CARTER PRESIDENCY PROJECT
FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT BERGLAND

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The initial portion of the interview with Secretary Bergland was conducted over lunch at the Miller Center. Thus, the first eleven pages of this transcript cover an informal discussion of agricultural policies of interest to the Secretary and the discussants. These pages were not deleted because occasional reference is made therein to Secretary Bergland’s tenure in the Department of Agriculture and to President Carter’s agriculture policies.

The formal interview process begins with Kenneth Thompson’s comment on page seven.

BERGLAND: The programs that are designed to support agriculture haven’t changed much in fifty years. Fifty years ago every farm was like every other farm. I grew up on one of those poor, rural, poverty-stricken, subsistence enterprises; there were about seven million like that. They’ve long since been modernized.

I worked for the rural electric cooperatives. Electricity came in 1938 and finished after the war. That started the exodus, and the machinery and new technologies and all that change—things became very specialized and very capital-intensive. Second, until the last twenty years, the international markets didn’t count, and who cared? They were insignificant. Now they are everything, and they are fickle, and we haven’t figured out how to live in this world agriculturally. We need more scholarly research.

YOUNG: When did the international market, the global market, become a really important factor in American agriculture?
BERGLAND: In 1972-1973. Those were watershed years, and the reason they were is that two things happened. The world had two bad crops back to back. Southern corn leaf blight infested the corn crop of the United States and reduced the yield substantially. The Soviet Union had a bad crop, and so did Australia. All this converged, and at the same time the Soviets and China changed their food policy. Until that time, the Soviets and the Chinese would import some but not much. If they had a bad crop, they would simply tighten up, tighten the belt. They made political decisions in 1972-73 that profoundly changed the world’s trading patterns because the Soviets decided that year to purchase their shortfall. So we entered the markets in a major way.

A combination of those two things really sort of set international trade to skyrocket. From 1972 to 1980, I think each year, it set a new record. Well through 1981 it set a record, and then it tapered off since, for reasons that have to do with policy. But it’s not the Americans’ fault. It’s that other countries are discovering technology. The Chinese have doubled their yields. Governments have gotten very sophisticated in developing strategies that encourage and put incentives under increasing productivity. The only ones who don’t are the Russians and the Egyptians and Bulgarians and a few African states. And even they are showing signs of change. I went to Poland one time on Carter’s orders. The Polish economy was falling apart at the seams, and the Russians had told Carter, “You’ve got to help the Poles get this thing straightened out, or we’re going to take them over.” I mean literally, “We are going to invade.” So we sent a team of experts over there, and you didn’t have to be too smart to figure out what was wrong. They were starving their farming business into the ground—starving it out. They wouldn’t put any money into it, wouldn’t allow the economy of those farms to prosper. All they looked at was the cost of food at the retail end, and all they paid any attention to was the demand side of the market.

Killed their supply side.

After our people had been there a month, it was clear what they had to do; they had to change their pricing policies. They had to put incentives under increasing productivity. We met with [Edward] Gierek. He said, “I can’t do that. That would result in cost increases at the retail.” I said, “Yes, it will. Your choice is either cost increases or shortages.” “Well, there’s got to be a different way.” He didn’t believe us. In three months he was gone. Shortages drove him out.

THOMPSON: Does the government do a better job than I felt we did [at the Rockefeller Foundation]? I worked with George Harrar and Norm Borlaug and Ed Wellhausen and the whole Rockefeller agricultural program. E. E. Stakeman, whom you probably knew in Minnesota, was their mentor and one of the three wise men, and in 1943, he proposed that the Foundation go into Mexico. Secretary [Henry A.] Wallace was also very influential in that decision.

The production side, I thought, really was a kind of a miracle. They had miracle corn and wheat in a way before they had miracle rice from the International Rice Research Institute [IRRI] in the Philippines. We never seemed to be able to build in agricultural economics. We hired one fellow named Montague Yudelman, who was a very bright guy and ended up at the World Bank. The first thing he said when we landed at Mexico City and met Wellhausen and Borlaug was, “I’ve come to show you what your mistakes are.” That went over like a lead balloon. In the Foundation program they never really were anxious to get into economic considerations. But I wondered whether USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] abroad has done better in that regard?
BERGLAND: Some better. The most valuable contribution to that is the bringing of some scholars to the U.S. and going through our university system. That is just absolutely priceless. There is no substitute for that. If I were God or somebody and was going to do one thing to solve the world’s humanitarian problems, I would bring those people to a university in the western world someplace. Here in America or someplace else, but cover the costs and put them in there four years and send them home. Don’t let them stay here and practice medicine. That’s a mistake.

THOMPSON: Like the Filipinos and the Indians do.

BERGLAND: Yes. Get them trained here. There have been I don’t know how many thousands of foreigners trained in economics in universities in the United States who have gone home and made a big difference.

THOMPSON: That went fairly well. We had a good program, and eventually people like Vern Ruttan of Minnesota would go out and make contacts, and we would bring people here to Minnesota and Cornell, Davis, and elsewhere. The favorite saying that [Sterling] Wortman and Harrar and others always had was, “We can turn an agricultural system around anywhere in the world. We can teach them how to grow a crop.” On the social science side we were always scornful of that, but then we had to admit that in Mexico and other places they did it at least temporarily—if you had a crop deficit you became crop surplus.

BERGLAND: If they had the money, if the government would give them the money to do what they had to. Do you know Dale Hathaway?

THOMPSON: Yes.

BERGLAND: I appointed Dale as the Deputy Secretary for International Affairs during the Carter time. He did extraordinarily well, a very bright guy. He didn’t suffer fools lightly! He is a little difficult to get along with.

THOMPSON: I tried to hire him at Rockefeller, and I think he would have done better working with the agriculture people than Monte [Yudelman] did.

BERGLAND: He was with Rockefeller, wasn’t he?

THOMPSON: He was finally.

BERGLAND: I know he did a tour down in Los Banos in the Philippines with IRRI doing some economic work for them.

THOMPSON: Is Bob Chandler still alive? The fellow who was first head of IRRI.

BERGLAND: I don’t know. I never met him.
THOMPSON: He was one of these people who just become incandescent when they talk about a project they did. He started IRRI, then was president of the University of New Hampshire, and then for personal reasons he had to pick up and leave. But when he talked about growing new varieties of rice, why, you could almost see the rice start to come up.

PALMER: One of the problems we’ve got though, at least in my opinion, is that we can now double our production any time you say you want it doubled.

BERGLAND: The problem is not on the supply side. The world’s food problem has nothing to do with supply. It has to do with demand, distribution.

PALMER: And what you said earlier, what the consumer is willing to pay for it—the percentage of their dollar they are spending. Because beef is about the same now as it was back in the late ’40s. Our cost on tractors and everything else has gone up tenfold.

THOMPSON: Earl Butz made an argument—Well, you can state it better than I can. I don’t know what you thought about it. About the family farm?

BERGLAND: I missed your meeting because I had Monticello business. I didn’t get there. I have heard him talk about it.

THOMPSON: Somebody asked him, “What’s the future of the family farm? Isn’t it being wiped out?” He made an argument from his own family experience. He said he had grown up on a farm that first his father and a handyman, and then his father and he had run. It was about the same size then that it was now, but he said now that particular farm was still run by a couple of people. But its functioning depended upon being a part of a collection of farms in the same area, and they shared equipment, and they had high capital costs because of the total needs of the combination of farms. But he said in terms of being a unit that an individual or his family could run with this kind of infrastructure and backup, it still could go. But it couldn’t go alone the way he and his father had it go alone. Is there any truth in that?

BERGLAND: I think there is truth to it. I think it’s a fair analogy.

PALMER: I think what he’s saying is true out there. In this part of the country, you really have to moonlight to operate a farm. So many of these people work for DuPont and Sperry plants. They buy our used tractors or some of our smaller tractors. With the number of really big farms, if you were getting all of your income from that big farm—unless you’ve been a part of this recent dairy sellout—then you are in trouble.

CULLATHER: That’s true in Indiana, too. A large percentage of the farmers work manufacturing jobs on the side. A lot of the failures are due to the failure of the manufacturing economy.

BERGLAND: During my last year in the Department of Agriculture, we undertook and published a thing called A Time to Choose. It was a structural study of agriculture in the United States. I’d been to Alabama, and I was meeting with a group of black tenants on a credit problem
down there. One of the problems in the south is that a lot of the land is inherited and passed on
down through generations, and there are no titles recorded. Nothing registered. It’s just sort of by
osmosis. They inherit the family tract. Then they want to borrow money from FHA [Federal
Housing Administration] to build a house, and they couldn’t get clear title. So we had a meeting
down there, and to make a long story short, these were mostly poor and small-scale enterprises. I
believe they were better off in rural Alabama making a living as best they could than on welfare
in eastern Washington, the District of Columbia. I just really believe they are better off in rural
Alabama than in Anacostia, strictly from a humanitarian point of view.

Anyhow, I went from there to California, and I was hosted by a very wealthy California cotton
grower, G. J. Boswell from Bakersfield, who farmed 90,000 acres of cotton. He was making the
argument with me that I had to raise the price supports on cotton in order to help these Alabama
tenants. I got to thinking afterwards, Well, I’ve just been had. This fellow with his 90,000 acres
and his enormous economy of scale and his enormous stake has a lot to gain by a change in price
supports in cotton, and these poor people in Alabama have got nothing to gain by it. They’ve got
twelve acres or something apiece. They’ve got other problems, but it’s not price. That kind of
aroused my interest and launched me into what became a structure study. We published this
thing in the last month of our administration. It would have been the blueprint for a second
Carter term had there been one. What we would have done was target benefits. Instead of
pumping tons of money into these big farms, which is what has happened today, there would
have been a targeting.

What we found—and it’s still true, it’s been updated from time to time—about two and a half
million families in the United States engage in the farming business to some extent or other. That
is, they sell more than a thousand dollars a year so they qualify in census as a farming family.
About a million and a half are people like you talked about, George. There are people who have
a small tract, have a job in town, and enjoy the life. This million and a half is stable, not
changing in numbers. They don’t contribute a whole lot to the total food supply in the country,
but they make a contribution that runs around fifteen percent of the total supply. It’s almost all
perishables, and it’s all local. They get into the wine business, or they have local chickens or
something. They are not affected by the foreign economy much. They are mostly debt-free. They
will buy your used tractors and will probably pay cash. They are not big time operators, and they
don’t intend to be. As long as that job lasts, they’re in great shape. They are totally dependent on
the job’s economy. Now if that fails, their farm has failed.

Of the million farms in the country that are commercial—that is, they have more than $40,000 a
year in gross farm sales—a third have no debt. They’re people like my wife and me. We have
our place paid for, and we’ve been at it for thirty-five years. People like us have no real problem.

CLAUDE: When you say no debt, do you mean no debt on the land, or capital equipment as
well?

BERGLAND: No debt on the land. We rent the farm out, and the place is paid for. We don’t
have much income on that investment. Our return on our equity is not very good. But it has never
been any good. It’s never been over three percent. Return on farmland investments has never
been over three percent. People don’t buy land for the purpose of having a big healthy return. If
you want that, you had better buy something else. I can’t explain why people buy land. It’s the same reason they go fishing. It’s instinct.

Anyhow, a third of that commercial population has no debt, and therefore, no real way of trouble. A third has a debt of some sort and could be in trouble if things get worse. A third of the population has all the debt, practically. I guess the numbers show they have about sixty percent of it, but they certainly have all the trouble. The bigger they are, the worse shape they’re in. The big operator with a lot of borrowed money—who bought all this high-priced machinery and financed it all—is probably going down the drain. They are vulnerable.

One of my arguments with my friends and colleagues in the economic world is that they are measuring the wrong things. They keep measuring labor standards and labor output. I said, “You’ve got to do more than that. You’ve got to tell me how much that money is going to earn, too. If I’m paying ten percent interest on a note to borrow money to buy that tractor, I want you to figure out the economics of that tractor.” They don’t do that. Universities don’t spend time on that. All they do is figure out what I’ve got to do to get rid of hired help. They’ve just got to deal with the economics of these capital costs. If they don’t, they’re going to kill off this large scale farming thing.

PALMER: I think when we go to sell a tractor we can tell them the economics of it, but that doesn’t make a lot of difference to them as long as we can finance it. We finance it through Deere because they give you such tremendous terms—waiver of financing until next year, and only twenty or twenty-five percent down. And usually your used tractor covers that. So I think unless something radically changes, the person who wants to get into the farming business is going to be able to get his equipment financed unless Deere and Case International change.

BERGLAND: I don’t know what direction you want this to take.

THOMPSON: I was just going to say, I guess all of us know, but I think maybe the most important thing the Miller Center has done is its oral history of the Carter White House. There had been an earlier mini-oral history of the [Gerald] Ford White House. Nine people came down quite early before Jim and I were here. But Jim Young had the notion at Columbia that these oral histories that Columbia had become famous for could be made even better if one structured them, if one drew in people with some background and knowledge, and people with a set of consistent, coherent questions to ask. He had sixty people down from the Carter White House. Neither the national archives nor the Carter Library, I think, has anything corresponding—yet, at least—to that kind of an oral history.

But the one thing we had not been able to do was to have discussions with Cabinet people in that series. Well, that was not the purpose. Jim and I worked together. I’ve done the more general thing. But with each person we are bringing down now, we would like to have something a little bit more like the kind of scholarly inquiry that Jim conducted with the White House people, although there is a lot of material for the scholars and what is said to a larger group, as well. That’s the purpose, really, of this meeting. So Jim is in charge of it as he was the other.
YOUNG: You make the introductions, and I run with the ball. I think the agenda is quite open. All of us have some questions of pertinence that we can learn something about.

Let me just say a few words in general about the session. It has been our practice to consider small sessions and the oral history sessions that we’ve had with President Carter and his White House staff to be off the record. Even though it’s going to be recorded, it’s not for public release or report. Our practice has been to send the transcript to anybody who is kind enough to give us their time, and they can revise it, amend it however they see fit, for it to be used as a kind of research document for people studying the Presidency. President Carter has also asked us if we would—and we will—be willing to furnish copies of these transcripts to the Library in Atlanta under such terms the Library and the participants agree upon. We do that simply to encourage people to talk candidly and to assure them it’s not for the press and it’s not for publication.

In terms of the subject matter, I think there certainly is room for discussion of agricultural policy in those years, and problems, and how they were approached and why by the administration. I certainly want to encourage questions about that. Others of us here are somewhat more concerned with another set of problems that would have to do with how the White House looked to you, not only as an observer from within the administration, but in terms of working relationships as they evolved over time. Were there any significant changes? Also, about relations with Congress and whatever triangular relationships there might have been when there was an agricultural policy job that had to be done on the Hill.

I think we are all interested in getting from the experience of the people involved their perceptions of Jimmy Carter as a President and as a person. You gave us some of those this morning that were very interesting. You touched on most all of these subjects. We are always interested in, and have asked the former President and others, what it might have been like if they had had a second term. When I asked President Carter this he said—I’ll violate one of my own rules, which is I don’t ever tell any guest what one of his colleagues, much less President, said—but Carter wouldn’t mind. He said, “I suppose they would have said in my second term that I had a third term agenda.”

What we’re trying to do, really, is to figure out what kind of Presidency this was and what kind of administration it was. We’re trying to do that by asking the people who were in a position to know it best. Most of us see this administration before we began this project only as it looked from the outside through the screen of the press. I think with Mike’s [Fowler] exception—and you weren’t exactly in the inner circle—all of us have known it only from the outside.

THOMPSON: You should know that he [Mike] hyperventilated one time for the presidential physicians.

