

INTERVIEW WITH
Dr. Arthur S. Flemming
on
November 24, 1978
for
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



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ARTHUR S. FLEMMING

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This interview is being conducted with Dr. Arthur Flemming at his office in Washington, DC on November 24, 1978. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes. Present for the interview are Dr. Flemming and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: You had been around Washington for a number of years prior to the Eisenhower administration, I know, and I was wondering when did you have your first contact with Eisenhower.

DR. FLEMMING: In November of 1952 around the Thanksgiving period.

DR. SOAPES: Yes.

DR. FLEMMING: I was asked to come to New York by somebody on the staff there at the Commodore Hotel, and my first contact was with Governor Adams. He told me that the President-elect was planning to set up an advisory committee on government organization and that he had invited Nelson Rockefeller to be the chairman of that committee; Milton Eisenhower, his brother, another member, and that he wanted to know if I would serve as the third member of the committee. Governor Adams indicated that the suggestion had been made to the President-elect by former President Hoover. I had served on the first Hoover Commission as a member of that commission. Actually I did not meet with President Eisenhower at that time. He was on his way to Korea the day I was up there. But a few days after that why the three of us did meet with him at Morningside Heights.



DR. SOAPES: Yes, yes. What were your impressions at that first meeting?

FLEMMING: Well, I went away with a very positive feeling relative to him--relative to kind of approach that I felt he wanted to take to the whole field of government reorganization. Of course, although I had not met him and talked with him, I had the feeling that I knew him because I had been rather closely associated with Milton Eisenhower over a considerable period of time. I came to Washington first in the fall of 1927 right out of college, right out of Ohio Wesleyan. First evening I was here I spent in the apartment of Milton Eisenhower. Then as I became interested in and involved in educational work why our paths would cross. I saw a good deal of him as he worked over at the Department of Agriculture and also when he was deputy director of OWI. By that time I was a member of the USO Service Commission, and so, I worked with him directly on some of the personnel problems connected with the Office of War Information. We had talked about his brother good many times with one another, so I felt as though I really did know him.

SOAPES: Yes.

FLEMMING: Of course, I had a very favorable attitude toward him.

SOAPES: When you talked with him about government reorganization did you sense that he had a feel for the full scope of the government?

FLEMMING: Yes, I did. You realized that you were talking with a person who had been in the government service for a long period of

time and had had very many contacts with people in the government service. Certainly you didn't have the feeling that his interest or his background was confined solely to the military side by any means.

SOAPES: Yes, yes. What approach did he evidence at this meeting to the reorganization?

FLEMING: No, at this particular meeting he simply indicated the kind of a relationship that he would like to set up with this committee: that he would from time to time want to try out ideas on the committee; that he also expected us to try out ideas on him. He urged us at that time to make immediate contact with the members of his cabinet and talk with them about their ideas, get their ideas, and see what we could do about coming up with plans designed to implement their ideas.

He did indicate that he had during the campaign stated that he was going to take the then Federal Security Agency and convert it into a cabinet level department and that he would appreciate it if we'd go to work on that and develop the plan which would result in a cabinet level department in that general area. Actually, soon after that meeting--maybe we might have had another meeting subsequent to that--but very early in our existence, I was smart in following Milton Eisenhower, who suggested that I kind of concentrate on that particular assignment. We all felt that Senator [Robert A.] Taft [Republican from Ohio] would be a key



person in obtaining the consent of the Congress to any plan along that line. I did have a good working relationship with Senator Taft. First, I was from Ohio. At that time I was president of Ohio Wesleyan and had seen quite a lot of him out there and had worked with him out there, so that actually I did initially spend quite a little time along with Mrs. [Oveta Culp] Hobby [first Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] and representatives of the Bureau of the Budget on the development on that plan.

Of course, the first thing that he had to do was to persuade Congress to give him reorganization authority. We all recognized that that was the initial step. Of course, that was an area where Mr. [Herbert C.] Hoover was very helpful because in our work on the Hoover Commission we had concluded that if any president was going to move forward in the reorganization area he would have to be given a reorganization authority by Congress. And the President asked for it; Mr. Hoover backed it; Senator Taft backed it; Congressman Clarence Brown from Ohio did and so on. And so it went through very quickly. And you probably know, it didn't take very long to develop the plan for what is now the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, because actually the plan went into effect in April of '53. Very soon after the administration got under way.

SOAPES: As you were working on this plan and other organization plans how often would Eisenhower become directly involved in your deliberations?

FLEMING: Well, quite often. Sometimes with the three of us, other times with Milton. He saw a great deal of Milton, and as you know had a great deal of confidence in him. So that often-times the three of us would discuss something, and Milton was going to see his brother that evening or something of that kind, why he might try out an idea on him. He would give him our reaction to an idea that might have been presented to us by the President.

SOAPES: Yes. You said that you had had the opportunity to talk with Milton many times over the years about his brother. I assume Milton was frequently candid with you. What attitudes did he show towards his brother?

FLEMING: Great admiration and respect.

SOAPES: Yes.

FLEMING: He recognized that there were certain things about his brother that he recognized and that his brother knew that he recognized. They would kind of joke with one another about it. I remember the very first day that we were together with the then president-elect up at Morningside Heights. I had read in the New York Times about an address the president-elect had made the preceding day. It appealed to me, and I said something to him

about it. I said that I thought the comments were exceptionally well taken. I recall Milton was in another side of the room, and he asked him to come over. He said to me, "Repeat what you just said." And he said, "Milton's not at all sure that I ought to be known," I'm talking extemporenowly now, "because he doesn't think my handling of sentence structure and so on is all that it should be. And he feels that I've got a standard to set as far as the country is concerned."

