than the people. If our leaders were as courageous as our people, then we could find peace. Begin took it personally. But those kinds of speeches worked. There was an emotional context. Carter could always be up for something in an emotional context. He knew he had to be better than Ted Kennedy at the Kennedy Library dedication. That was not a substantive speech, remember. There were no issues to talk about.
Wayne: Well what about the Democratic Convention?

Rafshoon: The second Democratic Convention. Where we had a bad teleprompter. We had bad lights and a bad teleprompter.

Young: It’s possible listening to a lot of the things that have been reflections that people have given here, particularly on the early part of the Carter administration, and from some of the things that we discussed with President Carter, to suggest that in retrospect some problems seemed pretty predictable early in the administration but were not anticipated at the time. One of them seems to be that the administration, the President, and his main advisors who came in from the campaign overestimated the impact of their victory on the governing process. They were not really focused on all those agendas, competitors, and liberal Democrats in the Congress.

Rafshoon: Like the campaign put all the problems to rest.

Young: No, but the expectation of some greater degree of deference to the winner. There began to develop this sense of, “What’s going on here?” I think it may have been a genuine surprise to Carter that he had invested so much time in the constant campaign to get everything through the Congress and through the government, constantly giving speeches—ad nauseam was the word he used—on energy. To this group, to that group; he must have given 90 speeches in the East Room on the subject. I think it was kind of a surprise to him to find that you had to go through all of that issue by issue, group by group, building a coalition from scratch every time, never having any carryover from the other issue. Then I think also there was this surprise. I’m giving you an interpretation and asking for your comment. I am kind of surprised that there was such resistance in Washington.

Rafshoon: Probably. We said in the Massachusetts primary in 1976, “Every time we get cocky we get kicked on our [expletive].” We won the nomination, but we didn’t understand that we had to bring the party together in ’76—then we did. We almost lost until we did. We won the election and I really think that we might have thought, Well gosh, we’re on the right side. We’ve led the Democrats to victory. We’ll get to Washington and Carter is going to shove it to the Republicans and we’re going to be able to get all this through. I really think that we could not conceive that you had a continuing campaign for four years.

Young: Not in the electoral sense. In the policy sense.

Rafshoon: Not in the electoral sense. Policy sense. You had an electoral campaign. You had a continuing campaign.

Young: The election only introduces the policy campaign.

Rafshoon: Yes. For four years. And that’s even though there are Democrats there who all have their own agendas and special interests. The special interest state is not just campaign rhetoric, it’s there, and we had best understand how to accommodate and work hard to combat it. Bob Strauss used to say that you can never get a coalition for anything but you can always get a
coalition against something. We needed really not to let down our guard from the time we got in there. We needed to keep campaigning to win on policy issues.

**Young:** Why was some of the experience in the general election not helpful? You said you had to nail the party together when Stu’s issues people starting having to make statements for all the components in special interests.

**Rafshoon:** Yes, they probably said too much. We overdid that actually.

**Young:** Why wasn’t there a forewarning in that? Because all or many of those groups are there in Washington. There was a liberal policy about appointments.

**Rafshoon:** I think we made a mistake in that we gave away a lot of government. The government by and large was not visibly peopled by those who had been in the campaign with us. We gave away most of the jobs to people who had been nonpolitical and worked for [Morris] Udall, Kennedy, Mondale, or other people who have their own agenda. Some were Republicans. We weren’t political enough. Even though a lot of people thought we did everything for politics, actually we were not political enough. And therefore you had people in the government who had their own agenda. They weren’t articulating the President’s themes and goals.

**Young:** So there was no loyalty test really to the President, not even very far down in the White House staff.

**Rafshoon:** Over in the EOB, I’d say that if you had a secret ballot in 1979, we’d have won 60%. We’d have swamped Kennedy with 60%. I was going to have somebody on my staff one day go to the White House parking lot and put Carter bumper stickers on their cars and then the next day see how many were still there. And then get the license plate numbers.

**Young:** And a large percentage of the clean cars would be Volvos, wouldn’t they?

**Rafshoon:** Right. Well maybe not because they would have worried about the AFL/CIO [American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations].

**Young:** One joke referred to the crowd that eats brie, drinks white wine, and drives Volvos. Just to get back to the point of what you said as giving away the government. Is there a possibility that this appeared as a communication problem and the problem of gaining outside support in coalition building? The Wexler operation comes to try to tighten up the Cabinet or the staff. There were the Cabinet firings and some changes in personnel. You’re being brought on to handle the communication problems. Tim Kraft was brought on for other things. It could almost be seen that problems would come from the failure to appreciate how Carter would govern with his kind of program and with his record as a candidate. Of course, because of the new system, all his competitors were ensconced there in the Senate, all feeling that they had a better right to the job than he had.

**Rafshoon:** Our transition probably should have been more politically oriented than it was. We had a transition team that strictly worked in a political vacuum.
Young: I thought the transition team was locked up in Washington.

Rafshoon: We had a transition team before the general election, after which it came to Washington.

Young: And then started scrutinizing all the agendas?

Rafshoon: They weren’t looking at the political issues. They were looking at programs. They weren’t looking at politics. A really good example was that some appointment was given to somebody in Chicago who had been a Republican. Mayor [Richard] Daley was still alive then. This person had been a Republican Assistant U.S. Attorney and was going to be something in some department, which sounded like really “good government,” but nobody had told Hamilton, who could have checked it out. We should have checked with women, blacks, or Hispanics. There are a lot of things we have to take into consideration in making appointments that the Republicans don’t.

McCleskey: Could I pursue that? You say you made a mistake in the appointments by giving away too much. But how does a President pull the party together, given all the fractures that exist in the Democratic Party? How else would he be able to build a fort?

Rafshoon: I’m not saying we needed to have a bunch of Georgians or people who had been for Jimmy Carter from before Iowa. We wouldn’t have been able to fill those jobs.

Young: That’s what Hamilton said, there just weren’t enough of them.

Rafshoon: There weren’t enough. But you could have found some kind of way. Carter could have done more to engender loyalty from people too, instead of being so aloof. We could have had people in the departments. We picked a good Cabinet; we should have had more influence on the sub-Cabinet departments. I often said that Hamilton didn’t need Landon Butler in the White House. He should have been Deputy Secretary of something. Landon was very competent. He should have been Joe Califano’s deputy. I’m not suggesting we have a political commissar in every department. But why not have something like that so that there is some kind of discipline? John Kennedy did it.

Young: So has Reagan.

Rafshoon: Reagan has. We didn’t need all our friends in the White House. We needed them out in the government. And possibly we needed to articulate to these people that we brought in what thematically this Presidency wanted to communicate. When I came into this job, even a few days before I was officially there, all the PIOs [Public Information Officers] from the departments came. Walt Wurfel got them all together, public information. The Assistant Secretaries from all the departments met with me in the Roosevelt Room, and I have never been in a more hostile atmosphere in my life. Some of them were my friends.

Young: Why was this?
**Rafshoon**: They felt that they were going to be controlled. I heard Califano’s PIO saying, “This sounds like Nixon.”

**Young**: Before you ever said anything, or was it in reaction to something?

**Rafshoon**: I said, “We’ve got to stop speaking with different voices. Please check with me before you accept an interview on a television show. I’m going to send over suggested theme papers for your principals.” The President would make a speech. I’d do a theme paper on it with the backup and I sent it to every senior staff member and every Cabinet member saying, “Would you incorporate this in your appearances around the country?” That was hardly thought control. And I remember somebody saying, ”Boy, it looks like it’s going to be Nixon again.” She had been on the *Washington Star*. “This reminds me when I covered the White House during Nixon,” she said.

**Young**: And so when Carter said, “Good luck,” you needed it. And you didn’t succeed in that, did you? Not really?

**Rafshoon**: A few of them were wonderful. Some had their own constituency in the Washington press, which they had before they ever got there.

**Young**: They still do.

**Rafshoon**: Right. We had the former counsel to the *Washington Post* in the Cabinet, who could have helped us some with our press relations, but he had his own agenda. Carter didn’t punish enough. We all know that.

**Young**: Of course, there’s another way of looking at this. If one were to ask Jimmy Carter about this, I wonder what he would say in response to my theory, my interpretation. I could imagine he would say that it’s not entirely correct or it’s all wrong. He came in after Watergate. He could not, but even if he had been disposed, he would not want to impose himself. He was for open government; he was not going to have the Berlin walls built around him. He was going to allow Cabinet members free hands. I mean he said things indicating that this was a positive value with him. It was a deliberate strategy in which he believed and which got him into bad trouble.

**Rafshoon**: It was overreaction to Watergate. I mean the fact that we didn’t have a Chief of Staff because he didn’t want [H.R.] Haldeman. There was nothing wrong with the White House system in the Nixon administration, it was the players. Hamilton Jordan is not Bob Haldeman. You all have met Hamilton. Jody Powell is not Ron Ziegler who is going to do whatever is necessary. There was nobody. I am not somebody who would drive over my grandmother’s body for Jimmy Carter.

So we overreacted. We overreacted in taking away the limousines, for example. They weren’t limousines, they were cars. I once told the President that was a big mistake because wouldn’t it have been better for Jody and Stu, who lived in the suburbs. I didn’t mind it, I walked to work. I didn’t have any children. I lived close to the White House. These guys would come in from the...
suburbs in their cars. Wouldn’t it have been better if they could have sat in the back seat of the
car and read the papers? Jody could read the papers and Stu could have made notes about what
has to be done that day. How much would you have saved, you would have saved the taxpayers a
lot more money. But we “de-pomped” the White House. We did all these things, but the
American people didn’t want that. We were not going to put people in Prussian uniforms, but we
still could have played “Hail to the Chief.” I had the theory that our constituency wanted us to do
that.

Young: And yet when he walked down the avenue and didn’t ride in a limousine, that went over
great.

Rafshoon: That was fine, but that didn’t mean it had to continue. He was still walking much
later. When he was walking down the avenue after the inauguration, he was on center stage and
you didn’t see him waving to a lot of crowds of people.

Wayne: Would you consciously change that?

Rafshoon: Yes. I had this feeling that it was a mistake. I don’t believe Jimmy Carter ever said
don’t play “Hail to the Chief.” I don’t know who came up with that idea. But, as he used to say,
even the simplest gas station operators in Plains liked to see our buddy Jimmy up there in “high
cotton,” and they didn’t send him up there to do away with those things. They wanted to see him
in the limousine. They wanted to see our kind of people in power. And when you don’t have
those symbols of power, you can’t exercise power. But that didn’t mean we would have abuses.
They abused the system in Watergate. I think if any of us had tried, we couldn’t have repeated
that. Even if we hadn’t “de-pomped” the thing so much, anytime we started to abuse it I think
Jimmy Carter would have kicked us pretty hard.

Wayne: Did you have any trouble reinstituting it because of snide press comments?

Rafshoon: Yes, that’s when “Rafshoonery” became known. You’ve heard of that expression,
“Rafshoonery.” Rafshoonery was used by the Congress, and the press, and anybody who wanted
to impugn the President’s motives, as saying all we were was a PR operation, and that just
wasn’t true. It’s like the old story I’ve told about all the scientific reasons why our campaign
color was always green. People said Rafshoon had done some kind of test and found that it
showed naturalness. The reason it was green was that in 1970, the day I had to come up with a
brochure and graphics of it, green was the only paper in the agency at that time. They asked,
“Why is it green?” I said, “What’s your favorite color?” Somebody said, “Blue.” And I said,
“Well, if you had my job, it would be blue. I like green.”

And that was the same thing. I got in there, I said, “At this event that he’ll come in, we’ll play
‘Hail to the Chief.’” We played “Hail to the Chief,” and so we started playing “Hail to the
Chief.” A lot has been made out of things that weren’t anything. I guess there was something to
it because a lot had been made out of it, but it really wasn’t important.

Young: From where did the greatest pressure come for revamping or rearranging the staff
system in the White House? Were people on the White House staff satisfied with it?
**Rafshoon:** Before we got there, you mean, changing the system our way?

**Young:** No, during your stay.

**Rafshoon:** What changes are you referring to that we made in the staff?

**Young:** Well, there were two retreats. I guess at Camp David you asked, “What are we doing wrong?” And as I understand it, this was asked particularly the second time. But both times there was some feeling that we are protecting a view that we don’t know what we’re doing in the White House and that it’s disorderly, or we’re not running things well or we’re not in control of things.

**Rafshoon:** I wasn’t there on that first one. But I think that had to do with feeling that we weren’t doing a good job in our communications problems and in mustering support for our programs. That’s when it was decided that Anne Wexler would be so much better than Midge Costanza. That’s when it was decided we weren’t playing enough politics in the traditional sense and that there were a lot of complaints that Hamilton wasn’t returning his phone calls to all the Democratic chairmen around the country and therefore Tim Kraft could be moved into doing that because Tim loved that kind of stuff. Hamilton hated it. I think that pressure came from Hamilton, the First Lady, Caddell and myself, and Jody.