YOUNG: So that’s what it’s all about, and we don’t have any list of set questions or anything of that kind. One other point. We want to know what you think is important for people to know and understand about this Presidency, particularly for the people who will be studying it after nobody survives, when only its records and these conversations survive, what is important for them to know. What are the lessons it teaches? What kind of Presidency really was it as you saw it from
the inside? Those are the kinds of things we are trying to bring out in these discussions, and that’s pretty much open. Is that satisfactory?

**BERGLAND:** It sure is. He ran a zero-based Presidency. He started with nothing. He campaigned as an outsider. He ran against Washington, succeeded in this effort. He generally incurred the wrath—or at least he did not generally excite the support of—professional politicians, people like me. I’m a professional. I’ve been elected to Congress and knew what it took to get elected and reelected as a Democrat in a Republican district. So when he came in, he started with no real professional support and had to import it.

The first couple of years, it was a disaster. He got better at it, and by the time he got to the third and fourth year of his administration, he was getting better all the time. Much better congressional relations. He hired some people from the Hill, Bill Cable, who was in the Speaker’s office, and others from the Hill who were really very good Hill people who knew the process and got brought into the White House after the first year’s debacle.

He improved his congressional relations. Things like dinners for members of Congress. The President the first couple of years wouldn’t touch that. He absolutely abhorred having a social event with these people who come over. I don’t know what he thought. I think he thought they were going to try to talk him into something he didn’t want to do—for whatever reason. I’ve never really understood. The first couple of years the politics and the social contact with Congress were really bad. But it got better, and had there been a second Carter term, I think it would have been much better. Because I think in the second term he would have made White House staff changes that would have allowed more professionalism.

He had a very strong religious view of the world, and he applied Christian tests to almost all of his decision-making process. It had to meet his standard, ethical standard. He had his own Christian view of right and wrong, and everything had to pass that examination. That was basic with him. That’s really what drove his decision-making process.

**YOUNG:** Did he ever talk to you about that or explain that to you?

**BERGLAND:** No, he didn’t. It was a *sub rosa* thing, always there. I knew it. I had this little thing I mentioned this morning about the grain reserve, the Genesis reserve. Aside from that, nothing was ever said. He was very private. He kept his own private agenda. He would go to church dutifully, and he was a churchgoer. Mrs. [Rosalynn] Carter and the family went to church, and he taught Sunday school. He believed in this very passionately. With him this was not something he wore on his sleeve. He didn’t go to church because it was good politics.

In fact, he hated it when his picture showed up in the Sunday *Post* when he and Mrs. Carter came out of church. Sometimes he would be very angry about this. He couldn’t understand why they couldn’t leave him alone. He didn’t enjoy the limelight, didn’t enjoy that. Even though that was a political asset for him, he went out of his way to avoid being photographed in such a setting because I think he regarded it as sacrilegious. But he carried that religious test into the job with him. I think he will be remembered in that setting, that light, whether people approve or not. It depends on one’s point of view. But that really drove him in these kinds of things.
It was more important to him than the political tests that most professionals would use. “Have you got the votes? How do you go about it? What do you have to do to get the votes?” That’s what people like me would do. We would figure out what we had to do to put together the majority. He didn’t like that business. That was grubby.

**YOUNG:** He is often spoken of as being politically naive. What you are suggesting is that it was some kind of aversion and wasn’t lack of knowledge.

**BERGLAND:** He didn’t like it. I’m only guessing, but I think he believed that he would have to compromise on some principle that he wouldn’t do. And believe me, he wouldn’t! I mean, I can’t imagine him dealing like [Ronald] Reagan—no disrespect intended—on this Iranian business. Anybody in the Carter household who had suggested such a thing as this would be drawn and quartered. Absolutely! I mean, on things of this sort he was unyielding. I’m talking about matters of principle. It didn’t matter what it cost.

**THOMPSON:** On the arms part of that. He did send Hamilton Jordan on some secret missions, didn’t he? It would be the arms part—trading the arms for the hostages?

**BERGLAND:** I never really knew what Hamilton Jordan did. I suspect not much, to be honest about it. [Zbigniew] Brzezinski had some nutty ideas about the world. I always thought he was a disaster. It kind of bothered me that for two administrations in a row we had an east European refugee who had a major influence on foreign policy. I didn’t like that as a matter of principle. I thought it was a mistake because he had a warped view of the world. He did not necessarily have the same views that I thought were more fundamentally important.

**THOMPSON:** Dean Rusk used to say, “Brzezinski’s main problem was that he always put Polish national interest ahead of U.S. national interest.” That’s too harsh.

**BERGLAND:** That’s a bit harsh. I don’t think he had a Polish interest, but he certainly had a Polish view of the Russians and would not allow himself to be more objective about the Soviet Union. Everything the Russians did was sinister, in his view. I think he overreacted to some of this stuff. There could have been a SALT II [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks] accord earlier, and it could have been made to work. The President wanted that. He really wanted that thing to happen, not because it would make him a hero or a figure to be reckoned with in the annals of history, but because it was the proper thing to do, whatever that means. That’s how he would base it. He said, “This is the right thing to do.” And that’s why he got so involved in the Camp David business—because it was right. It wasn’t because of the political popularity.

**CLAUDE:** Isn’t it curious that he—with his early sense that our fear of the Russians was inordinate—would have appointed a Brzezinski who was so paranoid about this?

**BERGLAND:** This one I can’t figure out. It made no sense. I know nothing about the politics of the Brzezinski appointment. I’ve never read anything about it. I’d be curious to know how this came to pass. It was misfit, really.
THOMPSON: He helped him when no one else helped him. Wasn’t that what Brzezinski told us?

YOUNG: Yes.

CLAUDE: He had become acquainted in the Trilateral Commission.

YOUNG: But I don’t think we ever asked Carter why he appointed him. We didn’t ask Carter.

BERGLAND: I never asked Carter, but what I do know is that Brzezinski was a constant source of irritation, for me, for example. A little anecdote: The President had an interest in China. President [Richard] Nixon had started some very important initiatives in the People’s Republic of China. These were spellbinding things for which I hope he is given proper and due credit. [Henry] Kissinger helped arrange it, and his role in this is priceless. Carter wanted to continue that, but didn’t know how. And I certainly didn’t know how. By sheer happenstance one day, the Chinese emissary to the United States, Huang [Zhen], didn’t have diplomatic standing, of course, but he was whatever it was we called those people at the time. The country didn’t have diplomatic recognition. They didn’t have an office and an officer.

Huang came over to the Department of Agriculture and said, “I’d like to bring some Chinese scholars to America, some scientists, agricultural scientists. Could you help me arrange it?” I said, “Well, sure, I’ll try.” I didn’t know anything about that business, so I called Dale Hathaway, who was my deputy for international affairs, and I told Dale what was up. I said, “I don’t know how to go about this.” Dale said, “Let me go fishing around.” He had some friends over at the State Department. He called over there, and one thing led to another, and it came to pass.

There was a meeting in the Capitol building with members of Congress. This Chinese delegation was here, and they had toured certain universities and had seen what it was they came to see. They were very bright Chinese scholars, spoke little English. The meeting on Capitol Hill was sponsored by, I think, Tom Foley, who was chairman of House Committee on Agriculture. Lee Hamilton was there. It was a small bipartisan group of the House members. This Chinese ambassador got up to speak with this group and introduced his little delegation, and proper words were spoken, and he invited me to come to China. I said, “I would like to do this very much.”

The word got back that I had been invited to China, and Brzezinski called me up, and he was furious. He said, “You have no right to accept that invitation.” I hung up on him. I wasn’t going to put up with his nonsense. He called me back and said, “You can’t hang up on me. I want you to know you have no right to go to China.” I said, “I’m not going to China. What’s this all about?” He said, “Well, you just accepted this invitation.” I said, “I was just being nice.” “No, you didn’t. You accepted. You did something you weren’t allowed to do.” I said, “Stick it in your ear,” and hung up again. We didn’t get along very well. I thought he was just officious. I was just trying to be courteous, just applying sort of ordinary political principles.

To make a long story short, the President did send me to China on a political mission—in November of 1978, was it? When was it the diplomatic thing came to pass, January of 1979? I
did get sent to China by Cy Vance, over Brzezinski’s strong objections. He never forgave me for this. He wanted to be the Henry Kissinger. I had nothing to do with him. I didn’t like him. I thought he was a narrow-minded officious transplant. I wasn’t going to argue with him. I just avoided him every chance I could.

THOMPSON: Were there many people in the Carter administration like that who were overbearing and arrogant? Did it have a disproportionate number?

BERGLAND: There were so few that it made it unusual, and that’s why the Brzezinski thing was such an uncommon quality in the Carter appointees. He didn’t appoint people like that. I don’t think Carter liked people like that. I don’t think he liked to be around them. How he got the Brzezinski thing is beyond me. He was really the only one. I had some troubles with the White House staff.

I had trouble with Hamilton Jordan, for example, because he wouldn’t talk to me. In the political appointments process, first, early in the administration Jordan wouldn’t return the phone calls. So I ignored him. I didn’t pay any attention to him. He got in trouble, and I wasn’t going to help him. I didn’t owe him anything. I didn’t know him. I didn’t particularly like him. He sort of wandered around the Cabinet meetings with his coarse shoes and kept to himself. And he wouldn’t return phone calls. He was trying to handle congressional relations, and he wouldn’t talk to them. My friends on the Hill would call me, and they said, “How do we get through to the White House?” I said, “Good luck, pal. I can’t do it either. I can talk to the President, but I can’t talk to his staff.” That was true. I could get through to the President anytime I needed to, but I couldn’t get Hamilton Jordan on political matters. So I didn’t deal with him. I don’t know if that was arrogance on his part, or what it was about him.

YOUNG: Was this throughout, or just the first part of the administration?

BERGLAND: The first two or three years. It got better towards the end because they made some changes in the staff and brought in—they elevated—Stuart Eizenstat got moved up in the ranks, and Jack Watson was promoted. These were very good people. Watson and Eizenstat and that group were just top flight, very bright and much more sophisticated politically.

MCCLESKEY: You’ve answered my question in part, but I was struck by the emphasis you put on the improvement in Carter’s congressional relationship after the first couple of years or so. Was there a similar improvement in his relationship with the departments and agencies?

BERGLAND: I think so. Although we never had any real trouble, even in the early years of the Carter administration. I think I had the support of the President. I supported him. I mentioned this morning, in the budget process I never played games with the President’s budget. I wouldn’t go up there and try to destroy it with the Appropriations Committee. I lobbied hard, and he got word back. I dealt with the politics of this thing. I got cross-hauled pretty hard by Democrats up there from time to time that I was too tough. He got word back, and he called me up and said, “Hang in there. We like this.” I always got along with him and had no real problem with his staff because I didn’t have to deal with them.
He had trouble with other departments, I know. I’m aware of some of that. I don’t know what all went on there because I didn’t really care. It wasn’t my business, and I didn’t need it. But I know there was bad blood between him and Mike Blumenthal and Joe Califano. And Mrs. Pat Harris was difficult for him. You’ll have to talk to somebody else about why. We didn’t have that same difficulty. I played pretty hard-nosed politics with him, but I’d do it early.

MCCLESKEY: Could I explore that for a moment? Here is a President who—I think for very basic reasons, which I think I understand a little bit of—was himself averse to certain kinds of politics, which I think is unfortunate. You describe yourself in what I would consider to be—a favorable term—a “professional politician.” So how do the professional and the amateur get along? How is it possible for you to have this good working relationship?

BERGLAND: Try to train the amateur. And I mean that sincerely. Bob Strauss was very good in this stuff. Politically, he was probably the single most important person in the White House. He gained in stature as time went on. As the days wore on, Strauss became more and more influential with the President in political matters—relationships with the Hill and with outside organizations whose contacts were necessary. Strauss and [Walter] Mondale were both very good at this. They treated the White House staff with appropriate contempt in the early years, and as time went on, the President saw that Strauss and Mondale and these political people really could help him a lot. So he depended more on them. I would say that Bob Strauss was really kind of a dean of that group. He was awfully good with me and to me. He was a generation older than me, and I respected that experience. He was probably the best political operator I’ve ever known.

MCCLESKEY: I never knew him, but he came from a little town about twenty or thirty miles from where I grew up in west central Texas.

BERGLAND: He was a powerful asset to the President, not only in terms of his relations on the Hill, but he got involved in international political matters in his trade job—which was kind of a grubby job in itself, but it opened up political contacts for him in foreign places.

THOMPSON: Jim Young had a series of sessions with Anne Wexler and that operation. Did that help congressional relations?

BERGLAND: Oh, yes. Anne was also a pro and came on stronger as time went on. It was people like Anne Wexler and Bob Strauss who substantially improved the President’s politics in the latter months or year or two of his administration.

YOUNG: It’s obvious that even though he himself was not your “professional politician,” he appointed a great many of those people with that political experience in his administration. It was not apparently a disbarment or disqualification. You had it. You had, I’m sure, something else to commend you to his attention. Anne had it. Bob Strauss was his appointee, after all. I don’t think Bob particularly wanted that job in the administration, but was talked into it.
PALMER: Both you and the President were basically farm background and came from farming. Did you ever get into a discussion with the President about the philosophy of farming, or were you mostly trying to put out brush fires?

BERGLAND: No, we had a couple of philosophical discussions, one of them in the Governor’s mansion in Atlanta when he called me up for this first interview, the first time I really got to know him. We shared philosophical views on matters of intervention. The President was very strong on letting the marketplace sort things out. It came as no surprise that he was the guy who started airline deregulation and appointed people like Fred Kahn to positions of authority whose job was to deregulate. He wanted to deregulate the price of oil. A Democrat could do things that a Republican couldn’t have done on matters like deregulation. So he used that influence.

Early on, he and I had this discussion about the role of the marketplace, and I used a little thing with him that he remembered and reported back from time to time: The markets can establish price but not value. I was taught that by Willard Cochrane when I was a student at the University of Minnesota a hundred years ago. Marketplaces have a role in establishing price, and they are good at allocating, making short-term decisions. They are no good in setting long-range public policy. That’s where they fail miserably.

Carter knew that, and he said, “Would you be comfortable in getting rid of some of this machinery we have in Agriculture? I’m talking about political machinery like peanut allotments, and a lot of these old 1930s vintage New Deal regulatory authorities. Are you comfortable with that?” I said, “Yes, in most cases I could.” He said, “Well, I think we ought to get rid of all we can get rid of.”

YOUNG: This was your discussion before you were offered the job?

BERGLAND: He had to be sure that I wasn’t a straight out and out Marxist interventionist. It was going to commit half the government to make all these decisions. I didn’t believe in that business because I didn’t believe it could work. I’m a true liberal. I believe the decision should be made locally, and the individual right to choose is the most fundamental. So liberals like me have trouble with Reagan’s thing on prayer, abortion, and some of that that is intervention where it absolutely has no business being.

The President and I generally hit it off in agricultural policy. I told him that one of things we had to deal with that I didn’t really understand was this international side. I said, “I know it is important, President, but I don’t know how to do it. I’m not an expert in this.” He said, “Can you find experts?” I said, “I think so.” That’s when I went to Dale Hathaway, whom I had known from Michigan State. I talked with him and asked if he would help and could he bring some people in. He said, “Yes, I can.” And he did.

We had what I think was a very good team that recognized the international marketplace for what it really was, a kind of political jungle. He said, “Well, do what you need to do with this.” He didn’t know what had to be done, but we changed the domestic agricultural programs in a fairly significant way. We set up this reserve scheme where the grain was stored on farms. The farmer owned it. He or she built the storage. They kept it, and they were responsible for keeping
it in good condition. We made small payments to them for that purpose rather than having big government bins and having government ownership. We kept it out there on the farm under contract, and it worked very well. It was the best grain reserve strategy we’ve ever employed, and it fit Carter’s general theory that we want to keep the intervention thing to a minimum.