Well, Milton was a purist, or a perfectionist, as far as the use of the English language, still is as far as the use of the English language is concerned. Of course, he had his start in journalism in the information side, and he headed up the information side over at Agriculture for quite a number of years. He knew how to use a blue pencil. So that his brother's involved sentences would bother him somewhat, but not in any derogatory sense at all. He just recognized it as a fact of life. But as I talked to him over the years about his brother, and then from time to time the President would talk to me about Milton when Milton wasn't around, there's no doubt at all but that the President had the highest regard for Milton.

SOAPES: Yes, yes. Besides their use of the English language were there other contrasts that you could note between them?

FLEMING: Well, offhand I don't think of any sharp contrasts they had. There was an understanding, I mean, there was a

recognition that they had grown up in, or I mean that their careers had taken place in two different worlds. Milton's career largely, of course, on the civilian side of government and then the educational world. Whereas the President's had been largely on the military side.

He told me the story that he had told a number of times that when Columbia first started talking to him about becoming president. He said they were talking to the wrong Eisenhower, "after all I've got a brother who's an expert in this field. I'm not an expert in the field," and so on. He said that their response was, "Well, we think you can open some doors and that's why we're--among other things--interested in having you take on this particular assignment."

In that connection I had a very interesting conversation with him. During the first term I served as his director of defense mobilization. I was on leave as president of Ohio Wesleyan University. At the end of the first term I felt I should go back, the University having given me by then four years leave of absence. So there was a luncheon for me, and he was there. I sat along side of him. He said, "Tell me about Ohio Wesleyan." So I did. He said, "You know, when I was finishing up in Europe after World War II, the thing I wanted to do more than anything else was to become president of a small liberal arts college." And he said, "When I came back to this country they invited me to be Chief of Staff of the Army, and I'd felt that I should undertake that assignment." "However, when I was coming down near the end of that tour of duty

and people were talking to me about doing a great many different things, including of course, the presidency of Columbia University." He said, "No one talked to me about being president of a small liberal arts college." He indicated to me then that he was a little reluctant about going to Columbia. He didn't know whether he and Mrs. Eisenhower would really enjoy living in New York. And it was a larger institution than he wanted to head up. He said after he'd been there a little while he was having dinner one evening with a friend, who was the chairman of the board of a liberal arts college. He never identified the college. His friend said to him, "You know twelve or eighteen months ago we were trying to get up nerve, our nerve, to come down to Washington and invite you to become president of our college." As I recall it, the President said, "I looked at him and I said, 'Brother, I was sitting right there waiting for you. If you had come in with an offer, you would have gone out with an acceptance.'" I've often told that story to illustrate the point that you should never assume that you know what a person wants to do.



Because I'm sure when they were thinking about it--when the trustees of that small liberal arts college were thinking about talking to the President about being--then General Eisenhower--about being president of their college, they probably said, "Well he wouldn't be interested in taking over a small operation like this."

That was just what he wanted to do. He thought that he could make a contribution in terms of having, or developing, a rather close personal relationships with both faculty and students.

SOAPES: Yes.

FLEMMING: I draw on his experiences and so on in that way.

SOAPES: Did he ever comment on his tenure at Columbia, whether or not he thought he was successful?

FLEMMING: No, I never really got into any discussion with him on that. I talked to other persons who had the feeling that he did things for Columbia that no one else could have done. In other words that their analysis of the kind of contribution he would be able to make was probably an accurate contribution.

SOAPES: Yes.

FLEMMING: I saw a story in the newspapers just within the past few months, a death of the person whose whole estate comes to Columbia University. The newspaper stories said that this particular person had written Columbia into his will prior to the time that General Eisenhower became president there and had taken it out of his will because of some dissatisfaction, something that had gone on in the University. Then had put it back in as a result of contacts that General Eisenhower had with him. What he had said about the importance of an educational institution of that kind. I read that; I kind of thought about that comment, "You can open up some

doors for us other people might find it difficult to open up."

Of course, I think when he went in there was a lot to be done in the way of reorganization as far as Columbia University was concerned. I think he, from what I've learned, applied his interest in reorganization, his background in organizational matters to the University, did it in a way that benefited the University.

SOAPES: Yes. Now when was it you went into ODM? [Office of Defense Mobilization]

FLEMING: Well, I was actually in ODM at the beginning of the Eisenhower administration. I was there as an assistant director of ODM in charge of manpower resources. I had come in there under Charles Wilson at the beginning of Korea when President Truman set up the office by executive order.

During World War II, of course, I was on the Civil Service Commission, but I was also the government's representative on the War and Manpower Commission. And I was the government chairman of the Labor and Management Committee of the War and Manpower Commission. So when hostilities broke out in Korea, they asked me--President and Mr. Wilson--if I'd come back in and take over responsibility on the manpower side of it. The person who was director of the office at the end of the Truman administration was Mr. Fowler, Joe Fowler, who later became Secretary of the Treasury. He left at the end of the Truman administration.



And so the first thing the President did was to ask me if I'd serve as acting director of Defense Mobilization. I agreed to do that, and then after a few months he indicated he wanted to send my name as director. So really, I was in there right from the beginning of his administration.

SOAPES: What were the major problems that you faced?

