

Roger F. Lewis Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 05/12/1970
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Biographical Note

Roger F. Lewis was the confidential assistant to the Secretary of Labor from 1960 to 1967. This interview focuses on the Department of Labor during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, especially the Department of Labor's work on equal opportunity employment, among other topics.

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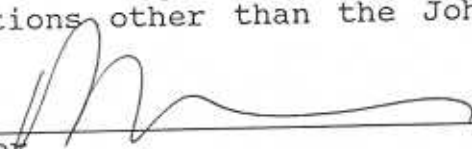
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Roger F. Lewis– JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

ROGER F. LEWIS

May 12, 1970
Washington, D. C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Let me ask you to begin with, Mr. Lewis, the title that you had of confidential assistant is not one that is noted too often in the Government Organization Manual. How did that come up and what were the circumstances of your appointment?

LEWIS: Well, it's intriguing. It was sort of interesting. What had happened was I was in the Justice Department and was going to go in the U. S. Attorney's office, and they were trying to make a place for me there, and I went back to Chicago and I got a call at about 11:00 in the morning from the then under secretary, who parenthetically was my professor in

law school, and he asked me if I wanted to come aboard with him and become one of his assistants, which I thought was just great, and not twenty minutes later I got a call from David Acheson, who's a U. S. attorney, saying, "Hey, we've got your spot for you." And my answer was, "Sorry, you're about twenty minutes too late." And I don't know why I was listed as confidential assistant. I suspect that despited the seriousness of the title, it was just a slot, civil service slot, that they could put me in on his staff.

MOSS: Well, why not special assistant? I mean this is the usual thing, you know.

LEWIS: I don't know. I don't know. I think the secretary, the under secretary. . . . Hey, there might not have been a special assistant slot for the under secretary. I believe that was probably the reason. Subsequent to that time, titles--perhaps I'm getting ahead of my story--but titles are so interesting in government and they're sort of a maneuvering that goes on. And I know when I was appointed special

assistant to the secretary, immediately my name went up on the board list under his and there was some friction. And one of the other people called himself a special assistant to the secretary without formal title who happened to be a little bit disturbed over this and the secretary called me in, and you know, said, "Well, how are we going to resolve this?" And I said, "Well, it's very easy. Take my name off the board," which it didn't bother me at all. And interestingly enough for a short period of time some of the bureaucrats, after my name went off, I got a small bit of trouble dealing with them. And so there came a time when there was a problem-- it involved a legal problem with the solicitor of labor, Charles Donahue, who is really one of my very closest friends now, but I had a problem and I couldn't figure it out. And I went to the secretary, and the secretary immediately called him up and said, "Look, when Roger is talking to you, he speaks for me, and if you got any jurisdictional problems in the Labor Department, I want to end these jurisdictional disputes right now." I never had any prob-

lems with him or with anyone else subsequent to that call.

MOSS: This was simply because you didn't have the formal status.

LEWIS: Well, I had the status, but I guess it was something that, you know, your name comes off a board or something. I don't know; it's really strange. Perhaps one of the anecdotes about the secretary was we had one of bureaucrats, a senior career bureaucrat, came in to the then under secretary and gave him this whole--a very competent bureaucrat by the way, but he was the kind of person who always had to let you know that he was working fourteen hours a day for the government and how really valuable he was. Well, he was pretty valuable, he just got sort of tiresome in letting you know all the time what he was doing. But he went in and he said to the secretary . . .

MOSS: One moment. Let me break. You can name names if you want and put any restrictions you **want** on it, so if instead of a faceless reference, you can identify the guy . . .

LEWIS: Oh, sure. Well, this is Millard Cass.

MOSS: Okay.

LEWIS: And he came in and gave [W. Willard] Wirtz the speech about how the secretary didn't--you'll forgive me for calling the secretary. . . . that's a little. . . . the then under secretary . . .

MOSS: Okay. Yes. To avoid saying the then under secretary all the time.

LEWIS: Right. He came in and said to him to the effect that well, if he wanted to replace me with someone else, that's okay with me because I've got plenty of other things to do and I don't need it and so on and so forth, this whole big thing. And the secretary sat and listened, said, "Thank you very much." And as Millard was walking out of the door, just as he crossed the threshold, said, "Oh, by the way, Millard, if I did want to replace you, how would I do it?" Demolished him completely too. It was just his own sense of humor. So at any rate I got involved and it was primarily--I was just out of school, and I was working with [Thompson] Tom Powers and with

Steve Shulman who was then the executive assistant to [Arthur J.] Goldberg and doing all sorts of various minor, minor tasks, writing letters and getting acclimated and such as that.

MOSS: Now, what did your job develop into?

LEWIS: Well, basically, I guess, it was a correspondence type job where it was my responsibility basically, and I think throughout my entire term with the secretary to make sure that the letters that went out over his signature, especially to congressmen and to other members of the Cabinet were correct from a policy stand point and that we didn't have any bombs innocently being written by someone down in the bureaucracy and going out and causing a big explosion.

MOSS: Did you come across any of these bombs?

LEWIS: Oh, well, yes. I'd have to think a bit. I mean, you know, just over the time. And he knew it was just the normal sort of thing where you want to say the right thing to the right congressman or perhaps withhold an answer depending upon a particular

situation. That's kind of vague, but I mean if you were, for example, going up for appropriations and a congressman wanted a certain project funded and the decision had been made, well, not to fund the project on purely administrative basis, well, you didn't want that letter from the secretary's testifying before the committee to go to that key congressman turning his project down. I mean that sort of a thing which is normal in government.

MOSS: Right. And one of the things that you sometimes run across is the bureau chief either formally or informally running around the secretary's office to budget or to the Hill. Did you get any of this where you were really undercut?

LEWIS: Well, some of that, of course, did happen. Bob Goodwin of the Bureau of Employment Security had his own particular congressional contacts. This was mostly handled by a legislative type, but I mean, it was well known that he would go up and do his lobbying with the state administrators who would then go to the Hill. There were other lines of communi-

cation and the budget area which were handled by other career people. [James E.] Dodson, before he resigned, a fellow by the name of [V. S.] Hudson, whom I think is also subsequently has passed away, but he had these strong contacts built up over years and he was used in the budget process more than our political legislative liaison types.

MOSS: Let me ask a few things about Willard Wirtz. How did he fit in with the Kennedy Administration after having been such a strong [Adlai E.] Stevenson supporter?

LEWIS: Well, I think that perhaps I ought to preface all my personal comments on the secretary by just making it clear that I feel a sort of father-son relationship to the secretary. I'll try and be as objective as I can. We have to have that caveat in mind that I just happen to think he's a fantastic individual. I think he fit in rather well. I think there were problems, of course, because, as you know, the President, President Kennedy was on the labor committee and felt that he was very knowledgeable in the whole

area of labor-management relations. But I think to a great extent his advice after he became secretary was listened to and was heeded. I think there were more serious problems that occurred later on in the [Lyndon B.] Johnson Administration because Johnson leaned very, very heavily on the secretary, but Joe Califano took it upon himself to become involved in labor-management disputes. And the fellow had no personal knowledge of any of the events that took place. But I think by way of hearsay, the problem was that Joe would get involved in these labor disputes and sort of throw his weight around and just sort of bull his way through and didn't have a feeling for the relationships and sometimes created problems, especially with the operations of Jim Reynolds, who at that time was involved very heavily in the labor-management dispute area. I think, of course, when Goldberg was secretary and Wirtz was under secretary, Wirtz was involved mostly with the running of the Department because Goldberg, as you know, is extremely active in all sorts of labor-management disputes.

MOSS: This is an interesting situation here because I have heard it said that the sheer administration of the Department was not really to Wirtz's taste and that he sort of found himself in this slot with a very active secretary above him doing the kinds of things that he really was interested in and that the running of the Department itself was not his bag.

LEWIS: That's correct.

MOSS: And that when later it came to [John F.] Henning to be the under secretary, he didn't quite hack it and a lot of this fell on Cass. Well, is this fair?

LEWIS: To some extent on Cass, I think Leo Werts--I would have to give Leo Werts ~~ma~~ majority of the credit for the real operation of the Department. There were all sorts of conflicts between Cass and Leo Werts, but I think when Dodson resigned, retired--he didn't resign. He retired. I don't mean any implication that he was forced out. He wanted it of his own free will. Leo Werts came over from the international labor side and became our administrative assistant secretary. And he did, in my view, an excellent job

in the management of the Department which took a
great load off Wirtz. It took^{it}/away from Henning
I guess, who never really had it. And so it left
Wirtz free to do the kind of things that he was,
you know, was more interested in doing than think-
ing of all these various problems.

MOSS: The relationship between Wirtz and Henning was not
a satisfactory one.

LEWIS: That's correct. It's absolutely correct. And I
must say that Henning personally was a very wonder-
ful guy, a nice guy, but you have to realize that
Henning was, what we would consider, a lightweight.
At least I would consider him a lightweight. I think
it's probably fair to say the secretary considered
him such also, and he just couldn't operate on the
same level as the secretary. So the secretary be-
came more and more reliant^{up}/on Jim Reynolds, as you
know, subsequently became underssecretary, but I
guess in this whole area. . . . You know, the
Labor Department, I think, is unique in government
in the Kennedy Administration when you think of the

fact that of the original appointees by President Kennedy, well, let's just see who they were: There were Charlie Donahue as solicitor, who stayed for eight years, Jim Reynolds who was appointed who stayed for eight years even though part of that time was as under secretary, Esther Peterson, and George Weaver. I don't think there was another Cabinet Department in government who had this continuity of top leadership. As you know, we lost Jerry Holleman, which is another story in of itself.