**Young:** Not the policy people?

**Rafshoon:** No. The second time when we were at Camp David there was a feeling of, Okay, we go back and make a speech and say we’re going to start doing things differently because the country feels that you need to do better. We can’t do it unless we start cleaning up, and Mr. President, you’ve got to get rid of some people who are (a) disloyal and (b) ineffective. And if we’re going to come back and do some changes let’s both clean house a little.

**Young:** Both in the departments and in the White House.

**Rafshoon:** Yes.

**Young:** Could you tell us a little bit about that, how that came to a head. It’s not the first time we’ve heard about it, but we have learned different things about it.

**Rafshoon:** Tell me what you know.

**Young:** Can’t tell tales out of court. You know, of course, where the President had come from Tokyo. We know the circumstances, we know some of the details.

**Rafshoon:** We should have made that stop in Hawaii and gotten some rest. And I don’t think the American people would have begrudged it.
Young: There is some indication from some who have talked to us and talked to me that Carter was personally at quite a low point as well as being tired of the way the administration was being played. Some people were giving him—you were not named at all—volunteer advice that the Jimmy Carter who got elected is not the Jimmy Carter who’s being seen any more.

Rafshoon: I was one of those people.

Young: Yes. There were several perhaps who were saying this. And some have portrayed Carter himself as really quite dispirited at this time. At least I have the thought that however reluctant Carter might have been to go through that exercise, he had a strong idea jelled in his mind about what he ought to do in response to it. That was the crisis of confidence speech about which there were several wars, some of which he alludes to himself. Mondale said it was a bad mistake, and Stu and all the others had questions about the speech. Two things were put together, the energy component and another component got in there. But could you give us your viewpoint about those? It has all the earmarks of being a crisis point in the history of the Carter Presidency.

Rafshoon: Well, you have the facts. I don’t have to go into the public facts.

Young: The gas lines, and Carter was very low in the polls at that time.

Rafshoon: People say come on back, don’t stop in a line. Do a speech. Let me tell you the mistakes that I think that I feel responsible for, so that might give you an idea. One, I feel that I should have thrown a tantrum when it was suggested that we go back and do another energy speech.

Young: That was in the works already when you were on the way back, wasn’t it?

Rafshoon: Yes. I called the speechwriters back then and said, “Start working on it.” We should have gone to Hawaii, we should have rested. He should have rested. The feeling was, Well, the public’s going to go crazy, you’re sitting there on a beach in Hawaii, while there are enormous gas lines. You now see what the public will stomach in the way of vacations. Carter’s known as a workaholic and somebody who gets too immersed in detail, so if he stopped in Hawaii for three days that would have really started a revolution over the Fourth of July.

Young: They were right, I think. He’d be running away from it, because this is uncharacteristic.

Rafshoon: For one thing, he was going to take a vacation. He was also going to be in the Honolulu Fourth of July parade. It was a mistake. Or if we weren’t going to go to Hawaii, he could have gone back and gone to Camp David as he did. Remember, he came back and went to Camp David. But it didn’t mean we had to make another energy speech.

He was really dispirited by the fact that in the past few months he had done some really good and worthy things. We had concluded a Middle East peace agreement in March and his ratings went down. We had concluded a SALT [Strategic Arms Limitations Talks] agreement and his ratings went down. We had gotten an energy program, frankly, that we knew was going to work
eventually. I mean Carter already had some credit for the fact that now we have a bit of an oil glut, energy prices are down, and we don’t have any gas lines. And yet everything was down.

Caddell had come up with his famous memo, which had a lot of good things in it. I think that, when we said let’s go back, the substantive people said and the issues people said we’ve got to make a speech. There was no reason to make that speech. Every time we would make a speech on inflation or energy, and the more that we talked about it without being able to ever bring the little carrot of good news, people would more and more find Carter responsible for those things. We were more closely identified with the bad news the more we made speeches. And really we had nothing new to say, but we said, “Okay we’ll make a speech, and this time we’ll really come up with some tough things.”

So we went back and we sent up a speech which was, I’d say, a fair speech. Then he called Mondale, Hamilton, and me. Jody was out. It was the Fourth of July, and Jody was out buying watermelon. Rick Hertzberg was on the phone. He said, “I’m not going to give this speech.” I said, “You’re not going to give it?” The speech wasn’t bad, but it was nothing.

He said, “I’m not going to give another energy speech.” He and the First Lady had been up there together and he said cancel it. We said, “Well, what do we tell them? How can we cancel it?” He said, “Tell them I’m not going to give a speech.” I said, “Mr. President, we’ve got to say more than that.” He said, “No, tell them I’m not going to give a speech.”

So immediately the country thought, *My God, he’s not making a speech. He must have cracked up.*

**Young:** There were plenty of people in Washington and around the White House who thought that.

**Rafshoon:** Well, they talk too much, those people in the White House. I mean like somebody going around saying Carter’s lost his head, he must be in Camp David swinging from the trees with coconuts. I said, “Yes, with his clothes on.” But all he said was that he didn’t want to give a speech. In retrospect, why was that a crisis when a President cancels a speech? We probably should have said it was canceled because he has nothing to say about energy right now, and when we’re ready to make some changes on our energy program we will have some announcements. But right now the President has authorized us to say, “We need, as painful as it is, to stick to the progress we have made; it’s going to get better.” Reagan would say it’s going to get better. In spite of the fact that you’re punching pregnant women in gas lines.

So then Carter said, “You all come up here and let’s talk.” And then we went up, and we said we’ll do a speech. We’ll come back and we’ll do a speech. The main thing that Pat argued was that, “Nobody is paying attention to you, Mr. President. You’ve become irrelevant.” And to an extent that became true. The political cartoon always had Carter looking like a wimp.

We said the only way we’re going to get attention is to say something different, and this will certainly get attention. So we devised the plan: the speech, which would be more than just energy. We would admit some failure. And there was always a fight there. You know, “Why are
we admitting failures?” Reminds me of how I first met Jimmy Carter: “Why are you saying you’re not number one for Georgia? Don’t talk negative.” Stu and Mondale wanted an energy speech. They wanted the President to come out and campaign, go around the country more. We decided to make some changes. We decided that we had too many press conferences. It’s interesting.

Young: Am I right in thinking from the drift of where you’re going now that the particular event which was important was the decision to have no energy speech because you were becoming irrelevant, so whatever’s done has to get some attention. And then something happens and you’re discussing staff and Cabinet arrangements.

Rafshoon: That’s right. We’re going to be up here and we’re going to come back and just make a speech. We’d better also take this as an opportunity to look at ourselves and see why we are having so much trouble. Some of it is personnel. Some of it is that you are a manager, and not a leader.

Young: So it’s a question of one thing leading to another. It wasn’t that somebody or some group had an agenda prepared for Carter to say cancel that speech and not only do a different speech, but make a new administration.

Rafshoon: Do a different speech. We discussed it a lot and we had people come up from the outside and tell him what was wrong.

Young: And that evolved on the mountain.

Rafshoon: Yes. How the speech evolved is one thing. One question was whether it was just going to be about the crisis of confidence or whether it was going to be about energy. Stu brought some hard-hitting energy facts. I may even have that speech here. A few notes.

McCleskey: Is there any chance that the contents of your file could be added to the record here?

Rafshoon: I’ll have to talk to my agent. And since he gets ten percent.... This isn’t worth very much, believe me. Well, we started working on the speech. Rick Hertzberg came up and I was there and we stayed up all night and then we gave it to him. There were different drafts.

Young: It was still undecided about what the content would be.

Rafshoon: On July 12 we had a draft. I said, “I’ve gone over your draft with the speechwriters and we have these comments.” He had taken our speech and then he’d had that meeting with all those people and I remember all those quotes of what people have told me. And he’d sent it back to us. And while he was running that morning, I came back with the first set of quotes, which was very powerful; the second and fourth were also good. “We suggest you combine the energy and economic analysis clusters into one and make the resulting speech shorter.” The quotes were selected to say things that he wanted to get across to the American people.
His note was, “OK, but let me approve specific deletions. Put in brackets.” Then on the energy portion we talked about what we didn’t like about the energy portion. Stu was drafting two pages of hard, tough, specific rhetoric with emphasis on individual responsibility. I told him he could use only one figure, because Stu always wanted numbers. This was a sop to me. He objected.

I said, “Here, this section needs either a series of brief, clear specific directives and proposals such as ‘I will propose, I will direct,’ or a more explicit summary of categories of effort to be outlined the next day. For example, ‘I will propose a series of steps designed to increase conservation, step up domestic production, and unleash the unlimited creativity, ingenuity, and enterprise of America to find and develop alternative sources of energy.’” My feeling was use this to take care of energy and then get back to what you’re trying to talk about.

But then Carter said, “Stu will give you these two pages.” And then I said, “The objective is to assure people that you are ready to take decisive energy action so that they will pay close attention to the larger issues you wish to discuss. The phrase at the bottom of page eight is correct, but the way it is stated might minimize the importance of the war on the energy problem. We should consider saying that meeting the threat to America requires a successful war on the energy problem, but more because the threat is deeper than energy alone.” He put okay.

I went on, “On page 12, having deleted most of the harsh criticisms of society, is it still valid to say you have sounded the warning in the harshest of terms?” He said put more harshness back in. “On page 14 where you are talking about the generation we are, you could add that we are the generation that will win the energy war.” He said try it.

The text said, “Energy will be the test of our ability to unite, but it will also be the standard round which we will unite. On the battlefield of energy we can rally our nation to a new confidence and we can seize control of our common destiny.” It looked pretty good. The point was we were trying to say that energy was our priority.

**Young:** He did pretty well on that.

**Rafshoon:** After he let it stay in. It was the closest we came to doing what people said we should have done, as Roosevelt rallied people in World War II to fight the Nazi threat. We were saying, “Let’s use energy to do something about the crisis of confidence that America has. The speech lacks reference to government or Presidential actions as a result of the Camp David reflections. It needs a strong sense of your response to what you have heard and learned.”

And that was the point. If we came back and just did a speech and didn’t learn something up there on the mountaintop from all these experts, then we were in trouble. Okay, so he didn’t put that in the speech. He didn’t say that in the speech. He said, “What I’m going to do in energy….” But he didn’t put specific things that he was going to do.

Okay, we started talking and we said, “Well, he’s got to do something. This is our opportunity. This is the last opportunity to really make some changes. We have got to get him to make some changes in the government.”
And there were reasons. There were people who were not loyal. There were people who were ineffective. We said, “He’s got to get rid of Califano. He’s got to get rid of Blumenthal. Califano is disloyal and is ineffective. He’s got his own agenda.” But aside from that, Califano has not been able to get anything through Congress. He’s one of the great myths in Washington. He’s a Washington insider who comes up with the anti-smoking campaign, alienates the tobacco industry, and probably will go back to private life and represent R. J. Reynolds on how to get around regulations that Joe Califano wrote.

He didn’t get through welfare reform. He didn’t get through any hospital cost containment. He fought. He was disloyal in our lobbying for our own Department of Education by lobbying against it. We were getting calls from people in Congress who were saying, “Will you tell us what the hell you want? Joe Califano called me up and said to vote against the Department of Education. I’ll play it round or flat; what do you want?” It was a disingenuous question, knowing what Carter’s views were on the subject.

Blumenthal was just ineffective on economic policy. I think we may have been a little too harsh on him. [James] Schlesinger had to go and he was planning to go. We weren’t firing Schlesinger. We all liked Jim Schlesinger. Jim Schlesinger just became a symbol of energy problems, and of course from his previous incarnations, a lot of people didn’t like him. Being a lifelong anti-Nixon Democrat, Washington was prepared to hate Jim Schlesinger. I came to love him. But it was time for him to go. And he said, Give me an opportunity to go and I’ll go.” So that was the third party of the triangle. And some fool came up with the idea of, “Why doesn’t he ask for everybody’s resignation and then he can build a new Cabinet.” Some people thought it was crazy and some people thought it was smart. Some people said, “Well, present it to him.” And that fool did present it to him with a note. And we never knew until he did it that he had decided to do it that way. And in fact, the fool who had given him that note had gone down to Atlanta the day he did it and Hamilton called him and said, “By the way, you’ve just resigned. I have your resignation. You, and me, and everybody else.”

It was a mistake. And I’ll tell you why it was a mistake. We didn’t realize the impact it would have publicly and we didn’t realize how well the public would receive the speech. I mean we did our own shooting ourselves in the foot. We did our own Sam Donaldson, as when Carter would make a good statement and then Sam Donaldson would ask him about Begin and Sadat, and Carter would say something foolish.

Then he made that speech Sunday night. There was the cable where you could dial in positive or warm or all kinds of reactions. There were all kind of polls, all kinds of call-ins. We didn’t give the press an advance text so they could see beforehand that this was one hell of a speech. In fact, David Broder wrote, “Jimmy Carter got his voice back tonight. He believed what he said.” And we were really in good shape. We stepped on that news by having the Cabinet firings on
Tuesday. We wiped it all out. And I regret that. I was that fool who came up with that idea. I guess somebody’s told you that, haven’t they? No? Oh well, I was only kidding. It wasn’t me. It was Caddell. Caddell agreed with me. Caddell thought it was a great idea.