There was a lot of opposition in his administration to this deregulation. Brock Adams, for example, just got all crosswise with the President when he started to deregulate airways. That was a big fight. Fred Kahn and persons of that sort were arguing that we’ve just got to get the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] out of this business of granting landing rights and controlling tariffs and setting routes and granting subsidies. We’ve got to get rid of all that stuff.

Fred and I used to argue some about this because I said, “I respect what you’re trying to do, but we in the rural areas are disadvantaged. We’ve got to deal with rural places separately because it’s inherently more expensive to deliver mail on a rural route than it is a city route. If you’re going to put public services on the basis of the least cost denominator, rural mail carriers are going to go out of business. There won’t be any rural mail routes, or rural schools, or rural railroads, or rural airports. There won’t be any. If the market is going to be the test, we are in big trouble.” He said, “You’re right on that, but that’s for the social scientists to cure.”

DERTHICK: How about dairy price supports. Did the President press you? Did you press back? You made some reference before to hard politics. Did any hard politics occur?

BERGLAND: No, on that one he just said, “Run it as best you can. I don’t want any terrible expense with it.” He stayed out of it. And I ran it best I could and didn’t have terrible expense. We didn’t have either any big surpluses or any grinding shortages. We had a fairly decent balance in the dairy supply and demand side. But I had to adjust price supports up some years to encourage production and down some years to discourage it.

PALMER: The dairy boys are the best customers, the ones who could pay the most for our equipment on a year-to-year basis over the last thirty-some years that I’ve been here.

BERGLAND: Yes. Dairying is a terrible job, it’s just awful. But it’s steady work. I used to milk cows for a living as kid, and I thought to myself, If I ever in my life grow up and farm, I am not going to milk cows. I want nothing to do with that business. I kept my word.

On a dairy thing like this, he didn’t get into the philosophy of intervention. He just said, “Don’t spend too much money, and be sure there’s enough to go around.”

He supported me strongly on the demand side of this thing. For example, I went to him one day with a major budget dispute. I wanted to amend the budget, to go over the bottom line on developing a special milk program for kids in the schools and to expand what we called the “Women, Infant, and Children” grant program. The WIC program was a scheme for the woman who was poor and was receiving public assistance and was pregnant or nursing or had babies. She could, on the advice of her doctor, get a voucher to buy certain commodities for her diet. But they were specified, and they were very explicitly targeted on the advice of that doctor. He would write a prescription, and we would fill it.
Doctors told me that this is, hands down, the most cost-effective program in the government. If you can get that birth weight up and keep those infants born healthy, you’ve solved half their problems for the rest of their life. So I went to him and said, “President, two things. I want to amend the budget. We need $510 million for WIC, and I want $280 million to pump targeted milk into targeted schools for a breakfast program.”

He listened to it, and he said, “This is the right thing to do. What kind of problems do we have?” I said, “Well, it’s a budget problem.” He said, “Okay, go and see what the Director”—I think then it was, I’m not sure if Bert Lance was still there or not—“See what we can do.”

I got into big trouble over there. Of course, they said no, that it wasn’t in the budget, and had all the excuses. It’s political judgment, and the President took care of it somehow. But when I presented the case and showed him the merits, he said, “Yes, this makes sense.” We did it. We doubled the budget for those things and got no credit for it. He wouldn’t allow us to take any political credit.

YOUNG: You were given more or less a free hand in the development of policy after this initial discussion in which he and you found areas of agreement as to main policy and direction?

BERGLAND: Yes. He never interfered as long as I was able to carry this thing out.

YOUNG: Did he take a strong interest in agricultural policy throughout his term except for the times when something else happened?

BERGLAND: He would, on matters like this paper thing I talked about this morning. If I had a program we were sending up to the Hill, he would want all the documentation. He would read it all and call me. He was curious. He would call me at home, or he would call me at work. It was unusual to call me on Sunday. That only happened once. He never asked me or expected anybody in his Cabinet to work on Sunday. That was family time. He observed that, religiously.

The business of the substance of our agricultural policy, once it was approved—once the law was passed, and as long as I could stay within the budget—he didn’t call me and say, “Why don’t you do this?” or, “Don’t do that.”

Now I had trouble with his brother once, Billy. Billy was drunk, and called me up, and I didn’t know him. This was in April, probably, of the first year, in 1977. He called me up on the White House line and said, “This is Billy Carter.” I had never met the gentleman. I knew about him, but I didn’t know him personally. He said, “I hear that you are going to screw up our peanut program.” I said, “What? I don’t know what you’ve been hearing. What are you talking about?”

To be honest with you, I didn’t know what he was talking about, and it turned out he didn’t either. I could tell by his voice in this conversation that he was incoherent. But what I didn’t know was whether he had the President’s ear or what it was. So he goes on and on about this peanut thing that I was about to foul up. I was making some changes in the program, that was true. But the President knew what I was doing.
The rule—the thing he had that I didn’t mention this morning is really important. It tells something about the man. In that early discussion, like in December of 1976 after the election when I went down to see him, he said to me, “You know, my family is in the peanut business,” which I had read about. He said, “How would you act on peanut matters?” I said, “President, I don’t know a thing about peanuts. I have no idea what this is all about, so what I have to do is hire someone who does know and follow their advice.” He said, “Would you ask me for advice?” I said, “Respectfully no, Sir.” He said, “Good. I don’t want to be involved in this business.”

After I got the appointment, I was over there one day, and I said, “President, I’ve got a peanut problem.” He said, “You know, you and I got a deal.” I said, “That’s right, we have a deal.” And I never, ever went back to him, and he never called me. He absolutely refused to get involved in anything. He wouldn’t even talk about peanut price supports or issues or questions of substance that might somehow in some way be regarded as enrichment. He wouldn’t do it. I mean to tell you, he didn’t do it. Now his drunken brother Billy blew the rule, but after this episode, this conversation, I called Jack Watson. I said, “Jack, I don’t know what to do here. I’ve got an embarrassing problem.” He said, “What is it?” I told him, and he said, “Forget it. Don’t pay any attention to it.” So I didn’t.

PALMER: A minute ago you said the President took care of what I call the social programs when the necessary extra milk was needed. How did the President feel about the social programs in the Agriculture Department? This really was a big percentage of your total agriculture budget.

BERGLAND: It was the biggest part of our budget. I’m trying to recall numbers, but I think our total budget was $25 billion or something, of which easily half went into feeding programs, school lunches, WIC, food stamps, and these things. Every year in Carter’s budget, that budget went up, on my recommendation and with his strong support. He believed in that. He figured it was the decent thing to do. On one occasion I provided him some documentation. So he saw the cost benefit analysis. He was impressed by that, but that wasn’t what drove him. His instincts on these social programs were purely humanitarian. I think it was really his test.

RILEY: I’d like to follow up on that and ask you about the potential policy shift of food stamps into Health and Human Services—I guess it must have been HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare] then. I’ve read Califano’s account of that. I understand that you two were on sort of opposite poles on that issue. I’m curious about your end of the story on that.

BERGLAND: Joe was a very smart naval professional. I had high regard for him. I respected him. He had his job to do, and I had mine. He had his constituency. He was very good at it. When Joe Califano came at you, you knew he was coming ready. And you had better be ready to meet him. So I did my best. The way I did it was I went to the committees on the Hill. I know I couldn’t beat Joe in his own department, and he couldn’t beat me in my department.

I had people in Congress—I shouldn’t use the word Neanderthal, but it’s the only way to describe some of those people—who wanted to get rid of the food stamp and social programs. They said this was all wrong, and if they had any ambition they wouldn’t be hungry. You’ve heard that nonsense. There were some of them up there who wanted to get the Department of Agriculture out of this business and purify it to the point where it became a farmer agency only. I
said, “Nothing doing.” My view is derived from politics. I’m in the business of counting votes. There were forty members of the House who came from farming districts. There were another hundred who came from rural districts. And there were two hundred who came from cities and suburbs—more than two hundred—who didn’t have a farm or even anything closely related to it in their district.

I had to get into those city districts to get votes, to get past appropriations in these agricultural programs. I couldn’t just do it with the small number of farm votes. So I kept arguing with my colleagues up there, my former colleagues and friends, that if you take the social programs out of the Department of Agriculture, we have lost a big constituency. And you’ll never pass anything. You will never get an appropriation bill for research past this urban House if I don’t have some quid pro quo I can use to muscle this thing.

“Besides that,” I told them, “if you take food stamps out of Agriculture, the Committee on Agriculture will lose jurisdiction, and it will be transferred to the Committee on Labor. How do you like them apples?” They said, “We can’t do that. Those people are nuts over at the Labor Committee. They’ll give away everything.” I said, “Well, maybe. The best way to keep this under control is to let me have it.” “You’ve got a deal.”

So when Joe Califano tried to do the politicking up on the Hill, he ran into a real firestorm that I had lit. They called the President. These conservatives like Herman Talmadge, Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee. A real fine, interesting, colorful fellow in a lot of ways, and he and I got along fine. We had disagreements some. He called the President and said, “President, I hear Joe Califano wants to move that program. Let me tell you it would be a big mistake politically. Don’t let it happen.” How many other calls the President had, I don’t know. But Joe didn’t win.

RILEY: So you actually didn’t go to the President. You went through Congress.

BERGLAND: He got shot down my way.

THOMPSON: Some of the literature says you added things to the Department like conservation and so on, or that you were involved in activities which involved your playing this role of being an ambassador to urban groups in order to get farm programs through, and that, in a sense, Food for Peace—which must have started a good deal earlier—and several other things were the things you talked about when you talked to urban people. Food stamps as well. Was the motivation for talking about and expanding your mandate into at least one or two of these areas a political motivation primarily? Or was it because you and the President thought that these were fundamentally a part of Agriculture? Or was it both of those?

BERGLAND: Probably both. The President probably viewed it more from a humanitarian viewpoint. I looked at it from—

[Tape change, missing text]
—the President liked that. He knew what I was doing, and he said, “Go at it.” He supported me fully on this one. I did it partly because it was the right thing to do and partly because I needed their votes. Pure politics. I could count. We worked that one hard. I didn’t do anything dishonest, and I never violated the President’s budget. And when we agreed on something, it was done in the proper way. But we made those changes.

I set up the Center on Human Nutrition, the first one of its kind. I couldn’t find a doctor to staff it because medical schools don’t train people in nutrition, I found out much to my dismay. I finally got Doctor Jean Mayer from Tufts to come down and run that thing. I staffed it with scientists and started to find a linkage between diet and health, and diet and attitudes, and doing some very exciting experimentation with diets and behavior. We had a volunteer group at a Federal penitentiary in Ohio, for example, that willingly submitted to some tests in diets. And our people did a lot of study with these kids. They’re mostly black, and they came out of Cleveland or someplace in the state.

They were all poor, of course, and they found that we could alter their attitudes by changing the diet. Implications for this were enormous, because if we can discover the linkages here, we can start putting breakfast programs in those ghetto neighborhoods and start doing things with kids’ health early and change their attitudes. Doctors claim there are some linkages, things we can discover here regarding crime rates. That may be a little far-fetched, but we are on the track anyhow.

I just got beat black and blue by the egg people. They didn’t want me messing around with this business of diet linkage because they might discover that there was something to do with fat and cholesterol. One day I recall a terrible meeting up on the Hill. The egg lobby had hired a lawyer who had been a staff man for Senator Talmadge. His name was Mike McLeod. They got the chairman, Talmadge, to invite chairman Foley of the House Agriculture Committee, and to invite me to come up there for a little private chat.

When I got a call from the two chairmen, I went. I regarded both of these as friends and professionals. I went up there, and here was this egg group from Georgia. They had this lawyer, Mike McLeod. I thought, “Here we go.” What I had done was publish a document that was intended to be used by the food stamp and WIC recipients, many of whom couldn’t speak English, had poor eyesight, couldn’t read. They couldn’t understand the legalese that most government documents had, so this thing was in just very plain and simple terms, short words, and big print. That’s my rule.

We printed it in Spanish and a couple of other languages, and what it did was describe what they should avoid and what they should choose in their diet. They go into a store to buy groceries for the family, and they are not really well educated in the stuff. We tried to get them to drink less pop and eat more vegetables and more milk. And we made a difference. It did work.

In the course of this thing, we wanted them to eat less fat, and that got the egg people’s attention—the cholesterol thing. So they put the heat on me. The egg people got me there. They had these two chairmen and had given these guys a lot of money—not Foley, but they had given Talmadge money. They got me there, and the egg people said, “We are demanding that you
“retract this.” I said, “Nothing doing.” I got mad. They said, “Well, you are going to do all this great damage to the egg industry.” I said, “I’m not changing it.”

It wouldn’t have mattered to me what they had said. I was so furious with that crap that I wouldn’t have given them the time of day. I just stood my ground. I said, “I’m not going to do it.” They said, “We’ll take it to the President.” I said, “I’ll see you in the White House.” And it was a shoot-out. After about ten or fifteen minutes of this, I wouldn’t give, and the egg people kept bearing down. This lawyer kept grinding, but I wouldn’t yield. I said, “I’ll quit before I yield to this bunch.”

Finally the meeting exploded, and I got back to the office, and I was still furious. I had a call from Tom Foley. He said, “My God! I never had any idea that this was what the meeting was about.” They hadn’t told him either. They just said that Chairman Talmadge and the Secretary were coming over and would like to have a little meeting, and he innocently went. A couple of hours later, I got a call from Chairman Talmadge. He said, “I don’t know how to talk to you about this. I’ve got to tell you I’ve never been so embarrassed in all my life. Don’t change a thing.” He had been critical of what I had done, but he was so embarrassed by it. Well, the word got to the President that they had this really tough, absolutely hard-boiled collision, and he called me up and said, “I heard about this. Good for you. Stand in there.” He didn’t care what the politics of it was.

To that extent his ignoring the political world was a plus. He didn’t care if the egg people had a jillion dollars or had all the votes in the country. If there was a matter of principle involved, Carter was tough.

YOUNG: Just one follow-up to Ken’s question. The President was supportive, on other than political grounds, though, of broadening the constituency base or the program base of a department, and that was good politics. But that wasn’t the consideration, apparently, that moved into consumerism and nutrition, which all provide a broader base of interest support for the Agriculture.

BERGLAND: He had been a very progressive Governor in the state of Georgia. He had dealt with civil rights and human rights issues in a very moderate but sensible way. He brought the state along and did great things. He kept that on in the federal administration. He is really good on civil rights matters.

FOWLER: You’ve talked a good deal about the early years of the Carter administration, the appointments. I guess you have fielded a question or two about the transition into the Carter administration. I wonder if you might focus for a minute on the latter years and, in particular, on the transition to the Reagan administration. This was part of the brief interlude that I was at the Carter White House, and I was absolutely astounded by the dedication that seemed to emanate from the President himself to make this transition the smoothest transition in American history.

It seems to me that perhaps that’s the flipside of the “Georgia Mafia” that so hampered our relations with Congress that when it came to something that was a matter of principle like putting interests of the country above the settling of political scores, the word was, “Don’t respond to the
barbs of Mrs. [Nancy] Reagan or Ronald Reagan, Jr. Do everything you can to make this the best ever." Was that the impression that you had? Do you think that’s an accurate assessment of that particular attribute of the Carter administration?

BERGLAND: That was absolutely true. Your assessment is right. The President called us all together after the election. He really wasn’t destroyed by it because he had been expecting it. He knew it was coming. The polls showed it. It was obvious. It was a letdown, but it was not a bolt out of the blue. We had a meeting in the White House, and he spoke briefly about the campaign and how it was not to be. There is no way he could have done it, for which he was sorry, and he took responsibility.

