

James E. Dodson Oral History Interview – 4/28/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Dodson, Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of Labor (1961-1962), discusses the Labor department under the John F. Kennedy administration, the problems in the Labor department, and women in high-ranking positions, among other issues.

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By JAMES E. DODSON

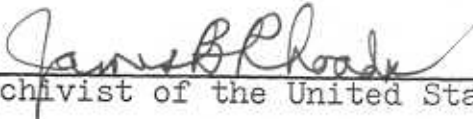
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James E. Dodson

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Oral History Interview

with

JAMES E. DODSON

April 28, 1970
Washington, D. C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Mr. Dodson, let's start first by talking about what we were just talking about, as a matter of fact. You go back quite a way in the Labor Department, don't you? Where do you begin?

DODSON: I started in 1933 in the U.S. Housing Corporation. During the first World War the Labor Department had the responsibility for building housing for war workers and for transportation. One of the big jobs was operating the Norfolk County ferries which...

MOSS: Oh, for heaven's sake.

DODSON: ...most people have either forgotten about it or never knew about it.

MOSS: By the time, let's see, you took over as assistant secretary for the administration when?

DODSON: I really don't recall the date. Let's see, it would be about 1950.

MOSS: Okay, fine. So approximately at the end of the Truman [Harry S. Truman] administration or the beginning of the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] administration.

DODSON: That's right.

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MOSS: Right. Okay. This was about the time, wasn't it...

DODSON: Oh, I was approved by Truman. I took over sometime during the Truman administration under Tobin [Maurice J. Tobin], Secretary Tobin.

MOSS: Right. This was about the time, wasn't it, that they began to have career assistant secretaries for administration, after the Hoover [Herbert C. Hoover] Report, (Hoover Commission on Organization of Executive Branch of Government) was it not?

DODSON: Well, the Hoover Report and then it went along for, oh, several years, but there were I'd say a half dozen of us in government, that felt there was need for this type of career administration, continuity of office, so somebody (was) staying on. So I was a party to the original law along with I'd say half dozen others in other agencies.

MOSS: Of course one of the purposes, as you said, was to have some kind of continuity.

DODSON: That's right.

MOSS: Now, in the transition from the Eisenhower to the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] administration, what sort of things did you do to provide this continuity?

DODSON: Well, during that particular time, why, I was the one career person left in the top staff, with the exception of a man by the name of Cass [Millard Cass]...

MOSS: Millard Cass.

DODSON: Yes, Millard Cass. He and I were the only two. Well, from the standpoint of making any decisions with the regard to the day-to-day operation—not policy so far as legislation- problems of that kind, was concerned. I had the responsibility for keeping everything operating, but not legislative-wise. In fact, Arthur Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg]—who was to become secretary of Labor—a month or six weeks before he took office, he called me up in his office and talked to me about different things, and...

MOSS: What sort of things did he talk to you about, do you remember?

DODSON: Oh, about the operation of the department, and well, first off, I had planned to retire. I'd planned to retire under

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the Mitchell [James P. Mitchell] administration, and Secretary Mitchell had asked me to stay on. So, I felt that if I stayed on, I would then have to stay on for awhile with the new administration—it would only be fair to do that—if they wanted me to. And so, this is when Arthur Goldberg called me to his office. Well, we went over different things in the department and talked to me about some of people's strengths and weaknesses—the key people.

MOSS: What particularly was on his mind? What was he worried about? Do you remember?

DODSON: He really wasn't worried, I don't believe, about anything. In fact, I would say this at the very beginning, in general, the transition from the Eisenhower administration to the Kennedy administration was the easiest I went through.

MOSS: Was it?

DODSON: Yes.

MOSS: Why was this, do you think?

DODSON: Well, in the first place, I think, Mr. Goldberg had knowledge of a lot of people in the department, having been associated with the labor movement, and he was a very considerate, and I don't want to say easy man, but he understood and he understood people and so our transitional period that time was very easy. It wasn't always so, but that was an easy one.

MOSS: What were some of the major problems, as you saw them, that were facing the new administration when they came in, particularly for your area, but going to the policy area, if you have any reflections on it?

DODSON: Well, I will say this—that the incoming administration inherited one of the smoothest working organizations we ever had in the Labor Department. Jim Mitchell had been a very good administrator, and he understood administration, and he also understood delegation of responsibility to people, and letting them operate and only getting into it when it was absolutely necessary, so there was a good functioning organization that was inherited by the Kennedy administration. Really, other than that what you might call normal growth, and pressures to get some legislation changed, expansion and safety programs, raising the minimum wage, which were always with the

department, there wasn't really anything unusual from the standpoint of operating the department on a day-to-day basis.