**Wayne:** Just one very small point.

**Young:** We didn’t try to trap you.

**Rafshoon:** Now who gets to read these transcripts?

**Wayne:** One very small point because you just mentioned that—

**Rafshoon:** Nobody’s going to use anything until after the ’84 elections, are they?

**Young:** What do you mean use anything?

**Rafshoon:** Any of this material. You know, publishing any of this until after the ’84 elections?

**Young:** We’re not publishing the transcripts, no.

**Rafshoon:** Or that fact.

**Young:** If you say not. If you say you didn’t say it.

**Rafshoon:** I may be working for another candidate. I don’t want him to know when I come up with another hair-brained idea.

**Young:** No, we recognize personal concerns.

**Thompson:** Before you leave, if Carter had been strong about firing people, would this have happened earlier?

**Rafshoon:** No. And I’ve got to say something as part of my argument and part of my defense. There are a lot of people who say that Kennedy made his decision to run when we did that firing of the Cabinet, because it showed that Carter was out of control and that Reagan took a lot of heat. The public forgot that too. Kennedy didn’t decide to run then. Kennedy would have always run if the polls showed he could win. That was one of the arguments I used to have with Stu and Mondale. We didn’t have to adopt Kennedy’s agenda to keep Kennedy out. They used to say, “We’ve got to be more liberal, more placating of Kennedy.” Kennedy would decide to run if we were weak no matter what, if he saw it as an opportunity.

But later when we were in the campaign in 1980, in defending that concept I said, “You know, if we hadn’t done it that way we might be sitting here with Joe Califano still at the HEW [Health, Education and Welfare] making statements that are hurting us, that are undermining our efforts in our campaign.” I don’t know if he would have fired him if he hadn’t had that device. Of course when he fired him, he told Joe he was the best HEW Secretary in history.
Wayne: But if he wouldn’t fire, would he discipline? You must have known before this what was going on with Califano and Blumenthal and several others. Wasn’t there any attempt to discipline?

Rafshoon: You know what he’d do. Yes. I’d go in and say, “Look what Joe’s done.” He’d say, “I’ll talk to him.” I’d come back, “Joe’s made this statement. Did you talk to Califano?” He’d say, “Yes, he says he didn’t do it.” I’d say, “Mr. President, he did.” He’d say, “Well, he says he didn’t so you’ve got a problem with Joe, work it out.” People could lie to him.

Wayne: But how about on the Education Department? Everybody knew that Califano was opposed to breaking up that department.

Rafshoon: So he told Mondale to discipline him. To get Joe on board. Of course Joe was Mondale’s find. Fritz had brought Joe in.

Wayne: What did Mondale do?

Rafshoon: He talked to him.

Wayne: With no effect?

Rafshoon: With no effect. And then Joe could go out and say, “Listen, everybody, I have a constituency of two in the White House and those little jerks aren’t going to tell me what to do as long as the President and the Vice President give me their confidence.” Joe had worked for Lyndon Johnson in the White House and knew what you’re supposed to do to a Cabinet member.

I used to say, “Joe, what would you have done when you were assistant to Lyndon Johnson if some Cabinet member had done what you had done? You would be the one to whom Johnson would have said, ‘Call that little son of a bitch up and tell him I’m going to cut his you-know-whats off if he does that again.’”

Except maybe Johnson wouldn’t have asked Joe to do it. Johnson would have called that guy in and said, “You little son of a bitch.” It would have scared the hell out of him. So Joe figures until he hears from the President, I don’t care what these guys say. But that didn’t happen. Carter didn’t like to discipline.

Young: For that kind of thing maybe. There are other situations where the President really suggested quite decisively whom to fire and when to lay down the law, as in the Iranian desk at the State Department.

Thompson: In what?

Young: The Iranian desk situation at the State Department.
Rafshoon: We’re not talking about people very close to him though. I’m talking about people who walk into his office a lot. Faces, people that he knew personally.

Young: People down in the lower command.

Rafshoon: And he doesn’t have to do the firing in that case.

Young: I think Carter said he brought the people actually in.

Rafshoon: He brought them in and chewed them out in a meeting, in talking to them.

Young: And said that he would fire all of them. He doesn’t care who’s doing the talking.

Rafshoon: And what happened?

Young: Well, I don’t know. Didn’t it straighten out? That’s what I thought.

Rafshoon: To an extent. This was a mass chewing out.

Young: That’s right, in which he said he’d fire them all, not caring who was behind it.

Rafshoon: But it never happened.

Young: He instructed Vance to do that and Vance didn’t act, so he brought the people in himself.

Rafshoon: And then if he had had to fire them all, he probably would have asked Vance to fire them all.

Young: Well, that’s following channels.

Rafshoon: We had that great joke about Carter getting tough, calling in Hamilton and saying, “Hamilton, fire Bella Abzug.” Which was kind of fun. But he didn’t.

Thompson: Was there anything of his religious and ethical views about forgiving people that entered into this unwillingness to fire?

Rafshoon: I think there may be a good point there. I think he really thinks that most people he takes on are as honest and decent as he likes to think he is. One of the problems he’s always had, I love Jimmy Carter so I’m not talking out of school, was his rhetoric. Sometimes he can be awfully hyperbolic, and overuse superlatives. You all have read Hamilton’s book I guess, where he talks about the time in Germany—I’ve got that memo here—don’t use superlatives, don’t say
what a great guy [Helmut] Schmidt is. Everybody knows. And then he comes out and says, “We had the finest meeting ever held by two world leaders, Helmut and I.” That’s the old small town southern boy, he wants to be liked.

**Thompson:** The way his English teacher liked him?

**Rafshoon:** Yes. The way those guys in Atlanta liked him when he went up there for things in the big city.

**Thompson:** The way he was liked in the Trilateral Commission. Is there an escalation here? We came back and we broke up in cars coming back, but somebody said that from the English teacher who liked him and spotted him as the best pupil to other groups, there was like a ladder and he kept climbing.

**Rafshoon:** Always trying to achieve. Always being a good student. Always knowing the most. When he went to Vienna for the SALT summit, my wife went. We were sitting in the box next to his and we went to the opera and [Leonid] Brezhnev was in the next box—since Carter was going to the opera, Brezhnev had to go to the opera. Brezhnev was cracking probably off-color jokes with people in the box with him. Carter was studying the libretto and making notes. He could not enjoy the opera without making it a learning experience.

**Young:** But that has nothing necessarily to do with being liked.

**Rafshoon:** Achieving. He’s a good student.

**Young:** Achieving. But that doesn’t necessarily bring love and respect. You know environments. He did many unpopular things.

**Rafshoon:** He did a lot of unpopular things.

**Young:** From very early he did things that were not designed for social standing.

**Rafshoon:** I think he felt that he would get a lot of credit for having guts. There’s a lot of Harry Truman there, but he didn’t want to look like a bad boy. I can remember having a big fight with him on something, about the only time we really did. It’s before he was elected; it was during the campaign on an issue that just drove me up the wall. I guess I just lost my cool. I thought it was a good meeting. Hamilton and Jody were there. He said, “This is the worst one, this has been a very unpleasant meeting. I hope we don’t have any like this anymore.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “I just hate to see you so mad.”

I said, “That’s the way I feel. I think it’s good.” I don’t think he really agreed with me on what I had said. And when we were leaving he said, “You’re really doing a good job.” About the only time he ever said that to me. I said, “Aw, go away.” We couldn’t leave on a harsh note.

**Thompson:** Had to correct it immediately.
**Rafshoon:** Yes. And I have a feeling that might have happened with a Califano. He might have chewed him out and then talked to him about something that he knew he could give him some praise. “Joe, I think you’re doing a wonderful job on, you know, infant mortality.”

**Young:** I think that would probably have been very much in character. Good points and bad points.

**Rafshoon:** And that may be also textbook Annapolis too. Certainly it isn’t [Hyman] Rickover. Rickover always told you you weren’t worth a damn. I was in the Navy. They always said when you bring in a subordinate, chew him out but also tell him he’s doing a good job. And probably his tone might have been different in his chewing out than it was in his praising.

**Thompson:** Would this have been true of [Alexander] Haig too? He seems in some places to bracket Haig and Califano.

**Rafshoon:** I think that’s a good point. I think Haig and Califano are very much alike. I knew Haig was in trouble when I saw him in his confirmation hearings. He had Califano as his lawyer. You remember that. Haig was discovered by Califano as a Major in the Defense Department when Califano was counsel. And they’re very close. I think they are a lot alike.

**Wayne:** Can I get back to one thing you’re saying, because now this discussion has led me to conclude that one of Carter’s problems was that when something became a major issue, he always ended up giving mixed signals. In one sense he would be angry and want to chew someone out or have them chewed out, but in another he couldn’t end on that note. So if you put yourself in Califano’s shoes it may very well be true that he was hearing two things, so he heard what he wanted to hear.

**Rafshoon:** Of course, especially if you’re somebody who really is a good infighter like that. You take a mandate from the good. He probably made Joe feel or anybody else feel, “Nothing’s going to hurt me.” Joe was stunned when he was fired. He did not believe it.

**Young:** Well, the President apparently did not do it reluctantly then. Did he do it reluctantly? Was Carter forced into firing or did he fire him?

**Rafshoon:** He was forced into it, I think.

**Young:** By all of the advice.

**Rafshoon:** I think he felt he was doing it for us. It’s the kind of thing that’s really untenable between him and the White House staff and it’s not going to work. And I think that might have something to do with it.

**Thompson:** Because you couldn’t get along. Is that a rationalization?

**Rafshoon:** May have been a rationalization, sure. I don’t know.
Young: You would expect a President to be reluctant. He invested a lot of energy in advertising the quality of his Cabinet at the beginning. And he’s admitting a mistake. And he’s under pressure from his White House staff to get rid of these Cabinet people and that could carry many agendas with it. So you could understand just from any President’s point of view why there might be some waffling here.

Rafshoon: And some of those people from Washington came up and told him of specific instances. I’ve heard from somebody that when Joe told Ed Williams’ partner about how stunned he was that he was fired, Williams said, “Joe, what do you mean, you’ve been [expletive] him all over town.”

Thompson: Did Carter ever talk about the Roosevelt alternative, about not firing, but moving people over or appointing them to something else?

Rafshoon: We did some of that, but not enough. The ones who had to be fired were so public that no one knew where to move them to.

Thompson: Ambassador to somewhere.

Rafshoon: They wouldn’t have accepted it.

Young: Take them away from their business. We’ve been talking about mixed signals and tough mindedness and soft-heartedness. The other view that we get, or another impression we get, is of a President who has got a very strong stubborn streak and is very difficult to persuade out of certain things. That has been another side that’s come up, at least where his mind is made up.

Rafshoon: Are we doing an interview on Carter or about what I did?

Young: It could be on both, but we try to end up on Carter too.

Rafshoon: Oh, you do. I mean, this is nothing you haven’t done with other people too.

Young: We do it with everybody, but usually we reserve it for the end and we try to get a better idea of what this person was contributing or what problems he solved. That’s why I say later this afternoon we might want to come back to this. But all the conversations come around sooner or later in one way or another to what kind of President Carter was and how he dealt with the prototypical issues that a President deals with: disloyalty, crisis, management of communications, and all those various things. You can’t keep the President out of the picture, but we’re supposed to talk about it from your point of view.

I think you had a chance to work with Carter in some of his most highly problematic aspects of his Presidency, his communications programs, his politics and things of this kind, so that naturally figures in it. I would like to hear more about your own views about the White House staff if there are more there; as a critic of it, why did you think it was strong, where do you think it worked best? If you look back on it, what might have been if there had been a second term, what might have been different about it?
Wayne: Perhaps also how your role with Pat Caddell evolved during the course of the time you were in the White House. And how you used the stuff that he was getting for the projections and the images that you were attempting to help the President.

Young: We might also have some more talk about the campaign work on this line.

Rafshoon: Seventy-six or ’80?

Young: Eighty particularly but also ’76 if that’s pertinent. Were there some unusual conditions prevailing?

Rafshoon: I’m responsible for ’76; I have nothing to do with ’80. Actually I did ’80 until we won the nomination. Then I wrote a memo how to handle Reagan. Our campaign was irrelevant in ’80. It was not the campaign. There were greater forces that changed that campaign.

Thompson: Since I won’t be here for a couple of hours, did Carter have a sense of humor?

Rafshoon: Sure. That’s one of the really bum raps he has. Jimmy Carter has a sense of humor. If you all went down there and spent that day with him I bet you saw a lot of that. And people said that Carter didn’t have a sense of humor; he was funny. He could be downright funny about things. He’s not a backslapper and he won’t be a regular guy. I can show you notes that he would write to me that were really funny.

Thompson: And he appreciated your sense of humor.