But it was not a crying session, and there were no recriminations, and there was no finger pointing or fault finding. It was all, “We did our best and lost, and now we will go on to other things.” He asked each of us to do our best in trying to accommodate the Reagan people. He said, “When they announce their transition team, I want each of you to work with them and do everything you can to help.” He did it in a quiet way, but you could tell he was sincere and honest in this. In fact, the Reagan people who came to see me were very good. They were not the noisy breast-beaters. They were very competent people, and I was impressed by their quality. They later disappointed me, but early on I thought these people were okay.

CULLATHER: I wonder if I can follow up on what you were saying upstairs about the contrasts in administrative styles of the Reagan and Carter White Houses. A lot of writers sympathetic to the Reagan administrative style say that a President just ought to set general themes and that the kind of micro-management, detailed decision-making you were talking about can be a handicap. Can you recall any instances where it was either a plus or a minus?

BERGLAND: It took up enormous amounts of the President’s time. He would wade through these documents and read the charts and try to understand the logic behind it and wanted to know all the pieces and parts. The upside to it is that he really understood the machinery of the government. The downside to it was that he was so busy examining the pieces that he didn’t have time for themes. He refused, for example, to put things together in a broad thematic approach.

Reagan is big on slogans. He has the “New Beginning,” the revolution, and all this stuff. It’s about ninety percent bunk, but it has an appeal. Carter wouldn’t have anything to do with that. He thought that was demeaning. I think he was not political enough. There were times in the process where the White House or his role in the Iranian hostage-taking thing, for example, was a big mistake, because what he did was bring that whole problem right in on top of him.

Reagan learned that lesson. He has nothing to do with it. He won’t even talk about these hostages. He walks away from the deal. I marvel at how he can get by with that. But he learned a lesson because he saw Carter take this stuff too seriously. He became engrossed in it, and he became responsible for its outcome, and it was constantly in the public attention. These Marines got killed over there in Teheran, and the President says, “Too bad, it’s my fault,” and that’s the last you ever heard of it. There’s nothing more to it than that. I would like to see a President somewhere between Reagan and Carter. Carter was too much detail-oriented. I don’t think
Reagan has any idea what’s going on. I’d like to see somewhere between—the Harry Truman style.

**YOUNG:** It may be useful to draw a distinction between what Carter took on—like the Iranian hostage crisis—and himself managed and tracked from day to day with Lloyd Cutler and all those others who were absorbed in it, and the interest in knowing the substance of an issue that he might be signing off on. That is, looking at a chart on page 430 or whatever it was, in which he was not really managing agricultural policy here, was he?

**BERGLAND:** No, he wasn’t.

**YOUNG:** You had a free hand in that.

**BERGLAND:** I had a free hand in—

**YOUNG:** It was not one of his projects.

**BERGLAND:** No.

**YOUNG:** The interest in detail and the interest, it seems to me, in what you call micro-management might have been really different things, and you might draw a distinction between them. When I went to see Carter, he said, “By now you know more about my Presidency that I do.” I said, “That’s not true.” He said, “No, I’m serious. There are a number of things that may surprise you—on policy, about which I will not be a very good informant, that I didn’t really know about. There were people in my administration who know a lot more about that policy than I will. However, when it comes to issues, I’m an engineer, you see, and I feel I must know the details.” So the interest, I think, of the details was there, but the micro-management wasn’t everywhere. Is that a useful—?

**BERGLAND:** That’s a correct example, and he would pick his details. The Iranian hostage crisis he was into. The Camp David thing he was into. It was an obsession with him. I never really had many discussions with him about agriculture and food policies. He had a few things I mentioned, like the WIC funding and other matters, but he never really paid much attention to what I did because I stayed in the budget. I didn’t have money troubles. So I knew better than to cross him up. It would be like crossing up my dad.

**MCCLESKEY:** Could I pursue this question of agricultural policy? I gather from what you’ve been saying that by and large you had a pretty free hand in developing agricultural policy as long as it didn’t cost too much and as long as it didn’t spring too many surprises and that sort of thing. My question is how did you go about developing that policy within the department and elsewhere? I’m interested specifically in the role played by your own staff, the role played by congressional committees and staff, and the role played by the interested groups in the community.

**BERGLAND:** First of all, I believe that the perishable industries like tomatoes and chickens and eggs will all be driven by market forces. You really don’t need to have any government role in
the chicken business. It does take care of itself. It gets overbuilt, and then prices drop, and then there are troubles. But it’s really working pretty well, actually. I never got into that stuff. Prices would fall, and people would say, “You’ve got do something with the price of chickens.” I said, “Well, why don’t we wait three months, and let’s take a look at it.” Three months later, the thing would have gotten straightened out. Carter liked that, and I believed in it, so there was no problem in that one.

What we had to deal with, though, were the enormous production surplus capacities we had in grains. I knew from my experience that in 1972-73—when we had the two world crop catastrophes, and when the Soviets changed their import policy—they went to buying up shortfall instead of rationing. We had this big run-up in prices. Wheat went from $1.50 a bushel to $5 in a year and a half. People started plowing up grass and bulldozing trees and draining swamps. I mean, there was response to this price boost. Earl Butz liked to take credit for all that, but the disaster was that people misread this. They thought this was a permanent new introduction to some level of prosperity we’d never imagined could exist. So we increased cropland basically in those four years by twenty percent. It was all by draining swamps and plowing down grass. People plowed up this grassland, and they sold off the cows, and they put in soybeans.

We had reason to believe this was not only an economic mistake of great proportions, but it was an environmental disaster. I told the President about this. I said, “I want to do some survey work,” because he was interested in this stuff. He wasn’t disinterested, but he didn’t tell me what to do. He wanted written reports. Every Friday I gave him a written report on what took place during the week.

YOUNG: Was that at his request?

BERGLAND: At his request.

CLAUDE: All departments did this?

BERGLAND: I don’t know, but I did. He requested it. I would give him a little update on what was going on. This was never mixed up with policy. I never used that to try to influence him on a question I may have to have on Monday. Just a little report thing. He would read it because I would get it back and he had put a checkmark, and he’d say, “I’d like to know more about this,” or something like that. It would come back out. So I knew he was reading this.

One time I had this thing about this erodible land. I said, “I know we’ve got a very serious problem with the soil erosion. I’d like to do an inventory.” Or, “I’m going to do an inventory.” He sent it back out, and he said, “Wonderful idea. Keep me informed.” So I did from time to time. What we did was a survey, and we found about eighty million acres of cropland in the United States had erosion rates of more than five tons per acre per year. It was site specific. It wasn’t every place. It was only fields here and there, but we found them. I told him about it, and he liked that. He said that was the kind of government he liked. We were targeting in on a problem, and we were going to do something about the problem itself, and that suited him to a tee.
I liked it, too, because we were really dealing with something generically. Instead of saying we need to appropriate more money for soil conservation service, we said, “We’ve found out what the problem is. It’s all this grass that got plowed down when beans went to ten dollars. It’s washing away, and we’ve got to do something about it.” So we put together programs to deal with it. I’d report to him from time to time. He never told me what to do or never wanted to tell me how to do it. He was activist in that sense of the word. There were more parts to your question.

MCCLESKEY: Let’s take that as a concrete example. Is this interest in the problem of erosion a matter that you picked up and said to your staff, “Let’s develop this”? Did this come up from the Soil Conservation Service? Where did it come from?

BERGLAND: No. It came from my own experience. Because I saw what was happening up in my home part of the world with bulldozing trees and tearing up and draining swamps. I saw the numbers the Department published on what happened with the cropland acreage. We had this big increase in acreage. The world was taking up the slack. They were taking up the surplus.

But we had inflation. The oil price thing was a disaster. We had two major oil shocks. I think when Carter came in oil was about $9 a barrel. That was before his time. It went from $1.50 to about $9 during the Ford administration. It started off with inflation rates that unseated President Ford, but it really took off during Carter’s term. It went from $9 a barrel to over $30 in four years. It was just a disaster. And of course the oil prices kept climbing, and the fertilizer costs kept climbing, and the cost of farming kept climbing. The food prices kept climbing, inflation went up, interest rates went up, and it was all driven by oil.

He couldn’t do anything about it. It was another one of those frustrating things. He couldn’t do anything about it except do the obvious, and that is to conserve it. It was natural to him. The President knew. He was always a saver, a rural conservative who said, “We can’t waste anything.” He was right. So he said, “We’ll conserve.” So he turns down the White House temperature and puts on a sweater. Remember those speeches he’d make? But he did more than that. He said to people like me, “I want you to do everything you can to turn off our dependency on imported oil.”

We turned our research people loose on it. We got into alcohol and other wood uses and did a lot of work. We passed laws on gas mileage standards. Our imports have been cut in half. Carter deserves credit for it. It’s a combination of Carter and price. When price goes up, people start doing things they ordinarily wouldn’t do. They put on storm windows. My folks didn’t put storm windows in the house until the gas prices doubled. That’s not Carter’s. He doesn’t get credit for it.

But Reagan is claiming credit for breaking inflation. That is pure bunk. What happened was the oil price thing stopped going up. In fact, the King of Saudi Arabia is trying to teach Margaret Thatcher a lesson in supply management, and sooner or later she will find out, and when she does the price will go back up again.
We had this terrible inflation thing, and it really was bad. The grain prices kept climbing. We kept moving the surpluses abroad, but we knew we had this enormous productive base. We had increasing yields all the time. We had this added crop line acreage, and something had to give sometime. We just knew it. So one of the things I did was we managed to curtail supply by dealing with this fragile lands issue. Then we went overseas, and we worked in economic development with guys like Monte Yudelman and others to help develop more demand in these large undeveloped countries, like China and Mexico, and with some success. So we moved the surpluses overseas.

But the whole world discovered how to raise more grain. Modern technologies are being applied everywhere, and now we’ve got grain coming out our ears, and so we have a grain surplus in the United States. We don’t have a surplus of chickens or eggs or turkeys or tomatoes—it’s grain. The big mistake was when that big price ran up in ’72 and ’73 and we had all this bulldozing.

PALMER: But doesn’t this say that the signals that have come out from the Department of Agriculture—and I’ll say prior to your time, so I won’t be backing you up in a corner—to the farmer or to the producer probably were the wrong signals?

BERGLAND: They were. They were market signals. I used to argue with my friend Earl Butz who said, “The market is going to allocate all this stuff.” And they sent the wrong word. Earl and I used to argue endlessly. I was in Congress, and he was an evasive witness. Boy, we used to go at it. I always believed they were sending the wrong signals, and he said, “No, get the government out of this business and it will take care of itself.” Well, it didn’t, and we are paying the price for that now.

PALMER: But at the same time he was trying to get the government out, through the ASCS [Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service] they were still giving you fertilizer and giving you dollars to do this and do that.

BERGLAND: There are inconsistencies, inconsistencies that I couldn’t do anything about either. For example, we had this surplus crop problem, and it was growing, and we are still putting a billion dollars into agricultural research to increase productivity at the same time. There is no way you can rationalize that, to be honest about it. And yet, when I tried to change the research budget and change priorities, I got my head blown off. The land grant universities took their case to Jamie Whitten, who was chairman of the appropriations committee, and he fixed it so that I didn’t get my way. So we kept pouring money into more agricultural research and more fertilizers under ACP [Agricultural Conservation Program] because Jamie said, “It’s the way we’ve got to do it.”

Of course it’s inconsistent. We had this dairy dilemma. Partly through some good administration and partly through just pure luck, we managed during those four years to have neither a big dairy surplus nor a big shortage. Times were pretty good in dairy farming in those times. It was pretty steady. They had decent income, no big deal, but they bought cars, and they were the one group of people who could pay the bill. We knew that there was always a risk that surpluses would build, and the difference between too much and too little in the dairy business is about one percent. And this is fine-tuning.
To questions like “Should we finance more people in the dairy farming business?” The obvious answer is, “No, of course not.” But we did. Young people, veterans from the service, would come home, and they would come out here to start farming in Virginia. They would go into the government office of FHA and say, “I’m a veteran. I’m home from the wars. I want to borrow government money to set up a dairy farm.” We set them up, lots of them, hundreds of them, maybe thousands. At the same time we knew that it was a mistake. We were going to have milk coming out of our ears. So we had these collisions. I couldn’t do anything about them.

**PALMER:** Reagan has bought them out, and now there’s a milk shortage.

**BERGLAND:** Yes. Reagan bought them out.

**RILEY:** We keep ranging back and forth from policy questions and White House area questions, and I want to get back into the White House area. Pretty much, both this morning and what we’ve heard this afternoon, we get a picture of a cordial relationship between you and the President. I’m wondering if you can think back during your time as Secretary. What perhaps was the greatest conflict that you had with the President, to circumstances surrounding that? I’m interested in how he responded and how you responded. I have a hard time believing that there weren’t occasions when you were in conflict and how that might have differed from the norm.

**BERGLAND:** The only time there was any really fairly serious conflict was once at Camp David during July of 1978, 1979, when Joseph Califano was canned.

**RILEY:** Yes, 1979.

**BERGLAND:** That was a tough session. That one was really called to look at the politics of the administration. The White House politics were bad, and guys like Strauss were just really hammering on the President saying, “You’ve just got to change this. You’ve got to get better staff. You’ve got to improve the professionalism.” I knew that was happening. I never sat in the meetings, but I’d heard from some other sources that Strauss was really getting tough with Carter about this. Carter was demanding loyalty, and I expected that. He didn’t have to tell me that I had to defend his budget. I had sense enough to know that. So he and I never had any troubles with it.

We got up to Camp David and got into the business of the politics. And I remember telling the President that I thought he ought to be a bit more imperial. I thought the White House was too democratic, that I would like to see him on television with dark blue suit and starched white shirt, and that I thought he ought to be more authoritarian. He really got mad at me about that. It was not his style. He thought that was a publicity ploy. I said, “I’m not arguing for the imperial White House, not the Nixon kind, but I am arguing for more appearance of control.” He took that as a personal offense. He really lectured me pretty hard on that.

**RILEY:** Given the shake-up, how do you account for your staying on? In other words, was it pretty much the budget issue? You said you didn’t cross him up on the budget.
BERGLAND: Yes, I didn’t cross him up on the budget, and I never double-crossed the President politically. I’m not suggesting others did, because I don’t know what all was behind the shake-up. I dealt straight with the President. I dealt square with him and he with me. So we did have a good professional relationship. Some of the staff people in the White House told me about the difficulties they were having with Califano and Blumenthal, who had their own agenda and were going to do their own thing. I didn’t know what that was about, and I didn’t really care, to be honest about it. I knew that the President’s subordinates had to go along once the choice was made. He allowed me to argue before the decision was made. But after it was made, the game was over, and I think some of those others didn’t play it that way. I think they tried to run the end run, I have reason to believe.

PALMER: You brought up the question of Harry Truman a few minutes ago. Don’t you think the difference in what you have just talked about and Harry Truman’s Presidency was that he had the background and experience of years in Washington and Carter didn’t?

BERGLAND: I think that mattered. I never knew Truman. I’ve only read about his Presidency. But I admired him, and he is a highly regarded administrator who had the capacity to both be informed on substance and who had an enormous talent for appointing highly qualified people. This was where President Truman was very good—at bringing people like General George Marshall and others of that tremendous intellect and capacity into his government. Carter had some of that, too. He had some very bright people.

YOUNG: The Cabinet appointments. Did he ever talk to you about his formation of his Cabinet?

BERGLAND: He never did.

YOUNG: They show a very different profile of experience, as you well know, and background in Washington from his own immediate personal staff.

PALMER: Bert Lance, for example?

YOUNG: Bert Lance was on his own staff. I’m talking about his Cabinet appointments: Harold Brown, Bob Bergland, Ray Marshall.

BERGLAND: I have no idea how he did this. I always had reason to believe that in my case my name came to his attention through either Hubert Humphrey or Walter Mondale. I didn’t know.