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MOSS: From your experience as a career administrator how difficult or how easy is it for a new, different man to sit on top of somebody else's organization? Does he have to mold it to his own ways, the way a president has to mold his presidency or is a department somewhat different?

DODSON: No, it's according to the individual. Again I say, that Arthur Goldberg knew some of these people, and I think he had some faith in their ability. The molding took place but not in a dramatic sort of way. It was really, as I say, the smoothest transition we ever had, and we did have one that was really bad.

MOSS: Now, it was the Durkin [Martin P. Durkin] situation and so on? Is that the one you're recalling?

DODSON: No, no, that wasn't too bad. It goes back to Secretary Schwollenbach [Lewis B. Schwollenbach].

MOSS: Oh yes. Right.

DODSON: When he came into office why...

MOSS: Well, Frances Perkins had had that for so long that I imagine...

DODSON: But his approach was entirely different from that of Secretary Goldberg, entirely different from any of the other secretaries that we had. Schwollenbach's first statement to the top staff in the first meeting he held was, one phrase he used, "I do not know anything good about you. I do not know anything bad about you."

MOSS: For heaven's sake.

DODSON: But that was his start-off with the crowd, and in that group were national figures. The Children's Bureau in the department then as I recall, Katharine Lenroot [Katharine F. Lenroot], a nationally known figure, the B.L.S. (Bureau of Labor Statistics). The commissioners, nationally known, and the employment service, the Bureau of Labor Stds. and so forth and to start off that way was bad. And then he brought in six people from the West, and they got to be known as the "secret six."

MOSS: You didn't have any of this sort of thing going on in the Kennedy administration?

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DODSON: Never had it with any other administration. But this was one that I was ready to pull up my stakes. (Laughter)

MOSS: Do you recall anything on the policy end? You've talked about the smooth transition on the administrative end.

DODSON: Well, on the policy end, of course, there's always, as I said, it's been the pressure to why not increase the minimum wage, increase coverage of the Fair Labor Standards Act. There was a bill that all the secretaries have tried to get through, one to increase safety, in other words, work with the state labor departments to build them up so that they would have a real safety inspection force. Those kind of things brought pressures on the department to get busy.

MOSS: Just about everybody in the Labor Department gets into this safety business, don't they? Each bureau, practically, as some aspect of its work that gets onto this safety thing, I noticed in reading the reports. Everybody's got a statement on safety.

DODSON: Well, you have safety in the Bureau of Labor Standards. When I was there I tried to keep the Bureau of Labor Standards in the promotion of safety and keep the wage and hour division in the policing of safety. Couldn't always do what I wanted to do. (Laughter)

MOSS: How would you characterize the impact of the new administration on the career staff?

DODSON: Again, because of the fact that there wasn't any major disturbance of the top staff—I'm not talking at the assistant secretary level, but at the bureau chief level—there wasn't, really, any major disturbance. There were a couple of bureau chiefs that felt that they'd better leave, and they did of their own accord. With regard to, well, the largest bureau in the long run that had the most pressure coming to it, for its administration, was the wage and hour division, and the administrator of that division stayed on, even though he was known to have been friendly with Dick Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. They lived in the same neighborhood. And so his name was always tied up as being friendly to Nixon, but I know him very well and he certainly did do a conscientious job of administration in the Wage and Hour division.

MOSS: This did not affect his standing in the department in any way?

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DODSON: No, no, other than that people would say, "How does Lundy [Clarence T. Lundquist], Lundquist, Lundy stay on?" But he did.

MOSS: Do you know of any efforts, say by people in Congress, to get him booted out because he didn't have a right to the job?

DODSON: I can't name the congressmen that were after him, but I do know one that went to his defense, and he happened to be a Democrat. And he was chairman of our subcommittee on appropriation—that was John Fogarty [John E. Fogarty]. John Fogarty talked to the secretary about keeping Lundy. He thought Lundy was a good man.

MOSS: No effort to get out the Black Republican?

DODSON: Not to that extent. Now, of course, the head of the Women's Bureau, she resigned. She knew, well, she was a pretty smart person, and knew that the handwriting was on the wall. I believe the head of Labor Standards left, and that would be about all. Now, take the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics—well, he's not really appointed by the president. He does have to be approved by the Senate, and he stayed on. Of course, all the assistant secretaries left.

MOSS: With the exception of Cass?

DODSON: Well, Cass is the deputy under secretary.

MOSS: Right, right.