Rafshoon: Yes, a lot. We didn’t communicate that. He didn’t. Like to go to these White House Correspondents’ dinners and Gridiron, and Jody and I used to have to fight him. He said, “Well, because that takes a day of preparation at least and then I have to do it and I have to practice and everything.” I said, “But, you do it so well, Mr. President.” He said, “Yes, but there are more important things to do.”

There weren’t more important things to do. There are very few things that are more important than doing those several events a year that those people put on. That is really important. And Reagan knows it. I mean Reagan got out with a damn sombrero the other day at the Gridiron. Bought him two weeks. You may think that’s not a lot, but hell, two weeks is two weeks. Look at all the columns that have come out since then about how funny he was. If Carter did do the White House Correspondents’ dinner, I’ll bet they go back, he did one in ’79. I was there and got some comedy writers, but he took it and did it himself. It was one of the funniest things he’d ever heard.

Young: There was a [Thomas] Jefferson-[Andrew] Jackson day speech I think he gave, and one of them in 1978 or 1979, the first part of the speech—it’s one of those I happened to be reading last night—is poking fun at himself and his staff and his family. All the things he’d been heavily criticized for he was making jokes about. How he spent two solid years doing the work and
trying to find just the right house they wanted to live in in Washington, and now they’re going to take it away from him.

[LUNCH BREAK]

Young: Why don’t we begin this afternoon, to make sure that we don’t get too anecdotal or too fascinated by Presidential personality, by getting back to some of the operations and activities.

Rafshoon: Before we adjourned you said we’d talk on my views on the White House staff organization, its strength and weaknesses, and the role with Caddell and the campaign role.

Young: If you could give us a little bit more about not just your jobs but your participation in the activities. For example, were you part of the senior staff meetings when you were there?

Rafshoon: I was part of the senior staff meetings and then we used to have our small meetings. I’m not a great meeting participant. The bane of my existence at the White House was meetings. I think we may have had a few more than we needed, but I’d always have somebody on my staff represented at the meeting.

Young: Did you have a deputy?

Rafshoon: Yes. My deputy was Greg Schneiders. I wanted Greg to come to this, but he’s working for [John] Glenn now and they’re off in Massachusetts at that Democratic issues straw vote conference. We’d have meetings. There’d be a task force on a particular issue or a particular initiative and one of the senior staff members—whether it be Wexler or [Jack] Watson or whatever—it would be their task force. Then we’d each put somebody from our own department to represent us on the task force and go to those meetings. And then Hamilton, and Jody, and I would work very closely. I would spend a lot of time in Hamilton’s and Jody’s office.

Thompson: In terms of your arrangements with television or the press advance, did you pretty much have carte blanche to do what you wanted to do within the general framework of where the President was going or when he’s saying that? There was nobody who was looking over your shoulder you had to report to?

Rafshoon: No. You know we didn’t have a Chief of Staff until after Camp David, until July of ’79, although Hamilton was always considered a de facto Chief of Staff. We never worked that way. Hamilton, Jody, and I go back to Georgia. I used to say in ’76 in the campaign, if anything happened at night and we’d wake up in the morning and see something on television that required action, we wouldn’t even meet to decide what the action would be because in my area I knew what I had to do. In his area Hamilton knew what he had to do. Jody was on the road with Jimmy and he knew what he’d have to do and we’d do it. And we always got along well enough that nobody was ever trying to jockey for position.
It would be funny. You’d get back together later in the day and you’d find that what you had done would have been what you would have done in a meeting. Hamilton would say, “We’ve got to get somebody into Wisconsin,” and he’d call up and get somebody there. I would increase the television buy. Jody would make some statement, get Jimmy to make some statement that we could use then. I’d have somebody call Jody’s office and find out where Jimmy was going to make the statement so we could film it without even knowing that it was going to be a statement. So that kind of worked a little bit in the White House. We never lost time on backbiting.

Young: And you referred to the collegial group anyway. The essential collegiality of the group. Nevertheless they are there. I’m going to ask another question. What difference does it make to have a Chief of Staff? Why did you need it and what changed?

Rafshoon: We weren’t the only people on the White House staff.

Young: So the other people needed to be coordinated.

Rafshoon: Yes. We needed to be able to have Hamilton exercise discipline when he needed to. Appointing him as the Chief of Staff also helped with the Cabinet. It showed that the President was investing a little more authority in Hamilton and you’d better start clearing some things through him.

McCleskey: I wanted to ask, in the White House how did you keep informed about what was going on and what themes were to be developed? Were you part of the flow of paper? Did Eizenstat’s papers come across your desk? Did you depend on these meetings with Jordan and Powell?

Rafshoon: Too much. All of the time. And talking to the President. Jordan and Powell. More Jordan because Jody was the most overworked person in the White House. But we would talk a lot at night on the telephone. We socialized a lot. We’d constantly be talking about Jimmy Carter. We were together not too long ago and said, “We’ve been here all day, we had something else to talk about; we talked about our movie. You know, we haven’t mentioned Carter all day. Free at last.”

That’s the way it happened. Themes are driven by events, unfortunately. We were driven by events, so it wasn’t too hard to find out what our needs were.

Young: What did the regular morning meetings with the President accomplish from his point of view, do you think?

Rafshoon: It was a way of him knowing what direction everybody was going in. We were able to formalize a method of giving him information directly, and possibly argue things out. One of the problems was how Jimmy Carter liked to have paper, rather than be a party to argument. It gave you a chance to maybe personally get some arguments on the table. It also could be a forcing mechanism for a decision. You know, “Mr. President, Frank [Moore] has to go up to the
Hill and tell them what you want and he’s leaving in fifteen minutes. Will you render that decision?”

And sometimes they were orchestrated too. Hamilton would talk to the President and say, “We need to tell somebody at this meeting. I’ve told him, but it might help if you’d tell him.”

**Young:** Would you characterize this as political advising as well as informational, what’s going on and what decisions need to be made?

**Rafshoon:** More substantive than political. I mean there was never any discussion of campaigning with those things.

**Young:** There was no discussion about the politics of Congress, what the politics requires, what political problems we have here, what political strategies need to be followed to get this thing from here to there? I asked that because a lot of people have created a picture—not necessarily in this group—that Carter did not welcome political advice.

**Rafshoon:** That’s not true. Carter welcomed all kinds of advice. I think he had a habit of letting you know—not as a habit, it was a manner. You never knew if he was taking it or not if you didn’t know him well enough. But he accepted it.

**Sabato:** Did he ever actually interrupt someone and say, “That’s about the campaign,” or “That’s about the political process, and I don’t want to be involved in that”?

**Rafshoon:** Most of the people in that meeting wouldn’t have been campaign oriented. Except Jody, Hamilton, and eventually myself. And we had separate campaign meetings after the campaign started. Carter didn’t focus on that campaign until late in ’79. And some of the things he did prove that he didn’t focus on it. We might still be there. And I think that’s to his credit, I don’t mean that as criticism.

**Wayne:** I wonder if I could follow up and move from this to a slightly different, but I think related, subject. One of the things that you mentioned that interested me was the fact that you socialized a lot with the same people that you worked with.

**Rafshoon:** No, no, I didn’t say that. I said Hamilton and I.

**Wayne:** And Jody.

**Rafshoon:** Jody to a lesser extent.

**Wayne:** I guess my question is, how did you get a sense of what it is that the public wanted in terms of the President and whether or not he was meeting those expectations? Were you relying primarily on Caddell’s polling?

**Rafshoon:** No, no. Well, certainly Caddell’s polling to a degree. I socialized with a lot more people than Hamilton. You know, having a beer was the exciting social life that Hamilton and I
would have, maybe Chinese food at some restaurant in Washington. Those were our dinner parties. But I got around the country a lot. I used to go back to Atlanta. I used to talk to a lot of people. Believe me, when you’re in the White House and you have a job and people think that you have the ear of the President you hear from a lot of people. You hear from people you went to school with in schools you never went to. And mail. We did orchestrate our mail. We got our mail. We got a lot of mail from people, told us things that were going on. And you could talk to others. There were some good sounding boards out there in the political world.

**Wayne:** How about that Wednesday morning meeting that Anne had, the internal Washington group. Was that a useful source? A useful barometer?

**Rafshoon:** I went there only once.

**Young:** So it wasn’t useful.

**Rafshoon:** No. Because I think those people had certain axes to grind in Washington; they’d pull their punches or would give you advice that might have something to do with something that they’re interested in. I’m not saying that they didn’t have useful advice. I went in there, and what did they tell me? “Carter needs to speak more forcefully. He needs to rehearse his speeches. You need to really spend some time on that. We need to get him a speech coach. He needs to show toughness.”

I did not need that. I remember one guy coming in and asking for a meeting with me. He wanted only 30 minutes and he told me that he thought I needed to understand that the biggest issue in the ‘80 campaign was going to be inflation. I said, absolutely. And that was it. He was a well-known Washington person and I had to spend 30 minutes discussing that with him. And I said, “Boy, you’re right and I’m going to write a memo on that.” Honest. It was so frustrating.

**McCleskey:** Let me play sort of the devil’s advocate role here for a moment. Doesn’t your reaction—and I think I would have reacted the same way—but doesn’t that reaction sort of suggest that you were mostly looking for or expecting help from them rather than thinking about what you could do to them that would make them useful to you?

**Rafshoon:** I think we made a mistake in not bringing more of those people in. Yes, I really do. Yet you don’t realize how much more we did than we’ve been given credit for. I can name you people who were called on a lot. Probably not in the first year.

**Young:** By the President or by people for him?

**Rafshoon:** We always got them in to see the President.

**Young:** Are we referring to old Washington hands?

**Rafshoon:** Yes. We didn’t use old Washington hands enough. Averell Harriman was in that White House every three or four months. Wonderful to talk to too. He was very sharp; he gave good advice. But they said we never used Washington hands for substantive things. But that’s
the point. We tried, but we should have done more. I think when we first got to Washington we should have reached out and given certain jobs in that White House to some Washington insiders. We could have had anybody.

**Young:** In the White House, you mean.

**Rafshoon:** Possibly.

**Young:** Because you had quite a few in the Cabinet.

**Rafshoon:** We should have had somebody as Counsel to the President who knew Washington. If we had to do it all over again, you know what I would do.

**Young:** Did you see any marked change in the way things were done in the White House in the staff operation? Were there any marked changes in the ways of getting things done by the President over this four-year period as you looked at it, sometimes from the inside, and sometimes from the outside? Does it end up substantially different in any respect from what it was the first year?

**Rafshoon:** I think that it was looser the first year. I think that we became more businesslike after that first year. We really did not anticipate how much press scrutiny would be given and how much press attention would be given to the ways that the rest of us acted. Hamilton and I were stunned. It just never entered our minds that we would be issues, that a lot of attention would be paid to us. We came to the White House in sport shirts and windbreakers. We didn’t realize that you don’t do that. As much as we said we were going to be different from the way things had been done, there was no need to uselessly and unnecessarily look for trouble.

We also started routine staff meetings. In fact, after a while we had a staff meeting every morning. The President started in his first year with too many issues, too many priorities, too many initiatives. He started to focus a little more on the important things after that first year. And we were able to keep a lot of things away from his involvement. After the hostages were taken, it really became impossible to think about your priorities or themes. After November 4, 1979, we never had a meeting with the President when he didn’t have that on his mind.

**Young:** Would you say that there was a distinctive staff system in the Carter White House, different from what you have seen in other Presidencies?

**Rafshoon:** I’ve never been in any other Presidencies.

**Young:** Looking from the outside even.

**Rafshoon:** Well, we started with one difference in that we didn’t have a Chief of Staff. It was more of a loose operation. When I came to the White House, I defined my role and put in these memos exactly what I was going to do and that was it. Possibly in other White Houses you are hired for a job and you are told what you are going to do.
Young: I have a feeling that that was very general with the Carter staff. Jobs were never slotted or precisely described. Everyone developed their own job description, I guess.

Rafshoon: Yes, but I believe they talked to previous administrations. There was a public, press, and Congressional liaison. Hamilton pretty well prescribed what he was going to do.

Young: But apparently it was not a case such as one could imagine with an Eisenhower, who had very clear notions and principles about the authority and jurisdiction of organizing.

Rafshoon: A military staff system.

Young: Yes, but I have the feeling Carter did have many strongly developed or precise views on organization.

Sabato: I don’t know if you’re willing to move along to the campaign topics at all.

Young: And also to the Caddell part of it as well.

Sabato: To start us off on a series of questions about the ’76 and ’80 campaigns, I wonder if you might evaluate the ’76 and ’80 advertising campaigns that you put together for Carter, and perhaps compare them to the campaigns orchestrated by other consultants for other candidates.