CLAUDE: You’ve pictured Carter as a tough disciplinarian who ran a tight ship and, I think, as one who was able to fire people, which strikes me as rather unusual among Presidents. I have the general picture that Presidents have trouble firing people. Was he tougher in that respect than most Presidents?

BERGLAND: He’s the only one I ever dealt with, so I can only [say about him]. But from all accounts, I think the answer is yes, he was tougher. He was tough on discipline. He didn’t allow any foolishness or any games played. If he had any reason to believe that someone was dishonest, he had no qualms about sacking them. It didn’t seem to bother him any.
YOUNG: This is contrary to his reputation in the press—that he was too easy.

BERGLAND: I know. No, he wasn’t on his help. He tolerated a lot of the incompetence, but he didn’t tolerate disloyalty to him or to his Presidency. They did some dumb things over there politically. For example, after the purge, when Califano left in the summer of whatever year it was, it wasn’t Hamilton Jordan but someone on that staff who called me up one day and wanted me to do a kind of a loyalty assessment of the people on my staff.

“Are they loyal? On a scale of five, how would you grade them?” And I said, “This is nonsense.” He said, “No, no, no! We want it in writing.” I said, “You’ve got to be kidding.” My theory is that if it is ever written it’s not secret. You might just as well put it in the paper to begin with. They wanted me to go through this business of grading everybody, but I was not allowed to grade women or blacks. I was supposed to grade them on the basis of their competence and their loyalty and general ability because, they said, “We are going to get rid of anybody who doesn’t measure up.”

I went over to this meeting, and I thought the whole thing was absolute idiocy. I got back and called Jack Watson and said, “Jack, I’m not going to go through this business.” He said, “Would you do it for me as a favor?” I said, “It isn’t going to mean anything because I’ve fired all the incompetents I had around here.” I had just fired this administrator who was playing games on the budget business. Not everybody I had was first rate. Some were good and some were average, but they were all adequate.

I couldn’t pay much money for these jobs. There is a limit to what you can get with the salaries we can pay. It’s kind of like university budgets. I couldn’t match private enterprise to get this talent. Jack said, “We’re going through this awful thing, but we’ve got to do it. Do it as a favor to me.” I said, “Well, I’ll see.” So I gathered up the forms and had the names, and I was going through this. Finally I just chucked the whole thing. As a matter of fact, I took it home and put it in my fireplace and burned it. I never sent them over. I never heard from anybody since, so I don’t know what happened to it. This came from somebody in the political staff over there. I told Mondale that I wanted to know what this was all about. They are going to purge the government of people who are either incompetent or disloyal. It was really a kind of amateur way of going about it. I never knew if the President knew about that or if he had a hand in it or not. I don’t know.

YOUNG: The only thing I’ve heard him say is that it was a mistake.

DERTHICK: Is it clear what loyalty consists of, or do you sort of have to learn it from experience? There’s a kind of innocent quality to Califano’s memoirs, I recall, of, “Gee, what did I do?”

BERGLAND: He just laid claim to everything around him!

YOUNG: There’s a real amateur for you.
DERTHICK: How subtle are the criteria of loyalty? Do you learn just by trial and error, or do you think there’s a fairly clear understanding of what a President expects?

BERGLAND: No, it’s not clear. It’s not the kind of objective thing you can put down in a formula and say, “This is loyal and this is not.” It’s not that. I don’t know how you quantify it. It’s chemistry.

YOUNG: It wouldn’t be—a presumable test that is sometimes applied is that of ideological conformity to—

BERGLAND: No, no.

YOUNG: It wasn’t that in Carter’s case.

BERGLAND: No, it was not an ideological conformity. He was not expecting the Cabinet people to line up to his particular brand of politics. It was not that. To be honest with you, I can’t—

YOUNG: Did he welcome any disagreement on policy?

BERGLAND: Before the decision, but not after.

YOUNG: Did he want to have competing—?

BERGLAND: He would limit this. There was a time, for example, when I and the Labor Department had a dispute over a matter. It got to be a fairly important matter. It had to do with the cotton standards. It had to do with the dust in the cotton mills and the regulations of how to deal with this health problem and what to do about it. It wouldn’t go away, and we at Agriculture had something to do with this. And Labor had something to do with it. Our two departments just collided. I thought Labor was making a mistake.

So at a Cabinet meeting one Monday I brought the thing up. I said, “President, we are kind of stuck in dead center. Here is the issue. Here is where we are coming from, and my good friend Ray Marshall is stubborn on this matter. He won’t see my viewpoint.” Ray took it good-naturedly because I called him ahead of time and said I was going to bring up this cotton dust standards thing. It was big. There was lots of money into this thing. So Ray knew, and I wouldn’t surprise him any. He came ready, and we carried this thing on for about five minutes.

And the President said, “Well, that’s enough of this. I hear the issue. Send me a paper.” So we did. We sent him paper. He had allowed the disagreement to go on so far, and then he didn’t want to hear any more about it. He would do that frequently in the Cabinet meetings.

DERTHICK: I wonder if loyalty might be defined by one’s associations in Washington, personal ties. It’s also clear from Califano’s book that he remained close to the Kennedy entourage. Is the White House sort of watching with whom you associate?
BERGLAND: There was some of that, yes. The Kennedy thing was more than casual. There was some paranoia about this. Senator [Edward] Kennedy was charging pretty hard against President Carter. Remember he challenged him, and he was involved in the primaries in Iowa and other things. Carter wouldn’t allow anybody to play games with Senator Kennedy. That was not permitted. I understood that. I figured that went with the territory.

I got crossed with Kennedy in Iowa, hard. We had a tough meeting out there once at the Field House in Iowa City at the University of Iowa. I was carrying the Carter banner, and Kennedy was carrying his own, and we really went at it. It had to do with agricultural policy. I stood my ground, and I didn’t back down one inch. Kennedy got mad because he didn’t know much about it, and I beat him in the argument. Because I knew my territory, and he didn’t. That’s the mistake he made. He should never have challenged me on my turf, on my subject, with my experience. He didn’t know who I was, and he thought he could kind of bamboozle this thing through. Carter heard about it. He just loved it.

I think Califano probably played some games here on the Kennedy thing. If he did, I don’t know. But if he did and Carter found out about it, it’s Katie, bar the door. He wouldn’t allow that.

CLAUDE: How about unauthorized leaking? Is that a part of the loyalty business?

BERGLAND: Brzezinski was more interested in leaking. He was always snooping around if he thought we were leaking things. I had nothing to leak. I thought Brzezinski was kind of a joke, to be honest about it. I can’t say that in polite company like I’ve said it here because people misunderstand it, but he got kind of petty in that stuff. But I was careful. There really wasn’t anything to leak.

I didn’t have any big security stuff excepting when we got into the Russian grain embargo. The President told me on the first or second of January he was going to have to take economic actions, and for me to start paving the way for it. I had six people in the department who had top security clearance. That’s all. Dale Hathaway was one of them, and some others. Just a very small handful who had the proper security clearance whom I could discuss this with in confidence knowing that it wouldn’t leak, it wouldn’t get into the press, and it wouldn’t influence the markets.

Dale Hathaway and I and my five colleagues had the opportunity there for three days to make a jillion dollars for ourselves because we knew what was going to happen, and we could have taken positions in the market, and we could have cleaned up. There were people in Washington who would have paid us anything to have access to this information. Not a peep. I mean, we held that one absolutely. There was not a hint. If I had played some games in that thing I would have deserved to be fired. I would have deserved to go to the pen because it was a violation of the law. But it would have been worse than that. It would have violated Carter’s attitude about ethics.

CLAUDE: You have presented Carter’s religious orientation as stiffening his principles, giving him integrity and standing by the things he thinks are right. All of us are somewhat worried about the implications for politics and public life of modern day religious fundamentalism and its
zealotry, on occasion. Is there any negative side at all that you see to Carter’s religious orientation, his somewhat fundamentalist stance?

BERGLAND: Not that I can recall. He was a tolerant person. He worked very closely with the Israelis, for example, in the Camp David matter. He didn’t allow his Protestant values to get in the way of that, and he was tolerant of the Arab world and the Moslem world. He knew a lot about Mohammed. He knew a lot about the rise and formation of the Moslem religion. He knew a lot about Zionism. He was really a scholar in religious history. That was a plus for him because he could deal with these foreign leaders who came from a very strong religious background. He knew a lot about the religious history, and that impressed them.

I never forgot some of those meetings I sat in on. The President was discussing Zionism with the President of Israel, Menachem Begin. I was at a White House dinner one night, and Carter was talking about ancient history, and he knew it. He knew it well. It was clear he hadn’t just been briefed. He and Begin had a fascinating discussion about that, and Begin loved it. To think that the President of the United States knew that much about Israeli history. Carter knew a lot about religious history in the world, and knew what drove some of the politics. It helped him.

YOUNG: Maybe I can pose a different part of that question. On the one hand, Carter used to draw lists and say, “Who is Jimmy?” So it would be, “I’m an engineer, a Christian...” and this and that. I think part of the answer to your question or part of the discussion is really about Carter the engineer you’ve talked about, as the person given to study and looking at the pieces and seeing the mechanical parts. It’s sort of hard to think of that element with the commitment to doing what is right, or the religious element—or whatever you want to call it—in his makeup as a President or as a decision maker.

One is a kind of mechanical thing, and the other is some other element. I think what causes concern behind the question that Inis Claude asked is was doing what is right determinative in a Christian sense? Or was there another part of his mental calculus that meant that you didn’t move from the sense of what is right in a religious sense to the policy decision? I don’t know. I’m being a little bit complicated here—

BERGLAND: It’s a complicated question. I don’t think I can answer for sure because I don’t know for sure. But I think that he used the sort of general principle of what is morally right and wrong and that everything was driven by that. He wouldn’t consider doing some things as have been handled in the case of the recent revelations in the Iranian arms thing. Absolutely not! Not even for a moment because it involved a matter of principle. And he wouldn’t allow the religious thing to be used as political ploy, like some of our fundamentalist friends talk about intrusion. They want the government in the church business—prayer in school, for example. Carter just absolutely abhorred this because he regarded that as cheap tinhorn politics, which it is. He wanted nothing to do with that business. He figured the Baptist church had better be able to stand on his own merit, and if it can’t there is something wrong with the church. It didn’t need the support of the state.

YOUNG: Was there a test? Do you think—as a decision maker, or as a President, or as a politician, or whatever—that he also had applied another test besides rightness or wrongness in a
general moral sense? “Did it solve a problem or didn’t it?” He often called himself a planner or a problem solver. Was that a test of a good policy for him? Did it solve something?

**BERGLAND:** I think it would. I think if it was useful—for example, in the Camp David thing. There were some religious implications in that one, but his objective there was not to deal with reconciling the Egyptian and Israeli differences but rather had to do with trying to get the shooting stopped over there, to bring an end to the gunfire. And he almost made it. There was a right and wrong issue here, but there was also the pragmatic practical side of it, and that was to stop the shooting.

**PALMER:** From your standpoint, does that make a good President? In this study of the Presidency, I think what you are trying to determine are what factors in the long run will make a good President, and so maybe we can advise somebody a hundred years from now rather than just having people run and get elected.

**BERGLAND:** Carter was a good President. He is a much better President than he is generally credited with being. He will be treated well by historians when you put him in the broader time frames that we need to measure a Harry Truman. You remember Truman. I don’t. I was born in 1928. My Dad thought Truman was great, but people around my community thought he was a terrible President. And now I think most people say he was one of our greatest. He is treated better now than he was at the time.

**PALMER:** People felt he was a very good President when he was in this part of the country.

**BERGLAND:** But there was a while, as I recall, his standing in the polls was down to twenty-seven percent or something. I don’t know. It was just way down.

**MCCLESKEY:** I think he was in probably more trouble than Lyndon Johnson was when his term ended.

**PALMER:** When he was running against [Thomas] Dewey?

**MCCLESKEY:** No, when his term ended.

**BERGLAND:** In 1952. Had he run in 1952, he probably would have been beaten, is that what you think?

**MCCLESKEY:** He could have had the nomination, I think, but I don’t think he could possibly have won the election. I think he would have done worse than [Adlai E.] Stevenson did, frankly.

**BERGLAND:** Probably true. Now in retrospect I happen to think he is a great one. Carter is going to be treated a lot better in ten years, in twenty years, than he is today.

**MCCLESKEY:** On what basis? That is, what are the factors you think—?
BERGLAND: Integrity. He had principles. He tried things. The Camp David matter is important to him, and he really worked at it. He put everything he had into it. He put his Presidency into it, and it got blown up on that stupid Iranian hostage thing. He’ll be known for that. He’ll be known as a person of average ability and some naivety to get elected, but when he got in there he ran a clean, straight, honest government. Reagan has one hundred and twelve of his appointments either in jail or indicted or resigned under a cloud. You didn’t see that during Carter’s time.

PALMER: You’re forgetting Bert Lance, of course.

BERGLAND: No, I include that. The Lance thing was really a bad rap. That really was a bum rap. That was a consequence of banking practices that were tolerated in Georgia but not accepted in New York.

YOUNG: Whether right or wrong, I mean it wasn’t a question of misfeasance or malfeasance in office, was it? There is no such accusation?

BERGLAND: Absolutely not. Bert Lance was an absolute straight arrow. In Georgia, and that little bank in rural Georgia, they do like they do in my bank in my hometown. They allow overdrafts in checking accounts. Still do. When I overdraw my bank, the banker calls up and says, “You’re overdrawn.”

PALMER: I sit on the bank board, so I don’t necessarily agree with you on that.

YOUNG: I’m glad you stipulated that! I won’t tell you about my cousin in banking in a neighboring town to Bert Lance!

BERGLAND: That’s another matter, but not shrewd. Bert was good, too. He got caught up in some practices. He was engaged in private enterprise, and business ethics in Georgia didn’t fit the standard acceptable requirements of Washington politics.

MCCLESKEY: Thinking about this larger question of the qualities that make for a successful President, or more generally, for a successful administration. In your own case—legislative and elected experience on the one hand, moving into administration on the other hand—are there different qualities needed to succeed in those different roles, or is it basically a matter of good political judgment and good political skills? And are they transferable across lines?

BERGLAND: Experience is required. There is no substitute for experience and good training. And that needs to be experience in different disciplines to make it work well. Carter had only average ability in picking people. If I were to fault him on something, that would be it.

YOUNG: Are you referring to his own staff?

BERGLAND: Yes, his own staff, just kind of an average collection, poor to average in the beginning. It got better as time went on, but the people he brought in with him were really not properly suited. That was a big mistake, and I’m sure if he had to do it over he would have done it differently.
DERTHICK: I just wondered whether you would elaborate on where the experience should be. Do you feel it should be experience in the government of one of the larger states, or experience in some large private organization, or experience at the national level?

BERGLAND: Well, a person has to know something about subject matter. I mean, they have to be an expert in this matter. I don’t care where they earn it. It can be on a university staff, but they’ve got to know it. There is no substitute for quality. Carter was really high on that. He really wanted quality, but he couldn’t always get it. I think it starts with people. If you don’t have quality to begin with, it’s going to be a long time learning.

DERTHICK: Which job did you find harder—to go back to Clifton’s question—if you had to choose between being a member of Congress and being a member of the President’s Cabinet or department head, which would you pick and why?

BERGLAND: Boy, that’s hard to say. The power is in Congress. They have the last word. They can override a President’s vetoes. They have the power of the purse. However, to acquire much authority in Congress it does take ten years—or at least it takes some time. A person has to become recognized as an authority on something. That takes time. It takes time to learn the subject matter. In a given Congress there are more than 4,000 bills that are reported to the floor, and there are thousands of amendments that are offered. There isn’t anybody in the Congress who knows much about all of it. The ones in Congress who have authority are those who know a lot about a little of it.