DODSON: So, also, one other thing that was favorable to a smooth transition—Willard Wirtz [William Willard Wirtz] from War Labor Board Days. So, we couldn't have had a better kind of combination come in there for a transition, I don't believe, than what we did have.

MOSS: A number of people have remarked on a surge in morale amongst the regular employees, the career personnel in various departments with the new clan of the Kennedy administration. Did you sense any of this, or was it a fairly routine sort of thing in Labor?

DODSON: I would say it was more routine. I don't recall any real...flag waving...

MOSS: Words I recall, ebullience, euphoria, and so on, are often attached to the early days of the Kennedy administration.

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DODSON: I think Kennedy was very popular with the employees in the department. He just had a personality that made him very popular. I had met him on Capitol Hill before.

MOSS: Do you remember the circumstances of your earlier contacts with him?

DODSON: Well, I met him in Congressman Fogarty's office.

MOSS: On what occasion?

DODSON: Oh, he was in there, and I was just introduced to him. He was taking up something with Congressman Fogarty at the time. Oh, we just spent a little time in conversation at that point. Very easy to talk to.

MOSS: What was your personal feeling of his coming into the presidency as a person, as a politician, as a leader?

DODSON: Well, I felt he was a very smart young man. I had no feelings against his ability to being a good president. I don't think he was there long enough to prove what he could do, or what might have been the final outcome of his administration. It takes a little while to get things moving, and he just didn't have the time because...I know one of the things that bothered me a little bit, we were sending up too many recommendations for legislative change. I believe a few good efforts are better than a whole bag of them.

MOSS: Okay, what do you mean by this? What sort of things do you think were superfluous?

DODSON: Well, I think—I don't know that any of them were superfluous—but I think you have to have a timing. You just can't send too many at one time to the Hill and get success with all of them. I believe in concentrating on a small number and really working on those and getting some place. And you have to elect what are first things. In the department the secretaries always gave me a lot of latitude with regard to the budget. And this was true with Secretary Goldberg. I would have a conversation with them about different programs in the department and whether or not they felt this was the time, this one might stand some growth or it should—we would slow down. Well, I just...I missed my point now.

MOSS: The question of too much legislation all at once.

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DODSON: Well, so that when the bureaus would submit their programs to me for budget examination, and we'd have a pretty thorough review in my office. There would be lots of good programs that would come in, but I knew and felt that we couldn't sell the whole ball of wax, so you had to then work with them on getting those agreed to that really had the most merit.

MOSS: How did this process of selection work and to what extent was your position backed up by the secretary?

DODSON: Well, I had first, as I say, the knowledge of the secretary as to what he thought should grow or should be held and “we can’t expand this,” and so forth. And so when a program would be submitted, the Bureau of Labor Statistics could always think of many programs for which they wanted more statistical information or research type of information.

MOSS: And more computers to manipulate them.

DODSON: And so you had to just talk to them along the lines of “What kind of sales talk do you have for this. Do you think we could sell the Budget Bureau on the Hill?” Then I’d raise specific questions with them, and lots of time it would be a case of curtailing the program, rather than going, we’ll say, for 500 employees we would agree on a hundred or some other number. This was also true of the Bureau of Employment Security with employment service and unemployment insurance. I’m not saying that their programs did not have merit, but you have to consider the overall finances of the government. What’s the atmosphere for getting a good increase? It was through taking these budgets to the Congress—I probably did it for about twenty-five years—that I learned just about what would be approved.

MOSS: Of course, you had some expansion going on in some other areas too, building up to deal with the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act...

DODSON: We had several new pieces of legislation come into the picture...

MOSS: Welfare pension plans reporting business.

DODSON: That’s right. It made it look as if the department—if you added your going programs to the full extent that some of your bureau chiefs would want you to do, you would go with such an astronomical increase figure that you’d just get yourself into hot water. Whereas, if you went up with, well, we’ll say

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a medium type increase, I think you came out better and you could do horse trading.

MOSS: All right. Now, where does the objective of the individual bureau to do its job, the job assigned to it by legislation and by executive order and so on, get lost in this horse trading? How much is compromised?

DODSON: Oh, it doesn’t get lost at all.

MOSS: The bureau chief, of course, complains that it does.

DODSON: Well, I would dispute that. It's a question of rapidity of growth that gets into the picture. You can't just do everything. Here's what happens too: Lots of times division chiefs pressure their bureau chiefs, and the bureau chiefs do not want to say no to their division chiefs. So they let certain things come up to me, and they know that we would get into a hassle and some adjustment would be made.

MOSS: Passing the buck to you to chop it off?

DODSON: That's right. That would happen in a good many instances.