Rafshoon: Let’s start with the first campaign. Again I will never plead guilty to being what I was called when I was in the White House, the image-maker. I’m not an image-maker. And if you look at the Carter campaigns for Governor and the ’76 campaign, it’s 90% Jimmy Carter and 10% technique. I tried not to screw up the other 10%. We developed, starting in 1974, the material for the ’76 campaign. When he announced on December 12, 1974, I already had about forty thousand feet of film in the can from the time that he had done that job for the DNC [Democratic National Committee] campaigning for candidates, and especially from the guy running for Congress in New Hampshire, the most important seat.

We had since 1974 catalogued what Jimmy Carter was. We developed those themes based upon his campaigning throughout the country in 1975, two hundred fifty days on the road. You could see what was working and what wasn’t. But they were him. We didn’t have formal speeches. He would jet out and respond to the vacuum that there was because of Watergate and post-Vietnam. He’d start talking about open government and honesty and decency and love and compassion and competence and confidence and all those buzz words, including government as good as their people. I’d come back and start looking at this stuff on a movie film and say, “I don’t have to write a theme for him.”

This is what he does well. I didn’t show it to him, but he could feel. This is what was appealing to the American people. And it was internally felt. The ’76 primary campaign was vintage Jimmy Carter that fit in with what the country was looking for. There were some changes as we went along. We were able to have very fast reaction to things that happened because we didn’t have the committee system and I didn’t have to check with anybody to do news spots.
Sabato: Even with Carter?

Rafshoon: Carter never saw the spots until the campaign was over. The first time he saw something was before the Pennsylvania primary; he went to a fundraiser and he got there early before he was supposed to speak and I had shown a five-minute spot. And he had to wait to watch that. That was the first time. And then afterwards, after he won the nomination, I came down to Plains once and played him all the spots that we had used during the primaries.

Sabato: That was the first time he had really seen them?

Rafshoon: Yes.

Sabato: After he had won the nomination”?

Rafshoon: Yes.

Sabato: Did he object to any of them? Did he suggest that the tone was wrong on one or another, or an issue was misplayed or something?

Rafshoon: No. You’ve got to remember, sometimes we would have him speaking. I could tell him, “Relax, these are your cameras, we’re not going to screw you like the networks are going to screw you, and I’m not going to let anything bad happen,” and then he would relax and talk. If you remember those spots in ’76, they were mostly Carter talking on the road. So we had very little problem with it. We made a lot of changes.

And a lot of times something would happen. You know the time when after we had won New Hampshire and then lost in Massachusetts it looked like we might lose Florida. Because we won Florida, people decided that the South can now send a President and not just a message to Washington. But then when we lost Massachusetts and they might have felt that the bandwagon was over, Scoop Jackson started attacking Carter in Florida on that home mortgage exemption thing, and overnight I had to fly in. I met him in Florida. We shot some spots on film at night, had them processed, edited, developed, and dubbed by 9 a.m. the next morning and on the air on every station in Florida that night. Those were things we were able to do because of the flexibility we had.

I know some people have said that I failed in the general election. I don’t think I failed in that the stuff we ran was bad. I think that I didn’t realize fast enough that we were sending out mixed signals between the campaign and what was on the air. You know what I mean. After he got the nomination he became too much of a regular Democrat. We had everybody flocking down to Plains to kiss his ring. We put Jack Watson, together with this mammoth transition team, to decide what our Presidency was going to be like.

Gerald Ford was running around the country acting like Jimmy Carter. Ford had become a regular guy, getting out and milking cows and going around the country and saying, “I know what’s good for America.” He was becoming the Jimmy Carter. I was continuing to run some of the same types of things we had in the primaries, but now we were going national. People
perceived Carter as getting close to Richard Daley and being more of a Democrat, becoming a little more liberal than they had perceived him to be. Carter had been more conservative in the primaries. When he became a Democratic nominee, he was more liberal. I think that I didn’t catch that fast enough to be able to maybe make him more Presidential, because people were beginning to see that.

**Young:** Is this a problem that stayed on or even got worse as you went into the administration? There is one other person who has been here who has also talked about the campaign in terms of one of the unusual things being that Carter started out in the primaries opposite from the way most Democrats had. And then as he got into the general election and had to get the Democratic Party and its liberal constituents, he moved from center to left. Correct?

**Rafshoon:** Oh boy. That’s right. When he came to Washington, he became one of them.

**Young:** And that’s the era of all the promises, because you have to make a lot of statements to all of the constituencies. I’m going to be for this, for that, and the other.

**Rafshoon:** It started with the acceptance speech. Maybe it started with Mondale. Picking Mondale was a good choice. Then there was the acceptance speech, which was certainly considered more liberal than they expected from Jimmy Carter. Meanwhile I still have it in the peanut fields, so to speak, on the spots. My spots didn’t hurt, but maybe my spots became a little irrelevant until I woke up. I got in trouble with the press that critiques spots when I didn’t use Tony Schwartz’s negative spots. Until this day I will say that I was right.

**Sabato:** Can you tell us a little bit about those spots? I’ve heard about it from Schwartz’s side but I’d be interested to hear about the incident, and also about the content of the spots, which Schwartz is hesitant to reveal.

**Rafshoon:** Schwartz came up with some spots. Everybody said you’ve got to get with Tony Schwartz. You’ve got to meet Tony Schwartz. You’ve got to have Tony Schwartz’s stuff ready. So I met with him. I liked him. I said, “We’ll see if we have to go negative against Ford.” I did not say I was going to use some. It was always my gut feeling that Carter, “Mr. Non-politician,” could not attack a President of the United States. If he did that, he would become like any other politician. They’d say, “Oh God, he’s not a good guy.” And we could not loose our good guy image. But I wanted to be ready because certainly we were being attacked, so I said I gave him a contract to develop some stuff.

I’d be glad to show them to you, because he delivered a whole bunch of spots with actors from New York talking about Gerald Ford. He had a guy talking about all the things Ford had vetoed. When you watched it you said, “They’re talking about Ford vetoing big government.” Ford could run that spot. It was so uncharacteristic of Jimmy Carter. Jimmy Carter may not have vetoed those bills, but those bills would have been different under Jimmy Carter because they would have been a little more restricted. And there was something about his hitting Ford on the East European gaff and saying something like, “Doesn’t he remember Cardinal [Jozsef] Mindszenty?” Well, I played that in my office in Atlanta to a bunch of the young ladies who worked in the office, and they said, “Who?”
And so I felt they were just not well done. They were good negative spots but they weren’t right for Jimmy Carter. But I did see where Tony could help us do a few, so I still had a contract with Schwartz to do so many spots. I decided I would use his facilities and use him to produce some talking head spots near the end where Carter got very positive and talked about 4.6% inflation being unacceptable. That later got used in 1980.

Unemployment was a very good issue. Tony did a good professional job on that. He helped write those, but they were also rewritten by my copywriter and Jimmy Carter. One of the reasons I used to not want to do talking ads with Carter is those were the one set of spots he’d have to be involved in the copying. And so he then rewrote them and they were good. But that’s the Schwartz story.

Sabato: Was there a Nixon pardon spot in there?

Rafshoon: Yes.

Sabato: What did that consist of?

Rafshoon: Newspaper clippings.

Sabato: About the pardon?

Rafshoon: Yes. He also did the “Ford to City: ‘Drop Dead.’” And I felt that we couldn’t run that because Ford really didn’t say “drop dead.” The New York Daily News had run that headline. They would have immediately said this is another case of Jimmy Carter lying because this is what he said. And even though it may have worked—it helped us in New York City—there would have been a press conference out of Washington saying that Carter in New York is lying. So I didn’t do it. But we kept losing points during the general election campaign. I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that Ford was using the incumbency very well. His campaign was wonderful. And probably the best spots were certainly his man on the street ones.

Sabato: With people from Georgia saying Carter is a terrible Governor and for God’s sake don’t inflict him upon the country.

Wayne: Which you used extensively in ’80.

Rafshoon: Against Reagan. And they worked until the debate. Those spots in ’80 about Reagan shooting from the hip and being just too much of a risk were working until that debate when he stood up there and didn’t press the button.

Wayne: It worked against Kennedy too, didn’t it?

Rafshoon: Yes.
McCleskey: So you had a very free hand then at least in '76 in developing material, running it, and so on.

Rafshoon: And in '80.

Wayne: Is there any difference in the discretion you had in the two campaigns?

Rafshoon: No, except there were more people; I had more advice in '80. Everybody had more advice in '80. The best thing we had going for us in '76 was we were based in Atlanta. And two things would happen. One, you didn’t have press being able to walk over to the headquarters and talk to everybody, especially to those who didn’t know what was going on. They’d have to fly to Atlanta and make an appointment to see people. And the other thing is we didn’t get the Washington Post until two days after the mail came out, so we didn’t overreact to what was happening.

We had a lot of advice in '80, and of course we had the White House. The advertising when you are an incumbent President is almost all from the press, which seems to feel that it’s almost part of public policy. They have a right to really go after you with a higher standard than they would a candidate. “The President is lying in his advertising.”

Sabato: Did any of the other staff members have a veto in 1980 over the ad you decided to air?

Rafshoon: The only one who could have a veto would be Hamilton.

Sabato: Did he ever exercise it?

Rafshoon: Not the veto. We’d discuss it and I would kill some things with Hamilton. We would argue it out.

Sabato: Can you think of some examples of spots that you did kill or decide not to air or maybe even produce?

Rafshoon: Well, I can remember having a film that was ready to go on the air and a lot of it had to do with SALT and then the Soviets’ invasion of Afghanistan. I felt that might be—

Sabato: Inappropriate?

Rafshoon: Yes. But it was very funny because I showed it to Hamilton and I did not know that we were about to pull down SALT. Hamilton didn’t want to tell me. He said, “That spot’s not going to work. Let me tell you something the President’s going to say this afternoon.” “Good spot, can’t we run it anyway?” There were some others. There weren’t that many.

Young: On the 1980 campaign?

Rafshoon: Oh, I went off on a tangent. Not a tangent. I didn’t realize I had a spot showing the duties of the President. The idea was to make you think—can you imagine Ronald Reagan doing
these things? There was one ceremonial event in Japan. We had the waving of the Japanese flag and showing Carter’s state meeting with the Japanese leaders. It was one of our five-minute films, and we got a lot of bad feedback from Michigan. I pulled it off.

**Sabato:** Yes. Who would have ever thought of that at the time?

**Rafshoon:** But the union people there said, “That is the enemy.”

**Sabato:** Did you use focus groups for the spots, or do you not believe in that method?

**Rafshoon:** Our focus groups were Pat Caddell. We tested some spots. We did some test campaigns in Montana, North Dakota, places—states—that were definitely not on our target; they were Republican states. But Pat would go into a market on certain subjects that these spots might deal with. Then I’d run a week or two of television at three thousand dollars for two weeks, and then we’d poll again to see if there was any movement.

**Sabato:** So you had massive scientific focus groups. That’s very interesting.

**Rafshoon:** I think that’s better than focus groups because these are real people. Even though we weren’t going to get votes particularly, we weren’t asking, “Are you going to vote for Carter?” We were trying to take care of some, for example, some of Reagan’s negatives. We could see him softening up in Republican areas. The Republicans could worry that Reagan is a mad bomber.

**Sabato:** If you had to run the ’80 advertising campaign over, given what you now know about Ronald Reagan, would you have made the ad campaign more negative, and if so, what would you have done?

**Rafshoon:** It was pretty negative. We had a lot of negatives. Tim Kraft and I disagree on a lot of things, but on November 4, 1980, that night when it was over, Tim made the most perceptive comment on that campaign: “We should have taken that thirty million dollars and spent it on two more helicopters in Iran. That’s what we should have done.” It just was irrelevant what we were doing on the air. What was happening in the country was just overwhelming.

The campaign was two parts. We started with a group of spots that show Carter as Commander in Chief, which was our defense spot, and mixed them with peace spots. You’ve seen them. All guns and a strong defense, then Carter with Begin and Sadat at Camp David. He was Chief of State doing complex work, part of which was meeting with people and dealing with tough issues.

**Sabato:** And the light on late at night.

**Rafshoon:** Yes. All of these things were positive Carter, but also he could look at them when all the advisors were gone. He had to make those decisions. They told you, “Can you imagine Ronald Reagan in this job?” Then we got tougher later on and we started talking about things that someone in the Oval Office has to do. Reagan might even start a war. Then we did the man on the street with Ronald Reagan. The negative Reagan stuff wasn’t attacking Reagan.
personally, although they then said it was. Nancy [Reagan] even got on the air and said, “You’re attacking him personally.” She was talking about Carter when Carter said that the Reagan Presidency would separate rich from poor, black from white, and that with Reagan we would not have nuclear arms control. He can’t balance the budget, increase defense, and do all these things. All these things, of course, we were wrong about. Those things were working. With Iran going on, with unemployment and having stagflation, it was a wonder that you still had us neck and neck with Reagan until the debate.

**Sabato:** Your ads were negative. That’s a given. And then you had Carter as well becoming negative and striding on the campaign trail.