And so when it came to things like the national defense budget and defense authorization bills and new hardware and money matters, I knew nothing about it. But there are persons on that committee whose judgment was sound, and I just followed their advice blindly. I didn’t know anything about this, and I didn’t have time to learn.

They did the same with me on matters relating to things in which the committees on which I served had jurisdiction. A lot of people called me and said, “We don’t want to hear all the details, just how we’re going to vote for this amendment tomorrow.” I said, “Vote yes.” They said, “Thank you very much,” and hung up. End of conversation. That’s how Congress runs to this day, and I think government runs that way, largely. A phony can get by for a while. You can fool reporters, and you can fool the public and fool your colleagues, and for a little while get by. But by and by this catches up.

The same with the executive agencies. There is no substitute for experience. He’s got to know what’s at stake. So the happy part in Congress was that there really was control over trying to control the direction of policy. The happy part of the administration was that we had control over the ideas. Congress can’t plan. Congress is structurally incapable of doing any planning at all. Congress cannot change courses, really. They can veto and say, “Well, we’re not going to appropriate money for this idea,” so they don’t, and that’s the end of it.

But they really can’t tell the President—or Congress couldn’t tell me how to run the Department of Agriculture. They tried. I used that little egg thing, for example. I had other instances like this.
They couldn’t tell me how I was going to run things, but they could deny me money for what I wanted to do. I wanted to change research, for example. I wanted to put all the federal money in research into basic research and development, new discovery—into the high-risk, high-price, long-range, long-shot exotic research and genetic engineering and some of these new sciences.

The universities didn’t want that. They wanted me to provide them money for the ongoing kind of practical applied research. There was a big fight about this, and neither of us won. We compromised on that. They took their case to Congress, and they beat me on what I wanted to do. I was able to get enough out of it so that I got some direction, some change in it. Probably on balance the Cabinet job was more satisfying because it came to an end. Congress never ends. A lot of my friends up there would like to figure out a way of quitting gracefully. You can’t quit.

PALMER: They ought to have an automatic retirement age like they do in corporate businesses.

BERGLAND: It wouldn’t be a bad idea.

MCCLESKEY: Elaborate on that. Why?

BERGLAND: They can’t quit?

MCCLESKEY: Yes, why do they want to?

BERGLAND: They have so much money invested their constituency won’t let them quit. I just got beat to death when I agreed to resign my seat in Congress and go into the Cabinet of Jimmy Carter. I got just cross-hauled something fierce by people in my district who said, “You are a traitor. We’ve invested ten years of our life in your political campaign. We’ve given you money and what do we get for it? You quit.”

I have a friend in Minnesota who was chairman of the Committee on Public Works—name was John Blatnik. He had been there for a long time and was chairman of a powerful committee. He was a good chairman. He had a heart attack and just about died. Doctors told him, “John, you either get out of Congress or you won’t live two years.” So he quit. They were just furious. People were mad at him, not just up in Minnesota, but a lot of the constituent groups said, “We made you chairman of this committee, and what do you do? You quit.”

The support of these outside groups—these PACs [Political Action Committees] and these economic groups get a special interest in somebody, and they won’t let them off the hook. That’s the unhappy and unpleasant part. I had to deal with that in the Department. That was one of the unhappy parts I had. I had people who were demanding that we continue with policies to feed land inflation. Oil prices were climbing. Interest rates were going up. Grain prices were strong. Farm profits were capitalized in land values. So I’ll bet you around here in this area of Virginia, land values went from wherever they were to something three times higher in less than five years.

PALMER: They still are up there, here.
BERGLAND: And they are still up here. They tripled nationally. They tripled in a period of ten years because people bought land for a lot of different reasons. To make a long story short, I went to Kansas one time, and land was $2,200 an acre or something out there. And they wanted more. The way to get more was to put higher price supports. Wheat was $5, and they wanted to go to $7. I said, “Why?” They said, “Because land is going up.” “How come land is going up?” “Well, wheat prices are strong.” I said, “I’m not going to do this.” I knew what I was getting into. I was sticking my head in a noose. “I’m not going to do this. I’m not going to feed land inflation. I want for everybody to understand that this administration is not going to feed land inflation. If you got out here and bid $2,200 an acre on a piece of land and you know it’s more than it’s worth, you are on your own.”

There was blue smoke. If you remember the tractorcades, people came to Washington on tractors. It was me they were after. The issue was land inflation, because I refused to feed it. They bought all this land, and they had all these high-priced loans, and they wanted me to guarantee that they would have a return, they could pay them off. I said, “Not with me you are not going to do it. Because where is this going to end? I could put $7 wheat, and Kansas land goes to $3,000, and then you’ll want $9.” They said, “Well, that’s true.” I said, “Where’s it going to end? What’s the purpose here?” “We just want more. Just want more.”

Cowboys came in from Colorado all puffed up about free enterprise and free markets and didn’t want government controls. They do this, you know, they come in and have this big meeting, and they wear their hats, and they have all these pious platitudes about they can stand on their own two feet. Then they send a delegation over to see me about controlling imports. And I said, “Wait a minute. I just read your big fancy American Legion speech downtown about how you’re standing on your own two feet and you don’t need support. What’s this all about?”

They said, “Well, it’s different.” I said, “No, it’s not different.” They said, “Yes, it’s different.” I said, “It’s not different. You are talking about a subsidy. You want to be protected from imports. You can’t have it both ways.” They got me hauled up before a hearing of the Senate committee chaired by a Senator from Utah that just beat the life out of me on this thing because I wouldn’t cave into them on the import issue. I didn’t because I thought it was hypocrisy. Carter heard about it and he liked it. He said, “Hang in there.”

YOUNG: Did you ever get a call on the other side from somebody in the White House—perhaps even Carter, but I doubt it—asking you to withdraw or compromise a position because of some political problem of greater priority that they were experiencing?

BERGLAND: Well, they questioned it. For example, when one of the tractorcades came to town with 3,000 tractors and they tore up the city, busting into the Department of Agriculture. One day my life was threatened. I would get phone calls threatening my life. One day they came into the Department, tore down the doors, and police came in. I was in a board meeting of the Commodity Credit Corporation. The cops came in and said, “There are four people in the building with revolvers, loaded weapons. We’ve got to get you out of here.” They took me out a door and down the basement and through a window and went into a squad car and into the White House compound. I mean, it’s tough business.
I was down in Texas at a meeting, and this bunch got organized outside. And as I was leaving the meeting hall they stormed me. They pelted me with eggs and tomatoes. This is the same American Agricultural Movement that had this inflation thing, except in Texas it was led by the advanced guard of the John Connally for President campaign. That’s who they were, and I knew that. They were trying to destroy Carter’s credibility, so they thought they would get it by going after me.

[Tape 2]

That’s the tension that was applied here. When this thing was all happening, the President called me over to the White House one day. It was on the news. It was every night and it was every day, and they had the traffic tied up. They were all over the Hill. They were petitioning and screaming and calling for my resignation and the President’s impeachment. It was tough going.

He called me up and said, “Are you okay?” And he called me over to the White House. The word was he wanted to talk to me about these demonstrations. I thought, I’m in trouble. I got in there and he said, “Are you okay?” I said, “Yes.” I didn’t really know what he meant. He said, “This is pretty wild out there. Can you stand this heat okay?” I said, “Yes, I’m okay.” I was awfully tired, but I was safe. My wife and family lived in a home where we are not registered in the phone book, and nobody could find the place. So I felt secure enough. He said, “Well, we’ll do whatever we need to do to assure your personal security. What about the politics of this thing?” I said, “It will go away.” He said, “You’re sure?” I said, “Yes, sir, it will go away. It’s just got to wear itself out because people have got to go through this thing.” He said, “How do you know?” I said, “Because I’ve organized a few of these myself.”

I had experience. I organized a couple myself in the fifties against the policies of President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower during the administration of Ezra Taft Benson, so I knew that those things had a limited life. He didn’t ask me to back down, but the White House told me—Bob Strauss and Mondale and Jack Watson and Eizenstat would call me frequently. They said, “Keep the pressure on Agriculture. For God’s sake, don’t let this thing turn on the White House.” I said, “I agree.” And they never did. They never came after Carter. They came after me. If they had any sense they would have gone after Carter, but they didn’t know how to do it. They weren’t good enough at it.

The reporters were telling me, “Carter is going to dump you. You’ve attracted all this bad publicity and all this attention. It’s only a matter of time.” They were writing stories about my demise, that I was going to go, that I was a political liability for him and had cost him a lot. Carter never, ever questioned it, never even hinted at it, that I was a political drag. Whether I was or not, I don’t know. But, as a matter of principle, he was not going to—The only thing he inquired about was my state of health.

His advisors were helping me to keep this out of the White House. I did. I kept it out of the White House but by being very visible. I was a very active lightning rod for them because I went up to the Hill, and there was a House hearing one day on an agricultural matter. This bunch was in town, and our security people said, “We’ll take care of your life.” They worked out a deal with the SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics] team at the district police department. They had their officers without uniforms and put metal detectors in the doors, and whenever anybody set off the
machinery they put a cop on their tail. They were not uniformed. They were dressed like everybody else, so the population didn’t know they were policemen, but they were there. There were a half a dozen people with loaded weapons, and instead of disarming them and getting into a big shootout, they just put a cop right by them, and if there had been a move, they would have broken their arm.

We had to move the hearing room to the House Ways and Means Committee where they could hold a thousand people. They packed that place. A couple of demagogues on the committee—a couple of Democrats and a couple of Republicans—got after me for failing to cave in to this group of loyal citizens who were demanding their due rights and justice. I argued with them. I mean, it was a shootout. I hung tough and didn’t yield, didn’t sympathize with them. I didn’t show any sympathy or any remorse, and I wasn’t going to change my mind. I stood my ground with this committee, and it was a shouting match. The audience was on the side of those committee people who were pounding on me.

I stood my ground, so I became the lightning rod, and that’s how we kept it out of the White House. The President backed me up. After a while, I thought I was going to test him, too, to find out if he could stand this.

YOUNG: My thought on this is that from the White House standpoint they were quite well aware of the Secretaries who took the heat, and that this is one of the implicit grading systems I think some of them had.

BERGLAND: That’s probably true, yes. This one I went through was so visible, everybody knew about it. There were a lot of pressures that were sub rosa that I never saw in other agencies, so I have no way of judging that. But the President never flinched on it.

YOUNG: Were you close to Mondale?

BERGLAND: Yes.

YOUNG: Did you maintain some relationship with him or have any working relationship?

BERGLAND: All the time.

YOUNG: Could you tell us a little bit about that, and also about what role he and some of his staff people might have been playing in the Carter White House?

BERGLAND: Mondale and I are the same age, and he is from the city of Minneapolis, and I was from the country. And so our lives joined in the Democratic Party as young people. He was a lawyer, and I was a farmer. We came through different tracks but wound up in the same place. He and I were active in the state Democratic politics. He went in and became Attorney General and later United States Senator, so we have been together for years. I’m sure he had a hand in my selection as Cabinet officer, as a Secretary, although I have no evidence. I just know that he had a hand in this thing.
He was terribly unhappy with the White House staff. They didn’t get along. He didn’t get along with Brzezinski, and I thought he had good reasons. Mondale had good political sense mostly. I had wondered about it when he got to be a candidate for the Presidency, but in the doings in the White House, Mondale and Strauss were the two really heavy Democratic partisan political hitters. I was kind of a member of that team. But none of us thought about using it to undermine Jimmy Carter. That was never, ever thought about. Our interest was in protecting him from these Democratic hyenas on the Hill.

YOUNG: This morning you gave us some observations about some changes that occurred in Congress that happened while you were there, democratizing Congress. You also mentioned sort of the decline of the party as the glue—or the shield at least—and the rise of the PACs. I guess in some ways the Congress that the Carter administration faced experienced some of its difficulty perhaps in those changes in Congress. I’m trying to connect those changes that happened mainly in the Nixon/Ford years, partly in reaction to abuses of power in the White House, partly for other reasons, how they might be weighed in terms of assessing the problems and the performance in the Carter administration and Congress, in its congressional relations. I think everybody who studies it recognizes that the liaison staff did not get off on the right foot, and that there were some liabilities there. Allowing for that, how do you think about the changes in Congress and the difficulties in dealing with Congress in terms of getting something through that the Carter administration faced?

BERGLAND: The move to strip chairmen of their authority and the move to elect chairpersons, and the move to democratize committee selection process and generally reduce the power of the speakership took place in 1975. In 1976 it was finished. The results were chaotic. Earlier in the seventies, the President (then Nixon) and Congress had agreed that the way to curb the price inflation problems is price controls. And so we had controls on everything.

Carter said he wanted to decontrol. His political and philosophical agenda was such that price controls didn’t work—and they didn’t generally. So he wanted decontrol. Then all prices started climbing. Carter was forced to deal with this Congress that was just going through this change of life and trying to get them to agree to changing—say eliminating—price controls. There was absolute, utter confusion.

If it had been ten years earlier, he could have gone to the Speaker and the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and the majority leader and the old Titans, and they could have worked out a political deal, and they could have made it happen. Speaker [Tip] O’Neill doesn’t have that kind of control. Wilbur Mills was gone. The Titans that had run the place either had been stripped of their authority or had left Congress.

So the President was, to be fair about it, dealing with a Congress that itself was not sure of how to deliver. Four hundred and thirty-five members of the House, each with an opinion on almost everything? And deal with a committee with that number of persons, each one of whom has five minutes right on every amendment. Start multiplying this thing. You can see why the thing goes on and on and on ad nauseam. So Carter was trying to bring in decontrolling the airlines and deregulating oil and gas prices at a time when the Congress itself was really unable to perform efficiently. So part of the reason that his congressional relations were bad was that the
management of the Congress was really out of control. And that was due to structural change. So his problem there was partly purely coincidental, pure coincidence.

YOUNG: Do you think expertise and experience could have altogether overcome it?

BERGLAND: Some. It would mean the agenda would have to be slowed down. The problem he had in the first two years, he had pushed too much up there, too many initiatives for a Congress that was unable to digest this much. He slowed it down. He should have put it on the second term agenda.

YOUNG: Could you give us a picture of an important issue, an important policy that had to be sold in your field, agriculture, to Congress, whether it took the form of an appropriation request or budget or some other policy? And tell us how you worked through that. We are interested in how much you use your own congressional staff, whether the White House staff—was it involved at all?—whether they ever called on you to help with some of their things. How did the congressional relations in the administration work on a departmental issue of some importance?

BERGLAND: Let me take the issue of the food stamp program and the purchase requirement. The food stamp program started in the fifties, I think, and it expanded in the sixties. It provided that a prospective applicant must apply at the local welfare agency, and they are graded according to their need. They file a financial statement, and they declare their income. If they meet certain criteria, they get it free. If their income was at certain levels, they had to pay ten percent, twenty percent—they divided that, scaled according to the income of the family. So the person who was destitute and had no income at all would get food stamps free of charge.

Keep in mind that the food stamp constituency of about nineteen million persons consisted of sixteen million of these kids, and about a million were persons who were mature adults but incapable of holding a job. Mentally retarded. Not sick enough to be in a state hospital, but not well enough to find a job and compete. They just couldn’t compete in this tough environment. All but a handful of these people were really in very bad shape, physically or mentally. Or just babies.

We had a problem in that there was a lot of cash that was transacted and would change hands. This person would get certified as being eligible for food stamps, but they have to put up twenty-five percent. So if they are eligible for $100 in food stamps, they had to come up with $25. That’s where the fraud came into it. Vendors would set up a vending office. You would get your certificate of eligibility, bring it into a vendor’s office, they would collect the money, and they would issue the food stamp book itself and abscond. They’d steal it.