MOSS: Yes. I want you to go into that after a bit.

LEWIS: Sure. And he was replaced by [Daniel P.]^{Pat}Moynihan.

What they did was they. . . . Holleman was assistant secretary for Manpower when he resigned. They created an assistant secretaryship for policy planning which was Pat Moynihan. Then after Pat left, it became assistant secretary of Manpower again. In that intervening period, Stanley Ruttenberg had come out of the labor movement, was Manpower administrator and then he was put in the assistant secretary for Manpower slot.

MOSS: Right. It's a little juggling just to please people's proclivities.

LEWIS: Well, I don't know. Pat was very much interested in that whole business until that relationship cooled over a series of events. Pat went on his own way, and his record speaks for itself today. A fantastic character.

MOSS: You mentioned a few minutes ago that President Kennedy had been on the labor committee and had his own expertise in the labor field and so on. Were there any specific events that gave you to feel or the secretary or the under secretary to feel that the President was taking over the area or horning in where the Labor Department could really do the job?

LEWIS: I don't think. . . . No, I don't think that would be an accurate characterization, but I would think that the President, in various policy decisions, which I wasn't privy to, probably relied a little bit more on his own basic feelings and his own expertise, perhaps, rather than in following necessarily the recommendations of the secretary. And I don't think

he took this personally. I don't think he took this personally at all. You asked before what his relationships were with the Kennedy, well, with the President, broadening that just a little, I think, that his relationship with President Kennedy was excellent as intellectual to intellectual, person to person. They're both people of high quality. I think the President felt that. I'm not, however, sure that the secretary's relationships with the rest of the Kennedy staff--I guess they were proper--but I think that, as you know, the Kennedy people felt very, very strongly about their President (underlining the their) and their relationships with him. And anyone who was in the Stevenson camp, I think, was always a little bit suspect or either with us when in the nitty-gritty or you weren't. And so there wasn't this personal relationship between him and I'm talking about the top White House staff. But again, I don't think (a) that interfered with his operation as a Cabinet officer in any significant sense.

MOSS: Who were the people on the White House staff that

you had the most contact with?

LEWIS: Now you're talking about the Kennedy . . .

MOSS: Uh-huh.

LEWIS: Well, at that particular time, I really. . . . My contact would be with Fred Holborn who was involved in the preparation of documents, things such as that. I had no significant contacts at that time while he was under secretary and while President Kennedy was living in any real personal relationship basis with the White House assistants. This changed when Wirtz became secretary, a Johnson became President. I did have some dealings with Lee White and with [Myer] Mike Feldman, but these were just not continuing. It was sort of an ad hoc thing where I'd have to put in a call on a very minor problem, again emphasizing that--appreciative, my position at that time was not, you know, one that I would be involved in a high level type situation. It was more staff work.

MOSS: How about the relationship between Wirtz and Gold-
of
berg, complementary, or were they too much/the same
kind of person to do--to work in harness together

or what?

LEWIS: No. They had a very good working relationship. They were personally friendly. To the best of my knowledge, they still are personally friendly. They are not complementary personalities at all. I think there's a basic difference in the two men. And they're both. . . . I think that Goldberg--he was an activist. He was very pragmatic. He was sort of like Ted Kheel, if you will, you know, the labor mediator in New York, whereas the secretary Wirtz is extremely reflective individual, and he is always trying to get at what he feels is the right solution through the merits of a problem. Goldberg was a--he knew where he wanted to get and he'd be an operator. It was a good way of describing it. And he liked being involved in these mediation sessions. Good God! I remember one. I think it was in that air line dispute in '62 where Goldberg gave a speech in Kansas City at lunch time. He flew to New York to give a dinner speech, left the dinner speech, got to the Labor Department at 8:00 and then

we began about seventy hours straight of labor negotiations. And here we have, I think, it was the management people were in the under secretary's office, and the labor people were in a conference room down the hall. And there's Goldberg going back and forth. Everybody with their ties down. I was a young person at that time and I was dying. And Goldberg had this tremendous reservoir of energy and he'd just beat people down by his exuberance and his getting people together on various points. It's a process that's very hard to describe, but it was amazing to watch. For example, there was a meeting at the President's Advisory Committee of Labor-Management Policy in the White House. And there was some issue--I think it had to do with pensions, vesting of pensions, which was a very sore point at that time. And the meeting began to get very, very heated. And the positions began--you could just feel were polarizing, and it was an almost visible split in the room. And at this point, Goldberg said, "Oh, by the way, George [Meany],

(speaking to Meany) I've arranged with the President

. . .

MOSS: To Meany?

LEWIS: To Meany. I've arranged with the President to have all of your wives come on a special tour of the living quarter of the White House and then we're all going out on the Sequoia, nudging an aide who immediately ran off in a tizzy to try and see if this thing could be worked out which it was. And that evening they all got together, the wives were enchanted because Jacqueline Kennedy took them around upstairs. And then they all went out on the Sequoia and the differences resolved. Ittsort of broke the, you know, it broke this tension. But I mean he was that way. He could do. . . . He had the feeling of how to do these things. I'm not sure Wirtz was so inclined.

MOSS: What would other than the business of being careful when setting up a factual step by step case and so on, how would you characterize the operating style of Wirtz? What incidents could you give us

as illustrations of the way he operated?

LEWIS: Well, as I say, he was one of the, if not the most tough-minded man I've ever met in my life. You couldn't slip anything by him, a soft phrase, a soft word or something. You know, he'd say, "Now wait a minute. What do you mean by that? Now let's just explore this fully." And he would delve into the various aspects of a problem. I don't know whether I can give any specific examples of that. He was just a very tough-minded man and would want of to have all/the factors of the situation brought out. I don't know how helpful that is to you, but it's just that it was more of a lawyer's way of looking at a problem, all aspects of it and getting all of the facts in front of him with which he could make his decisions.. However, I must say that he had tremendous amount of perception. For example, when Adlai Stevenson died, the secretary was out at the funeral awaiting the presidential plane and the presidential plane came in and there was Arthur Goldberg aboard the plane with the President. And as

he got off the plane, the secretary greeted him with "Mr. Justice, how are you?" And this is, of course, before any of the announcement came out, and you know, Goldberg was shocked, and the President was shocked. And I don't know. I never asked him, you know, why he figured this, but I guess by having Goldberg aboard the plane at that time, it was just sort of a clue to him in this mind that that would be the next step. He did this on countless occasions.

MOSS: This sort of perception of . . .

LEWIS: Right.

MOSS: . . . events as leading to a specific conclusion.

LEWIS: That's correct. I remember in law school--he was my law school professor--this was at the time in the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower Administration where they were having all of these, I think, it was the steel labor dispute, and he could foresee the events weeks and months ahead when we discuss it in class, and he'd be giving us his views on what he thought the President would do, and by and large, pretty accurate stuff, pretty accurate stuff.

MOSS: So he put together, for instance, he knew there was a Jewish vacancy on the court. He knew that Goldberg wanted that kind of thing, at least a federal judgeship of some sort.

LEWIS: I guess.

MOSS: And here he was on the plane and . . .

LEWIS: Right. Because he was not really that close to Stevenson. I guess that's how he put it together. It's been on my mere mortal mind to figure out how that worked, but he was right. Wirtz was very human, human person. I think of several, again, anecdotes: One we came in on a plane International Airport and there's this huge limousine.

MOSS: No. This is fine. Thank you.

LEWIS: And there's a man standing, you know, looking inside of the car and all this radio equipment that was in the car and the chauffeur and the whole thing. And the secretary walks up to the car. And the man says, "Is this your car?" And the secretary says, "No. It's yours." And the man says, "Gee, I never really. . . ." of course, indicating that your tax payer, you're paying for this car. And he said,

"Gee, I never thought of it that way. Well, it's my car. How about a ride to my hotel?" Wirtz said, "Sure. Get in." And off we went and took this guy to his hotel. And you know, there's one awfully happy tax payer in this country somewhere. The other of course is the *Mary Grace Cellucci* story. There was a letter came in, the secretary, which I got. And it was from a girl in a grade school class, I think, in New Jersey. I do remember her name, *Mary Grace Cellucci*. She said, "Dear Mr. Secretary: I have been elected the secretary of labor of my third grade class in the so-and-so high school. My duties are to clean the room and on Fridays I wash the blackboards. What are your duties?" signed *Mary Grace Cellucci*. The answer from the Secretary had, "Dear Madame Secretary: Same here. Sincerely, Willard Wirtz." Terrific sense of humor.

MOSS: You mentioned the President's Advisory Committee on Labor-Management Policy. Did you find any change in the way this worked after Secretary Wirtz took over this? It was more or less Goldberg's brain-

child and baby and brought it to fruition right in the early months of the Administration, as I understand, over joyed that he actually got it going.

LEWIS: Yep.

MOSS: He was simply charmed by the whole thing. Did it change much with Wirtz coming along?

