

INTERVIEW WITH

Orme Lewis

by

Thomas Soapes  
Oral Historian

on

July 19, 1976

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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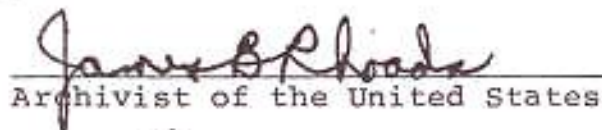
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This interview is being conducted with Mr. Orme Lewis at his office in Phoenix, Arizona on July 19, 1976. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Mr. Lewis and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: First of all Mr. Lewis I note from looking at the sheet you've just given me that you were born here in Arizona in 1903.

MR. LEWIS: Correct.

DR. SOAPES: And your education was here in Phoenix and then at Stanford and George Washington.

MR. LEWIS: Right.

DR. SOAPES: Had you always intended to go into the law profession?

MR. LEWIS: I don't think I gave it any thought.

DR. SOAPES: One of those things, you just always were going to be a lawyer.

MR. LEWIS: No, I don't think so. I think the truth was that I enjoyed Stanford a little bit more as a place of recreation than schooling, and, as a result, a dozen or so of us who went there from Phoenix, before we got through with Stanford

were dispersed throughout the United States and I ended up in Washington, D.C. where I went to a business school, Strayer's Business College and took the civil service examination and went to work for the Department of Justice as a clerk. Those contemporaries of mine with whom I made friends there were all going to law school from five until seven at George Washington. So I didn't have anything else to do during those hours of the day and they were not available; so I went to law school.

SOAPES: You went into the justice department in what capacity?

LEWIS: A package wrapper, a photostat operator, in the Disbursing office, and, as an aside, in the Disbursing office I took care of the payroll which included all of the employees of the Department of Justice. The payroll was made up on a breakdown sheet because it was paid in cash entirely. And another fellow and I went to the Treasury Department twice a month and picked up a satchel of money that I had calculated was necessary, and we then put it in envelopes and delivered it to everybody from the attorney general down to people who held jobs like mine. And that payroll was thirty thousand dollars a payday. And that included the predecessor of the

FBI, then called the Bureau of Investigation.

SOAPES: I'm sure that the figure for that same payroll would be many factors higher by today.

LEWIS: Thirty thousand dollars? It's impossible to believe; sixty thousand dollars a month!

SOAPES: Then you came back to Phoenix in 1926?

LEWIS: Right.

SOAPES: And established a law firm. Is that the same firm as--

LEWIS: No, I went to work for my father's law firm. And he died about a year later. And I left it and practiced law alone then, except for a short partnership period, until 1950 when Paul Roca and I created this shop.

SOAPES: What was your specialty in the practice? Or did you specialize?

LEWIS: No, I was completely a generalist because I practiced in Phoenix which was a little town for better than twenty

years by myself. So I had no choice; I did what came in the door.

SOAPES: By 1950 it was beginning to grow a little and--

LEWIS: Yes. In 1950 it started to really grow and the practice changed and law firms became usual rather than unusual and this shop started and reached its present stage.

SOAPES: Did you participate in politics here in Phoenix?

LEWIS: Yes, I served in the legislature, our state legislature, in the House for a term in 1929--our terms were two years. And then I was blown out with the mid-presidential term of the Hoover period when all of us were blown out of office in Arizona. It was a very Democratic state then in any event. And that was it. Then, from that time on, I had become interested in politics and a few of us youngsters concluded that we had to develop a two-party system in Arizona. Arizona was about five to one in the most populous counties, which was this one and Pima County, Tucson, and seventy-five to a hundred to one in some of the smaller counties. And so we started to work and we kept on. What

caused us to keep on I've never been able to figure out because we were defeated a hundred percent every time. But we did; we worked very hard for twenty years, from 1930 until 1950 when we elected a Republican governor for the first time since 1928. And that was my career in politics.

SOAPES: Who were the principal people that you worked with?

LEWIS: Dick [Richard M.] Fennimore, a lawyer, no longer living, who was a very good friend of mine and I worked very closely together. Then--I'm an abominable person even on my best friends' names--the names that ring bells to people outside of Phoenix would be Bud Kelland, Clarence Budington Kelland, who we picked up in some fashion and made national committeeman and he remained in that capacity for many years and was the subject of many intra-party fights, because that was the only thing we had to keep our interest going. We fought with each other regularly, steadily. And our big job was to see to it that our precincts were filled. I wouldn't attempt to go down the list of names of the people that I was associated. I mentioned Dick's name particularly because he and I worked so much and so closely together.



SOAPES: The work that you were doing was primarily organizational, trying to get contacts in each precinct and get an organization from which you could develop a campaign?