We lost millions and millions of dollars. We lost five or six hundred million dollars a year. These people would steal the money. It wasn’t the food stamp recipients. It was the people merchandising this thing. So we knew the way to eliminate food stamp fraud was to get rid of the purchase requirement. I went up and talked to some of the leaders in the Congress. What we wanted to do was get rid of the purchase requirement so that instead of this person paying $25 for this book of coupons and having all the trouble we had with handling that money that got
stolen, we just say, “We will reduce your food stamp benefits. Instead of paying us $25 and getting a $100 book, you don’t pay us anything, and we’ll give you $75.

So we eliminated the cash. I went up to chairman Foley and some of the people on the House side, and they’ve known about this purchase requirement problem for a long time. They said, “Yes, this makes sense. This is the smart thing to do.” I went over to see Chairman Talmadge and the more conservative Senators, and they just had a fit. They said, “What? You are going to give these things away free? Free food stamps? It’s a mistake. The President ought to have his head examined.” I said, “The President doesn’t know about this.”

So I beat it right back to the White House. I got a hold of Jack Watson, and I told Jack what we wanted to do. I said, “We’ve compared the analyses in this thing. I’ve just been up testing the political water, and it’s big trouble. I don’t know if we can go ahead with this or not.” He asked, “What are the savings?” I said, “Well, the savings to the government is about five hundred million dollars a year that we are now losing through fraud and can’t recover. It’s big bucks, and that’s the plus side. The down side is that we are characterized as giving away food stamps.” He said, “Well, this is an important thing.” So he had me prepare a paper as was customary, and I sent it in. He sent it in to the President. Not for any lengthy debate necessarily, but we were looking at this to kind of let him know.

YOUNG: Jack, at this time—it was before he took Ham’s place.

BERGLAND: Yes, he was secretary to the Cabinet, Cabinet secretary. Because on this one I had to get some feeling from the President. The budget implication was generally positive, although the experts said if you eliminate the purchase requirement you’re going to have a lot more people in the program. There are just a lot of people who will take part in this thing if they don’t—that they got caught up in is that this poor soul has to make a decision either to pay out $25 for food stamps or buy a pair of shoes. So they do without. They buy the shoes instead and go begging.

We thought there would be an increase in the number of participants but weren’t sure. So Jack called back. He said, “The President says go ahead and try this. Take a look at it. Produce the first cut on cost and benefit.” So we did. We got our experts together, went to the churches and to the so-called welfare community, and told them what we were going to do. And they thought it was a wonderful thing. They all endorsed it immediately. We went over to Joe Califano’s department, Health and Human Services, and told them what we were planning on and wanted to get their assessment as to the impact on welfare costs and other elements that they had in their domain. It came back plus. Ours was plus. Ours was that it was in the public interest, it was the way to correct fraud and abuse, it would help more people, and it was justified on merit. But we had this enormous political problem. “You are giving away free foods stamps to these ne’er-do-wells.” And it included Chairman Talmadge from Georgia.

We had a meeting in the White House with the OMB [Office of Management and Budget] people who didn’t have any problem with what we were doing. There was really no controversy in the Carter administration on this one. It was a political problem. So I met with the President, and he looked over the evidence after he had read all the papers. He said, “Go ahead, we’ll take the heat.” I said, “I’ve got to have help from outside organizations. I can’t get the Senate
committee turned around just on my own. I’ve got to have help from other groups.” So the White House called and got support from churches and from other organizations that had a stake and an interest in this thing.

YOUNG: Was Wexler on board at that time?

BERGLAND: Wexler was on board. She was enormous help. The Vice President’s people helped. Wexler got Joe Califano. They helped. Ray Marshall got some help from some of the laboring groups, and we put on a full court press, and we turned the Senate around on this one. They passed a law and its operating procedure, and it has worked wonderfully well. We eliminated almost all the waste and all the fraud.

YOUNG: So this was a coordinated effort put together with some White House political help in organizing help.

BERGLAND: Yes.

YOUNG: Were East Room or Roosevelt Room presentations made by you or by the President on these to outside groups?

BERGLAND: No. The President never brought in these people and put on a public display, a public show, that I can recall. Not on this one. This was all done kind of quiet-like. He really wasn’t big on this public display business. It was not his thing. Here was what I regard as a wonderful improvement in a food program for which he could have gotten tons of credit if he had wanted to make publicity out of it, and he wouldn’t do it. He just didn’t care. It didn’t matter to him.

YOUNG: Is there anything different about what you’ve described and the way it was gone about? Would it have been different if it had been done ten years before with the old-style Congress, with the Titans around?

BERGLAND: We probably couldn’t have gotten it done. I think ten years before had we tried it, it would have failed.

YOUNG: So here is a case where effort made possible the difference.

BERGLAND: In the old days, you couldn’t buck a committee chairman. But after the reforms you could. I could afford to take on Jamie Whitten, and I did a couple of times. I challenged him on some appropriations matters. He was trying to appropriate money for things we didn’t want and prevent us from doing things we did want, and I challenged him. I usually lost, but at least I had a chance to challenge him. And that’s something you could never have done in the old days.

YOUNG: Often the changes in Congress are spoken of only as something that made life more difficult for the White House, for a President trying to get something to Congress. It’s not usually portrayed as something that opens some opportunities as well. Maybe that’s one reason why
Anne Wexler’s operation, which was something sort of new, helped overcome some of the weaknesses of the congressional liaison staff, do you think?

BERGLAND: Oh, absolutely.

YOUNG: It also was an arm to help build some outside support.

BERGLAND: It built outside support. When Anne Wexler and her associates came into being, the politics of the White House started improving a lot. She was a very powerful, persuasive asset to the President.

YOUNG: The people in the White House, when you ask them how and why they did this—I think it was in the second year—say, well, this is where the Panama Canal Treaty effort taught them. It was a great learning experience about how you had to go out to the country and organize targeted groups to support it. They learned that lesson then, and then they tried to build it into the various operations instead of changing many of the personnel in the White House liaison staff.

BERGLAND: And they did a good job on that Panama Canal Treaty.

YOUNG: Were you ever called upon to help them out on anything through your congressional contacts and experience?

BERGLAND: Yes I was. During the time when the thing was coming up to a vote, we did. We turned all of our Capitol Hill liaison people loose, corralling votes where we could. We didn’t have a whole lot of leverage, but we worked at it.

YOUNG: On the Panama Canal issue?

BERGLAND: On the Panama Canal issue.

YOUNG: Was that the only instance?

BERGLAND: No. There were other times this happened, especially later in the Carter term. The Panama Canal experience was the first really high-powered lobbying job we got into, directed by the White House staff. And it worked. From that day on, the President’s political relations with Capitol Hill improved. When he could win a big one. They respected that.

PALMER: In your relationship with the State Department, you referred to the grain embargo. It concerns the farmer, as you know—and I’ve got my farming hat on right now—that the State Department, “uses agriculture for their own use.” I gather from your previous conversation you didn’t feel that. Would you say that that was true only in the Carter administration?

BERGLAND: No. We’ve had economic sanctions as a part of U.S. foreign policy since the day we were founded. It has never been different. We have trade embargoes against Cuba and North Korea, and China—I think there are seven countries in the world in which we have a total ban. I
can’t imagine the President just arbitrarily removing these. The truth of the matter is they don’t count. They don’t matter.

The Department just finished a very interesting study on embargoes, and the answer is they are interesting but not important. They change trading patterns, but they don’t change the basic fundamentals of supply and demand. The embargo had absolutely no effect at all on the Russians or on American agriculture. Not any. The President made a thing out of it, but he didn’t know what he was talking about. This study confirms that.

CLAUDE: Is that an Agriculture Department study?

BERGLAND: Yes. What if the Russians had invaded Poland instead of Afghanistan? And they came close to it once. If they had invaded Poland, I can’t imagine that the American public would have said, “Well, we’re going to continue to ship the Russians grain and computers and airplanes.” Now, Afghanistan is a different thing because the Afghan constituency in the United States is pretty small. The Polish community is big. If the Russian armies had moved in on Poland, I guarantee there would have been sanctions and probably a lot more.

That’s not a State Department problem. That’s an American foreign policy process. It’s just like we’ve got a ban against [Muammar] Gaddafi. We stopped shipping a lot of things to Libya. I’ve got to believe that if the President were to say, “Colonel Gaddafi has improved himself now. He’s no longer the bandit we thought he was so we are going to resume sales of wheat,” I bet you the American public would say, “Has this man taken leave of his senses?” We’ve got a ban against shipping grain to Nicaragua. We don’t ship wheat to Nicaragua anymore. It stopped. President Reagan stopped that with not much fanfare, but it has been done, and I’ve got to believe it will always be done.

CLAUDE: You take the real motivation behind economic sanctions to be essentially symbolic and political rather than meaningful.

BERGLAND: Symbolic and political. They have no meaning whatsoever.

CLAUDE: You don’t think they are even expected seriously to do damage to the people we are boycotting?

BERGLAND: No. The fact is they don’t work. Cuban sugar comes to the United States even though we’ve got a ban on it. And you can’t stop it. The only way you are going to make an embargo work is mine the harbors. Send out the Navy. Stop the ships. Then you can make it work. But you can’t do it by simply because of the displacement process. Sugar is fungible, corn and grain are fungible, oil is fungible. They beat you by trans-shipments.

FOWLER: When you formulated the grain embargo decision upstairs [earlier today], you seemed to say the United States could either opt to send military forces into the area, or it could opt to do nothing but make public pronouncements. Or it could opt for a grain embargo, economic sanctions. In your comments now, would it be fair to say that the grain embargo was
really a glorified public pronouncement, that there weren’t so much three different choices as two different choices?

BERGLAND: I think that’s safe. The President had three no-win political choices. There was no way he was going to win this one politically. The risk he took—I was going to say he knew it wouldn’t work. I’m not sure that he did know that, because there was a big fight between me and Brzezinski about the impact of this embargo. We argued that the embargo won’t have any effect on the Russians. It won’t have any effect on the American economy because of the displacement factors. The Russians will get grain from the Argentines, and we’ll get all the Argentine customers. And that’s exactly what happened.

Brzezinski was arguing, “No. It won’t work. We’ll stop them. They can’t get this grain. They can’t buy it in quantities, and there will be a twenty percent reduction in the Russian food supply.” I said, “This is bunk. Where did you get those numbers?” He said, “Well, that’s the way it’s going to be. You guys in agriculture have a vested interest. You’re against this embargo because you’re trying to protect your grain price.”

We had a terrible fight down there, and I lost. The President—I don’t know that he believed Brzezinski, but he really didn’t have any other choice in the matter, except one choice is do nothing. Even Cy Vance argued the do-nothing course was a mistake. Because if we do nothing and the Russians can move into Afghanistan and do whatever it is they are going to do, and American response is zip, the Russians say, “Ah-hah, we’ve figured these Americans out,” and they’ll just keep testing. They’ll test and test and test until they do get a response from the United States.

And so the President knew—or least there were a lot of people like me who advised him, said, “We can’t prevent grain from getting to the Soviet Union unless you are prepared to send in the American Navy and blockade the Black Sea. You can do that.” Well, no, we weren’t ready for that. “Then you can’t stop trans-shipments.” He knew that preventing leakage was very difficult, but he knew that he had to tell the Russians something. The sanctions were the only thing he could tell them. It’s like we see it these days with Reagan and the arms thing with Iran. He had to lay down these sanctions. The Iranian arms shipment thing was started with Carter, and Reagan kept it up. But he’s imposed sanctions, and in the case of Libya, I think he had to. Not that it’s effective, but it becomes a matter of political symbolism again.

FOWLER: As an exception to your general rule about economic sanctions, how about the sanctions against Iran dealing with spare parts? That might be an area in which the Iranians couldn’t turn as easily to other countries in order to—

BERGLAND: I think that’s true. The navigation systems for those F-16’s are built in the United States, and they can’t get them anywhere else. If they are going to fix that radar, they’ve got to come here. There’s only one place. In that setting, yes, you bet they work.

CLAUDE: Theoretically, the others would work if you could get all countries to collaborate on putting on the same sanctions. That, of course, is a difficult thing to accomplish.
BERGLAND: Well, impossible. We tried that on the grain embargo, for example. When the President called me and said, “I’m going to do this on a Thursday”—going to announce it next Friday afternoon, after markets close—my job was to get in touch with my colleagues in certain countries of the world. Cy Vance, other countries. We had the list, and one of mine was Canada.

I called my friend in Canada, my counterpart up there, and I told him what we were doing. I said, “I’ve been asked by my President to give you this word and ask you if your government will not take up the slack.” He said, “Well, I can’t tell you, but I’ll let you know.” So he did. He called back the next day and said, “Yes, we’ll observe this thing.” The only country in which we got no response, I mean zip, was Argentina. They’re run by a military government, and it was kind of interesting because they had all this tough, hard-boiled pomp about anti-communism, and they were the ones who withheld. And they were the ones who sold because the Russians knew they could deal with those dictators, those generals, by offering them more money. They bought them out. They offered them a premium of about $12/ton over the market. They bought them out. So much for anti-communism.

YOUNG: Didn’t someone send Andy Goodpaster down there to try to talk them out of that?

BERGLAND: Yes, General Goodpaster was sent down there. We tried through our sources, and they wouldn’t even return the phone calls. General Goodpaster went and got nowhere. I had forgotten that. So the violator was Argentina and a few other small scattered states. The Europeans were good at it. They stayed hitched. But eventually these things always fail. I mean, they fail in commodities. You’re right on manufacturing military parts. That’ll work.

FOWLER: An alternative type of economic sanction would be freezing assets, which, of course, was used in the Iranian hostage crisis. That might be another type of economic sanction that in certain cases could be used when there were significant amounts in U.S. banks or U.S. bank branches abroad. Do you think that in the Iranian case that contributed to the release of the hostages?

BERGLAND: You mean in this current round?

FOWLER: No, in the original.

BERGLAND: The original? I don’t know. I know so little about that. I had no information. I’ll tell you about one little thing that happened.

RILEY: The impression we get from you is that the President was pretty much during that final year almost totally absorbed by this. We’ve gotten, as I understand it, conflicting reports from staff members about exactly how absorbed the President was. I just want to make sure that I understand you on that. Your perception is that that did have him preoccupied.

BERGLAND: Pretty much. My impression is that he was pretty much a prisoner of the process. My evidence is— For example, I wanted him out into the country and taking part in political campaigns. This Iowa Democratic precinct caucus fight with Ted Kennedy was no Sunday school picnic, and I want him out there. And he wouldn’t come. It was all hostage. That was the
reason the White House political people told me, “No, the man can’t come because he’s got this incredible problem.” Maybe they weren’t telling me the truth, but that’s what I was told.

YOUNG: No, my impression is that that is clearly the way it started out. What was not anticipated was how long it would go on.

BERGLAND: Yes.

YOUNG: What might have been a wise decision at the beginning turned into a very difficult thing for them when the hostages were not released. It was not brought to any conclusion because he had to make appearances in the campaign—and eventually did very late—and then appeared to be violating his own rule. So it was a bad show from beginning to end. This brings up another question. Do you think one of the problems that Carter had was that he wouldn’t accept political advice? Rephrasing the question, on the question of the political advice to the President or the President’s search for or his receptivity to political advice, you mentioned one incident in which he had a very stern response to some advice about politics. This is one of the puzzles of those who study this White House to figure out where the political advice did fit in.

Many people have told us that he did not welcome recommendations based on political considerations. He wanted the facts and the evidence and wanted to weigh it, and at some point a political calculus might be made. Mrs. Carter is always included among those who were political advisors of his. [Charles] Kirbo was often included. Bert Lance until he left, and perhaps a few others. What is your impression here about how the President, or how this White House, did at some point take into account political advice and where it got it from if it didn’t look to its Cabinet people or it didn’t look to its substantive people for this? How did it get it?