LEWIS: I can't answer that really because I wasn't involved in it at all when Goldberg was Secretary I was involved only minimum--a very minor extent after Wirtz became Secretary. David Burke, who's now the administrative assistant to Senator [Edward M.] Ted Kennedy, might be a good person to talk to because he was the executive secretary then. He was, as you know, an extreme, bright, perceptive. . . . I think he would probably. The only minor help I could give on that. I remember in a meeting three weeks before the President went to Dallas, he came into one of these meetings and Arthur Burns, as you know, was a member, and he was always sitting around and puffing his pipe and looking very studious and everything. And of course, all these policies the Admin-

istration was espousing and completely and half of them I don't But the President was great because he'd always at some point in the meeting--and he'd done this before--would always at one point say, "And now, Arthur, what do you think about all of this?" And then Burns would pontificate for a given period of time, and the President would say, "Thank you, Arthur," and then go on with the meeting leaving us all not where this input of Burns would be in this computer that Kennedy had for wanting all positions. But that's a As I say my dealings with that committee were very, very minimal at best.

MOSS: Did you get involved with Under Secretary Wirtz and later Secretary Wirtz in discussing the different policies that were coming along, things like where you should stand on minimum wage and what the work week should be and this kind of thing?

LEWIS: Not really. Again only in a very minor way, again very minor. My function was not really on a policy level except when he would every once in a while ask

on certain things. I really wasn't involved in those discussions.

MOSS: You said that the President, of course, had his own expertise in labor. How do you think the White House understood and responded to the problems of the Labor Department and to the labor picture generally? Do you have any feel for this?

LEWIS: I guess. I've got to really think about that.

MOSS: A question of priorities and degree of involvement and this sort of thing. Did they do everything for you that they should have, or were there things that you felt that they should have done that they didn't?

LEWIS: Well, I don't know. I find that hard to answer. I'd have to think on that a bit. I guess it would. . . . There were all sorts of political factors that were involved in these various priorities ^{that} a/ the White House set. I know that one of the areas that we were. . . . that I personally was very much concerned with was equal opportunity. And we felt that this wasn't a White House problem

as such. We always felt that apprenticeship training and the Manpower programs were very important, but we got ourselves, especially on the job training. I think that was a thing that we felt--I know the Secretary felt--that you could do a tremendous amount of useful work with a minimal amount of expenditure that the labor movement, of course, with fought this because/on the job training they felt that there's a danger there to their workers. Now this is one area, but it isn't responsive to your question as such. We found, of course, that a lot of them, you know, in employment security and the bureau of apprenticeship term, this was staffed by labor union types, and it was rather difficult, you know, to have them respond/the way you wanted them to respond. This had to do with their own particular union political structure. Also it had to do with, you know, their contacts on the Hill. So I think there was some frustration in this area. But I really, on the White House thing, I don't know. I don't know at this point.

MOSS: What was your involvement on the equal opportunity employment, equal employment opportunity? I always invert those two.

LEWIS: Well, I was involved in helping set up when we tried to get black workers in the construction areas here in Washington, you know, growing out of that Howard thing. I was involved as an assistant council to the president's committee on equal employment opportunity, subsequently went to the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Committee] and Steve Shulman's deputy. But that was some of it. It was an ad hoc You see, the problems that we had. . . . It was sort of a funnel, as I guess is probably normal in any bureaucracy, and the executive assistant to the secretary would be very closely involved. I'd be more in an administrative thing where we'd be trying to keep as much paper away from the Secretary as possible, or abstracting these various memos, the lengthy memos that had come up and try and give him a, you know, a good enough shot that he could make various decisions when we felt that it

was important at a particular time for him to have it.

MOSS: What do you remember on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of the whole [Robert B., Jr.] Troutman hassle?

LEWIS: That was before my time.

MOSS: Was it?

LEWIS: Yeah. That was the Plans for Progress.business.

MOSS: Right.

LEWIS: That was. . . . That all came to a head long before I got involved. I think Steve Shulman was involved more in that particular aspect and could be, you know, helpful.

MOSS: Yeah. But you weren't involved with it until after Hobart Taylor was running things.

LEWIS: Right. Right.

MOSS: How did he run that show? Tell me a little bit about him and the way he ran that show.

LEWIS: Well, we didn't have that much doing with Taylor. He's quite an operator. I always felt personally that Hobart was out for Hobart and was running it.

Yet, don't get me wrong. He had the right reactions, but I think a lot of it. . . . You know, Hobart's background, as you know, he's an extremely wealthy individual. And he's now a practicing attorney here, very successful. And I always felt that that Plans for Progress and everything that he was really. . . . He could be both black and white. I guess that's perhaps a shorthand way of saying it. He can be as white as we are when he's talking to the business man. Yet, he could, boy, get down there and talk soul talk with the colored folk, and I'm not really sure. . . . He was effective I think.

MOSS: How does a person be effective when he's talking in two directions?

LEWIS: Well, you wouldn't always have the two groups together, I guess. He could, you know, get things done by his various contacts in the black community and through these businessmen. But I always felt that we had to watch Hobart because I never personally knew that we could trust him vis-a-vis Wirtz. I don't think there was any occasion. It was just a

question of keeping a wary eye to make sure that there weren't end runs being made.

MOSS: You never caught any end runs though.

LEWIS: Well, I never personally did.

MOSS: Do you know of any?

LEWIS: No. No. Not that I could really describe. It was just an on-going relationship type, you know, sort of thing.

MOSS: Where it was a matter of personality more than anything else.

LEWIS: Oh, I think that they liked each other, I think.

MOSS: How about within the Department on this equal employment opportunity business. Did you get any foot dragging within the civil service staff?

LEWIS: I think that our record on that--and I don't have the figures--but the Secretary made it very clear, you know, as to what our policies were. And I think more and more in the higher grades we had a greater percentage of black people, but it was an interesting thing because I know I was down in the basement one time, the depths of the Department. A whole bunch

of

of people down there doing just absolutely menial tasks. And we thought, "Gee, maybe it would be a good idea if we had some kind of a in-house educational program to give people training, people who were working menial job, perhaps they could become computer programers, things such as this, and get some messengers who we thought were, you know, bright people, but they were just doing these menial tasks." And we found when we tried to get this thing going that the people, interestingly enough, weren't, on the most part interested. And I don't mean necessarily all black people. I mean there were a lot of white people down there too. And they were just comfortable. Maybe there's a sort of a syndrome, a civil service syndrome that sets in after a while. A person gets so comfortable in his job that he just wants to do that and he doesn't want to take additional responsibility and it's just very easy doing the things that you do menially from day to day.

MOSS: These mostly older people?

LEWIS: Some middle-aged, but some, you know, some younger people involved in that too, I mean, who'd been in government maybe five years. I know that's why the Secretary always, you know, told us that he was going to get rid of us because he didn't want us, you know, involved in this sort of thing. Tom Powers left, and that I think was the turner-over in the assistants to the Secretary had nothing to do because just everyone of them was just absolutely devoted, but there came a time when certain opportunities presented themselves, and he much against his own best interests, especially with Tom, and the others, John Donovan and Frank [A. Potter], just said, you know, "Go!" It happened with me. I think that was one of the hardest things leaving him, but he was just absolutely clear. The thing to do was to get out and do something else before you get locked in. And of course, you have. . . . You know, when your involved with a Cabinet officer, you sometimes begin to feel pretty self-important, not because of anything and especially me. I wasn't really,

you know, involved that you had that status that, you know, you were talking about the title before. Well, you know, you have the status of speaking for the Secretary and getting involved in all sorts of meetings with important people and contributing every once in awhile a nugget or two. And I remember in California one time--we were sitting up and we'd been in several legislative meetings up there and there was a big banquet and a roundtable. And I was sitting at the head-table with the Secretary--I was, you know, twenty-six years old. I was feeling pretty important. And I got a note from the Secretary. I opened the note up and it said, "Meet me in my room after the meeting with a package of razor blades, some pipe tobacco, and the New York Times." And that, of course, that just put you right in perspective of what your real position in life is. I'm sure he didn't mean to do that, but I put everything in perspective for me.

MOSS: Tell me something about the other assistants and

the way they operated. Take Tom Powers for instance. What kind of a guy was he and what kind of things was he doing?

LEWIS: Well, Tom was doing. . . . He was, perhaps, the closest of any assistant the Secretary ever had to him personally. They got very, very close again like a father-son relationship. Tom, extremely bright, fantastically capable, and would operate in all sorts of very substantive level, not like myself. He wrote ^{position} papers, he worked very hard on the trade bill. He acted as sort of --he would deny this completely--as an assistant secretary of labor. Well, he was the executive assistant. He was just involved in anything and everything that the Secretary did, and the Secretary would rely on his judgment to an extent that I don't think he relied on anyone, anyone else as far as assistants go on these various areas. And of course, as you know, Tom won the ten top men in government award, which was absolutely deserved.

MOSS: How about John Donovan?

LEWIS: John Donovan also was very good. John was, as you know, he's a professor up in Maine, and a fantastic sense of dry humor, very, very bright, competent, competent person. Let's see, Fred Graham came aboard. He was his primary responsibility, I think it was speech writing, like mine was being mailman, and would be putting together various speeches and position papers as we all did, but that was his primary function. How are we doing on the tape?

MOSS: We're doing all right. I get so interested sometimes I forget about it. I lost about ten minutes of conversation one day because we were talking and the thing was flapping around there and I wasn't paying any attention to it.