FLEMMING: Well, of course, the Office of Defense Mobilization was in fact, as well as in name, in the Office of the President-- in the Executive Office of the President. This was particularly true under President Eisenhower. The area was an area in which he had shown a great interest throughout his whole career in the military. He had become interested in this area of the non-military, the mobilization of the non-military resources, back in the days when he was a young officer on General McArthur's staff, and he had become acquainted with Bernard Baruch at that point. He might have been acquainted with him even earlier, I don't know, but at least that acquaintance played a big role in his thinking in this particular area.

I remember somebody told me, I forget now who it was, but some one of his rather close associates said to me one day that I ought to dig out the testimony that General McArthur had given before Congress on this whole area of the mobilization of the non-military resources, and so on.

I said, "Why?"

"Well," he said, "Because I understand that, I've always understood that General Eisenhower had a great deal to do with the preparation of that testimony."

So I did have the library get it for me. I scanned it, and remember I was in talking with him one day. I said, "My attention has been called to this testimony. I understand that you had something to do with the preparation of the testimony."

"Well," he said, "I think General McArthur changed one sentence."

Well, that's all I wanted to know. I kind of kept that in my right hand most of the time I was in the office, and I did find him reflecting that same philosophy time and again as he came up against specific problems.

Well, the first job that I had on my hands, I had to take the lead on, was de-controls. The controls were still a fact growing out of Korea. The responsibility for working out a de-control program rested with the director of Defense Mobilization. And I got people to help me on that. Some of those names slip me at the moment, but, for example, one person that was very, very helpful on that, in that period, particularly in connection with the de-control on prices and wages was [Gabriel] "Gabe" Hauge [Administrative Assistant to the President], Manufacturers Hanovers [Trust Co.], as you know, the President's chief economic advisor at that time.

And then virtually parallel with that there were a good many issues being presented to us in connection with the stockpiling of materials. What policies were going to be followed in connection with stockpiling. We were spending a good deal of money in that area at that time. The director of Defense Mobilization had the responsibility for the administration of the Defense Production Act. That was his basic act. He had other responsibilities given to him by executive order. The President, when he asked me if I'd agree to stay as director of Defense Mobilization, said, took the initiative of saying, "If you do, I want you to sit with the Cabinet as a member of the Cabinet." He said, "By law you're a member of the National Security Council, of course, so you'll participate in the security council meetings, but I want you also to participate in the Cabinet meetings because this area is an area that impacts a large part of the government." He said, "You ought to be there for the purpose of presenting your point of view, but you also ought to be there for the purpose of listening to others, getting their point of view." Of course, this was taking place simultaneously with the evolution of his concept of the role of the Cabinet and the role of the National Security Council and helping him develop a policy.

And I'll cut back now for a moment to that meeting at Morningside Heights. That morning Milton and I had had breakfast with one another. One of the things we talked about was the role that the Cabinet as an institution could play in helping a President in



the development or evolution of policy. We had both had an opportunity in getting first hand information relative to the way Cabinet meetings were handled by President Roosevelt and also President Truman. We both felt that Cabinet meetings, for example, could be much more meaningful than they had been, particularly under President Roosevelt. Because it was well known that they were just kind of show and tell types of meetings and that really the basic issues did not come up for discussion at that particular time.

SOAPES: Yes.

[Interruption]

FLEMMING: So we decided we'd present to his brother some ideas about utilizing the Cabinet meetings in a more significant way. We did, and he said, "Well, I've been thinking along those lines also." He said, "People tell me that under our form of government you really can't use a Cabinet that way." Our response was that we weren't suggesting that we try to adopt the parliamentary system to our form of government, but we just thought that the Cabinet as a body could be more helpful to a President in the development of policy than had been the case previously in our history. We kind of dropped it there. We didn't pursue it. We kind of compared notes afterwards, and decided we really hadn't made a sale on it.

But I began to notice with great interest what was happening at the Cabinet meetings. I noticed first of all that in the

beginning there was an agenda for the Cabinet meeting. That had been unheard of in the past. Then I noticed that he would begin to ask for staff papers to back up items on the agenda and asked to have them circulated in advance. Then, of course, the third thing I noticed was his decision to appoint a secretary to the Cabinet, Max [Maxwell M.] Rabb. And then after Max had been appointed, why, we began to get minutes of the Cabinet meetings. Not discussion minutes but action minutes--certain items that had been discussed and the President had made a decision and directed the following departments to follow up on the decision. So all of those kind of mechanics of the Cabinet meeting were of real interest to me. But the thing that interested me more than anything else was the way he ran the meetings. I've said quite a number of times that he's one of the best practitioners of consultative management that I've ever seen in operation. He would introduce an item that was on the agenda, an item that he would assume the members of the Cabinet were--.

Oh, I should back up a minute and say this: That at a very early meeting or one of the early meetings of the Cabinet--maybe not the first but say the second or third, somewhere along there--he said, "When you come to Cabinet meetings I do not want you to feel that you're coming here solely as a representative of the department or agency that you happen to head up. I want you to feel that you're coming here as general advisors to me." He said, "If I put on the agenda an item in the field of foreign policy, I don't expect just



to hear [John] Foster Dulles discuss that item. If that's what I wanted, I'd ask him to come to my office and discuss it with me. But when I put it on the agenda for a Cabinet meeting I'm putting it on because I want to hear the rest of you discuss it."

And, well, he set a tone for the meetings which resulted in each member of the Cabinet feeling that his contributions were not only welcome but you really had an obligation to get into it. I say, he would start and often open the discussion by giving some of his personal views, but not giving them in such a way as to make you feel that he had made up his mind and there wasn't any point in discussing it further; but just throwing it out on top of the table. And then he would enter into the debate that would take place in a very vigorous manner. But again he would never do it in such a manner as to shut off discussion.