**Rafshoon:** It was so frustrating. It was so frustrating about the press. I am not going to be anti-press or anything, but Reagan got a free ride in the ’80 campaign. They did not conceive of Reagan winning until the very end; they thought Carter was going to pull it out. And therefore they didn’t want to be a party to possibly destroying a conservative candidate since the press was always accused of being so liberal.

**Sabato:** Was it that, or was it that they just hated Carter so much, they really wanted to give him a good hard ride.

**Rafshoon:** Well, they wanted to give him a hard ride. They figured that Carter had been sanctimonious to them and wasn’t a friend of them, so they’re going to hold him to a very high standard. But they didn’t hold Reagan to the same standard. You had people like Lou Cannon telling people on the plane Reagan was not as conservative, wasn’t that bad a Governor, he’s not as conservative as he runs, and the press was buying that. The national press did not swarm into Sacramento the way they swarmed into Atlanta after we got the nomination, or even before we got the nomination, to find all they could about Reagan. So Carter was frustrated. Really frustrated. The idea was that Carter shouldn’t talk about Reagan, shouldn’t make attacks on him and that Mondale would carry that, as a good Vice President does, and we would carry it in our media. When he saw that, he would just get carried away sometimes, and he would start making these attacks on him. In typical Carter fashion he would say things with hyperbole. He would characterize some of the things about Reagan rather than making a case for why Reagan was a dangerous choice.

**Wayne:** Were most of those statements that we read about like separating black from white and making the division between peace and war, mostly off the cuff statements? They weren’t prepared in speeches as you had aimed to do it?

**Rafshoon:** No. He never said the difference is war and peace. He would say things that would make it legitimately all right for the press to say that Carter says that the issue was war and peace. I couldn’t believe that the biggest story of the debate with Reagan jumped on by the press was that stupid Amy [Carter] thing. Amy on nuclear proliferation. What they didn’t focus on was the fact that Reagan lied in that debate. He was caught in a big lie and that was that. He said, “I never made the statement that nuclear proliferation is none of our business.” I then found the tape within two days. I had it on the air showing that he had said it in Jacksonville when he had
been on ABC. But that didn’t play because here again Reagan became the nice guy in that campaign.

**Sabato:** So they said, “He didn’t lie, he just forgot.” That was the line. He couldn’t be expected to remember every little thing he said about a little topic like nuclear nonproliferation. Just to finish off the point I was trying to move towards, your ad campaign was negative and certainly purposely and probably wisely so. Then it was Carter who was supposed to be maintaining the positive side of the campaign or anchoring the positive side of the campaign, above the barrel as the incumbent. But he became negative and very strident. And then he had to appear with Barbara Walters and say he was sorry and so on. The question I was leading up to was, did the facts that Carter was being held to a higher standard and that Carter crossed the line to join the fray and the negative campaigning cause you to change the focus of the advertising campaign by pulling a lot of the negatives and making that more positive?

**Rafshoon:** I did some of it. What I did was do some good talking head spots. Carter did it. We did a wonderful five-minute piece where he talked about nuclear war. He was going to stick to the facts, but he talked about his nuclear policies versus Reagan’s. He made a good thematic speech about the dangers of nuclear proliferation. I was very hesitant to pull too many of our negative spots. Maybe I was wrong. We had to still keep them worrying about Reagan. Pat has probably told you, and some people disputed, but our polls showed that even after the debate, by the weekend, we were pulling back up again. Reagan kept being knocked down because people still were worried about the risk there. And of course on Sunday, when the Iranian ultimatum came, we weren’t able to tell them to go to hell. We weren’t able to say the hostages are coming home or tell them to go to hell, which might have helped. All hell broke loose. It was over.

**Young:** On the ’80 campaign—

**Rafshoon:** Excuse me. Let me read you my memo that I gave him on the campaign themes. I mentioned here strengths and weaknesses.

**Young:** This is written at what point? At the beginning?

**Rafshoon:** This is one before the primaries. But it’s strengths and weaknesses. Strengths: (1) peace, (2) trust, (3) safety, (4) moderation, (5) incumbency, (6) courage. Weaknesses: leadership, the economy, energy. This was before Iran. This was before the primaries, so I guess it was written before. Iran was something that we could not control in the campaign. We didn’t deal with that as much as they did, and they dealt with it a lot with their fear of a November surprise.

**Sabato:** It’s interesting; you just read off the positives and they were all images and personal characteristics, and all the negatives were issues. I guess that coincides with what you were saying that the issues overwhelmed you in 1980. The personal qualities that Carter may have had gave him an edge personally over Reagan, which really didn’t amount for a whole lot in the end because of the issues.

**Rafshoon:** It was the best we could do. Our weaknesses included leadership—barring severe economic problems this was our biggest weakness in both the primaries and the general election.
People expect their President to lead, to provide a sense of purpose and direction and make them feel good about themselves and their country. There is a general sense that while you have been trying to do many good things, you have failed to provide the country with this vision. That is why [Jerry] Brown, [John] Connally, Reagan, and Kennedy, in ascending order, are such threats. They each, for different reasons, suggest vaguely that they could fill the leadership gap. They suggest that they have the magic that will provide easier answers to our problems and lift our spirits.

In 1976 Carter was the candidate of vision evoking a government as good and decent as the American people. There is a widespread sense that Carter let the country down on this score: economy and energy. Themes: the experienced outsider, public versus the special interest.

Leadership: we need to take on the leadership issue directly to compete with the other candidates in the hope category. Issues: we should avoid at all costs getting mired in a swamp of issues in this campaign. It will be difficult to avoid. Peace, trust.

**Wayne:** Is this analysis based on the polling data you were receiving from Pat?

**Rafshoon:** Some, and some was just my own assessment of it.

**Young:** What was Carter’s own response to the identification of leadership as a central issue? What was his feeling about that?

**Rafshoon:** In some of the things I said we had going for us he said, “Write lower expectations,” and he wrote, “I agree, the polls will help us.” Let’s see what he said about leadership. He said, “We need to pick a few key issues and fight.” SALT was one.

**Sabato:** But the Russians did the fighting, not Carter.

**Rafshoon:** I talk about hope here, I said leadership. [reading] We need to take on the leadership issue directly and to compete with the other candidates in the hope category. This will require incorporating a positive message into our overall approach. Since becoming President almost all of your messages to the public have been gloomy. Energy crisis, cutbacks, rising inflation, no easy answer. Lowered expectations. We need to balance this with a hopeful, positive, uplifting message without being Pollyannaish. The message should be, “We can solve our problems, we can be strong and at peace.” We can get control of our energy problems. We can make our economy work. We can’t do it with slogans or gimmicks or magic.

There is no magic in Washington. I know. I’ve been there. America can solve her problems, but each one of us individually must solve his or her problems with hard work, persistence, and occasionally some pain and sacrifice. This is what made America great. This is what will keep America great. But when they took the embassy, people said, “Okay, prove it. The test will be, will you bomb those bastards?” I’ve studied the Iranian thing more than anybody because of our experience. We could have been tougher with Iran and let the hostages go. They may have killed them. They’d put them on trial and we would have won the election.
He had the opportunity even that Sunday before the election, when we were discussing what he was going to say. Somebody said, “Just tell them to go to hell. Really get out there and tell them we’re not going to be pushed around anymore.” And as far as the election is concerned, that may have helped. That Sunday we interrupted television programming and he made a statement saying, “We are not going to be influenced by the calendar; this is a positive step but it’s not going to happen right away.” It was a positive step. But we knew they were intimidating us with the election. His answer at that time was—and Hamilton brought this up—what if they said, “Okay, well, we’ll just have trials” and then they’ll come back and say, “We will try one a day.” We were dealing with a really crazy situation. What would they do? That might have helped politically.

**Young:** There was never a chance Carter would do anything like that, was there?

**Rafshoon:** No. The guy who suggested it, I just thought, why? We did. We had separate meetings.

**Young:** He was right on the line on that subject consistently?

**Rafshoon:** Yes. Sometimes I said to myself I wish he was in this meeting.

**Wayne:** In talking about the debates, you said that the ads worked until the debates, and even right after, your polls were showing strong increases. Were you involved a lot in the decision-making?

**Rafshoon:** With Reagan, you remember, the big thing was the plausibility issue. People liked Reagan and they were beginning not to like Carter.

**Rafshoon:** Reagan crossed the plausibility threshold in the debate.

**Wayne:** My two questions are: one, did you have anything to do with the decision whether or not the President would debate or should debate? And two, did you get involved in the briefings? It was my impression in looking at the debates that the debates were an extension of his ads, at least in terms of his responses.

**Rafshoon:** They had all our themes, yes.

**Wayne:** Sometimes verbatim.

**Rafshoon:** Yes. He had his answers and he did very well. But that’s not what the people were looking at. There’s no way we could win that debate. They really did a number on us. Carter debating became such an issue. We didn’t do the John Anderson debate. We were calling for one on one. As long as Reagan wouldn’t accept the one on one we were okay; we were on top of it. We were saying he was afraid of one on one. The reason they did it was because they said they were going to lose. And they knew if they could debate one week before the election, then they could be plausible, but it wouldn’t hurt them. The counterattack would have been, maybe he was
wrong on anything like that. So it was the best situation for them, and we got pushed into that corner. And we had to get into it. I think it was a mistake not to debate Anderson.

I’ll tell you where our mistake was. I’ll tell you this. This will never be published until after ’84. We didn’t debate Kennedy. Actually a lot of us wanted to go to Iowa and debate and it was true. Carter said no. Because of the Iranian thing. The debate would have gone better with Kennedy. He’s smarter than Kennedy. But let’s say we wanted to go into why he didn’t debate Kennedy. After all the primaries Kennedy kept asking for a debate. He wasn’t going to get out of the race until there was a debate. One Friday we got together and we said, “We’re going to be spending all summer trying to put this party together. Kennedy keeps running, keeps this open convention thing going.” We didn’t worry we were going to win the nomination, but this was hell. We needed to get people back and Anderson was talking about running and everything.

The President said, “Kennedy says he wants his debate. We’ve got to have a debate.” We decided that there was going to be one next week. That following Tuesday or Wednesday there was the Democratic National Committee platform hearings at the Washington Hilton, or one of the hotels, and both Carter and Kennedy had been invited. Kennedy had said, “I’ll do it as a debate.” We told him to forget it, we would be over the next day for the second day. Pat, Hamilton, Jody, Carter, Mondale, Rosalynn, and I were in a meeting. We said, “Monday morning say you’ll be over Tuesday to meet him at that issues conference and he can have his debate. Say, ‘I’ll give you a half hour, Ted.’ Be ready, knowing Kennedy well.”

It was going to be a debate in front of a bunch of political activists, so it has to be all on issues, and I was pretty sure we could handle that. I remember running home, I was going on vacation the following week and I cancelled it. And I said we’re going to leave a week later because, I told my wife, “Don’t tell anybody, but we’re going to debate. It’s terrific.” Sunday night we had a meeting at the residence and Carter says he’s not debating. Not worth it, too dangerous, it’s not necessary, we’ve beaten him. And the person who had talked him out of it I truly believe was Mondale. And I remember that because that’s why I say Mondale’s not going to be President. It’s too risky, he said. We’ve got the nomination; that kind of stuff.

That mistake came back to bite us on the ass because if we had gotten that over with, and proved that Jimmy Carter could debate anybody, even the vanquished, we might have been able to avoid debating Reagan. “You know I can debate.” But the debate issue was there all the time after that. Then Kennedy would have looked like a real jerk staying in. “What else do you want?”

Sabato: He would have found something.

Young: Is there something here about the fact that Carter had never, as I understand it, run a campaign without being in an elected office? The campaign focus and the governing focus didn’t combine for him.

Rafshoon: That has something to do with Carter being an extreme activist; he never governs like he has to run for office again.

Young: Well, he never had to.
Rafshoon: Never had to. And he wouldn’t ever do things. You could not get Carter on the substantive issues to defer action until the second term. That was just not his nature. Panama Canal, for example, was a no win situation.

Young: He was asked about what a second term might have done. He said, “Well, I suppose I might have done all of those things they said are properly third term issues.” He said he would have gotten SALT through.

Rafshoon: In the second term?

Young: Oh yes, absolutely.

Rafshoon: Well, I wonder. He could get SALT through today. But the environment might not be the same. Sure, you could get SALT II today, because look who has been President.

Wayne: Was he nervous going into that debate that week before?

Rafshoon: I didn’t think so. There is some question about the preparation. So finally we had to do the debate and we went up to Camp David and prepared. I didn’t think he was nervous.

Young: What about the so-called “Rose Garden Strategy”? That’s a misnomer perhaps, but surely there was discussion about what role and posture he should take in campaigning, during the Iranian crisis and in staying in Washington.

Rafshoon: It didn’t start as a Rose Garden Strategy. It started with the fact that they’d only been held a month and we had to announce. We had a big campaign swing for that week of December 4 when he announced. There were fundraisers and all, and he said, “I just can’t do that. I can’t run around the country raising money and making political speeches while they have just taken our embassy.”

Young: And then you had no way of knowing how long it would last.