LEWIS: Oh, my golly. Well, let's see. And of course, the relationships with the assistant secretaries were by and large, by and large good. They were the normal kind of--you know, frictions in between. But as I say, all in all this group of assistant secretaries staying together and working together

for eight years. That's an awful long time for people, especially in a bureaucratic situation and people who didn't know each other before, I believe, for the most part, didn't know each other before. Tremendous amount of harmony. You know, there were obviously problems that arose. And I mean the Holleman, of course, the Holleman affair.

MOSS: Oh, let's go into that right now since we brought it up the second time. What do you recall of the Holleman-Billie Sol Estes business?

LEWIS: Well, I recall several things. I recall one, I think it was very unfortunate because the investigation that we made, that I was involved in, showed that Holleman was absolutely clean vis-a-vis his government relationships with Billie Sol Estes. And they were friends from Texas for a long, long time and checking the Labor Department actions that Holleman was involved in and that concerned Billie Sol Estes, I believe, almost with-

out exception, the actions taken by Holleman were against the interests of Billie Sol Estes, but it was just one of those things where you get a sub-Cabinet officer involved in that sort of a scandle and he's just got to go. And interestingly enough, that almost was the end of Goldberg's career, but for this sense of Goldberg in a certain situation. What happened was they were going to have a dinner party in the departmental auditorium, one of those rooms for Lyndon Johnson. And Goldberg felt that would be a good idea because, I guess, at that point there may have been some. . . . They weren't as friendly as, perhaps, Goldberg thought they should be, and he wanted to be involved more with the Vice President. And Holleman suggested that ^{,who} Billie Sol Estes/was an old friend of the Vice President's and knew everyone, take up a good portion of the tab for this dinner. And Goldberg said absolutely not. And at this time he knew nothing about Billie Sol Estes's other activities. It was just his own feeling that, "No, I'm not

having anyone from the outside pay for these kind of things. I think I ought to pay for it myself." Well, query, "If in fact, Goldberg had taken money or allowed this big affair to be funded by Billie Sol Estes, what the effect would have been on Goldberg?" Now, it may not have been, but it certainly would've raised a lot of questions and I don't know where Goldberg would be if, in fact, that had happened. So that's basically the. . . . I thought it was unfortunate; I didn't have that much dealing with Holleman because I came in rather a little late in his tenure. But as I say, that subsequent investigation, and it was a thorough investigation, and Wirtz was in charge of it. I don't think he had done anything improper with regard to his own official functions.

MOSS: Okay. Of course, Holleman's going out more or less cleared the way for . . .

LEWIS: Let me take a break for one second. Let me get us. . . . Would you like some more water?

[Interruption]

MOSS: Talking about the Holleman situation and of course, Jerry Holleman going out in a way created the sort of void that led to the question of who was to be under secretary when Wirtz became Secretary. You had Henning who eventually wound up in the job. I understand that both Meany and [Walter] Reuther had candidates, separate candidates for the job that they were trying to push. Do you recall this at all?

LEWIS: I do, but I don't. . . . I really wasn't involved in that one because, you see, at that particular moment in time they had just set up the Manpower administration and it was a brand new thing and they'd set up these Manpower training programs And I was sent down to work with Seymour Wolfbein in trying to set these programs up. Secretary felt that at that point in my (in quotes) "career development" it would be useful in getting involved in a program area as opposed to being, you know, on an administrative level. So I, you know, was just down there helping do the ordinary things

in Manpower which really was nothing of real great significance.

MOSS: I was just going to ask you, what did you do and what problems were they running into in setting these things up?

LEWIS: Well, it was a question of money and priority of programs, who would get the various programs funded. The first thing I was involved in was, I think, there was a question of what the first program in the country funded was going to be. And I went to South Bend, Indiana. John B ? they'd set up a program there with management, labor, and public. They had a tripartite committee and funded program. I went down for the opening of that. But it was just. . . . There were no, at that point, there was an interesting way to be because even though I had this relationship I was down in a bureaucratic set up and just working day to day with the ordinary nitty problems that are involved in getting things funded and reviewing programs. And nothing of great overall significance.

from the standpoint of your work quite candidly.

MOSS: Well, one of the things that we get interested in is the way that a new organization is set up from the point of view, say, of somebody looking back at the history of public administration.

LEWIS: Well, I could probably be of more help in that area describing our experiences with equal employment opportunities commission. But, again, this is sort of off the track because it doesn't relate to Wirtz and it certainly doesn't relate to President Kennedy.

MOSS: This isn't necessary that it relate directly. What we're after is the Administration and the events of the Administration as well as the individual men.

LEWIS: All right. Then let me perhaps filibuster sufficiently on the commission.

MOSS: Sure.

LEWIS: Well, what happened was, again, a little anecdotal stuff--I was out with the President,--this is President Johnson now--in Detroit, Michigan advancing

this trip and being with him. When I got the word that Steve Shulman, who was then general counsel of the Air Force and very close friend of mine based on our relationship in the Labor Department, was named as chairman of the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] I immediately picked up the White House phone and the signal corps guys got me Shulman at some party or something. I say, "Eah, you know. Good god, what did you do ~~to~~ wrong? How the hell did they put you in that mess?" Little did I know what was in store for me because the next thing I know, Bill Moyers is saying, "Hey, we want you to go over to the commission with Steve and set that thing right." And there I was. Well, as you know, the commission was basically moribund [Franklin D.] that/Roosevelt had used it as a vehicle primarily for his candidacy in New York as opposed to doing all of the things that perhaps could have been done. Of course, it wasn't all his fault I guess. They probably didn't have enough money. They had mag-

nificent offices. I don't know whether you've ever been up there.

MOSS: No.

LEWIS: 1800 G. It's a penthouse. It's the whole floor. I remember we walked into Steve's office and it's gigantic, gigantic office with panoramic view overlooking and a bathroom and a console with, you know, eighty push buttons and he took me to my office. And as I say, my office ~~and that place was~~ bigger than the Secretary of Labor's office. And I was just, you know. . . . But anyway, to get on to the seriousness, what we did, our first exposure--we came in before the appropriations committee and we gave them information and we found when we came back that information was wrong. Of course, we had to go back and indicate to them that we just didn't have the hard facts and figures on our case load. So what we did was we knew we had to (a) staff the place up. The staff was depleted; the morale was bad, and we decided that what we would do with the particular prejudice, I

guess that all young lawyers have, we figured that young lawyers can do anything. So we brought in a bunch of young lawyers and one of our young lawyers knew nothing about computers, but he was sort of interested. We said, "Okay, you're going to be our computer expert." And the people said, "Oh, you can't do that. It takes years to learn." Well, this fellow, night and day, two weeks, he became a computer expert and went out through Steve's contacts in the Pentagon, we got him some military computer people and we computerized the operation. We brought in Gordon Chase, a terrific administrator. He's now one of [John V.] Lindsay's Cabinet members up in New York, young guy. We brought in a group of people who were friends or business. . . . people we've known in government and who were all, for the most part, very competent. Now we also had an advantage because it was our little agency and we could keep tabs on everything. They also hadn't converted the people over to career status. That was just about to

take place, and we held it all up. And these people were all scheduled which means it was an emergency sort of thing to start staffing an agency. So we could, for the most part, bring in people or shift people or do pretty much whatever we doggone wanted. And pretty soon the agency started shaping up. We developed the contracting staff. Also, of course, we had a lot of advantages because, for example, when we wanted to do certain administrative things and our bureaucrats there at the beginning would say, "No, you can't do that." And I would call over to Leo Werts at Labor and say, "Leo, we want to do, you know, such and such. And our guys tell me can't do that. Now who, you know, tell me who in our department would know how to do it." And he put me in touch with a fellow by the name of [] Cramer who'd say, "Well, you know, you do this," and he'd come up with a solution. And I would go back to the bureaucrats and say, "Now, wait a minute. You said we couldn't do it. How about doing it this

way?" And he'd say, "Well, maybe you can." Well, this, after a couple of times of saying in effect, you know, "Well, you better tell me how to do something as opposed to saying no." We began to have these things done. I talking about with regard to funding, staffing, putting your slots in. So the organization began to shape up. And we revamped the compliance system so by the case load there was huge backlogs of these cases. And decisions had to be made. Well, what we did was we divided them up amongst the various commissioners and I would take a huge stack and Steve, and we started to reduce the backlog. It was decisional material.

MOSS: This is a problem across government, isn't it? This backlog of cases and so on--you run into it in the labor-management reporting and disclosure business. You run into it in the welfare plans; you run into it in land applications in Interior.

LEWIS: That's right.

MOSS: All over the place.

LEWIS: Oh, sure. But of course, in a small agency-- remember at that time we were pretty small. We were a hundred and some employees. We set up our regional staffs, and again, we used these doggone computers to check on these people and the productivity. And remember, it was a unique situation because we had control because it was small enough at that time and we were putting our people in who were very much motivated, as you know. I mean, that was. . . . These bright young some lawyer types, some others would come to us from all over wanting to get involved in this sort of thing. And as you know, the commission didn't have real power. They didn't have cease and desist. All we had was our, you know, probable, I guess, probable cause things. And Justice wasn't instituting the title seven pattern and practices. That started to improve. Our relationships--I guess it was very interesting because at one time in the appropriations process you're always subjected to certain pressures and what have you.