LEWIS: That's right. Well, we developed campaigns. I was state chairman for a couple of terms. To show what we were faced with, in one of the campaigns I got two men to run for governor. The idea being that if everybody registered as a Democrat, because the Democrats had a good sales pitch and that was, "Why register as a Republican--you have nobody to vote for in the primary and so you have no decision as to who holds office in the state?" And I was trying to develop contests so that we would find ourselves in a position in which people were interested and registering Republican. So we ran these two individuals, and we ran them out of the same office. And, as is so true of politics, by the time the campaign was half over, each became convinced that there was a chance he might be elected. And they began to get annoyed with each other and we did get a little bit of a campaign out of it. The next election, a good example of what we were faced with; we couldn't get anybody to run. Finally having

gotten three people to run for three state offices--and we elect a lot of our state offices or used to here--we found ourselves in a position where we had no gubernatorial candidate. We had no candidates to speak of except three minor state offices. So I decided that the thing to do was to ask the three not to run, to advise the public that we were trying a new program and that was we were going to select the very best candidates and write them in. And so we made up a list of people and got the word out to the counties and they wrote the names in, having an utterly blank Republican ballot in the state. And then having nominated them, we then went out with our sales job selling them on signing this slip required to acknowledge the fact that they were a candidate. And we did. We succeeded in that. I might say we didn't succeed in electing anybody, but we were so accustomed to that that that really didn't bother too much.

SOAPES: What year was this?

LEWIS: That must have been around 1940, I think.

SOAPES: And you really didn't have much success then until 1950.

LEWIS: No. We had no success until 1950. There were a number of factors that entered into the 1950 success. First, during the war, we began to have a new influx of population and it came from, the most part, from the Mid-West, but it came from all over the country. And for some reason or other more of those were Republicans then they were Democrats. And after the war was over, there'd been a lot of air training here, those boys had liked it here. So they didn't have any particular place to go, the war being over, and a great many of them came out here. And we were able to grab hold of a good many of them because they were young and energetic and wanted to be a part of the community. As a result, we changed the registrations rather considerably; still very Democratic. Then, too early, probably, a woman who had held office for twenty or thirty years as state auditor and had been elected with no trouble ran for governor. And we were able to get a fellow who was a radio announcer and a very personable individual and extremely capable of speaking to run--Howard Pyle was his name. And so Howard ran and the combination of the better registration, the change in population, his--well the public's acquaintance with him because he had been on radio

for so long, that was before television was very important-- and the fact that he was running against, even though she was very popular, a woman-- and she put on a miserable campaign for some reason or other--all of those things contributed. As a result we then, ever since that time have been a negative party in registration, but the more successful party in elections. We've lost a few elections, but we've won most of them. I think right now we've reached the stage that I talked about for so long, that there should be a balance to the place that each party was accountable and that's about what we've reached and we may very well have reached the stage where we're going to get our ears knocked down in an election or two. This is pretty easy for the Republicans to do because of the registration difference. Pima County, which is the Mo [Morris K.] Udall area, was originally about the only Republican area, but long ago it changed and it, together with the political tone of the times, may very well end up by that. Not to mention the fact that we have changed our term of office from two to four years in many of our offices so the Democratic gubernatorial incumbent--who is it? who is it

out there?--ah, Raul Castro will be staying in office and we will have no governor spot on the ticket. We will only have the national ticket before us and Paul Fannin, who would be the senator running this time, is retiring. So all of the elements tend to favor the party out of office.

SOAPES: In regard to 1952, was there a significant battle here between the Taft and Eisenhower forces?

LEWIS: In depth. And as this is a [Ronald] Reagan state politically now, it was a Taft state then. And I was of the Taft group. And probably is the only one of the principal reasons that I got an appointment in Washington during the beginning of the Eisenhower administration. I assume that they felt that they had to give token recognition to the Taft forces so they really, to a great extent, centered them in Interior. On top of it, I had had the background of having been state chairman, of having been chairman of the delegation to one national convention and a member to another national convention. And, having developed a great many friends in the Taft group, it wasn't too difficult for them to select me.

SOAPES: How would you characterize the differences between the Eisenhower and the Taft people here in this state? Were there differences of age, of economic levels?

LEWIS: No. I think that they recognized Taft as a conservative and this was, and still tends to be, a conservative state and they didn't recognize Eisenhower as being conservative for sure, and so they were inclined toward Taft. And to go back historically, this was interesting because this state centered its most bitter political turmoil in the Republican party over [William Howard] Taft and Roosevelt--by Roosevelt I don't mean your Roosevelt, I mean Teddy Roosevelt--when Teddy split the party. And I guess historically, too, my own inclinations ran from the fact that my father was on the Territorial Supreme Court, having been a Taft appointee. Because that's the way in the territorial days a judge went on the bench. I think that that is about it. I don't think that age had anything to do with it; economics I'm sure didn't have anything to do with it. This never, during those periods, never was a state with wealthy people. Practically didn't have any wealthy people. You could name the families up through 1940 in the state whom you considered wealthy. You might be missing some, but this