Rafshoon: That’s right. I planned to go ahead; I was doing all the preparation for the Iowa debate. He said, “Okay, we’ll cancel it if they are still there, but that’s not going to happen.” I mean, believe me, there was no reason why we didn’t want Jimmy Carter there. We wanted Jimmy Carter up there in New Hampshire campaigning. That was perfect for him. He wasn’t going to be running around next to Kennedy. The best thing we always had going for us was Jimmy Carter’s personal campaign. And then it got to be a real trap. He was just there.

Young: He was a bit reluctant to go out, wasn’t he?

Rafshoon: As long as he stayed in there, the more he lost that wonderful quality he has of campaigning. When he started again, he was really rusty.
**Sabato:** Were you relying on the policy experts to tell you that the hostages were bound to be released a week from now?

**Rafshoon:** Well, who would have ever thought they could last that long? We had things happening like getting the Shah out of the country. Maybe they’ll come to their senses. You know what we were dealing with. Until the decision was made for the rescue mission, nothing improved. Everything just fell apart after the April 1 attempt.

**Sabato:** You mention that one incident of someone outside the inner circle suggesting that there should be a more ferocious or retaliatory posture on Carter’s part.

**Young:** It was within the inner circle as well.

**Rafshoon:** Well, I don’t know what you call the inner circle.

**Young:** I mean that Zbig has talked about that.

**Rafshoon:** Oh, yes.

**Young:** And also about Carter’s reason or not following that advice.

**Rafshoon:** But Zbig’s advice was more honest and more ideological. This was politics.

**Young:** Oh yes, I know. That’s why I was saying no matter who was telling him that, this was rejected.

**Sabato:** Any additional military action after the failed rescue mission was never seriously considered.

**Rafshoon:** We always knew we’d get them out eventually, alive. Military action would have killed them. They would have gone crazy. They would have killed our hostages. What would the military action have done, except make the country feel that we want to occupy Iran? Did we want the Russians to come in? It made no sense, except from a public relations standpoint. Zbig of course has said that he thought he wanted to do the bold stroke and maybe even let the Russians come in too.

**Young:** The point being to define the honor of the country as the issue rather than the lives of the hostages, which Carter chose to do very early apparently. His concern with the hostages and their lives is the important thing here. That was the policy debate, as I understood it, at the high level.

**McCleskey:** Could I raise a question that comes back particularly to the ’80 campaign? Do you have any impressions or recollections you could share with us about the relationship of the Carter-Mondale re-election campaign to the Democratic Party organization?

**Rafshoon:** Well, go back to ’76 when we ran against the Democratic Party organization. When we got the nomination, Strauss delivered the party intact to us, but the organization out in the
country was pretty flabby since they hadn’t been through the lean, tough guerrilla war that we had. Carter was never a great party politician, although he’s got a better record of sticking with his party than anybody, any other politician. He’s always voted Democratic and supported the party. In ’80, naturally it was our Democratic Party. Most of the party organizations supported us against Kennedy.

In some respects we probably forgot the lessons that we taught the country in 1976. I thought you should spend a lot of time bringing in the county Democratic chair, and every Governor, and every mayor—all of whom didn’t want Jimmy Carter particularly—but they liked our programs. We had wonderful Ed Koch, to whom the President said, “With friends like you, I really don’t need any enemies.” Probably we had that pretty well wired. I don’t think it delivered a hell of a lot to us. It didn’t wash. They can’t turn out the vote; they can’t control people. So we had to have our own organization out there. And we didn’t have near the money that the Republicans had.

There’s a loophole that allows you to do party-building fundraising without limit. And there are millions of dollars out there if we’d get out the vote with state parties, but not for the Democratic Party. We can’t get that kind of money. In the one area they could help you, they don’t have the resources. And as far as having it to help your public perceptions, we had in a way the worst of both worlds. We were not good inside politicians and yet we were the incumbent establishment candidate. And you had people who were still mad at Carter, who were the Kennedy people. Kennedy was openly working against us. Not openly, but his people were not helping us in many cases. I truly believe Kennedy did not want Carter to be re-elected. So it was tough.

Sabato: I’m sure you read the passage in Jordan’s book about the price the Kennedy people extracted.

Rafshoon: The Steve Smith meeting?

Sabato: Yes.

Rafshoon: I loved it.

Sabato: Was quite a price.

Rafshoon: They denied it too.

Sabato: After it was over?

Rafshoon: When the excerpt came out in Newsweek they denied holding us up for that fundraising. And of course the answer was that Hamilton said, “I’ll be glad to show my thousand dollar check to the Kennedy campaign, and Rafshoon will show his, and Frank Moore will show his, plus the loan that he took to make it. We’d like to see any of your people show us your contributions to the Carter campaign.”

Sabato: You were all shaken down.
Rafshoon: Oh, yes. It was by this poor boy from Massachusetts, help him out with his campaign. His campaign debt is paid off, mine isn’t. In fact, we asked Kennedy to do some spots for the general election. We asked that he would do some spots from Massachusetts and New York and a few places. He came back and said he would be glad to, but he didn’t want Rafshoon, who had done a job on him in the primaries, to do it and that his own media person David Sawyer would do it. Fine. But I wrote the spots. Bob Shrum came over to my office and we wrote it together exactly. “They didn’t mind that we put it together,” Shrum said, “but you can’t go near the Senator. He feels this way about you.”

So I have four talking head spots and two radio spots. “Think you know something about production? Okay.” So we took them. I said, “OK, have David call me and we’ll talk about it and come up with a price.” So David called me up and said, “Fifty thousand dollars.” I said, “David, are you kidding?” He said, “That’s the cost.” I got him to come down to forty.

Wayne: Was it Sawyer who was doing this?

Rafshoon: Was doing Kennedy’s spots?

Wayne: No, no, who was putting the price on this?

Rafshoon: Well, David came and gave me their price.

Wayne: Why were they so high? They were holding them up for the campaign?

Rafshoon: Of course. It was blackmail and we had the money. I’m sure that they said he probably had a production bill from Kennedy, who needed to get paid off right. So he said, “Well, Dave, I know I priced those spots, I could do them for maybe twenty five hundred dollars.” Put out some really dull ones; make a little profit. We’re talking about an hour. An hour of tape. Of course Kennedy is really good in talking head spots.

Sabato: This is where he says, “Jimmy Carter represents the only real chance.”

Rafshoon: Yes. Forty thousand dollars.

McCleskey: It strikes me that yours is the charitable interpretation. It seems to me the uncharitable one is that they just didn’t want to do it and thought they’d put the price high enough.

Rafshoon: Oh, no. No, they wanted to do it.

Sabato: Because Kennedy, I suppose, could now point to these things as positive proof that he did make an effort for Carter.

Rafshoon: Oh, I’m sure it was a way of helping pay off his debts.
Devaney: Did you know about the Kennedy debt before the convention? And why wasn’t that debt linked to some agreement in the convention over when he would talk and what the platform would look like, what he could say on the platform.

Rafshoon: That would probably look too crass. They knew when they’d get us.

Sabato: Could that have been in the back of Kennedy’s mind in refusing the winner’s embrace on the platform? Deciding he’d play this thing out a little bit longer.

Rafshoon: Probably.

Wayne: I’d like to move you back to the President.

Rafshoon: I don’t like Kennedy.

Young: The feeling is mutual, isn’t it?

Wayne: Did your relations with Pat Caddell and the way you worked with him change from when you moved into the White House until you left for the campaign, and even after that change?

Rafshoon: Yes. Pat and I worked very close. We always worked closely. Our personal relationship changed some when I went into the White House because then I wasn’t out there with him throwing myself on the barricades to get some changes. And probably to his credit, he kept it up. I, being inside, felt, Well God, Pat, you’re right. I got a little bit of the same attitude everybody else had. If you were in here you’d know how tough it is to do these things.

Wayne: Why wasn’t he in there?

Rafshoon: There probably was enough bad publicity when I went in. Bringing your pollster into the White House full time was bad publicity. We had enough criticism. People were saying the President reacted to Caddell’s advice too much. It was almost like you were bringing a pollster in to tell you how to conduct public policy. And I was never associated with public policy. Secondly, he had a retainer to the DNC and okay, we’re doing polling, he’d have to have given all that up. My firm did no business with the government, or we would have had so many restrictions on conflict of interest that I probably couldn’t have done advertising for relatives. Widget company probably would have them say, “That man is related to somebody in the White House.” So he couldn’t do that. But certainly Pat was still very close. We worked together while I was in the White House. Then when I got out and was in the campaign, Pat and I worked very closely all the way.

Wayne: Let me ask you, when you say working closely, now you’re trying to help the President with his image along certain lines, strengthen the leadership dimension. Are you telling Pat, “We need to find out this kind of information”? How are you evaluating what you are doing as you’re going along?
Rafshoon: Pat knew what we needed to ask, what he needed to find out. He would be bringing polls to us all the time.

Clinton: You say there were some difficulties when you were brought in, those are the interpretations that were put on your influence?

Rafshoon: Rafshoonery.

Clinton: Rafshoonery and all that. Did you find it difficult to deal with this problem in a way that wouldn’t seem to confirm the very charges you were trying to refute?

Rafshoon: I know. And I think I got a little timid. There were some things I might have done differently, more aggressively, if I hadn’t worried so much about that. And there again probably it was a mistake bringing in someone so close to the President as was ad man Rafshoon. Bob Haldeman made it bad for us ad men, for the rest of our lives. That worried me a lot, and I tried to slink into the background sometime.

I can remember I had been one of the people who advised the President when he had a meeting of the vetoing of the nuclear carrier. When it got to my part, when he kept saying it’d never sustain, he would lose this, he said “What do you think?” I said, “Do you want to veto it?” He said yes. I said, “Do it. If you don’t veto it, you will never make a credible case for not vetoing it because you don’t believe it and you’d sound foolish and look foolish doing something you don’t believe. I’m not going to go into the merits of whether it’s right or wrong, but if you veto it, you’re going to do it right because you really believe in it.”

Okay, so he vetoes it and during the fight where they were trying to override it, the Wall Street Journal called it “the Rafshoon veto.” It ran an editorial column calling it “the Rafshoon veto.” People in Congress were saying he vetoed it because Rafshoon made him do it so he’d look tough. I have a thing here, [reading] “Admiral Rafshoon,” it’s not just talk, “Congress cuts muscle for another layer of fat so Gerald Rafshoon, Atlanta ad man, and student of the defense budget, instructs John Stennis, [Charles] Melvin Price, and other greenhorns who don’t understand President Carter’s veto of the defense procurement bill.” Don’t mention that I was Lieutenant JG [Junior Grade] in the Navy and those people never served.

We sustained the veto. I wrote a letter to them and it goes back to the thing that I became a convenient scapegoat. Rafshoon sounds like an easy, fun name to deal with in order to impugn the President’s motives on things that he would normally do. My job after he vetoed it was to get all the material and prepare talking points and speeches and all the tools to help sustain the veto.

Young: Was there a no veto policy in effect at the beginning?

Rafshoon: I don’t know about that.

Young: It was quite a time before there were any vetoes.
Rafshoon: It was a mistake. He made a mistake in not vetoing the first public works bills. It was... I don’t know if there was a no veto policy.

Young: I don’t know. Somebody has called it that and said, “You know we’ve studied this and found out that the exercise of a veto was not a negative thing.”

Rafshoon: I think it doesn’t take a whole lot of sense to see that that’s a positive thing.

Young: I didn’t think so either. But what was suggested was that there was an indisposition to veto or to exercise any vetoes because that sounded again like Ford, who had had almost a record number of vetoes.

Rafshoon: We found in our polling in ’76 why I wouldn’t use the Tony Schwartz spot. That wasn’t a negative reception. He was doing the people’s business. Ford was showing himself as a guy who had lived in Congress for 35 years and was on the way to becoming a lobbyist when he became Vice President and “the Anti-Congress Guy” because he had done all the vetoes. In the general election Carter was linking hands with all the big government people.

McCleskey: Taking the example of the veto of the carrier, at least the *Wall Street Journal* somehow found out that you had figured in the decision, even if it was for the wrong reasons.

Rafshoon: It was a leak. It was somebody who had opposed the veto decision and shot off to the WSJ. “This is a mistake. We’re not going to be able to sustain it. And that’s just Rafshoon,” they said.

McCleskey: Was this a continuing problem in terms of your own relationship to the President and to these other people?

Rafshoon: Yes. I did not enjoy the publicity. It just physically made it hard. You’d go in there and you’d prepare something, you’re in there in the midst of checking all the technical and physical facilities of the speech, and the next day you see a picture in the paper of Rafshoon checking the cameras before the President comes in to make his speech.

Wayne: So what you are saying is this so-called Rafshoonery attitude was held by a number of members of the staff who felt that you had no business advising the President on policy?

Rafshoon: Just a couple.

Young: That does not surprise me.