MOSS: Did you get the other kind of situation where a bureau chief would make an end run around you to the secretary or to the Budget Bureau or to the Appropriations Committee in Congress?

DODSON: Very seldom. We had, this is another part of the organization of the department. We learned a long time prior to the Kennedy administration that bureau chiefs would run around and go up to the Hill. Now, that would work to the detriment of the department's appropriation as a whole. It worked to the detriment of maybe what the secretary wanted. I knew what he wanted in the way of where increases and decreases and where plateaus should take place, but when the bureau chief, who had maybe done a few favors or so for an important member of Congress, would run around and run up there, he might get his wishes approved by the Congressman and might come out with an increase, but that increase may not be in keeping with the department's program as the secretary wanted the department's programs to be. Well, we made a rule in the department that anyone going up to talk on appropriations would first clear their contemplated visit to the Hill with me. And then they would tell me what to place up there. Now lots of times I would talk them out of going. Lots of times you can talk yourself into

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a problem on the Hill when you think you have something good.

This only has to be done, and a term I used a lot, you have to have "sales material" for what you're selling. You're selling your program, you're selling them the appropriations that's necessary to put your program into effect. Unless you have "sales material" to back that up, in terminology, it's just that simple, you need to have "sales material" to back up whatever you're requesting. So, I would talk with them, and they would see what might be asked of them, and also you'd develop your relationships with the Hill to the extent that they'd tell you what's bothering them. They'll tell you what is bothering them about individual bureau chiefs and so forth. You would know that they're not in good favor or they are in good favor. And that has to play a part in the decision as to what you go for and don't go for.

MOSS: I haven't had a great deal of experience in administration, but I do know that the kind of rules you have cited can go soft if it's not continually backed up.

Did you get this kind of backing consistently from the secretary and the under secretary?

DODSON: I never had any problem whatsoever because if the secretary... Well, in fact, very seldom did I have a bureau chief go to the under secretary or the secretary because I think we could—I'd try to be a reasonable person, and we would thrash it out over the table. In fact, I had a staff, of course, and we'd have reviews of their program, and I'd have my staff in along with myself and the division chief would have his key people up, and we would have these reviews and then before we went to Capitol Hill we'd have a rehearsal, because I knew in advance the important questions that were going to be asked of them. This is where I developed a value to the bureau chiefs, so then they rejected what I would want to do in the way of some kind of adjustment in their program.

On the other hand, they also knew that I increased many a program in the department. I never looked at the budget process as being just a red pencil; it's to submit an adequate plan.

MOSS: Who in Budget Bureau did you deal with mostly during the Kennedy administration?

DODSON: Well, Mark Alger in the later years, was more or less the key man over there in connection with the Labor Department and Health, Education and Welfare items, and I would say Mark Alger.

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MOSS: Did you have any trouble with the Budget Bureau people at any time, difficulty getting your things through them?

DODSON: Oh, you would be unhappy at times but then after you cooled off, you could reason it out some, and on the whole I think the Budget Bureau treated us pretty fairly although we never got all we would ask for and sometimes – of course, I'll say this – I'd don't know, maybe I'm getting away from your points, but one of the weaknesses that has developed in budgeting is that the larger the program you have, the more you can get away with and the more mathematical tables control. For example, we would say we estimate seven million unemployment insurance interviews or applications for unemployment insurance and then there'd be so many repeat visits to the office. Why you could time those at three minutes but if you made them three and a half minutes, who could say that you were wrong? And we had all kinds of problems with the states, running time studies and that sort of thing, and they would vary it to so you got down to where you made sort of an arbitrary figure on the basis of all the information you could gather. But the real point I wanted to make was that when you have a large number of items, whether it's three minutes or three and a half or four minutes, it adds a lot to the estimate and it's hard to defeat.

MOSS: So, despite all our reliance on hard evidence and statistics and so on, it's still a guess in a way.

DODSON: It certainly is. Take some people in the Budget Bureau and some in our own department believed in continuing time studies, and in continuing time study, usually the person fills the forms out at the end of the week and they're always looking for more money so they put the most time on, what they think are the most responsible activities they're performing and you do not get a real true picture. I used to believe in a test check supervised time study as being the best way; you didn't have to do it every day of the year. One of the things we used to have in the department was the equipment salesmen coming in, saying you needed daily cash balances, so they wanted to sell you all the IBM. Well, there's very few departments needed the daily cash balance—I can't really name one that needs a daily cash balance—but they would sell a lot of this IBM and NCR (National Cash Register Company) and other companies. They would always be after you and one of the salesmen's approaches would be, "You'll have a daily cash balance." Well in government administration it's nothing but a cash book – in most departments. Your appropriation is made and you spend it, so it's a cash book

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and salaries will account for, oh, from 60 to 80 or 90 percent of your total expenses, your travel and your printing for another ten to thirty percent. And so you spend a lot of money chasing five percent of your expenditures and so I was the old time, practical sort and while I was there I never went for all that automatic stuff.