is an odd state that way, or certainly my part of it, this central section, Phoenix area. But this is a state which fortunately got turned on being what you might call conservative in a social sense as well as in a political sense. People who came here did not want to be seen and heard, as distinguished from a great many places where people do wish to be seen and heard. A good example is in the days when you went to the movie downtown and stood in line to wait for the ticket window. I can recall standing in line and three people in the line were famous movie stars and nobody turned around and looked at them; you heard nobody talking about them. It's still this way. There are many, many residents here who are of national prominence, but even I, having lived here so long, don't know they're here. The key people of Madison Avenue, and this is a odd group to say this about, key people of Madison Avenue during the Bud Kelland regime in the Republican party all had winter homes here and spent most of their time here, and, except for a few of us who were friends of theirs, nobody knew it. Bill Benton, Jack Louis, Bruce Barton--the Barton who was a writer and an advertiser--Ray Rubicam--oh I don't know, you can name

quite a number of such names that were here, they just dropped out of sight when they came here. How this occurred, I don't know, but it's still exactly the same way.

SOAPES: One other factor that distinguished some of the Eisenhower people from Taft people in '52 in some states was that the Taft people were the professional politicians, whereas Eisenhower people were, in many areas, newer to politics. They were independents; some of them were Democrats. Did you face that sort of situation here with Eisenhower people?

LEWIS: No. What we had here was the Republican party which was made up of a handful of people. The others were just voters. None of them got any money out of being interested in politics. Quite the contrary--they spent money as distinguished from getting any money out of it, because there were no jobs to hold, there was nothing like that to be done. Once in a while something of that sort, but very, very seldom. The party was split right down the middle because it needed to be, I guess, and because of two characters. There was Ned Creighton on the one hand who was a real



old-fashioned politician; physically, mentally. His life was politics because he made his living representing business, mostly mining interests, and keeping them informed as to legislative matters. He published a little sheet. His son and his grandson are still in the same business. It's the ideal way to keep your fingers on how the state government is operating and particularly how the legislature is going. Anyway, he was the leader of one group. There was a fellow named Hugh Daggs who was kind of a rough and ready individual who came out of mining and cattle and whatnot. And he led the other group. Each of the groups were nothing but a bunch of kids like I was. If one was in favor of somebody, the other was in favor of the other. And I guess that was it. Hugh's group was more or less the Eisenhower group, and Ned's was the Taft group. Truth is that both of those men had really lost hold by the time all of this came about, though they were still deeply friendly with their particular groups. I belonged to the Ned Creighton group, as did Dick Fennimore. I don't think that the Eisenhower group had the same degree of enthusiasm because I think it would have been not too hard

for them to have been a Taft group if it weren't for the fact that we were the Taft group. Eisenhower didn't spark this state is what happened, and Taft had a long association because of his father and because of his conservatism. Although he probably wasn't as conservative as he was charged with being.

SOAPES: You mentioned that your appointment was part of making a bridge to the Taft people.

LEWIS: That was the impression that I always had. Not mine alone. The solicitor of Interior was a Taft man; the--

SOAPES: Clarence Davis?

LEWIS: Clarence Davis. The undersecretary was probably a nonpolitician.

SOAPES: Ralph Tudor?

LEWIS: Yes. The assistant secretary for minerals, what was that tall, lanky guy's name?

SOAPES: Felix Wormser?

LEWIS: Yes, Felix. Felix was a Taft man although I would not really identify him as a politician either. And Fred Aandahl from North Dakota was a Taft man. Now that I look back I think the secretary was an Eisenhower man.

SOAPES: Douglas McKay.

LEWIS: Yes. But, nevertheless, that was generally the way it was. A good example was that one of my bureaus for the first four months I was there didn't have a head. There was an application in for recommendations from all over the Taft area for a fellow who later became an awfully good friend of mine, Bill [William C.] Strand, a very capable newspaperman, to be the head of territories. And Sherm Adams wouldn't get off the dime because he wasn't about to appoint any more Taft men. And I finally raised hell with him about it and he went ahead and did appoint him. Incidentally, he was an interesting person. He was an utterly Eisenhower man.

SOAPES: You're talking about Adams?

LEWIS: Yes. He was a very capable individual. I always

regretted his tragedy which really was, in my way of thinking, tomfoolery. But, in any event, he had that typically down-east approach to the use of language. As garrulous as I am, he was the opposite. And I think about ninety percent of his difficulties arose out of the fact that he felt it was unnecessary to say something. Though I was not only an admitted Taft man, I was recognized as being one all the way through, he and I struck up an extremely comfortable relationship and I rathered enjoyed him. And whenever I had a problem I'd just pick up the phone and call him and go on over to the White House alley and go in there and visit with him about it. Did it fairly often.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: Was Barry Goldwater active in the Republican party in the early '50s here?

LEWIS: Not at all.