We did know when he had apparently heard enough. He had certain ways of conveying to you the feeling that he'd just about made up his mind. And he usually did make up his mind following the discussion of the item. And he'd indicate to us where he'd come out. But once in a while he would use a favorite expression and say, "I'm not going to shoot from the hip on this one. I'm going to sleep on it and you can get my decision in the Cabinet minute when it comes to you tomorrow." We always got them the next day.

The Security Council meetings ran in essentially the same way. In some respects they maybe were a little bit more formal even

than the Cabinet meetings because, as you know, back of the Security Council was a planning board and each one of us had representatives on the planning board. And the planning board was the body that hammered out the papers that backed up each item on the agenda. So there'd been a lot of debate and a lot of discussion prior to the time it hit the Security Council. And that was to some extent one of the weaknesses of the system, I mean the planning board fell under some obligation to get a consensus. Sometimes the consensus was the lowest common denominator. Consequently, that consensus would have to be challenged in the Security Council meetings.

Of course, some of the debates in the Security Council meetings were very, very exciting, as they were in the Cabinet. There isn't any doubt at all that the debates that took place in both the Cabinet and the Security Council made significant contributions to his thinking and to the evolution of policy as far as he was concerned.

When I later became the Secretary of HEW I had a number of situations where I know that the debate that took place was the factor that undoubtedly influenced him in deciding, for example, the sense of the proposed legislation to Capitol Hill. I feel that that contribution that he made both through the Cabinet meeting and the Security Council to "Cabinet" government, if you really want to call it that--that's the phrase the people are using these days; we never used it then--but the contribution

that he made to demonstrating what the Cabinet as a group, the Security Council as a group, could make significant contributions to the evolution of policy. A contribution that I hope the historian is going to pay more attention to--.

SOAPES: Yes, Yes. Can you cite me a specific example where you recall the debate having a major influence?

FLEMING: Yes, I'll give you a specific one. Have you talked with Brad [Bradley H.] Patterson?

SOAPES: He has been talked to. I haven't personally but he has been interviewed.

FLEMING: Ok. Well not, I'm going to give you an incident. He's got the complete file on this. Well, it's out in Abilene I guess now.

SOAPES: Yes.

FLEMING: I'm recalling this from memory. Brad, as you know, was the Assistant Secretary of the Cabinet right straight through the eight years. When Max Rabb left and [Robert K.] Gray came in, why, he stayed as the Assistant Secretary. And Brad can take shorthand, so he took shorthand notes from time to time. He didn't do it all the time, I mean. And he didn't do it for the purpose of necessarily providing a record, a transcript of a Cabinet meeting. But when he would kind of sense that something was taking place that was fairly--might be rather important from the standpoint of



history, why, he would do that. All of his notes, as I understand it, are in Abilene, and I would think they would be invaluable to historians.

Well, this was in 1959 or '60, or early '60, along in there. I should give you this additional background. At that time the Assistant Secretary of HEW for planning and for congressional liaison was Elliott Richardson. He had felt, and I had agreed with him that the administration ought to submit legislation designed to increase the--step up the involvement of the federal government in the field of education, really at all levels.

There had been passed earlier the National Defense Education Act, which was the first act since the Land Grant Act that really put the federal government into the business of higher education. But we had a good deal of experience with that. We'd had experience with the stepped up assistance on the elementary and secondary side. We just felt that the time had come when we should go further.

I'd been discussing these possibilities with some of the people at the Budget Bureau, and I hadn't been able to develop any great degree of enthusiasm for it over there. I'd discussed it with some of the members of the White House staff. They weren't particularly in opposition to it, but they also were not very positive about it. So one afternoon I was talking with General [Wilton B.] Persons. I said to him, "Look, I've touched all the

bases that anybody should touch on this. I think it's about time the matter gets presented to the President, so that he has the opportunity of making a decision." I said, "I think this can be an important part of his record; the kind of a record that will be taken to the voters in the fall of 1960."

He agreed with me. This was a Thursday afternoon. He said, "I happen to know he's free right now, why don't we go in and chat with him." So we went in. And I laid it out. I had no papers with me, obviously. At that time I just laid it out orally. He wasn't very enthusiastic about it. He wasn't hostile to it, but he wasn't very enthusiastic. He started talking about some of his experiences at Columbia, and so on.

This is one thing I always had to keep in mind as Secretary of HEW that he had been president of Columbia and that he would approach some of these things from that particular vantage point. I kept pressing. Some of us used to say when the blood begins to go up the back of his neck you should stop because that means he's at the point where he's made up his mind and he doesn't want to be pressed any further. Well, I think maybe it had reached this particular point, but I still thought it was very important to press from the standpoint of his administration. And I did. So he said, "Well, let's take it up at Cabinet meeting tomorrow." And Jerry Persons said, "You don't mean tomorrow, you mean a week from tomorrow." Because there was a rule that the Cabinet papers should be distributed ahead of the Cabinet meeting, you see.



He said, "No, I mean tomorrow. I think Arthur's right. If we're going to send it to the Hill, we ought to send it up next week.

So I said, "Well, we've got a Cabinet paper ready on it, and we'll have it here."