And I remember I think it was Congressman [John J.] ✓
Rooney who was the head of our appropriations sub-
committee, and it was a most blatant. . . . We had
a problem up in New York with a certain, I think it
was the--I don't remember his name--but he was the
second man in that. . . . He was a hack. But
worse than being a hack, he was anathama to the
minority groups. He just couldn't relate to them.
And he was creating more problems, and we wanted to
get rid of him. And we were going to get rid of
him until we got a call from Rooney. And the con-
versation basically went, "I understand you want
to get rid of Joe Jones," and well, you know, it
was kind of from this end. "I'm going to tell you
something, it costs you fifteen thousand dollars
to keep him on the payroll. Now if you don't keep
him on the payroll," in effect he said to us, "I'm
going to cut about a million bucks off your appro-
priations." Oh, so you fold. I wonder, are these
tapes privileged? I could get into a lot of trouble
with . . .

MOSS: You can put any restrictions if you want on it. We have things you can restrict it for a hundred years; you can restrict it till everybody you mention is dead, whatever you want.

LEWIS: I'm thinking as a lawyer I may just want to--I may want to put a few restrictions on that one.

MOSS: What we do is give you a sample of possible restriction; alternative restrictions you can put on it, and being a lawyer, I suppose you could draw up your own. We have things that have been approved by the GSA [General Services Administration] Council and this kind of thing so that you can take your choice as to what kind of restrictions you want to put on it.

LEWIS: But of course we found--in that agency it was very interesting because there was. . . . Luther HOLCOMB who was vice-chairman and a very proud man. And he was from Texas and he fancied himself a big buddy of the President's. But of course, we had this good contacts in the White House, that's on both of us because he did. And yet, we were very

sneaky individual. I think he was perhaps the most evil man. He's a minister, but he's the most evil man I ever met in my life from the standpoint of end runs and you know, especially when Steve was near the end of his term. There'd be all this adverse publicity about Shulman leaving to start a fancy law practice based on his work at the EEOC. And it was all we tracked down, and ⁿ Holcomb would come in and just, you know, sympathize with us. And we knew doggone well because we'd seen people-- like at one time this reporter came out with a particular scathing piece, woman reporter who subsequently became friendly with Steve, and we couldn't figure out where the hell she got this. And then a friend of ours who'd been at the same restaurant two days before the article came out, saw ⁿ Holcomb and her at lunch. See, so we knew and yet he would come in and say, "Oh, gee, isn't that terrible." Wow! What an evil man, evil man.

MOSS: Did you ever run at cross purposes with the Civil Rights Commission?

LEWIS: No. Our major problems were in dealing with Justice, trying to get them to, you know, to more vigorously enforce the pattern of practice suits, which began to bear some fruit as time went on when more of these suits were gained. And of course, we also at the very end were trying to get this legislation which would give the commission aside from additional staffing would give them the authority to issue cease and desist order, sort of like the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board]. And then, of course, Cliff Alexander came in and, you know, did a job, but we felt--and I think justifiably so--we felt that we did a real service in this particular--I'm not hesitant about saying it--to build this organization up because by the time we got done with our systems and with the people and we could show results and we started getting more money and more staff, but based on legitimate output as opposed to just becoming a bureaucracy that needed more people because we wanted to build an empire. We could go to the Congress with hard facts, provable facts showing what we were doing.

And we did get more money; and we did get more staff; and it was gratifying.

MOSS: Let me take you back to the Manpower thing and do you have anythings similar to recount on the way that was being set up?

LEWIS: No, because you see it would be analogous, as I said, I was down there in the bureaucracy and I was not, the Secretary did not put me down there-- I want to make that absolutely clear--to be sort of a spy within the, you know, within the workings. Not so at all. We just severed our. . . .

MOSS: Were you suspected of this? I mean, this sometimes happens, you know.

LEWIS: Well, possibly, but I guess as time went on, it was pretty clear that there was no, you know, that there was no relationship. And I wouldn't. I think if there were ever any problems--and I can't really recall any specifics--I mean, again, I was personally friendly, again, it was sort of an incestuous relationship. I was friendly. I wouldn't certainly talk to the Secretary about it because

impose on his time or our relationship. I mean it just wasn't important enough, but what I would do and I guess I probably did do it from time to time would be to talk to either Tom or John Donovan and talk about that. Now you talk about the process of government. It's very interesting. There were. . . . It was sort of an informal relationship between all the assistants to the Cabinet officers, and you could get an awful lot of things done, things cleared up, by just calling your counterpart in another agency and we were all very friendly. We would have lunch together; there would be meetings at the White House which would be involved more politically, but there was this cadre of people where you knew in any department if you had a problem, you could call a counterpart and immediately get some reactions. Now this, of course, is interesting because it's the way government operates. For example, if you know where to go in government to get help, it clears up the bureaucratic process. For example,

it happened to me. I'd do it now. You can call-- a person would call me and say, "Hey, you know, there's an application coming for such and such. And we had no action. What's going on?" you know. I could immediately call the bureaucrat and say, "I would like a report by the end of today on the status of that." Now making it clear that only once did someone ask me to influence, you know, a decision, and of course, the answer was no. But to get a . . .

MOSS: Do you recall the circumstances of that?

LEWIS: I got a call from a sub-assistant in some other department who said that he had a friend who had-- oh god, was it an on the job training project that he wanted funded and it would be, you know, make political sense and all sorts of other sense if that was approved. And the answer was, no. You know, we're not going to give any kind of approval, and I'm not so sure that it was entirely a moral decision, but it's a question, again, of protecting

our--well, let me back track for a second. I felt, Tom felt, John felt, Frank felt that our primary function in life as an assistant to a Cabinet officer was to protect him. I mean, it was almost a fetish, and it took on physical aspects which I'll get into as well as the policy aspects. And I would no sooner have, you know, done anything that I thought could backfire on the Secretary, you know, than go out and murder somebody. That's kind of a trite way of putting it, but I mean we felt just that strongly. So the . . . We were . . . You know, I was this abominable no-man that used to call me. I got a mason chain that he gave me for sitting out there and beating off the hoards. But I mean that was part of our job. I guess on the physical aspect: anecdotal material. There was an Equal Employment Opportunity Conference in Chicago. Secretary was going to speak before it. And I went out ahead of time to case it. And I found, good god, there was a picket line being set up by some black mili-

tants who had perfectly--they had some grievances against the construction. I say, "Well, here's this conference and there's a picket line. And we got the Secretary of Labor coming in. Oh Jesus!" So I call up Tom and I say--you know, and I'm talking to the Secretary--"Well, what do we do?" I say. "Well, you know, there's a back entrance. We'll bring him in the garage and bring him up to me. And we'll cross the picket line." And the Secretary comes in, and of course, showing his perception, instead of going to the back, he goes right to the front door and the pickets are standing out there picketing. And he walks right up to the leader of the pickets and says, "Hello, my name is Willard Wirtz." And the cameras are grinding. And he says, "I understand that you're here not picketing to close this meeting down but to give publicity to your, you know, your heartfelt grievances and legitimate grievances. Is that right?" And you're not trying to keep me out of this meeting?" And they said, "No, sir, you

know, we want you to go in there." He said, "Well, you come on in. We're going to set up some meetings with my assistants and with me, and we're going to talk about these problems just as soon as I give my presentation." And he walks in. And we did hold the meetings. But there was one fellow involved in this thing, big ugly guy, boy, he was big. And the Secretary's giving a press conference and we'd gotten some words through the Chicago police that this guy had a very unsavory backgrounds. Beside from being big and mean looking, he was in fact-- he'd been in jail for assault and . . .

MOSS: Keep going. We running towards the end. I'm just watching the tape, that's all.

LEWIS: Well, then let me. . . . So at any rate, he's in the press conference. And we can see this guy come in the back door. Tom and I are sitting up at the front and this guy starts--and he's looking mean and he's starting to edge toward the Secretary. And oh, jeepers, you know, and as he's getting closer, I nudged Tom. Tom was an all-

American football player. I say, "Tom, if that guy so much as puts a finger on the Secretary, you jump him (that was very brave)--you jump him and I'll fall against the cameraman and knock the cameras out so they won't be able to film this thing. He isn't going to put his hands on our boss." Tom nods. And the guy came all the way around and he didn't touch the Secretary; he just sat and listened. But I guess this is sort of an instance of the physical thing. The other thing I can remember--there was a deranged man who wanted to have some kind of veteran's benefits and the Secretary's office was laid out in such a way that there was a straight shoot from the reception room. By straight shoot, I mean it was a line to the Secretary's office. And a guy came in one day with a gun, and it was an unloaded gun and the police came, but we were very much concerned at that point. We wanted to keep the doors shut and everything. And the Secretary wouldn't hear of that. Then as you know after I left, his office

was ransacked one time by a bunch of people. I think also, and perhaps one of the big disappointments of the Secretary, was the fact that he never really got the credit he deserved in the Equal Opportunity, never got an award. He didn't look for awards and he didn't look for honors, but I think he always was a little bit disturbed over the fact. He never really got any recognition at all for the work he did in the area of equal opportunity, and I think he did significant work and put his neck on the line several times with the unions and incurred, perhaps, he gave some very straight speeches to the building trades and incurred their ire. And never once got an honorary degree from a black university or anything like that. I think he felt--I think that he felt sort of a little bit bad about it.

MOSS: Let me flip this tape. Just a moment.

LEWIS: Sure.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

MOSS: And you just remembered the only time you got blasted by the Secretary, Isn't this a ^{wonderful way to begin} a new side.