Rafshoon: In fact, the most substantive person in the White House, Stu Eizenstat, was one of my great supporters because Stu was quoted saying that somebody in his staff came to him and was complaining that I had killed the President doing a Rose Garden statement because it was too much. Stu said it was about time somebody was around here to protect him. But a few people would because they felt that I was not a traditional Washington operative.
**Young:** That’s why I say that it does not surprise me. Can you comment a little on some that are hard to put together? You’ve talked about Carter.

**Rafshoon:** Something about Jimmy Carter’s administration?

**Young:** No, a particular enigma about him. You’ve just talked about telling him to go ahead and veto if you feel like vetoing it. There’s a comment about him saying that the problem was not that at all. The problem was that he was so stubborn that dissuading him from doing anything was difficult. He was very stubborn and quite decisive and once he had made up his mind to do something it was very difficult to deter him. I’m trying to put that together with the comment that says, “But if you really want to do this, don’t feel bad, go ahead and do it.”

**Rafshoon:** I think his mind was made up that he wanted to veto it. But almost every one of his advisors in that meeting said, “Don’t do it.” He probably would have done it if I hadn’t said what I said. What I was saying is, “Do it and then we can mount a good enough campaign to get it through.” I also said if we lose it, we’re not going to look bad. If you’re going to lose one to Congress, lose one that you really believe in. I felt it would elevate us above this little petty stuff that we were getting into. You know the whole image of little Jimmy Carter eliminating a big nuclear carrier. To his credit, Mondale also said at that meeting, “Let’s do it.” I remember him saying, “We can get that thing passed, they’ve never seen a carrier in Des Moines, Iowa, or Lincoln, Nebraska.

**Young:** Do you think Carter lost touch with the mood of the country and the public?

**Rafshoon:** In ’80, yes. I think he felt that he had come so far so fast that he didn’t believe he’d ever lose. That somehow things would work out. Like all Presidents and like all politicians, when you go into the country on these trips that we have worked our tails off advancing, you never have a bad trip from his standpoint. The crowds are always good, they all love you, Jimmy, and he’d come back and say, “We’ve got problems, but the Washington Post is crazy. You’ve got to get out. Should have been on this trip.” So he did lose touch, yes.

**Young:** Was there ever a point when you had problems with the Democratic Party, particularly in Congress? Was there a bipartisan strategy with specific dealings with the Republican people who were helpful to you?

**Rafshoon:** Remember, the first few years we had great bipartisan support. Remember Howard Baker’s statement that, “Mr. President, if I’m right one more time I’m going to lose my job.”

**Young:** You had bipartisan support.

**Rafshoon:** In fact, Baker, when he ran for President, was hurt by the Panama Canal thing.

**Young:** But it was free. I was told it was free. You never developed the will to do it. It just came your way.
Rafshoon: Yes, you’re right. I think we worked on some of that. The thing about strategy with Congress is that your enemies today are your friends tomorrow. It was free in that a lot of Jimmy Carter’s beliefs and philosophy jived with moderate to liberal Republicans. I mean there are a lot of issues that Jimmy Carter and I would make that are alike. He’s a better model of somebody from Knoxville, Tennessee, than from Boston. So that wasn’t hard to come by. We were trying to lead the Democratic Party crying and screaming in a direction that they didn’t want to go. And we didn’t do it as strongly as Reagan forced it to them.

You know there’s a body of opinion that says if they’d been a little more cooperative with Jimmy Carter and maybe gone a little, cut some of these big programs incrementally like he tried to do, then we may not have had Ronald Reagan being able to come in and say, “The Democrats are the big spenders completely.” We were trying to go in that direction. But that was not the heart and soul of the Democratic Party. That’s why Glenn I think may have a problem; he’s going to have a problem getting the nomination for that reason. But he’s a better general election candidate for that reason.

Sabato: One minor point. You were mentioning Mondale, you’ve mentioned him a few times, not necessarily derogatorily, but I wonder if you find yourself agreeing with the Brzezinski thesis on Mondale’s impact on the Carter White House, or do you disagree with it?

Rafshoon: I think Fritz was a very loyal Vice President. I think he by and large supported the President on most things. I think his impact was that he did work on the domestic political situation, but he’s like everybody else; he’s coming from somewhere. He was an honest person. He believed strongly about some of the things he talked about. For example, he was against the grain embargo mainly because of Iowa politics. Tell me what you see as Brzezinski’s thesis. That Mondale was more of a softy?

Sabato: Yes. He was soft and not just personally vain, but also much too politically oriented, and he led Carter off the proper and appropriate pathways. I guess it’s really a Brzezinski-Griffin Bell thesis.

Rafshoon: Yes, that’s a little much. He had that inclination. But I think it might have been in domestic more than in foreign policy. I think Brzezinski may be overstating it in his area, except in the Middle East. Fritz—and he’s doing it now—is really 150% pro-Israel. He’s more pro-Israel than Begin.

Sabato: In domestic policy, though, was Mondale really that responsible for pushing Carter off the path of centrism that had gotten him as far as it had gotten him onto the more liberal Democratic constituency line? Is that really accurate, or was it because of everything else connected with the Democratic Party?

Rafshoon: Because of everything else connected with the Democratic Party, but Fritz is conveniently there to do it. You aren’t going to win by moving yourself closer to the liberal Democrats. That’s my thesis and other people’s. Kennedy will run if he wants to run. He can win. Not if you adopt his policies. He’d then find another reason just like the debate. As long as it’s there. As long as he was leading Carter three to one in the polls he was going to run.
Young: Was there ever a point where Carter could have, or was given to consider saying just that, publicly and in a powerful way?

Rafshoon: Saying just what?

Young: Like that the Democratic Party—

Rafshoon: Needs to move in this direction?

Young: —is out of it. I know where the country is, these people don’t. Was there ever an attempt to pull away from his party rather than trying to carry it, was that ever considered? It’s not realistic perhaps, but was it ever considered?

Rafshoon: It would have been good. You should have been there.

Young: Look at the convention and what happened there. I would have liked to have seen Carter say, “The plague on you. I’m President and I know the mood of the country better than you do and I always have. And here’s where it is.”

Rafshoon: We gave them too much. If somebody came up to me—one of our old supporters came up to me on the floor of the convention and he said, “We’ve whipped his ass, and now we’re going to kiss his ass,” and walked away from me. Big mistake. Did it again. Big mistake.

Young: Why does the party always seem like the important thing that deters him from where he started out?

Rafshoon: Well, somebody comes in with figures and says, “We’re going to lose the traditionalists, you are not doing well with the traditional Democrats.” And then we had the Anderson threat.

Young: Could have gotten the Congressional too.

Rafshoon: Remember, Anderson was running too. They were all going to leave the reservation. That makes a lot of sense. Got to get them back, can’t win with that. What you always have got to realize in a case like that is that these people who bolt the party aren’t doing it—they aren’t really doing it for ideological reasons. They are doing it for selfish reasons and therefore when you do move their way it ain’t going to help you. Never does.

Sabato: It’s never enough.

Rafshoon: Never enough. Gave them a platform, but Kennedy—if Carter had been reelected—Kennedy then thought he was going to run again, Mondale would have a big shot for ’84. You should never think that; it’s like thinking the “liberal party” of New York is really a party of ideologues for liberal policies. They’re a party for patronage. Ray Harding wanted to come to see
Carter about getting the liberal party endorsement, you know, a list of judges that are all judges and that kind of stuff, those are his issues.

**Young:** Maybe Carter should have done it.

**Rafshoon:** We had the criteria. You had to have a law degree.

**Young:** Just to be electable in New York. Well I asked the question because it seems to me that there were several opportunities where Carter might have said it even as a signal to the Washington part of the Democratic Party. But he always seemed to be terribly deferential.

**Rafshoon:** Too much pulling and tugging at him, like I was saying. Carter was nice to people. Nobody could be more gracious than Carter. And it was saying that you were not working with these people enough. Russell Long is going to come your way if you just have him up a couple of more times. Carter said to me after it happened, dinner with Russell, and he said, “We don’t speak the same language, I do not understand what he’s talking about. It’s not just the accent.”

**Young:** If there had been a re-election and a second term, do you think it would have turned out differently? Would there have been either some changes made or would the administration have hit its stride?

**Rafshoon:** Oh yes. I think Carter would have pushed real hard on the things in which he believed, much harder.

**Young:** Wouldn’t his problems have been worse in getting them through?

**Rafshoon:** It’s hard to say. I think winning against all odds, when you’ve been written off as a one-term President, would have carried him a long way. I think he would have been very activist and I think he may have proven something to the rest of the party. That his way might be what the people wanted. I don’t know. It would have been a different White House, I think. A lot of people would have been gone. Hamilton definitely wasn’t coming back, you know. I wouldn’t have been in the White House.

**Wayne:** Had any plans been made like with your operation, if you wouldn’t have been there, to set up a memo or something about what should be done in this area?

**Rafshoon:** No. We had no second-term planning.

**Sabato:** No second-term transition like the first term?

**Rafshoon:** No.

**Young:** Could I ask you a question about the first-term transition? Can you shed any light on what happened to wipe out so much of the transition work and the Watson staff business that was going on there?
**Rafshoon:** I don’t know what the hell they were doing.

**Young:** They were never tied into the campaign?

**Rafshoon:** No. When you say the work, on policy work?

**Young:** Yes, all the departments doing their transition work.

**Rafshoon:** I think that probably when we finally got some people, and appointed our Cabinet members, I would think that Harold Brown, Cy Vance, and Bert Lance and other people took all this transition material and said, “Thank you very much, I’ll get back to you.” And they were probably right.

**Young:** Is it possible that the preparation for entering into office, in terms of what the transition staff was given to do, was all policy oriented and not politically oriented?

**Rafshoon:** I think it’s very possible.

**Young:** And that the political advice was not organized or systematic?

**Rafshoon:** It was not factored into that. There were no politicians in that transition team that was working during the election. We had enough to do. Our politicians were busy trying to get elected. There were no politicians.

**Young:** Yes. Which might help to explain some of the surprises?

**Rafshoon:** Yes.

**Young:** Making assumptions that he wouldn’t otherwise make.

**Thompson:** Is it a liability to enter, especially a little bit late, into a political group with an advertising background? Is this something that people score against you in any way? Did it limit your influence with the political people?

**Rafshoon:** With that group, I was involved from true creation. I was with Jimmy Carter four years before Jody came on the scene. Hamilton was our youth coordinator in the ’66 campaign.

**Thompson:** I guess I meant Mondale and people of that kind.

**Rafshoon:** Maybe so. Fortunately, I’m like Joe Califano; I had a constituency of one. So he trusted me. Advertising people are not all ignorant of politics. I mean some of us read and keep up with politics. Not a lot.

**McCleskey:** Clearly those of you who had been with Carter for some time had a set of experiences and perspectives that were different from the people who were brought into the government and some of the other staff members. Were there differences in political perspective
as well? I don’t mean so much on issues as I do the way the political process works. Or was it always that you understood the phenomenon pretty much in the same way, but reached different conclusions in how to deal with it?

**Rafshoon:** Oh, I think we probably reached different conclusions about how to deal with them, but I think we were educable. I think we learned and adjusted.

**McCleskey:** I was sort of thinking the other way around. Were you able to educate them?

**Rafshoon:** A little bit. Not a whole tot. Not a hell of a lot.

**Sabato:** You should have made the time with the NEA [National Education Association] earlier.

**Young:** Would you recommend on the basis of your experience in this White House that the kind of job that you were brought into is a necessary job to be done in any White House, and not really dependent on the strengths or weaknesses of the candidate? It’s a job that has to be done.

**Rafshoon:** Yes. I think that you should have a press secretary and you should have a person for communications, absolutely. And give them more staff.

**Young:** I think that’s the whole thing that is obscured by the press talk about the cosmetologist and the Rafshoonery and all of that. That is the media exposure and just the difficulties and the numbers of opportunities for people to speak. Not only the President, but all these people around him required something like that.

**Rafshoon:** It’s ridiculous how shorthanded we were in that area. One of the biggest mistakes Jimmy Carter made was thinking he was cutting the size of the White House staff, and not having enough people in press, communications, and Congressional liaison. That was very foolish. You see all those perks and all go along with that too. Think how much you could have used those things for your contacts.

**Young:** It’s really quite funny.

**Rafshoon:** Just think, if we’d had that yacht you could have taken out 20 selected Washington columnists and pulled the plug. “Lifeboats for women and children only.” And all our problems would have been over.

**Young:** On that note on what the Presidential yacht is really good for and how you really missed that opportunity, thank you an awful lot, Jerry, for talking with us today and being generous about your remarks and also your time.

**Rafshoon:** I told you, this was like going to a shrink. Now I can go on to another life. Am I cured of my Jimmy Carteritis?

**Wayne:** We’ll just have to see if you hook up with somebody the next time around in these Democratic primaries to see if you’re cured. And of what.
Young: We have seen in the people who come here various states of remission from the disease of Carteritis. But we’ve never seen a complete cure. But we’re working on it.

Rafshoon: Will you give me a prescription? I can get it filled when I get back to Washington.