So, my recollection is that it was the first item on the agenda. And I had Elliott Richardson come with me. He sat in the row back of the Cabinet table. And the President presented it in a rather unenthusiastic manner, then kind of turned it over to me. I made my presentation. Then I began to pick up plenty of opposition to it. Ezra Benson [Secretary of Agriculture] as you would expect, of course, ultimately opposed what we were doing already let alone doing anything more as far as federal involvement was concerned. And people like Neil McElroy [Secretary of Defense] were not particularly enthusiastic about it. Fred Seaton [Secretary of Interior] wasn't particularly enthusiastic about it.

Maybe for the first hour or so, why, the opposition had the floor. But then Jim Mitchell, the Secretary of Labor, came in in a very supportive way. My recollection is that the Attorney General did also, Mr. [William P.] Rogers. And near the end of the debate the fellow who came in in a very supportive manner was Richard Nixon. So after we'd been at it I would say close to two hours, maybe it wasn't quite that long, but it was a long vigorous discussion, he [President Eisenhower] finally said to me, "Well, I guess we'd better sum it up." And he said, "You come over next Tuesday and

see if you can get Charley Halleck enthusiastic about it." And he kind of laughed when he said it. He knew I wasn't going to achieve that particular goal.

But if I had been dependent solely on a meeting with him in his office on that preceding Thursday, I think I would have had a negative decision. Probably. You can't tell, but he was leaning in that particular direction. But after he listened to it, pro and con, the exchange, and so on, he decided he'd go the other way on it.

I'd submit that that's a lot better way to proceed than to put a thick file in front of him which would have the pro and con there all right--although some of the members of the Cabinet would never have an opportunity to put in a memorandum on a matter involving higher education, elementary and secondary education. The President could wade through the file and undoubtedly get the feel of the conflicting points of view. I guess I'm reflecting my own bias. I personally would much rather listen to--participate in--that kind of a vigorous give and take and then make up my mind than I would be dependent on a file.

The interesting thing is that the Vice-President, Mr. Nixon, was very enthusiastic about Cabinet meetings and Security Council meetings under Eisenhower. He used to talk with me about them. I assumed when he became President that he would probably pick that up, do it in the same way, but he didn't. I also have the

feeling that if he had, his administration might have proceeded somewhat differently, because he was influenced by the give and take of the debate. I've seen him. Of course, he himself was a good participant in that kind of give and take.

But I feel that President Eisenhower made a very real contribution, and I hope it is written up and evaluated to a greater extent than it has been. It's clear to me that's what President Carter was feeling for or has been feeling for. He's talked about the use of the Cabinet. Well, from what I've been able to learn he hasn't gone as far as President Eisenhower did. I mean he hasn't taken the highly controversial issues and scheduled them for Cabinet debate.



As I've described the process, the way I've just described it now, I've had people say to me, "Well, what kind of a contribution could Arthur Summerfield make to a debate on foreign policy?" He was then the Postmaster General. My response is, "Look, listen, Arthur Summerfield was closer to the grass roots than any other member of that Cabinet." In those days he was still the chairman of the National Committee and that whole intelligence network, really, domestic intelligence network. And I've heard him from time to time say, "Well, people feel this way or they feel that way." And when he's said it the President paused, Foster Dulles paused, and so on. He did make a contribution from a different point of view.

SOAPES: Yes.

FLEMING: I just think under our form of government the Cabinet and the Security Council ought to be used in that particular way. Well, I've gone down a number of by-paths here.

SOAPES: No, it's a very interesting path though that you did go. I wanted to move back just for a moment to ODM--

FLEMING: Yes.

SOAPES: --that was before ODM and one other agency had been combined into one head.

FLEMING: Yes. The Civil Defense was separate when I was director of ODM. Val Peterson was the head of Civil Defense. I worked very closely with him. I really had a coordinating responsibility there, and the President looked to me to do that, although Val had access to the President from time to time. There wasn't any problem there. But they were separate at that time. In fact, if my recollection is correct, for a good part of the time, it was an independent agency. Then it's next step was to go into defense, and then it became a part of a combined agency. Then it went back to defense; now it's becoming part of a combined agency again. Fact of the matter is, that reorganization plan that Congress approved in the past few weeks, far as I can see virtually brings ODM back into being again.

SOAPES: But were there any problems that you encountered having this split?

FLEMMING: No. No, I wasn't aware of it because, as I say, Peterson and I had a very good working relationship. For example, I had responsibility for developing a plan for relocation of government on the event of an attack. And this was something that the President had a personal interest in. It also reflected his background.

I remember working with people who were experts in that area, which I certainly wasn't. We developed a plan, a tentative plan. I brought it in and submitted it to him one day, and [Walter Bedell] "Beetle" Smith was there. It was a small group; it wasn't a full Cabinet meeting this time. Just a small group. And he was Under Secretary of State. Of course, very often he was acting because Secretary Dulles was off on a trip or something. And he listened to my presentation, and I remember two observations. Smith quizzed me very hard on my communications plan. He said, "This isn't worth anything unless you've got a communication network that's going to stand up under very difficult and tough conditions."

And the President finally summed it up and he said, "It reads very nice on paper. I'm interested in your presentation. It isn't worth the paper it's written on unless we test it." And he said, "I want you to develop plans for what should be at least an annual test of this plan for relocation." And so I did. And while I was



there it was tested once a year with his blessing, with his participation and blessing. And we had these relocation sites. Some of them probably are still regarded as classified sites, some underground and so on.

And I have another reflection and this is kind of an interesting footnote. I took him through one of the underground operations. He said, "Have you planned to duplicate these facilities topside?"

I said, "No, not necessarily."

He says, "You better do it. Human beings can't stay underground indefinitely."