I’m asking the question in part because one of the criticisms that began to crop up with great frequency in the second campaign about the Carter White House was suddenly that it moved from not being political enough into being all politics. And there were stories about how the President was using patronage to buy votes, and the Rose Garden strategy was essentially a campaign strategy and so on. So there was much criticism as the campaign heated up because it was playing politics to the hilt.

This is a two-part question, one about his political advice and how he treated political advice and from whom he got it for whatever you know about it. The second was how he used it.

BERGLAND: I think he got his political advice mainly from Bob Strauss and Walter Mondale and Anne Wexler when she became a permanent fixture. Strauss is probably the single most important political advisor he had. Strauss maintained absolutely superb contacts on Capitol Hill and other places around the country. He was a good political strategist. As time went on and the President could see that he simply had to change his political ways or he would go down the drain without much chance, Strauss became more important to him and was involved in discussions I never took part in. But I know he was there because I heard it from others, and he weighed in pretty hard.
Strauss is a good, tough, smart, political creature. He probably came too late. To be honest with you, I can’t recall any actions the President took in his last few weeks or months of office that I would regard as unusually partisan electioneering. I don’t remember anything like that. He did come out on the campaign trail, but it was too late. Again, I think if the hostage thing hadn’t preoccupied him, and secondly, if he had been more effective on television as a debater, he would have won the election. He was not a good TV personality. He was incredibly weak at that. There are ways that can be overcome.

YOUNG: He was said to be very good in smaller groups and one-on-one as a persuader.

BERGLAND: Because he was so well informed. He knew the material. Anybody who was going to talk with him about some technical subject, he was loaded. He had that stuff because he read it and he remembered it. When it came to enunciating broad goals and dreams and hopes and aspirations on television, he was not good. And this is where Reagan was so tremendous.

PALMER: Don’t you think any incumbent has a real advantage in a debate because they have so much more knowledge, whoever the President is when he runs for the second term or any Congressman or any Senator?

BERGLAND: He does. He has an advantage. Some would argue that’s too much of an advantage, that he knows too much. He would be better off if he didn’t know quite as much. He could be a little bit looser, a bit more relaxed.

PALMER: That would depend on the person, though, wouldn’t it?

BERGLAND: Yes, it would depend on the person. Like, for example, in the President’s press conference the other night he made a number of misstatements. Right away they have to patch things up. They issue supplements and issue new statements and corrections. “The President meant this or said that.” It was a disaster. The politics of that thing on the Hill is just a disaster. People say, “My God, this old man doesn’t know what he’s doing.” So knowing it in this case was a handicap because they have high expectations. They thought the President should know more about it. If he wasn’t the President, he could get by with it.

YOUNG: That was generally—though it wasn’t a mass audience address—that was generally regarded as one of Carter’s strong points on television. In the press conferences he was given generally high grades.

BERGLAND: High grades in press conferences, yes.

YOUNG: In press conferences, not in public speeches.

BERGLAND: Oh, absolutely, the man was unbelievable. He would go to a press conference, and he knew more about the subject matter than any reporter. Absolutely, he was at his best because he knew the material. He was well prepared. We would prepare things on press conferences for him, which is standard White House procedure, and there’s nothing unusual about that.
But if he was going to hold a press conference, we would gather together my top political people, and we would try to figure out what’s the burning issue in agriculture. It may be a food issue or credit question or foreign policy matter with the food implication. We pulled all this stuff together, and we would send over everything we could think of. And then we would highlight the one or two or three that just might come up. He read all that stuff. You bet he was prepared—terrible press conferences.

Where he was weak was in this general presentation on television. Now, like the talk about this “malaise speech.” Well, he never used the word “malaise,” but it left the impression that the country was going to the dogs. The public doesn’t like this. I mean, the public doesn’t like it. They would rather be lied to, much rather be lied to than hear the bad news. He was warned against that speech. There were a lot of people who knew about that thing and told him, “Don’t do it.” He went ahead anyhow.

**YOUNG:** Mondale was very much against it.

**BERGLAND:** Very much against, and Strauss very much against. Mondale called me, and he said, “Have you heard?” I said, “Heard what?” He said, “This speech the boss is going to give tonight.” “No, I haven’t heard,” because I didn’t know about it. He said, “Let me tell.” I said, “My God,” because I could instinctively tell that politically it was going to be a mistake. But he had made up his mind he was going to do it, and that was it. It didn’t matter what the politics were. The country needed to know that things were going to the dogs.

**YOUNG:** But his approval rating went way up right after the speech. Then when the “malaise” message was fully understood it plummeted, and the Cabinet firings came down.

**BERGLAND:** That’s right. He didn’t have a strong voice. He didn’t have a commanding presence about him. He was not a tall person. He was not physically an overpowering person like Lyndon Johnson or Ronald Reagan, his incredibly evil voice control. Carter lacked all that. He absolutely refused to do anything about it. He could have. There are very good organizations in Washington, D.C., that would give him lessons on elocution, even lessons on how to read a text. He couldn’t read. He’d slide through periods and stop where there were commas. Do you remember that?

**CLAUDE:** He could smile at the bad news he gave. I remember that as one of his attributes. He would say something terrible and give a quick smile about it.

**YOUNG:** He said he would try to control that later on. He recognized his faults.

**BERGLAND:** He was a bad reader. Those things he could have been trained in.

**PALMER:** William Faulkner, from the same part of the country, was a very bad writer in my opinion because he never put a period or a comma, or anything! [laughter]
YOUNG: I’ve never heard Carter put in that list! Russell is from Alabama. He may want to come back to that cotton dust, I don’t know.

BERGLAND: That is interesting. Let me use that cotton dust thing. There is an interesting twist to this. The persons who worked in cotton plants inhaled this dust and would get a disease called byssinosis—brown lung disease. We did a research study. We put money into research conducted by Duke University Medical School and found out that everybody who smoked cigarettes and works in a cotton plant will contract this disease. Everybody. There is no exception. If you smoke cigarettes and work in this plant, you are going to get this disease. It was statistically one hundred percent.

Issue: can we do something about this? Can we put on a public campaign to announce that this was a risk and really put this thing to the test? Joe Califano did. I don’t know if he did it with or without White House blessing. That is beyond me. But what I do know is that he decided, “Well, I’m going to let everybody know.” So he put on a big campaign, and he said, “If you smoke cigarettes, you are going to get this disease.” His department put on a major antismoking crusade.

I personally thought he was on the right track, but I know that there were political people on the Hill who were just furious with Joe Califano. He was persona non grata in North Carolina. Absolutely. Just keep him out of here. He is a disaster for us politically. I don’t know how the President handled that one, but I do know that it was one of those issues in which we in our department thought that the way to cure byssinosis is to banish smoking. Or just don’t hire people who smoke cigarettes. In time, by the process of attrition and death, you’ll get cured.

But there were people in the Labor Department, for example, who didn’t want to touch that cigarette thing with a ten-foot pole. What they wanted to do was install huge filters, put in million dollar filters and filter the air. It never got settled.

RILEY: I have a question here of personal interest. Given your relationship with Hubert Humphrey, what kind of President would he have made?

BERGLAND: A good one, if he could have been persuaded to get a hard-nosed chief of staff, to have picked a good staff. Because Humphrey was a disaster when it came to hiring people. He couldn’t fire anybody. He didn’t pay any attention to finances. He didn’t care about his Senate finance budget—I’m talking about his personal budget. He cared about the public budget, but that was not his thing. His thing was concepts and ideas and firing up the public’s imagination, and he would have been good at that because he had good instincts. And a lot better communicator than Carter. His undoing would have been that he had weak staff because his Senate staff was generally average or worse than average in terms of ability. He just didn’t have a knack for hiring people who could say no or could make things happen and get the mail out on time and run things right. But he would have been a good concept person.

RILEY: So closer to Reagan in that sense, then, than Carter?

BERGLAND: Yes, he would have been as good at it as Reagan.
PALMER: He had a lot of experience.

YOUNG: But you know the returns aren’t all in yet, it seems to me, on the Reagan Presidency.

BERGLAND: No, they are not.

YOUNG: I mean, we may yet see the limits of what good communication skills are in carrying a President through his term.

BERGLAND: I admire the President in a lot of ways. As a professional politician, he is absolutely the best I have ever seen on television, and he has a capacity to pick the popular issues. Cutting taxes is a fairly easy thing to do. Increasing spending is a fairly easy thing to do. The President knows that the public doesn’t care about debt. The public is accustomed to debt. We all borrow more than we save. Most of us borrow more than we save. Borrowing money is not a bad thing with the majority of the American public. So the public debt problem that has piled up is of no consequence. The public doesn’t care. Reagan knows the public doesn’t care. He knows that we can live the good life and put the rest off to some other day, and he is enormously popular because of it, and he almost always takes the popular course.

The question is how long can it last. Someday somebody has got to do something about the debt question. Heaven help that person, probably. Mondale tried it. He didn’t do it very wisely. He tried to talk about the responsibility in balancing budgets and raising taxes, and you see what happened. The President has an enormous capacity for finding the popular and easy way, and he does it. Like the attack in Grenada. That’s big hero stuff. That’s like invading Fairfax County, Virginia.

DERTHICK: Easier. Particularly at 5:00!

BERGLAND: The Libyan bombing thing. That’s big hero stuff. The American public just loves that as long as it doesn’t cost anything, and as long as nobody gets shot. How long this can last, this so-called Teflon thing—My friends tell me that the chickens are going to come home to roost, and it’s going to be in Reagan’s term, and it’s going to be not on the deficit but on trade policy, trade deficits. We’re just destroying our middle class. The consequences of that neglect are going to happen during his term, I say. A lot of people say it won’t happen to this fellow. It’s going to happen to the poor so and so who follows him. That person is going to have to deal with the deficit and debt issues. Reagan just does a super job in picking popular things and doing it and doing it very well.

YOUNG: Was there any element of Carter’s legislative priorities that was terribly popular? The reputation is that practically everything he tried to do was quite unpopular.

BERGLAND: It was almost all uphill. Like the Panama Canal business, for example. Boy, that was tough. There was no constituency for that. The American public didn’t understand.
YOUNG: He had to build it from scratch. The comprehensive energy bill took four years, and there was blood on the walls.

BERGLAND: The SALT II accords. People didn’t know. There was not a big plus on that because they didn’t understand what it was about. I can’t think of anything the President did.

YOUNG: Airline deregulation?

BERGLAND: It wasn’t popular.

YOUNG: It wasn’t popular?

BERGLAND: Well, not particularly. People hadn’t seen the benefits from it yet, and they were afraid they were going to lose their airline service.

YOUNG: He pulled out of tax reform because apparently the Congress said, “That’s too much.”

BERGLAND: Too much, they had too much to do. You know, I can’t recall—The Camp David thing was popular. The American public liked this thing. He was getting good marks on this because he worked so hard at it, and the public knew he was working hard and he cared a lot, and they liked that commitment notion. Of course, it never came to pass, so he couldn’t reap the benefits of it.

YOUNG: The civil service reform wasn’t popular.

BERGLAND: Nobody cared about that. That’s like Reagan is going to modernize the budget process. Who cares? There is no political mileage in that. Carter was going to reform the agencies, remember? Slim them down and reduce the agencies from a hundred and eighty-six to thirty or something. Who cares? There is no mileage in that stuff. It isn’t really all that important anyhow, as a matter of fact.

PALMER: I thought he got good mileage out of Camp David, though.

BERGLAND: He really did. As far as it got, he really did. There again, he started from scratch. He initiated that thing. He built the constituency for it.

YOUNG: All of these actions, except for Camp David, involved very heavy legislative campaigning to get any of those things through. Not that proportion of the Reagan program after the tax cuts and the defense buildup, which were first-year things with Congress and not rough sliding, the majority of his things have not been primarily legislative objectives since that. Is that right?

BERGLAND: Except the tax reform.

YOUNG: The tax reform, but he moved in and out of that.
BERGLAND: He did move in and out, but he was always in it, though. He never walked away from it. The extent to which he was visibly involved would come and go.

YOUNG: That’s right, but the main involvement was carried on by [Howard] Baker and Treasury and less the White House?

BERGLAND: Yes. Baker was the heavy horse. Baker did the negotiating, but the President was always willing to call, and he’s a good caller. I have friends up there who tell me they would be off in their district, down in rural Texas, and there would be a call from the White House, and it would be the President. He would call them up. He would lobby personally. He was very good at this. No doubt if the President hadn’t used his enormous popularity and his ability and willingness to call members of Congress, the tax reform thing would never have happened. No doubt. For which he deserves credit.

YOUNG: And it apparently wasn’t all that popular either, because when he went out on the stump, he didn’t get much applause. They wanted to ask him about other things.

BERGLAND: Not particularly. But it cut both ways because there were winners and losers in tax reform, depending on whose side of the ledger you’re on.

PALMER: I think we’ll have to judge that later on.

BERGLAND: I think you’re right. We’ll have to judge that one later.

PALMER: I’m in favor of it, but I’ve gotten concerned.

BERGLAND: Well, sure, none of us are really sure what the elimination of some of these provisions means.

YOUNG: I never was for it. Speaking practically, not conceptually.

BERGLAND: I think the jury is not in, but Reagan, to his credit, did really lobby that way. If he hadn’t done that, it wouldn’t have passed. When the consequences of this tax policy changed, it finally started to soak in, and they started to see what it would do to housing and to the elimination of investment credits and other elements. The business world started to get very nervous about this. If Reagan hadn’t continued to put pressure on Republicans in the Senate, he would never have passed that thing.

YOUNG: I don’t want to dignify this by calling it conventional wisdom, but one of the comments you often hear from people who look at the Presidency nowadays is that all Presidents move away from domestic policy because it’s such a can of worms, and do something where they can make some accomplishments, which are in foreign affairs. That doesn’t seem to work too well for the Reagan Presidency, which has had tremendous success in its domestic policy initiatives and not much on the other side.

BERGLAND: Nothing. His foreign policy agenda is pretty bleak.
PALMER: We need some professionals in foreign policy and continuity just like in agricultural policy, and we don’t have it.

BERGLAND: Yes, you’re right. I don’t understand all the ins and outs and complexities of dealing with the Soviets and others in the world on military matters, but I’ve got sense enough to believe that some accommodations have got to be reached, or we’ll all be bankrupt. We’ve just got to bring this thing under some control.

FOWLER: What about the political mileage of having human rights as a centerpiece of American foreign policy? That seems to be an issue in which he could get support from labor, from Baptists, from many different groups. And it might rank along with Camp David as one of the issues on which Carter had something on his agenda that was actually politically beneficial.

BERGLAND: It was. It was generally one of those win-win things. The problem with the American public is they didn’t understand what it meant. It was of interest and of value to a very small cut of the American public that cares about things like this. I have a theory in politics. All politics is local, and it’s all economic. Some of these esoteric issues just don’t cut. When I was running for office in my own right, running for reelection in my own right, I did surveys and I knew exactly what the book value was on the issue of prayer in public schools. I knew exactly what it was worth. It was worth four points. Yet if you were judging this thing by the newspaper coverage you’d think the election was going to turn on it. Didn’t care.

People made noises, and they would sign petitions, and they demonstrated, but when it got down to it, the income questions were the ones that governed. I don’t believe foreign policy counts for much. I don’t think the mishandling of the Iranian matter is really going to do much for the President’s overall popularity. People really don’t care about it. They say, “He didn’t handle it well, but we’re all entitled to make mistakes.”

YOUNG: But if they think he lies, then he would be damaged.

BERGLAND: Well, they don’t like that.