SOAPES: When did he first come in as a prominent figure? Well we can start with the city council, didn't he?

LEWIS: Yes, but that never has been politics in Arizona.

SOAPES: I see. It isn't a partisan election?

LEWIS: No. He was a well-liked individual. His name was bandied about a good deal, first because of serving on the city council and because it was a small town, and he was an extremely active young man. I think his entry into Republican politics took place one Sunday when we invited him to a little meeting in the Adams Hotel and asked him to run for the Senate.

SOAPES: It was one of those cases where his friends truly did ask him or seek him out; he had not sought the office himself.

LEWIS: This is the history of the Republican party in Arizona up until the last fifteen or twenty years, because all you were doing was asking to be defeated. I can recall an occasion on which we had two people run for the United States Senate and I had been asked that year to run for the Senate, thank heavens I didn't run, and I think I was just within the age limit. Fellow named Senator Wilkinson, he'd been a state senator, ran. He was easy to talk into running because he was

the kind of a man that liked public life. And one other person that ran, if my recollection is correct, defeated him. If he didn't defeat him, he came awfully close to it. But right after the filings for the office took place and the campaign started, the other fellow was arrested for digging a tunnel under the street in Flagstaff and coming up underneath a bank, to rob a bank. And he was running on a Communist ticket. And if I recall correctly, he defeated Willie Wilkinson, but maybe he didn't; maybe it was close. Needless to say, the Democrat won, Henry Ashorst, I recall. But it's a long time ago and my memory isn't good. But anyway, we sought people to run for office. Once in a while a person wanted to run for office. Generally speaking, we had to go out and bludgeon them. And with Barry, that was what that amounted to; we bludgeoned him. It sort of appealed to him a little bit and he has always said that the reason that he did was that he was urged to by the Young Republicans. That's probably true, but we, the men, quote old Republicans, were not what you would call particularly old. Barry is five years younger than I am. Barry was elected, when was it--1952--so,

he must have been about forty-three or four years old at the time, and I was about forty-nine I think. And really that's what started the Republican party because what we were--this old time group of Creighton and Daggs existed before we were interested--and we created the Young Republicans. The Young Republicans were a rather new thing around the country. And I was president of it for three terms and the only reason I'm sure that I was president for three terms was that I couldn't get anybody else to take the second and third terms. Anyway, you asked the question about Barry and I think I answered it.

SOAPES: Do you remember just briefly what the factors were in his defeat of McFarland? Why it was that he won so surprisingly?

LEWIS: Sure. McFarland made the mistake of having his clothes tailored in Washington and the same mistake that our entire Congress is making now--the tragedy of the United States is the fact that Congress meets twelve months. The second tragedy is that the newspapers and the radio and television of the country have taken to criticizing Congress when they take a thirty-day vacation. My first acquaintance with

Washington was in 1922 when I went back to Washington, went to law school. At that time Congress met for two months one year and five months the next year. The people who were members of Congress represented the people of the areas from which they came because they had to live there most of the time and everybody knew them as Bill and Jim. Since they have lived in Washington, they don't know them as Bill and Jim; even if they do. I can't sit down with Barry or with John Rhodes or somebody like that and talk on the same plane as I could if I saw him twenty-five times in a matter of a few months. Except for the telephone, I see them probably once, twice, three times a year and they see everybody else about the same way. And McFarland was in exactly that position. Even [Carl] Hayden, who held office longer than almost anybody, was smart enough in that day when he lived here so much of the time to have two wardrobes. He kept one wardrobe here and he kept his other wardrobe in Washington. When he came here he took off the suit he arrived in and started wearing the clothes that he had here. Somehow, different towns dress differently and people don't feel quite as comfortable when they are with people who dress differently than



they do. And Hayden did that as regularly as clockwork and McFarland neglected to do so, and I think that was the prize reason of his losing. I think that as far as John Rhodes is concerned, he's going to have a hard time in this election for two reasons. One, because of the McFarland reason on the clothes; and the other one, because of the McFarland reason, McFarland was the majority leader of the Senate--John is minority leader of the House. That kept the two men busy and kept their minds pointed away from their home grounds. I hope John wins, and I expect him to win, but he's got a job on his hands.

SOAPES: He had a tough time last time.

LEWIS: Sure.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: So McFarland's case then is a classic one of not keeping his fences mended and Goldwater was able to take advantage of that situation.

LEWIS: That's right.

SOAPES: Turning to your service in the Interior Department, you went there in '53, right at the beginning of the administration.

LEWIS: Yes.

SOAPES: Assistant secretary for land management was your title, wasn't it?