LEWIS: Well, it was an unforgivable experience really. We'd been out, again, the Secretary and Jane his wife, myself--we'd been out in Illinois campaigning for Senator [Paul H.] Douglas. At that time Bill Moyers was up for one of the ten outstanding young men and the Secretary was going to nominate him. And I'd been working on the papers and given them to the Secretary. And he let me off at the Labor Department late that night, probably a Sunday night, and I said, "Well, let's get together tomorrow. We've got to talk about ~~this~~ Moyers. . . ." "Fine." They go off. The next morning I walk in and I said something to the effect, "Okay, we have this Moyers thing settled down now. I mean, we really got to get that, you know, that petition in." And wow! I don't know what it was, but he got absolutely furious and said to the effect, "What do you mean telling me I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing?" and on and on. Very brief, but I mean

just demolished me. But I staggered out of there wondering what the hell this was all about. I don't know what it was because our relationship, of course, in the next couple of hours returned to normal.

MOSS: Yeah. You don't know what set him off.

LEWIS: No, I don't. And that was the only time in the seven years or so that that ever happened. Some day I'm going to ask him. He probably won't even remember.

MOSS: How about his relationship with President Johnson as compared with that with President Kennedy.

LEWIS: I think that his relationship was good in the beginning and, of course, I think that it deteriorated as I'm sure you're aware of, very rapidly after a certain point in the Vietnamese war. Of course, this happened after I had left the Labor Department, but it's pretty clear . . .

MOSS: That was the cause though.

LEWIS: I think that was a major cause in this particular deterioration. I think the President held a Cabi-

net meeting if I understand, on the morning before Nixon was sworn in and the Secretary was one of those Cabinet officers not invited specifically. I think that was the cause of it, but I wasn't involved. I do know that we would get our briefings. We'd put together or put together for him a briefing book on Vietnam. And I became increasingly disturbed at the softness of the information. I think he felt likewise and that probably led to the deterioration of that relationship. Of course, there was always, as I mentioned before, that roughness between the Labor Department--Jim Reynolds particularly--on the Califano operation with regard to all these various labor disputes. You know, the settling of labor disputes, you have. . . . Labor dispute is very interesting because you have a human relationship. It's an on-going relationship. It's not the kind of thing like we lawyers get into. You have a suit that's a one shot affair. I guess it's more like a divorce proceeding where the relationships continue especially if there are children and you can't handle these very sensitive

disputes like you would try and roll back steel prices. You don't call in a labor leader and tell him you're going to do this, that, and the other thing because it's good for the country because he'll tell you in no uncertain terms what you can do. I think one of the reasons for that is, of course, that you have a--well, you've got a union political problem because, you know, you have union leaders who would like to do certain things, but they've got a problem with their membership. And you see this all the time now in labor disputes where a settlement is reached and all of a sudden your membership revolts on you. So I think that's part of it. You see, Reynolds had a very good relationship as did Goldberg and Wirtz to a certain extent. I guess they probably didn't always trust Wirtz. They thought he was sort of like Walden sitting on a pine. He would ^{always} give these speeches where he would be quoting from, you know, various [?] instructors. And they just didn't always understand that. But Jim Reynolds had this relationship and Jack Gentry

his assistant. And they could be of very great use. But then they would find sometimes where there'd be a meeting called and the next thing you know all these lines of communication would be shattered by virtue of the fact that somebody somehow got involved and said the wrong things to the wrong person at the right time just to break it up.

MOSS: Did you get involved in the steel price business at all?

LEWIS: No, I didn't. Are you talking about the . . .

MOSS: Spring, 1962 business rather than now ^{Goldberg,} Blough...

LEWIS: No, I wasn't, I wasn't involved, but I do know, again, from hearsay, that he was just absolutely furious because they did feel--this is all part of the public record. I mean just exactly what happened. I think it happened just that way. They felt they'd been betrayed by, I guess, [Roger M.] Blough. And just furious, just furious because they'd made these assurances and the next thing

different.

LEWIS: I think that's right. When I got involved, which was after Tom left, we would have breakfast on Friday mornings from time to time with Marvin Watson and Cliff Carter and several other of the White House assistants, and it would be basically somewhat of a political breakfast. It would be sort of an exchange of information back and forth, not always structured. We didn't have outside people come in and lecture to us or anything such as that. It was just, again, a way of keeping the communication open between all of us. And every once in a while there'd be a particular legislative problem that they may want to get the consensus of our group on. But, as I say, the relationships that perhaps were started by that Dutton operation pretty much persisted because, as you know, all of the assistants, or at least, you know, the political assistants, were pretty much bound together by that common thread and were involved in various activities at the committee, and we would get called on to advance the Presi-

dent and do all sorts of things such as that, which I guess, are sort of hatchable, but. . . .

MOSS: Who were some of the people involved in this?

LEWIS: Well, Joe Califano before he went over, you know, at the White House. There was Tom Hughes ~~Hughes~~ at Agriculture. There was, oh boy, let me just see--it wasn't [Walter I.] Bill Pozen--Orren Beaty, Ira Kapenstein, Post Office. Well, at any rate, there were various people from all over.

MOSS: Who do you remember as being an effective sort of person at this . . .

LEWIS: I guess we all felt. . . . I guess it was sort of we all felt we were just sort of equals, but I think just to answer the question directly. I mean Joe Califano was obviously very, very good. They all were and there is the judgment. I won't include myself in that--the judgment of these various people was by and large sound on a good many issues.

MOSS: You find any difference in the operation of the people who were in the Defense and State area from those who were in the domestic area?

LEWIS: We didn't have anyone from State. Ben Reed, who was the executive secretary over there, we could call on him. But they were pretty much out of the political area and I think rightfully so.

MOSS: What about Defense?

LEWIS: Defense also. Of course, Joe was in Defense but from a standpoint of political operations, it was always the domestic departments who were involved in this sort of thing, and there were never, to my knowledge, any. . . . Even Treasury, I think, even though Joe Bowman, who was in our Department, then went over there as an assistant secretary, we sort of counted on him as a contact, but there was never anything to the best of my knowledge politically involved from the standpoint of our operations with respect to especially State, Treasury, and I guess Defense, except of course, there were Defense contracts and things such as that, purely a domestic operation.

MOSS: Now, can you think of samples of the kinds of things you talked about?

LEWIS: Oh, well, we had an operation going to help--remember the freshmen. . . . Johnson came in in '64. They had that huge crop of freshmen Democratic congressmen, and we set up briefings for them. We set up briefing books in our Department where we would tell them the various programs that might be helpful to them and their constituents so that they would be knowledgeable in getting programs. And I think that. . . . I don't see anything. . . . I'm not being defensive at all--improper on that --because these fellows, we wanted to educated them as to what our various departments had to offer in services to their constituents, put it together in a concise form and had lines of communication where if a congressman wanted to inquire about certain programs, he would know or his assistants (we met a lot with them) would want, you know, would be able to come to us, and we'd be able to get them quick information. It was a statistical operation also from the standpoint of speech-making for both the White House and for the

various congressmen. That sort of a type operation which I assume is going on today. But it was much more, it was much more, I think, under Larry O'Brien and his people. I mean they had a great feeling for the process being responsive to Democratic congressmen, senators.

MOSS: In what way did they have this great feeling? What kinds of things were they doing?

LEWIS: Well, from the standpoint of touching the basis, I guess. As you see now, apparently, there've been a lot of problems with the operation over there now where they just haven't done their homework, especially, you know, on these Supreme Court nominations without being able to check out their people. O'Brien and his crew were very hardnosed about the fact of getting the right information to the right people and knowing where the particular basis were that should be touched. I think the President, both Presidents, Johnson got--was a master at doing that sort of a thing because you don't have to. . . . I mean, for example, if you

were giving a speech in a state where you had a Democratic candidate, or I'd say a congressman was running--this happened. I don't remember, I don't recall the particular state--but a Democratic congressman was running for senator, I believe, and we put together a speech, but the word came down, "Okay, but touch base with the senator, who's also up for re-election, just to check out the speech. Now, we know he's not, you know, it's a normal speech and there's no bombs in it or anything, but it's a nice gesture." And sure enough it was done, and the speech. . . . "Gee, this is just fine." But at least we gave that particular senator the feeling that somebody was looking out for him. And these are the intangible small, tense points that build up to when you really need something from someone that he's more responsive as opposed to going in there and not, you know, not touching these basis. I guess that--if that's concrete enough, that's the sort of thing that's very helpful I think to any administration. There's a great deal of pride, you

see, amongst these people, and you know, they all have super-egos and they must be fed.

MOSS: Going back to the assistant secretaries of Labor, you talked about them all staying for a long time. How would you characterize their strong and weak points? Take them one by one.

LEWIS: Oh, jeepers. It's their weak points I'm thinking of. Well, let me defer on that for a bit also and give some thought to that.

MOSS: All right. Well, let me put it a little different way and maybe we can work into it. Now, they had titles and specific responsibilities, but these don't always tell the whole story. Reynolds as assistant secretary for labor-management relations would get into other things as well. He got into the negotiations of the wheat deal, for instance. What is there about this man that gets him into other things and that sort of thing?