MOSS: Was there any attempt that you recall by the budget people to influence policy by squeezing the budget?

DODSON: Oh yes.

MOSS: In what particular case?

DODSON: Well, in the administration of the Fair Labor Standards Act, why, we would feel we would need so many inspectors to cover... And if we were to do a real good job—well, let's go back to the beginning on homework—we needed more inspectors to get around to the homework angle, and policy-wise we knew there were pressures on us to do something in the inspecting homework activities and yet we would be curbed at the Budget Bureau at times.

MOSS: Do you know why?

DODSON: Well, the money, keeping the budget down in total. I don't think we were treated any different than, we'll say, other agencies but they would have to feel that they had to make some reduction in our estimates. Now I'm afraid that too many people working in Budget had that feeling, that they've got to make some

adjustment in a program, and you're always fighting that with the Budget Bureau people, not to just feel you've got to make an adjustment. And in fact, on Capitol Hill I've had it said to me that, "Well, we can't give you all you're asking for, but where will it hurt the least?" and I'd work with them on marking up the estimates. But over at the Budget Bureau you didn't get that kind of chance. They would insert their judgment to a great extent—at the hearings and all—but they wouldn't say to you, "Where is it going to hurt?" I've never had that said to me there. But I have on Capitol Hill, several times.

MOSS: How independent is the Budget Bureau from the office of the presidency?

DODSON: Oh, on most operating, going programs I'd say it's independent.

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MOSS: Do you ever see any attempt to gain presidential control over the budget process directly, through the director of the budget or anything of this sort?

DODSON: Well the only time that the White House got into budgeting—and I'm not just talking about the Labor Department, but fairly well in general—was when Sherman Adams was there. He actually had us over for meetings in the White House.

MOSS: Okay. You talked earlier about the organization of the department and having a fairly smooth running machine when the Kennedy administration came in. Within the next two years, however, there was quite a reorganization: new things such as assistant secretary for labor standards, some shifting around of bureaus, the administrative assistant secretary getting his subordinate echelons better defined, at least on the organization chart and this sort of thing. How much of this was going on while you were still administrative assistant secretary?

DODSON: Well, there was an effort made and with some degree of success that started during Secretary Mitchell's administration to have the assistant secretaries have administrative control over certain bureaus with related activities. There was a group in the department that went for that. Then there were some that did not go for it. I was one that did not go for it; I keep the bureaus in a good operating position. But I did feel that the assistant secretaries should have control of the policy and legislation that was developed by these various bureaus. It takes a long time, when you go into a new department, to get the feel of the day-to-day operations so that you don't stir things up and I know when I went in the secretary's office from a bureau, it was about eighteen months before I felt I had my feet on the ground. But when you had new assistant secretaries come in and then immediately give them day-to-day operating responsibilities over bureaus, you are in a sense creating a super bureau chief and you're reducing the level of dignity of the regular bureau chief who has been operating a bureau for years and probably has an excellent reputation.

But new people coming in always feel they've got to change something. I say always, I think that's pretty – now some of it may be very slight, some may come over a period of time. On the other hand, it can become quite a morale depressor at the operating level and I, in my time there, had many discussions with Secretary Mitchell—I said, “Now why do you want to make super bureau chiefs?” and I

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really think that's what would develop, because when you appoint assistant secretaries and give them additional responsibility they're going to want to have assistants. So you build up another layer and instead of the bureau chief being able to go to the under secretary—and some of these chiefs are presidential appointees – instead of them being able to go to the under secretary, they first have got to convince some assistant to an assistant secretary and then maybe on to the secretary. And this kind of organization didn't go for. Now this started in the Mitchell Administration and it was pursued in the Kennedy administration.

MOSS: How did Goldberg and Wirtz receive your approach on this thing?

DODSON: Well there was a slowing down, but that's all. I really believe they felt it was what they wanted, I think they wanted to give the assistant secretaries some real day-to-day responsibilities. But in my knowledge of governmental administration, there's plenty of work to do in selling the various programs of the department to the big organizations and to the people in general. And there's also, when it comes time to, we'll say to change the legislation—one of the simplest illustrations is, should the minimum wage be increased from a dollar fifty to a dollar sixty? I think the assistant secretary who is—this is a political question—the assistant secretary should be the controlling factor in there, if he has the wage and hour (and public contracts) division as one of the bureaus reporting to him, and then he should take the weight of selling that, we'll say, to Congress, and to the public, and the unions, management and so forth. And these kinds of things are of a political nature, and he should know the political thinking of the administration and he should also have their friends, a knowledge of their friends, so that he can call upon them. And so I felt that the assistant secretary should be restricted, but it has gone farther than that now and that the ...