LEWIS: At that time it encompassed that bureau [Bureau of Land Management], National Park Service, Office of Territories, Indians, and a bureau that has been split since--Fish and Wildlife Service, which is now Sports something, and Commercial Fisheries. It was almost an idiotic handful. It was about half of the department, and how it had grown into that situation I really don't know and I never was able to find out. I used to talk with Otis Beasley about it, who I admired very much and he was a career employee of government, one of those exceptions that keeps bureaucracy from being utterly impossible. He was the assistant secretary for administration. That is the non-political office, although I regret to say that during our tenure, somehow, it got changed back in a number of departments to a political office requiring Senate confirmation and

the like. It didn't require Senate confirmation during my period in Interior.

Our department was very interesting. Doug McKay was an extremely interesting man, and I was a very, very fortunate person to have served under him. He was the type of executive who believed that his subordinates, the assistant secretaries, should run their shows, that they should keep him informed of things of which he should be informed--they shouldn't bother him otherwise--that he was available, and he was always available, when they wanted to discuss some decision that they had to make that they felt needed discussion with him or in which they just needed to discuss it with somebody else. But I have no recollection of his ever leaning over my shoulder. The only occasion on which he did was that he did keep Oregon to himself because of his close knowledge of it, which resulted in my making a fool of myself that's always embarrassed me. Because on one occasion I was up in the northwest and I came down through Portland and I was asked to visit with a small group of lumber people, who were the leading men in the lumber industry in Oregon and probably in a good part of the

United States. And I think it was the only time in which I hadn't done my homework because I'm the type of person that doesn't really have to do his homework in a specific fashion for a general meeting. Obviously for a specific meeting I do like anybody else. But I had apparently not thought of the fact that when I hit Oregon, unlike the other places, I would have had no background. And there I was with them asking me questions that didn't mean anything in the world to me. And I was utterly unable to answer them. I must have appeared the world's greatest fool to them. Even today as I look back on that meeting, I'm embarrassed. Frankly, all I knew were the words when they asked about some leftover elements of the Tillamook Burn, which to them was probably the San Francisco earthquake of Oregon. But except for that, Doug McKay was a superb boss, and as a result of it, I took my five bureaus, and I ran my five bureaus, and that was it.

I had trouble because the bureaucracy didn't necessarily want to do what I wanted to do. And I tried many tricks of the trade with them and they tried them right back on me and I won sometimes and they won a number of times. And I think--

and I may be kidding myself--but I think that I did, in the long haul, earn their respect. I got a medal there for which I was perhaps inordinately proud. Honors of that kind to me are embarrassing rather than pleasant, but that particular one I was proud of. They had a kind of a distinguished service award in which they give you a gold medal with a buffalo on it. As I was told, there is a committee of the bureaucracy of the department, not the political appointees, that decides who gets these every year and a few are given out every year, and I was called upon to hand out the awards one year. And they have a little mimeographed booklet that tells about people who get the awards. I was using that booklet and I was making the awards. When I got to the end somebody started to laugh and Otis Beasley came up and took the microphone away from me--it was in the auditorium of the Interior Building--and he said, "You've got the wrong book, Orme," or "Mr. Secretary," because everybody was very, very particular about calling people Mr. Secretary. And he handed me the other book and then Doug McKay made the award to me. Which was pleasing.

But the bureaucracy really was one of the hardest jobs. But I found that I enjoyed an executive position; I had never held one before and I was very curious as to whether I would make a mess of things because of it and I don't believe I did. I think I got along fairly well. At least, I had that feeling.

SOAPES: This problem that you're raising is the one I think that's been described to me by several other people who worked in different positions of the career civil servant, the super grades, who don't approve of a policy and they just ignore you or go about their own business.

LEWIS: I found some tricks though that handle them.

SOAPES: Oh?

LEWIS: They handled me for a while. Along about five o'clock in the afternoon the messenger would bring in a stack of files on the top of each of which would be a letter responding to some inquiry that someone had made, and then I would sit there going over those from about five until about eight, a nice

quiet time of day when I could work on them. And I remember it's where I got introduced to the penultimate paragraph and the vis-a-vis, typical forms of language that are used in Washington. Some of the letters were, to my way of thinking, not only not responsive but just loaded with that type of language. And I would take a pen and I would just tear the letter to pieces, shoot it on back to the department. Well pretty soon I became conscious of something and I got to talking with Otis Beasley and he said, "Orme, you're making a mistake." He said, "That's the reason the letter's written that way. They don't want to answer it. But you are insisting that everything be handled, so they write something that they know you will do that with so it has to go back to the bureau. A new letter has to be written; it has to make the rounds of all the little initials on the carbon. And by the time it gets back up to you, another month or two months have gone by. In the meantime the people have been screaming for an answer and then they say, 'Oh, I'm sorry, but we prepared one but it wasn't satisfactory to the secretary.' And so it's your fault."

So I said, "Thank you, Otis." What I then started to

do was when I got one of those letters I just kept that file and that letter. I handed it the next morning to one of my two administrative assistants and I said, "I want you to answer this, and hand it back to me within a day or two and I'll sign the letter and out it will go." Then the carbon of that would go to the bureau with no initials on it and all hell would break loose in the department because nobody had passed upon it. We kind of found an area of agreement as the result of that--things like that were a good deal of fun and yet, I think, accomplished what I was looking for.