LEWIS: Well, he's a man of extremely high calibre. He would--as Wirtz has often said--he was instead of an assistant secretary or the assistant secretary-- I use that term in relationship to Tom--but Wirtz

always felt that of, you know, that Reynolds from the standpoint of intellect and temperament and reactions, which is perhaps the most important thing to problems, that he was a man who could be counted on for instant and appropriate and good reactions to various problems. He relied on Jim Reynolds more than anyone else from that sense. Now, in the international area, of course, he had George Weaver, who was as you know, a colored assistant secretary, but he didn't have the relationship that the Secretary had with, say, Reynolds, one, and Ruttenberg, two, because Ruttenberg was also very bright. He was on the same wavelength as the Secretary and they, you know, communicated very well together.

MOSS: This becomes very important doesn't it, in getting things done, to have somebody on the same wavelength?

LEWIS: Oh, sure. Definitely. Well, you know, the Secretary brought Stanley in and it was just, I guess, a good fortune of chemistry which Reynolds and the

Secretary. . . . The Secretary wanted very much for Jim to become Under Secretary of Labor, and finally, that did come about.

MOSS: Why didn't it come about earlier?

LEWIS: I think pressures. I think pressures from the . . .

MOSS: What sort of pressures?

LEWIS: I believe from the AFL-CIO. I don't know really first hand, but I think the Secretary had tried to change the occupants of that position, and I think that it took quite some time before something appropriate was worked out for Henning. And I think, of course, that aided the Department. Then Tom Donahue came in--I know him, but I never worked with him, of course, because that happened after I had left. Esther Peterson and the Secretary got along well. She's, you know, very active. Personally, I always felt that she was, of course, militant in this feminist area. I don't mean in the bra-burning sense, but I mean in wanting to ^{do} ~~be~~ more and more ^{for} ~~@~~ woman's rights. And you know, here comes Esther again. What are we going to do

for women? What haven't we done for women this hour, Esther? That didn't indicate any less respect for her, but I mean, I think it was sort of a, almost a running joke with the Secretary and himself, you know, vis-a-vis this woman's problem.

MOSS: What other kinds of things did Esther Peterson get into?

LEWIS: Well, she was. . . . She had the labor standards area, so she was very much with the child labor and things such as that. I guess his relationship with Pat just absolutely torrid. Pat was a very. . . . He's a very talented guy, but I must say, and I'm certainly no one to judge Pat, but I felt that his press far outdid what he actually accomplished. I think. . . . You know, Pat, it's very interesting --Ralph Nader worked for the Department of Labor and Pat, to his everlasting credit, though he never got any credit for it, really, was he was one of the first ones on this auto safety situation, but that never panned out. Then there was the famous Moynihan report, which wasn't really the Moynihan

report, but he took a lot of credit for it, and I think that disturbed the Secretary quite greatly because there it was. You see, Pat, it was very interesting on the ^{... The} President was shot and he was [^] lying in state in the White House--I'm talking about President Kennedy, of course--and Pat gave that famous--all of the other Kennedy people were very, very ^{wild} [^] as you know--I mean it was personally so involved in the tragedy, the horror of that situation, and Pat gave that comment to the news when no one else was talking to the news about we will laugh again, but we'll never be young again, something such as that, and that sort of catapulted him into the limelight as, you know, one of President Kennedy's, [^] you know, close. . . . To the best of my knowledge, and this may not be fair, but the only thing that Pat ever did with regard to President Kennedy, could be wrong, was he wrote the St. Patrick's Day messages. I don't mean that to be snide. Now maybe he did things I don't know about, but up to that point to the best of my knowledge, that was the extent. But this could be wrong.

That may be unfair to Pat, but he was, as I say, he had the out breaks. I think for my own personal analysis of what he does, I don't think there's all that much necessary substance behind it, but he is involved in these various areas.

MOSS: Who was effective on the Hill *at this time* ?

LEWIS: Now with regard to which people, which group of people? You talking about . . .

MOSS: With regard to the assistant secretaries for instance.

LEWIS: Well, they all had particular contacts in the congressional area. Weaver had his contacts among certain of the congressmen, Reynolds. Esther, of course, she was a lobbyist, as you know. So she was quite, quite valuable. Well, I guess if I had to put it on a *continuum* I would say, Esther was very valuable. Stanley, through his labor, you know, work, even though he was in research, had good contacts. Jim Reynolds in certain areas, and the Secretary had his own, his own contacts that could be used because, see, the Secretary had great

respect, generally, for the people up there because he was the kind of man he was. He was prepared; he wouldn't give them unless through expediency he had to give them a soft answer, but he could be relied on to be straight forward; I think they admired his candor and his intellectual, as I say, approach to these problems. So he was pretty effective himself. Then, of course, we had our own legislative liaison who always running around doing their thing. As I said, in the area of appropriations, of course, that was a different situation. I think it's probably true in most departments. You have your career budget people who over the years have a going relationship with your appropriations committees, who, as you know, are the most important congressmen to any agency. There's just no doubt about it.

MOSS: Did you set up strategy sessions to go after, say, appropriations each year to make sure all basis were touched and this kind of thing?

LEWIS: Oh, sure. Sure. I wasn't personally involved in

that sort of a situation and I wasn't really involved from the standpoint of the Department vis-a-vis the Congress with the Congressional because it was sort of a little area that was cut out for a legislative type. Sam Merrick was very jealous of his congressional prerogatives and only on very certain occasions when I would know someone or something, perhaps I'd get involved. My involvement in that was, as I said, for primarily these operations with the new congressmen and the overall political workings through the Democratic National Committee, which was aside from Sam but we would tie in with Sam.

MOSS: What sort of things would you do?

LEWIS: Well, I described some of the process before with regard to the briefing of these people and having the sessions, and then basically the political work ^{would} be working with the White House setting up the poverty tours, going out and making sure that the appropriate basis were touched out there, advance work.

MOSS: Do you recall how things are beginning to set up for the '64 elections? Let's take it before President Kennedy was assassinated. Do you recall any specific activity that was going on that would indicate the direction that the '64 campaign would take?

LEWIS: No. Well, no, not really. From the standpoint of my own personal involvement because, you see, at that time now I'd just come back up into the, in fact, the office of the Secretary. And I remember just a ^{note} personal that my first advance trip for President Kennedy was going to be to Dallas, interestingly enough. And because the Secretary was flying to Japan, those other Cabinet officers, they felt it was probably better that I stay around, which I'm quite pleased in retrospect I ~~didn't~~ didn't go to Dallas. I caught up with it a few years later, unfortunately. I was with Bobby Kennedy when he was shot, but that's neither here nor there.

MOSS: Well, we do some of the work on the Robert Kennedy thing too. Would you describe that?

LEWIS: Well, there isn't really much to describe. I got a . . .

MOSS: How did you get involved in it?

LEWIS: Well, I got involved in the Kennedy thing through Dave Burke, who was with [Edward M.] Ted Kennedy. That was a very hard decision because we were very much against him running, not that I had an input into that except through Dave, but he made . . .

MOSS: Dave was against him running too?

LEWIS: Well, I think David best described his own, you know, characteristic, but I, you know, I didn't feel that he should, but that's neither here nor there. When the cleaver comes down you got to be on one side or the other. Now, at that point in time, I'd gotten a call. Senator decided he was going to run. Right about that time, I got a call from the White House people saying, "Okay, we're gearing up. Get ready. We're going to, you know, we're starting to get set for the campaign." And I had to make a choice, which I must say, was a rather hard choice, because I wasn't all together sure I

really wanted to work for Robert Kennedy at that particular point. Subsequent to that, I did, but I felt this strong loyalty toward the President's people, and I had great misgivings personally about the war, but it was a very hard decision. So I finally told the White House people, no, and went on with the Kennedy thing. The only active part I took in that was after, when he was going into California, they found that what should've been a great organization there in California, which was reputed to be, you know, the [Jesse] Unruh and everything. It was nothing. They had no organization, so we had to go in and set up our own organization, precinct by precinct, block by block, in that state. And I got a call, as did a whole bunch of other people, saying, "Hey, come on out here. We just need your help." We all got aboard the planes and out we went to California with the Boston politicians and the young lawyers and "took over the state" (in quotes) and set up our little organizations. And there came a time as, after in

this two week period, when what I'd been doing with the labor groups and the precinct work was sort of tapering off And I decided to, you know, to either go back, but they wanted me to do some advance work again here

So I was with him and Mrs. [Ethel S.] Kennedy going around, and best I can recall is that there was a big rally on Sunday or Monday night--I don't know. We had to get him from the Coconut Grove I guess, to the Garden, and we took him through the kitchens, which was the first thing we knew about this kitchen business. Then, you know, that night, it was a very, very sad. . . . Thank God, I wasn't right there when he was shot because I cut out just a few minutes before I knew I had to go back the next day, and you know, it was the sort of thing that all the young kids whooping it up. Not that I'm so old, but you know, who needs it? We'd done our work and the next thing was New York. And I didn't want to sit around and so I said good-bye. And he said good-bye. And I was in my room the next thing we knew he'd been shot. They took

him to the hospital. When it was all over and Dave had flown in and I got back aboard a plane the next morning to come back start the funeral for the. . . .

MOSS: Tell me something about your advance work for him. What sort of things were you doing?