MOSS: Who would you say in the new administration was closest to your point of view on this?

DODSON: In the new administration?

MOSS: Umhmm. I mean in the new Kennedy administration at that time

DODSON: I believe Willard Wirtz saw my point of view.

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MOSS: As these things began to develop, I guess the Office of Manpower, Automation, and Training was one of the earliest that came in and then Esther Peterson's [Esther E. Peterson] position as assistant secretary for labor standards; how much jockeying was there amongst the assistant secretaries and appointed people to get this new scheme of things into effect?

DODSON: Oh I wouldn't say that there was any what you might call day-to-day active jockeying. It was a case that a program was developed, put down on paper, organization charts drawn up and so forth. But I don't know of any case where there was any jockeying. We played pretty good ball with one another in the department.

MOSS: Where did your successor Leo Werts [Leo R. Werts] stand on all this?

DODSON: Well, Leo would be more for it, I think, than I would have been. I mean I was really against it, but Leo was more of a theoretical thinking person than I am or was and I think in theory there's a lot to be said for that type of organization, but in practical operations, I don't think it's good. And also, as I say, it adds Mexican generals.

MOSS: Yes. Yes. Let me shift to another subject and that's the equal employment opportunity and employee-management relations in the federal service area, and let me ask you what steps did you, as administrative assistant secretary, take to encourage the hiring, the training and promotion of minority group employees within the department and in the regional offices?

DODSON: Well, the personnel matters were left pretty much up to the personnel director and I only got into the very top echelon of personnel matters. The..

MOSS: The White House was asking for reports on what you were doing in this area very early?

DODSON: Oh yes, yes. This is one of the, well, to me upsetting factors of the administration. I think they were going too fast and really, we got into a lot of problems that I think could have been avoided. We....

MOSS: Could you give an example?

DODSON: We actually got into where we lowered the standards for applicants coming in, college applicants, and we developed

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committees for appeal purposes for the Negro workers. Also one particular example—and these things took so much time—one particular example is one of our Negro girls wanted to go to the World Series in New York. She was in a division that was really

working overtime and we were not granting very much in the way of leave at that time to anyone—they had to have a very good reason—but she had gotten a couple of tickets to go to the World Series, so she asked for two days off, so we gave her two days off. But she didn't come back then. She overstayed a couple days and so her supervisor came to me and said, "She just didn't notify us, she didn't come back, she overstayed her leave" and he says, "I want to give her leave without pay." Well, "Sure, that sounds reasonable." So, he puts her on two days or three days, whatever the overstay was, leave without pay. Well, next I get a memorandum from her that she wants to see me. So she comes up to see me – I was always available. Having worked up in the department, I knew so many of them; they knew me pretty well. So she came up and I talked with her and I supported the bureau chief. The next thing I got was a union delegation. They came up. These things, as I say, all took so much time. They came in and pleaded for her, a whole committee. I still felt we were right and I said so and still held my ground. I did not repeal. But I don't know how many hours we spent on that case of two days. So it got to be a point, that the operating people did not bring a number of charges that they would have brought, because they would have to spend so much time in developing their case and writing memorandums and appearing before appeals. Now this did get more aggressive and became a more serious problem in my year with the Kennedy administration than it had before.

MOSS: What about the regional offices, for instance, of the employment service, particularly in the south?

DODSON: Well, in the operation of the employment service there had to be pressure brought to bear on them so that they would not have separate lines for Negroes and separate lines for whites. And that again is something that has taken time, but it was being corrected and I don't know whether it was fully corrected before I left or not, but I know I've been in offices where it had been corrected.

MOSS: I understood that there were even separate offices sometimes, in separate buildings practically.

DODSON: Well, yes, but that would be very unusual. But there'd be, there might be separate rooms in the same building, or there might be separate lines for them to go to, separate

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washrooms and toilets, and it was a real problem in the south. But that was all being corrected. It was just a case of time to get it corrected. But if we did have a morale problem among our employees at any time, I think it was the feeling that the new administration was using pressure on us to show preference. Now probably the administration would not ever use the word preference, but that was the way it looked to a number of the employees.

MOSS: As though their equal opportunity was being threatened?