And one of his associates who had been with him in World War II said, "He was speaking for himself." He said, "We couldn't keep him underground. He could stand it just so long, then he had to get above ground."

But he took great interest in those relocation sites. I haven't been briefed in a long while, but I understand they still exist, and I guess they still do some of that work in connection with them. I see they're now possibly in connection with the revival of the interest in civil defense. There'll be some revival of interest in that.

But he was very, very insistent on the fact that this couldn't amount to anything unless we tested it. He said some of the Cabinet will react very negatively. He says, "They'll think you're just asking them to play games," and so on.

I remember saying to him, "Well, Mr. President, you're the only one that can offset that feeling."

He said, "I will. You bring it up at Cabinet meeting and bring it up at Security Council meetings, and I'll back you on it."

He insisted that they participate and get involved in the significant matters.

I suspect that my association with him was closer as director of Defense Mobilization, than it was as Secretary of HEW, simply because I was working in an area that, after all, he'd spent his whole life in. And he was the teacher; I was the pupil. I mean it was a thrilling experience to be associated with him in that capacity. I learned a lot from him. And, of course, part of my job was to coordinate Cabinet officers. I had to get them together from time to time on a particular issue. Well, they knew that he was interested and that he did keep in touch with me on it. Therefore, when I asked them to come to a meeting I didn't have any problems. Because they knew I was speaking for him.

I remember soon after I got under way we had some issues involving the Department of Commerce. Sinclair Weeks was Secretary of Commerce. I invited him over to have lunch, and he brought a couple of his people with him. They laid out their problems, and my staff laid out the situation as they saw it, and so on. Weeks came in with a comment. He said, "Look fellows," he says,

"when my dad was Secretary of War under Coolidge he had his office right in this building." Our offices were in the--what's it called now?--the old executive office building. "But he had his offices right here along with the Navy and the State Department," and so on. But he said, "If he had a problem on his mind, all he had to do was wander across the street and go in and see the President. No problem, the President had time," and so on.

I said, "Those days are gone forever."

He said, "We're talking about an area where the present President would love to be dealing with the issues if he had the time. He hasn't got the time, so he's asked Arthur Fleming to step in here and act as kind of an alter ego for him and to represent him," and so on. He said, "It's up to us to look to Arthur Fleming for guidance, feeling that we're getting through him guidance from the President."

[Interruption]

FLEMMING: ..."its getting off the beam, why, of course, we'll go directly to the President on it."

I thought he [Sinclair Weeks] described what the job was in a very informal way and effectively. And that was the kind of relationship that I had with him.



Of course, it was helped by the relationship I had on reorganization with Nelson Rockefeller and Milton and so on. In other words, I saw them in two or three--well, there were some weeks when I'd see them in three different capacities in the same week. Be in a Cabinet meeting, in a Security Council meeting, and then maybe meeting with the Advisory Committee on government organization. Because I was sitting in both Cabinet and Security Council meetings, I think I was able to be of help to both Milton and Nelson Rockefeller in interpreting certain things, too, because I'd hear them say things or express a point of view in those meetings which had a direct bearing on some things we were working on from our reorganization point of view. So I was kind of a clearinghouse there.

SOAPES: While you were in ODM and sitting with the Security Council did you get involved with the [J. Robert] Oppenheimer case?

FLEMMING: Yes. Not in a very detailed manner. The Science Advisory Committee at that time, of which Oppenheimer was a member, was set up in the Office of Defense Mobilization. The chairman and the members reported to the director in the Office of Defense Mobilization. So the communication from J. Edgar Hoover relevant to Oppenheimer was addressed to [Lewis L.] Strauss [Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission] and to me. Addressed to Strauss, well, because Oppenheimer was on one of his bodies, I think, at that time. Going back a good many years now, you forget some of the

details. But anyhow, there was a reason why he would get a communication from Hoover on it; I know why I got the communication. So I immediately called him, and we both went to see the President along with Bobby--

SOAPES: Cutler?

FLEMMING: --Cutler [Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs]. And I'm pretty sure Sherm [Sherman] Adams, probably, was in on that meeting. I'm sure I wasn't the only one that said this, but I said, "Well, it seems to me that a pretty formal procedure should be established for dealing with this. It isn't the kind of thing that we can deal with just off the cuff, but a formal procedure ought to be set up." And there was general agreement on that and that led to the establishment of the hearing. The decision of course was made by Strauss. It was an atomic energy matter, and I was not involved in that decision. So I was in it on the beginning.

SOAPES: You weren't in on the follow-through.

FLEMMING: I wasn't in on the follow-through after the machinery got under way.

SOAPES: Did you have enough contact with it to have an opinion as to whether Oppenheimer got a fair shake?

FLEMMING: Well, I don't know that I'm really--I think the procedure that was set up was all right. It was designed to get all of the facts and relevant issues on top of the table. And I would have to

assume that it did. Now if I had all of that information and was weighing all of that evidence, I don't think I'm in a position to speculate as to where I would have come out. Simply because I didn't have the benefit of all of that evidence. I think for a person to respond to that particular question would have to have had the opportunity of evaluating all of the evidence and then deciding what conclusions should be reached. I, just as a person, I had great admiration for Oppenheimer in terms of the contributions he had made, and so on. So I guess the best thing to say is that I'm really not in a position to respond to the question.

SOAPES: O.K. I want to move to your HEW period. The Eisenhower administration is thought of as a Republican conservative administration that disapproved of the growing federal role in many previously local and individual affairs; yet Health, Education, and Welfare is the symbol of government doing exactly the opposite.