On the other hand, I did make a bureaucratic mistake. When I arrived, one of the things I asked for, decisions that had been pending a long time, I think that came about because some poor old devil came in and was raising hell about having spent ten years trying to get an answer about a fish trap in Alaska. Fish traps are very valuable things and they have been discontinued, but there were grandfather clauses. They were worth a half million dollars apiece at least. So I told one of the fellows in my office to look into it and dig out all the yeses and the noes about it so I could make a decision. And he did, and I made a decision. Took



about three months to pull everything together because there were ten years behind the request. The fellow died. I think I decided it against him, but he didn't die because I decided against him. He had become so tied up with this battle that he'd had over the long period of time that I took away from him about the only thing he had to live for..

But mostly the reason these things are pigeonholed, probably fifty percent of the time a good reason and fifty percent of the time gutless politics. And a newcomer who tries to clear up the stuff hasn't had time to determine which fifty percent he's dealing with.

SOAPES: One historian who's written a book on the Department of Interior policy of the Truman and Eisenhower periods has mentioned problems of cooperation with the Park Service, Conrad Wirth--

LEWIS: Yes, Connie Wirth.

SOAPES: --were particularly strained and difficult.

LEWIS: That isn't true. That's absolutely untrue. Connie

thought he was going to get fired. He came tearing into my office not too long after I got there, about a month afterward, and said, "This is awful."

"What do you mean?" I said, "You've got itches, that's all. You haven't been discussed yet." I said, "Maybe we should get rid of you, maybe we shouldn't, I don't know." I said, "Why don't we go up and talk with Doug McKay about it now, decide?" So we did.

Doug said, "No! You're going to stay."

And that was all there was to that. And just that simple. There may have been a lot of background about which I wasn't familiar. I'm sure there was a great deal of pushing and hauling because that was a highly emotional department. He wasn't the best guy to have been in there by a long ways because he was a conniving bureaucrat. On the other hand, he was a pretty good administrator, and I had no trouble with him, particularly when I learned some of the tricks of the trade. He was using all of the tricks to further his bureau, which was to be understood, and I, through help that I got mostly from Otis Beasley and a little bit that I just learned by being there, was able to thwart or at least understand what was going on otherwise. I really had no trouble with him.

There was always the pressure to do more, but you've got to understand the pressure. I think the National Park Service is going to hell in a basket myself. And if Connie Wirth could be honest with himself, he'd agree. The two pressures in the National Park Service was the wilderness point of view in which you didn't want the parks to be more than a place to go to see how wonderful they were. Then, on the other hand, because of the pressure of the public to go there and the desire of bureaucracy to have a bigger job, there was the belief that the parks, that is the facilities of the parks, should be greatly improved. So here you had one group that didn't want them improved, another group that did. For instance you could not build a tennis court in a national park because that wasn't what a national park was for. You really shouldn't build a hospital in a national park. Perhaps you could build an emergency station, but it was a place for people to go to see something and not to have any fun in the sense of something that wasn't utterly related to the park. You had the pressures of those who had the concessions on the one hand and you had the pressures of the non-concessionaires that were fighting each other in this other way. What was the

well-known writer's name that was so interested in the parks, that blew his stack all over the place shortly after we came in? He wrote quite an article the Atlantic Monthly I remember that--well I ought to remember his name. [Bernard DeVoto] He was a great writer. Oh, I just can't say it. In any event, this particular individual said that the parks were being allowed to go completely to hell and all of that, just as though the Republican administration that had come in had automatically done this. Well, you have to remember this, during that period one of the things we were trying to do was to cut the government spending. Well, like everything else, the National Park Service had to take it a little bit, too. Interior, when we came in, was spending a little less than a billion dollars a year. We reduced it to a little bit less than a half billion dollars a year. Now it spends six or seven billion dollars a year. The National Park facilities have been improved to the place where they're so overcrowded now they haven't a chance to breathe. And the result is that they're expanding rather than contracting. And the only answer to that comes about from the people who believe in

wilderness area, create them. Well the wilderness areas are nothing more than what the National Parks originally were, and, if it continues on this way, the national parks will really end up by being Yosemites, that is hangouts for great mobs of people with their beauties incidental. And so I'm not speaking from one side or the other; I'm just speaking of the emotional aspects of that particular period. I do not think that we had any difficulties with the national parks then that they are not having now in some other form but still the same pressures.

SOAPES: So the debate between the environmentalists and the users was the same sort of debate that we have going on.

LEWIS: Exactly, except we didn't know the word environmentalist then.

SOAPES: The constant refrain I think that was directed against McKay was "give away."