DODSON: That's right, yes. And you, well, you had such problems as this: You have the coffee hour which you—not coffee hour, but coffee time—but in the morning and in the afternoon and then, like in the Labor Department, some of those people have to go a block and a half, let's say. So you can figure it's fifteen or twenty minutes each time they go for coffee, so you get that twice a day. But it doesn't stop there. Out on the mall, there's parking. So you can park for two hours in some places—you could in those days; I don't know what the parking rules are now—so they would team up in teams and change parking places with one another. Well, there was another, oh, half hour a day we'll say that went into—more than a half hour; of course they go in the morning, they go in the afternoon, to change parking. When you figured it all up, you were losing better than thirty man days work a year, and when you had production units you lost that much time, it just wasn't good efficiency. But again you were hesitant to really put the hand on that kind of operation the way it should be.

MOSS: Simply because of the length of time that it would take you to enforce the situation or did you feel you would not be supported?

DODSON: I felt that the atmosphere was such that it was showing that you would not be supported.

MOSS: Did you have any definite statement along these lines or was it just a feeling and an atmosphere?

DODSON: This is all feeling.

MOSS: Did you at any time try to take it as a test to the secretary or to the president?

DODSON: Oh no, I would never bother the secretary with anything like that. We would talk to the people and tell them, "All right now. We know you've got parking problems, but let's do this fast. Don't tarry," and that sort of thing, and "try to cut

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it down to less."

MOSS: Yes. What I think I meant was, did you take this feeling that you had and other people had to the secretary and tell him what it was doing to the department?

DODSON: I had mentioned it, but didn't make an issue about it.

MOSS: What was his reaction to it?

DODSON: Well, I just don't recall anything other than it's something we got to live with. I don't recall anything specific. I can tell you one thing way back with Frances Perkins, sitting with her one evening, talking about things in general. She said that, "Both parties have got a hot potato and they don't know what to do with it," and she was referring to the racial—you see, they had gotten into this and each one was trying to do a little more than the other. So I never will forget that statement. Of course, I was surprised at her using the "hot potato" language. You can strike that off if you want.

MOSS: What role did you have in the task force on employee-management relations? I would presume that you would have had something to do with this?

DODSON: Yes, but again I didn't get into it to any great extent.

MOSS: The secretary of labor was the chairman of the task force as I recall, and it was to come up with policy guidelines, government wide guidelines on union positions, the no-strike business and this kind of thing.

DODSON: Yeah, I remember. I got that for comment, the draft... Yes, because, again, I guess I started too young in government, in 1933, and was taught that you were working thirty days a month, although you didn't have to come in on Saturday or Sunday, and that you were subject to call for overtime and that you'd get paid for it. But also were told you took the same oath of office that the military did and you were the civilian army of the government and that sort of thing. I had that pretty well drilled in me and I couldn't see all the demands of the union, which I likened unto putting the government in the same position as a private enterprise. We had so many avenues of protection, through the Civil Service Commission, that just couldn't see where the union should get into the picture too much. That the employer could take his case to the Civil Service Commission or there would be review boards in the

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Department, too, for problems. But I could see a role for the union in being the lobbying organization for the government. So I always supported the union as being a lobbying organization.

MOSS: But not as a bargaining organization?

DODSON: Not as a bargaining organization.

MOSS: What was your reaction and comment when you received the draft of the policy statement?

DODSON: Well, I thought we were putting the union in too much of a relationship of an industrial union to an industrial establishment.

MOSS: Did you make this known to the secretary?

DODSON: I'm trying to think whether we had a conference after getting the memo and it was all done conference-wise, I think. I don't recall writing a memo on it. But I know it was pretty well known around how I felt about it. I wasn't antagonistic to the unions at all. I said, "You have a role. You can be our lobbyists. Everybody has to have a lobbyist with the Capitol, and you've got a very important function. But don't play around with these little individual regencies." I actually have had—back when I was business manager of wage and hour division—I had the union come up with an employee's claim that an electric fan was blowing on him, and the supervisor wouldn't change it. And there would be four members in the committee, or three members or something like that, taking all that time to come in and talk about that. That could have been handled differently.

MOSS: Yes.

DODSON: Very minute things that used to come up. This was particularly true when we had a CIO (Congress of Industrial Organization) and an AFL (American Federation of Labor) local; they were both trying to outdo the other in connection with what they could accomplish for the employees. Again, this is a time consuming operation.

MOSS: Why do you think moves were being made in this direction, both on the equal employment opportunity and in the union management relations in the government? Why with the Kennedy administration did these two things get a push?