FLEMMING: That's right.

SOAPES: What was Eisenhower's attitude towards these functions of government as you got it from him?

FLEMMING: Well, of course, first of all we have to recognize that he wanted to bring the department into existence. There was absolutely no resistance to, on his part, to bring the department into existence in the way in which we did. In fact, I shouldn't put it negatively. I mean he was enthusiastic about the plan that was developed.

I remember Mrs. Hobby and I one Saturday afternoon had a conversation with Senator [Robert A.] Taft about it. Senator Taft said to me, "The President is very anxious to have this done, isn't he?"

I said, "Yes he is."

And he said, "And he wants to have it done as soon as possible."

I said, "Yes, that's the message that I get."

Senator Taft said, "Well, I want to do everything I can to help." Then he asked me what we were proposing to call the department.

And I said, "Well, the only name I've heard up till now is Welfare, the Department of Welfare." If you'll recall, there was a plan submitted under Truman to bring into existence a Cabinet level department of welfare.

"Well," he said, "that could create some difficulties up here." Then he began to toy with various ideas. He finally said, "Why don't we call it Health, Education and Welfare? That's a long name but it tells the story."

Mrs. Hobby and I both reacted positively. And we took that back to the President; he reacted very positively. So I remember I'd go back to Ohio from time to time and talk with some of my rather conservative friends. I would get great satisfaction out of telling them that Senator Taft really named the department and carried it through.

Every suggestion we made to him [the President] regarding it, he reacted positively. He recognized that government was playing a role and that it was probably going to play an increasing role in those areas. Now he was concerned and worried about that role expanding too rapidly. I got a reflection of that when soon after I went into office Congress has passed an appropriation bill where they had increased the appropriations for the National Institutes of Health by, what was then, a rather sizeable amount. Again my best recollection is that they brought it up to around three hundred and fifty or four hundred million, something like that. Budget Bureau proposed that X amount of that--I think fifty million of it--should be put into what we then called a "presidential reserve." I opposed the Budget Bureau. He went along with me, I mean he decided with me against the Budget Bureau but did it in a rather reluctant manner I think, but still did it.

However, I think maybe the best illustration I can give you of his approach as a person is to tell you about an experience I had with him in connection with what is now Medicare. In 1960, of course, we didn't have any program of insurance for older persons or medical insurance for older persons, or any other segment of our population. There was a growing recognition of the fact that something had to be done, and there was a great deal of interest in something being done on Capitol Hill. But there was not unanimity by any means as to the best method to follow in order to accomplish the objective. But there were those who felt very definitely that the best way to

proceed would be through the Social Security system, utilizing the payroll tax as a means for raising the necessary revenues and then administering it through the Social Security system. As a person, I happen to agree with that. But although he had never said anything to me directly about it, I rather assumed that he would not be particularly happy about that.

Well, one morning I was in my office, and I had a call from Ann Whitman. She said, "A Mr. [Robert P.] Burroughs has been in to see the President. The President would like Mr. Burroughs to come over and talk to you." Well, that name registered, and I'd never met Mr. Burroughs, but he was an insurance man from [Manchester] New Hampshire who had been one of the original backers of President Eisenhower in '52. Probably enlisted by Governor Adams. And he came over and talked to me about the desirability of launching a medicare program by utilizing the Social Security mechanism. So I listened to him for ten or fifteen minutes, and then I said, "Did the President ask you to come over and talk to me about this?"

He said, "Yes, that's why he sent me over."

So I thanked him. Then I called Ann Whitman. I said, "I'm afraid maybe I've got the wrong understanding of what the President's position would be on this. I think you and Tom [Thomas E.] Stephens [Special Counsel and Appointments Secretary to the President] better get me in to see him so that I can talk with him. This is pretty important." Well, they did within a day or two. And I was there



alone. And I told him about my conversation with Mr. Burroughs. He got up and started walking up and down as he would do oftentimes when he was thinking out loud. He said, "Yes, I'd like you to develop something. I'd like you to put a pretty good deductible in it. You know," he said, "like these automobile insurance policies."

Then he described for me the experience that Mrs. Eisenhower's family had had with the illness of her mother. I guess she'd had round the clock nursing, very intensive medical attention for a couple of years. He indicated what that had meant to them from the fiscal point of view, and so on. So it was clear that he felt the time had come for some kind of an insurance program, and he wanted it through Social Security.

Well, I went out of there and went back down to the department. Got people in and working in that area; commissioner of Social Security, couple of his associates. Told them what I wanted. And I said, "This is on direct instructions from the President." They kinda looked at me as though I'd been hearing things, you know. They were delighted to get the assignment, but they never expected to get it under our administration. So they went to work on it.

Well, in maybe ten days, two weeks, or along there, he got a question on this issue at a press conference. And he responded to the question in almost the same way he talked to me. And of course, I kind of breathed a sigh of relief because when you're

in with the President alone you may hear what you want to hear, you may not hear certain qualifications and so on that get into the conversation.

But then everything broke loose. American Medical Association really went to work. And they trotted out the speech that he had made in San Francisco in October of 1952 in which he had said that he would not use the Social Security system. So he sent for me this time, and in effect said, "I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to change signals. As you know, I have a policy of not doing something that in the presidential campaign I said I wasn't going to do. I've got a policy of doing what I said in the presidential campaign I was going to do." But he said, "I still want to send a program to Congress dealing with this issue. Let's make it a federal-state program financed out of general revenues." And he said, "Make it a good, well-rounded program." Well, I went back again.