LEWIS: Oh, well that came about because of a horrible mistake that he made, against the advice that I gave him, that a number of others gave him. And I'm sure that if we'd been in his place we probably would have done the same thing he did because

it's such a hard thing. But when he arrived, a very, very nasty column was written by--oh what's Jack Anderson's predecessor?

SOAPES: Drew Pearson?

LEWIS: Drew Pearson. Oh, it was inexcusably nasty, and poor Doug just blew his stack. And he had a newspaperman as his PR man that every department has, that he'd brought from Oregon who had no Washington background, had no background in that sort of thing. Doug wanted to answer it, and we counseled him under no circumstance say a word, ignore it completely. All he wants you to do is to answer it. Well, eventually, he kept bellyaching so much about it that his PR man produced a good answer from Doug's point of view. As the result seven columns followed, and that's where "give away" came from.

Now, part of that "give away" was an interesting thing because I was the prime person in it, and that was with respect to the Indians. The Democratic Congress and President preceding us had developed a list of the Indian tribes that had reached the stage where it would be a good idea to give them an opportunity to take over their own affairs if they wished to do so.

So a list was made up, Congress had it, Congress had made it up, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had made it up, and so we started preparing legislation because we were practically told to do so by Congress. And we thought it was a good idea.

[Interruption]

LEWIS: As the result, we got through one piece of legislation before all of the complaints reached such startling and interestingly political volume that the whole idea had to be cut off. I think even Congress enjoyed the thing because they were able to turn the whole thing on us when they were the ones that created it. But in any event, the only one that passed was a trust arrangement for the Menomoni Indians which not too long ago was reversed. But I'll get back to the same thing that I've always said, the tragedy, rather his tragedy and the Indians--and I don't know whether a statement like this should be published or not. This wasn't my philosophy when I was in Washington; it's one that's developed from just growing older and having read more. The tragedy of the Indians in the United States is the same tragedy that would have happened in Europe that was overrun by each other of the people over such a long

period of time. What avoided it there for the most part was the fact that there and throughout the world when areas were overrun, people melded and one or the other became the ascendant party. The English acquired the Germanic twist that happened in eleven hundred something and so it goes with people. With the Indians this started to happen and then we decided to cut it off. And there's a perfect example of it--I wish I could remember the names of the two tribes. In Oregon there are two tribes--but anyway, but there were two specific tribes. Both had magnificent forest lands. One was given its lands along, I believe, about 1850, at least that's in the general area of time. Maybe it was later than that. Anyway--let me see--no it was much later than that. Anyway, it was given its lands. It dissipated immediately. Those Indians are storekeepers, school teachers, judges, lawyers, whatnots in Oregon today. The other tribe was not. It is now made up, and it was when I was there, of two political groups; they fight with each other all the time. It has multi-million dollars of forest lands. Lives like animals, it's so poverty stricken. Nobody understands why. But to try



and keep another society alive when it is surrounded by a thousand to one of another society is impractical. It may be nice to do that. I like to have this little group of dwarfs here who are my toys, but that's hardly fair to the dwarfs, nor is it fair to the others around them. Neither is getting any benefit from the others. The Indians might have been able to give us a good deal if they had become part of us, and we could have given them a good deal. Sure it would be too bad that a lot of their things would had disappeared, but so it is. A lot of things do disappear. The desert that was Phoenix is gone. Now you can argue maybe it would have been better for it to stay here, but it doesn't stay here and the whole world is that way and the whole world has always been that way. The only joy that the Indians get in most sections if an honest writer would analyze it is the political fighting that goes on to keep the control of the tribal organization. The rest of them just keep on living in whatever kind of way is available to them and that's it. Well the Menominis--I don't know what happened after this. The setup was a good one. They were happier than larks. I still have a picture at home taken with Eisenhower sitting at

his desk laughing his head off with two of the Menominis standing there and with several others of us that were mixed up--everybody enjoying themselves. They were just pleased as punch.

SOAPES: In regard to Indian policy, were there frequent consultations with the Indian tribes, Indian leaders in developing Indian policy?

LEWIS: Practically every single day that I was in Washington there was a delegation in my office. Now those delegations-- I will say this and I mean it--those delegations were those who were successful in the tribe of getting into the position where they got these opportunities to come to Washington to meet and discuss things. I took the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and sent him out on a trip where he, you might say, sat underneath a tree with the Indians in every tribe for several days. The trip took months and months and months and months. I don't think it did a damned bit of good. But I figured that it might do some good if at least the opportunity was afforded for these to take place. But what's happening up on the Navajo reservation now was happening up in

both of the Dakotas during the time I was there. It's happened with this tribe in Oregon that I'm speaking of-- same thing. During that period I would say that in about ninety-nine percent of the tribes the big battle was who would handle a fund that was created by the government for the purpose of providing money to buy cattle. And whoever was the chief of the tribe had most of the control of what was done with those funds. And they ended up in the hands of his friends or his family, something of that sort. Nothing unusual about that, but this is the sad part of taking people and putting them in a place like that. It doesn't work. If they were a part of society with which they're surrounded it would work. Now I don't think they would have lost their ability to paint or to make pottery or do things like that. They might have worked under different circumstances. The pottery maker might have become an outstanding ceramist and the jewelry maker might be working in his place where he was making jewelry in a more usual and accepted fashion. But the people that really had those skills that were inherent in them, the skills would have surfaced. They do surface. You can't hide those things.