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DODSON: Well, I felt that his record was such that they through that they had a more receptive person at the head of government, so they took the opportunity to push it. On the equal rights, and this goes back to equal rights for women, why, I can remember a congressional committee asking Miss Perkins for her opinion on equal rights for women. And she says, "I don't know why they want equal rights. They're protected by laws. They have all the advantages that, well, of preservation, whether it be in connection with an estate or what." And she made it very clear and the congressman congratulated her on being so courteous, so courageous and all, in expressing the views. And so that question used to come up with secretaries. As we appeared before appropriation—appropriation committees would get into getting a feel on policy thinking and that would be the first, maybe, approach, or getting some kind of statement on the record as to how a secretary might feel about a piece of legislation they had some interest in.

MOSS: In line with this equal rights thing and women's rights and so on, how did you regard the elevation of Esther Peterson from head of a bureau to assistant secretary?

DODSON: Oh, well, that was particularly all right.

MOSS: Aside from your other comment on assistant secretaries taking over the operational things in general?

DODSON: Oh, Esther Peterson was an intelligent person and very good to work with and I think...I have no feeling against women getting as high as they can get, but I do have a feeling you work for these things rather than through legislative process. And back in Miss Perkins' day we had, well, Katharine Lenroot, head of the Children's Bureau, Mary LaDame was one of the top special assistants to Miss Perkins, and Clara Beyer [Clara M. Beyer] was assistant chief of labor standards and stayed on through changes in administration. We had women in very high—when we'd have a staff meeting, why, we'd have a half a dozen women around the table in the top staff meeting. Now that has reduced in later years.

MOSS: I was thinking more particularly of looking on it as a rather artificial ploy so that the administration could say, "Look, here's Esther Peterson." We're doing something for women." Do you think it was as superficial as that, or was it really a useful kind of change?

DODSON: Well, I think it had two, I think it had both purposes: It gave the administration that opportunity to say, "Here

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we have Esther Peterson as assistant secretary," but she was a capable person. It wasn't just putting a woman into a job just to have her there in the job. She was capable. She did a good job.

MOSS: Okay. In closing now, can you think of any other specific differences between the Labor Department as you knew it in the Kennedy administration and earlier administrations; any comparisons that you can think of or any other recollections you'd like to add?

DODSON: No. as I said in the very beginning, the entrance of the Kennedy administration into the affairs of the Labor Department was really very smooth. And the changes and new legislation that was proposed all had the general agreement of the staff so that we really had a smooth operating department from all points of view for the year that I was there under the Kennedy administration. And I think Kennedy was looking upon as being such a nice, understanding person, and he had such a lovely personality that everybody just went along doing what they could.

MOSS: There's one thing that occurs to me, just a phrase that might tip something off. You talked about the assistant secretary for administration being put in for

continuity purposes. I've also heard it said that this is the man who knows where all the bodies are buried, where all the skeletons are in the closet. Were there any skeletons in the Labor Department closet that would be significant for somebody looking back on it twenty, thirty, a hundred years from now?

DODSON: No. Not as such. Now we did have problems with high ranking people, but not from a skeleton point of view. It might be alcohol, something of that sort, and we had our problems of that sort but not many; very few in fact. No, I know of no skeletons. We have had real good, hardworking men as administrators of the Labor Department. They've worked awfully hard. The only—and I don't want to say that Secretary Durkin didn't work hard – the funny thing was that when five o'clock came, he packed up his papers and left, every day at five. Now all the other secretaries have been there until six, seven, and ...

MOSS: Ten o'clock sometimes.

DODSON: Yeah, every day of the week and all that sort of thing. But he ran his operation on a union basis. He was very well liked and everything went along smoothly during his administration.

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I don't recall that during—he was about a year or maybe a little more – I don't believe we had any real active legislative programs going at that time. Going back to that time, too, we had a real problem budget-wise, from the Truman to the Eisenhower budget, I don't know whether anybody has ever mentioned that.

MOSS: Yes. Really cutting back.

DODSON: Well, we had submitted the Truman budget to the Hill, had our hearings on the Truman budget. Then we had to revise the whole thing to make it the Eisenhower budget, and cut back some, and then go up and have some more hearings on the Hill. And then the Eisenhower budget cut back too far, and before the year of operation the budget was for, we were asked to start spending next year's money for supplies, equipment, etc. But that was really a rough one, because I carried the brunt of the budget and that was a rough transition. We didn't have anything like that in the Kennedy... We had some review, but it was very simple review. It wasn't any real problem.

MOSS: All right, fine. Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Dodson, and if I come across anything else, may I contact you again?

DODSON: Yes, you can.

MOSS: Fine. Thank you very much indeed.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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