So we developed a federal-state program with the federal government handling a good percentage of the load. And in that program we did include everything. We included prescription drugs, we included care of the eyes, care of the teeth and so on; things that are still not a part of Medicare right down to today. Well, when I presented this to the director of the budget, who was then Maurice Stans, he just obviously reacted very negatively to it.

I said, "Well I'm sorry, but these are the President's instructions." And I don't have a clear recollection as to whether this got on the Cabinet agenda or not. I mean I'm not clear as to how I got Stans

to know directly from the President that this is what the President wanted. And there may very well have been a Cabinet discussion where the President said, but somehow or other I mean he--

SOAPES: We have those agendas available. We can check them.

FLEMMING: Yes, well, he got it across that he was backing this program. So I went up and presented it first to the Ways and Means Committee. And I recall so clearly when I finished my presentation, Wilbur [D.] Mills [Democrat, Representative from Arkansas] said, "Does this have the support and the backing of the director of the budget?"

I said, "Mr. Chairman, I indicated at the outset of my testimony that it has the support of the President."

He said, "I didn't ask you that question."

I said, "Well, the answer to your question is no. But we both work for the same man, and it does have the support of the man from whom we work."

And then over on the Senate side, Harry [F.] Byrd [Democrat, Senator from Virginia] was then the senators' senior. And of course, he just couldn't comprehend how the Eisenhower administration would be up there with that kind of a program.

I think maybe that story as much as anything reflects the President's approach to the basic issues that confronted us in Health, Education



and Welfare. People worried about medicare on the ground that this might be opening the door to socialized medicine. Well, he had lived under socialized medicine all of his life.

SOAPES: Yes, in the military system.

FLEMMING: Yes, yes. And he knew that some of the ghosts that people talk about, you know, are not there. But the interesting thing is that that became a major issue in the '60 campaign. [John F.] Kennedy picked it up and made it a major issue. And I was with the vice-president in his plane for the last five weeks working in this and other areas. He never could get on top of it, I mean even though our program was a very attractive program and a very liberal program. But in those days the test as to whether you were for or against the program was whether you were for or against using the Social Security system. We came awful close to having an Eisenhower proposal. Now actually Medicare didn't pass until 1965. And I have the feeling that if we had submitted the Medicare proposal involving Social Security in 1960 it probably would have passed before Congress adjourned for the campaign. Because with him,--with his being back of it--why that would have rallied a considerable amount of support for it. Then I've told you about the example in the field of education. That was a struggle for him there, but he finally resolved it by saying, "Oh, we'll move forward."

SOAPES: Yes, yes.

FLEMMING: "We'll get involved still further."

SOAPES: The major piece of legislation in the NDEA has the word defense in it.

FLEMMING: Yes. Of course, that was strategy. Now, that was submitted before I became secretary.

SOAPES: Yes.

FLEMMING: Right after I had sworn in, it had passed the Senate and was pending in the House, and I got involved immediately in the negotiations on the House side. Then, of course, I had the responsibility for implementing it. But it was kind of a by-product of some of the issues that had arisen in Korea and so on.

SOAPES: Yes. Yes. In response to the Sputnik '57.

FLEMMING: Yes, yes. That's right. In response to that, yes that particular scare. That's really what gave it its momentum. But he looked at these issues on a national basis. There was no looking at them from any parochial point of view at all. He looked at them as national issues and tried to figure out how they could be handled in a satisfactory manner from a national point of view. Where he could keep the responsibility with the states and at the community level, and so on, he would do that. I mean where there was reasonable opportunity of keeping it there; he definitely would do that. In other words, he saw the issues, he knew the issues had to be met and met head-on, and he would prefer to meet them head-on with what people might term fairly conservative methods.

But if he become convinced that those methods would not deal with the issues in a satisfactory manner, then he would deviate from those methods.

SOAPES: Yes. So his test was: Does it work?

FLEMMING: That's right. That's it exactly. That's it.

SOAPES: We're getting late I know. I want to throw in one further question on this education subject. Of course, civil rights was a burgeoning issue then--Little Rock in '57, the schools as a focus of racial intergration. Did you ever hear him comment on using the schools as a way of integrating?

FLEMMING: Well, not on that specifically. This was a struggle for him. But I mean where I am now I often think back to the discussions in '56 in the Cabinet relative to what was going to be submitted to Congress as proposals in the civil rights field. And of course, those submissions later became the '57 Civil Rights Act. Of course, this is in his biography. I mean that chapter on civil rights in his second volume. But I do recall the discussion on bringing into existence a commission on civil rights; and he was a proponent of that. He wanted to do it. He felt that time had come to put the facts on top of the table. And I recall the discussion where some people said he can do it by executive order. And he said, "But I couldn't give the Commission the authority to supoena witnesses and put them under oath." So which, of course, was right. Of course, his ideas as to what should go into that package were



the ideas that went to Congress, and those were the ideas that Congress accepted.

Those were in the very early days, of course, as far as desegregation was concerned, and there wasn't an awful lot of momentum backing desegregation. As you know that didn't come for ten years, almost. But I was Secretary at the time when Prince Edwards County, Virginia announced that they were going to throw their support back of a private school system--obvious intent of trying to defeat desegregation. I remember at the beginning of the press conference saying that we would see to it that all federal support was withdrawn; there would be no federal support that would find its way into those private schools under those circumstances. I never had any objection raised to taking that position on his part at all. I don't recall any Cabinet debate on the specific issue of desegregation.