LEWIS: Well, just the normal type advance, getting out the crowds and dealing with the problems of the various picketers and setting up a good itinerary, helping schedule to make sure. . . . I mean, for example, we had one guy want to set up a rally for the Senator in a shopping center. Well, he wanted to do it on a Sunday when the shopping center is not open, but even more importantly, there was a super market in the shopping center that was selling grapes. Now, oh, for god's sake, I mean, you know, this sort of a thing, I mean, you just got to have somebody, you know, and there were several of us who'd been through this before. Good god, that's all you have to do is have the Kennedy rally in front of a Safeway store that's selling grapes when he's been down

there with Caesar Chavez. Good god, you'd blow your whole relationship with the--inadvertantly with the Mexican-Americans. They were very important to us. You know, that sort of thing. The motorcades were fabulous. Going through Watts, god, they nearly tore him apart. They loved him. He went to . . . Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to . . .

MOSS: No, go ahead.

LEWIS: I remember we went out to Orange County, you know, the conservative, fascist people out there in the strawberry country, and he was wonderful. They had these people and he was needling them about Ronald Regan. He started out by saying, "You all going to vote for me?" And they all roared, "Yes, we are. Yes, yes. We love you." And he says, "Well, I was here a couple years ago and I asked you if you were going to vote for Ronald Regan. And what did you tell me then?" And they said, "Oh, no, no." And he said, "Yeah, you told me you weren't going to vote, but you did vote for him, didn't you. And

now you say you're going to vote for. . . ." you know, and so on and so. . . . And they looked. Then we went to Disneyland, and it was great, all the Kennedy kids and coming out of Disneyland, I remember out in the car right ahead of his, and all of a sudden the car brakes to a halt and the Senator leaps out one side and John Glenn dives out the other side. What in the hell? We get out of the car, and sure enough they'd had Freckles, and Freckles had urinated all over the back seat and all around. They changed cars. Oh, well, enough of that sort of thing....

MOSS: Didn't you get much static from the regular California people, the Unruh types? from moving in?

LEWIS: Well, there was friction, but you know, it had to be, it had to be done. And they were cooperative to some extent, but at that time we just had to win that primary, you know, we'd just lost Oregon, and it had to be done. And it was done with a minimum amount of friction if possible, but there was some. I, again, we had our own little thing

that we were doing, sign up these various areas. Sure there was, but I think a minimum based on those circumstances.

MOSS: Don't think you left any lasting scars on California politics, do you?

LEWIS: Not because of what happened subsequent to the-- if there were any. I'm sure that was all erased by that bullet.

MOSS: Wiped out. I'm beginning to run out of things. Let me ask if you have any thoughts in general summary that you'd like to say about the Kennedy Administration as such, or the Goldberg or Wirtz administrations in Labor.

LEWIS: Well, I think that, as is obvious from the history, the whole philosophy of the involvement of the Labor Department and the Secretary of Labor changed very radically with the Wirtz regime if it were. That where before Goldberg was very much active and personally active in the settlement of and the introduction of government into labor disputes ranging from the majors to the minor, for example, the

opera thing in New York, the Secretary's feeling was to have allowed the normal process to work and only where it became absolutely essential would he have Jim Reynolds become involved, but there wasn't this dramatic introduction. I think that would characterize. * *

MOSS: This is interesting because Goldberg was criticized quite heavily from many points of view, particularly in the labor reporters and the press for involving the government too quickly and holding out the promise of government involvement so the parties would be intransigent until the coming of government into the dispute.

LEWIS: Well, I think that's very well stated. Of course, the problem with it was that while in theory that was right, with Goldberg, he would always get results. But I think you're right. From the overall working of the system, perhaps it wasn't a good thing. And I think possible^{ly} the Secretary felt that way, that the system should be allowed to work more and to keep government out of it,

except as is absolutely necessary. I tend to agree with that.

MOSS: And there's a book. *Northrup* I think wrote a book on it.

LEWIS: That's right.

MOSS: And really heavily came down on *Goldberg's* involvement.

LEWIS: That's right. I mean, as I say, the only saving that grace for the thing was/Goldberg was so effective. But if in fact, you did have involvement, for example, the Califano involvement in certain of these things where it didn't work out, of course, then you had even worse problems. As to the--I don't-- you know, I wasn't involved that much in the Kennedy Administration ~~per se~~, except for those infrequent contacts with President people, his staff. To give that, I guess the only open things on this really were the questions of the relative weaknesses of the particular assistant secretaries and that other question about the White House and how I felt on their handling our relative priorities. And I'll give some more thought to that perhaps, but I think

I never had the feeling . . . [Interruption]

MOSS: You had. . . . I don't really remember exactly.

LEWIS: Well, I was. . . . Oh, yes, I said it was regard
to my feelings as to whether or not the White
House ^{MOSS: yes. Okay.} was responsible. . . . ^{LEWIS:} And I felt, perhaps
putting it in a negative way that I never felt
strongly that they weren't responsive enough to
the, you know, to our particular positions, except
and so far as they had the hard political decisions
to make with regard to the various programs, especially
in equal opportunity and things such as that.
You know, old George Meany is a grand old man and
had a lot of clout, obviously still does. That's
pretty trite, but it bears repeating, and to the
extent that some of the things that we wanted to
do conflicted with perhaps some of the decisions
that had to be made. Well, I could understand that.
And I never, to emphasize it, really had the fact
they were out, you know, to get us, or that the
Secretary was. . . . In fact, I guess it's fair
to state that [Robert S.] McNamara and Wirtz were
perhaps the most respected Cabinet members in the

Johnson Cabinet, at least at the time I left in 1966. I think there is just absolutely no doubt on that. The Secretary performed aside from his regular functions--in '64 he was involved very heavily in the speech-writing and policy function. He was the coordinator of all that activity for Lyndon Johnson. Now, this meant *not only...*

MOSS: Wasn't the originator of the American boys-Asian boys speech, was he?

LEWIS: No, I don't think so. As a matter of fact it was very interesting and I wish I had a copy. He did a speech for his own enjoyment. Lyndon Johnson's speech in Pickens, South Carolina, which is Bobby Baker's home town and it was just absolutely riotous, you know, a parody on Johnson. I guess maybe before we close, you know, Johnson was an extremely effective politician. I had a chance to. . . . And he was a very complex man. I guess this really isn't relevant to your discussion here.

MOSS: Well, in a way it fits. I mean there's the whole Kennedy-Johnson relationship is a curious one, and

the character of Johnson comes into it a great deal, and so I don't think it's entirely off the . . .

LEWIS: Well, I'll tell it, then. The President, on the stuff, was one of the most effective type campaigners that didn't come across in television, and it doesn't come across when you read these speeches, perhaps is why Wirtz did that parody. But when he'd go out there and he'd play these different roles and he'd bang on that podium, and he was a tremendously big individual, which you know, and he really got to the people in the most effective way. And he was strange. I got balled out by him once too and it was--I don't exactly recall where it was, but I do recall that he came up to me and--I'm six foot two and he's a heck of a lot bigger and he's nose to nose with a finger, and profanity and just chews me out for something I didn't have anything to do with. And I reel away from this experience to Bill Moyers and said, "Bill. . . ." Oh, wait. The important part of

that is after he does it, he winked at me, after just yelling and screaming and poking, and he winks and walks away. I stagger up to Bill Moyers who'd viewed this. "Jesus Christ, what's, you know, what's going on?" And he said, "Well, what it was was that so-and-so"-I forget, one of the other minor assistants had done what he blamed me for, and the President knew it, but apparently this assistant was having some problems. His wife was sick or something and the President didn't want to chew him out, but in some way wanted to get across to him that knew what he'd done and he didn't like it, so he picked on the first person he saw that he knew, which unfortunately happened to be me and then he winked to let me know he didn't mean it. Well, this is all a little obstruse for my poor mind. You know, this is the sort of thing he constantly kept his own staff, again, tremendous loyalty, give and take. But he would be really warm and giving in one aspect to these people. There's just loads of instances of that, and yet,

the next day, would just--he'd keep them on edge because he'd then chew them out. Strange, strange.

MOSS: As an observer, not entirely detached, but maybe now more detached than at the time, what would you say is the legacy of the Kennedy Administration? [Theodore C.] Sorensen's written a book that he calls The Kennedy Legacy. What would you say?

LEWIS: I would say that if I had to characterize it, that perhaps the greatest legacy of the Kennedy Administration was the ability of the President as an individual, his people, to give direction to the young people of this country, to give a feeling of political system in this country does have meaning and can be responsive. I think that, perhaps, Pat was right to a certain extent in that comment that we'll smile again, but we won't be young again. I think quite seriously that Lyndon Johnson, when ~~in~~ history, when the listeners to this tape perhaps are listening to it, will have a greater perspective than we have now, but I think Lyndon Johnson was a far more effective President, perhaps a better President, but for Vietnam, than Kennedy ever could

have been. But Kennedy started it all. It was his programs that Lyndon Johnson finished by virtue of his particular skills. I think that's basically it because he took, again, President Kennedy had this intangible charisma, if you will, that got people such as me--I was never interested in politics at all before John Kennedy came in. And we felt here was somebody who could really do the kind of things we all felt should be done for the country. He could verbalize it; he could mobilize people. And I think possibly that's the --what I consider his legacy. And if he hadn't have been shot, and if perhaps Bob Kennedy hadn't been shot, God knows where we would, you know, be right now. Perhaps we wouldn't be having these riots and these problems. I don't know, maybe that's a little too . . .

MOSS: Speculative.

LEWIS: . . . speculative, perhaps, you know, wishful in part.

MOSS: Okay. Fine. Thank you very much indeed for your time and letting me pick your memory.

LEWIS: Appreciate it.