SOAPES: Those were some very interesting comments on Indian affairs and it's something a lot of people are very interested in, of course, today.

LEWIS: Yes, and people would criticize what I've had to say greatly--I realize it--but I still believe it. I just don't think the English, if the Saxons had been held off in a village and the Germanic people who had come in there had attempted to keep them in idealistic little groups, I don't think they would have made the great England that history created.

SOAPES: Your view was that the Indians needed to be more fully integrated into the system.

LEWIS: I think assimilation is what has happened throughout the world and I think it's the good thing now. We talk about all of this and what are we trying to do with the Negroes and with the Puerto Ricans and what not, we're busing them. And yet with the Indians we put a fence around the place they live. Well are we nuts?

SOAPES: To turn to another subject, were things like the tidelands controversy or the St. Lawrence Seaway under any of your bureaus?

LEWIS: Not the St. Lawrence Seaway. The outer continental shelf oil leasing and drilling was a part of my responsibility. I held the first sale that had ever been held off of Louisiana and then they were stopped eventually by reason of the litigation between Louisiana and the United States. And then, interestingly enough, my son a few years ago became deputy assistant secretary of land management and handled the next sale after I was gone.

SOAPES: Stayed in the family.

LEWIS: Twenty years. [Laughter]

SOAPES: What, briefly, was your attitude and approach to this issue?

LEWIS: It really wasn't an issue because they didn't know how to do it. At the time that the first leases were made, we had to draw the regulations. And we had the department draw up

preliminary regulations. Then we had people that might likely bid on the things come in and indicate what they were interested in and why they thought the regulations were good or bad or whatnot. In my oversized office we had maps on the floor and we were crawling all over them trying to figure that out. At that time the bidding went into water as deep as sixty feet and at that time they did not know how to drill in sixty-foot water. Now they drill in the North Sea. There was no controversy. There was a little bit in California. I took a check to California after that litigation was over with. As government people do, I took a check for twenty or thirty or forty, I've forgotten, million dollars out and gave it to the then governor of California. There was very little work being done in California, nor was there any question raised about it because the only place that oil existed there was in two to three hundred feet of water and they were having a hard enough time learning how to drill in sixty feet of water. We didn't as far as the ecology aspect of it is concerned, we had the Fish and Wildlife Service work on it. They worked out methods by which when the drilling took place or wells were abandoned

or the like, they were covered because, that is the pipes that were left were covered, the holes were covered, because the people that were in fishing and shrimp business were afraid that their nets would be torn up. And that was about the only battle there was at that time. I might mention one thing. I don't know what a geologist would say today, but there was discussion of the area around Santa Barbara where we've had a lot of to-do. At that time the remarks were made by these oil people that we better learn how to drill in deep water because, unless drilling were done out there to a rather substantial extent, the oil was going to leak up and it was going to really make a mess of that area because of the cracks in the geological--the way the formation of the earth out there was--and unless the pressures were released by well drilling there was going to be trouble. And they were not talking from a self-interest point of view because, as I say, they didn't know how to drill in sixty feet much less in three hundred feet of water. It was just conversational when we were trying to work on our problem off Louisiana and Texas.

I can remember one remark. I had a man come in, what the devil was his name? He was president of El Paso Natural

Gas. Anyway, he came in to see me when we were kind of wrapping up the regulations and he said, "Mr. Secretary, the reason I came, and I'm very sincere about this and very bothered." He said, "We, the small bidders, want to be sure that the regulations are made in such a way that we will not be excluded because we are not in a position to bid large sums of money." He said, "There are three of us together, for instance, and we're only able to bid thirty million dollars. So we want the regulations--" to a boy from a little town of Phoenix this guy pleading that the small operators with only thirty million dollars to be protected. Well they were protected; there wasn't any problem about it, but there was apparently some worry at the time.

SOAPES: Territories came under your jurisdiction.

LEWIS: Yes, Bill Strand.

SOAPES: Was there much movement in terms of Alaska statehood at that time?

LEWIS: Oh, yes indeed. I was really in the dog house with  
in Alaska. It reached the stage where we worked



out a program for statehood and we, meaning the department that obviously included Doug McKay and Bill Strand, were deeply in favor of it. So we went to the White House and we had a meeting with Eisenhower and a few others--Sherman Adams, I've forgotten--not many of us--he sat at his desk in the oval room and we sat around the desk. There were few of us in number so that by sitting around the desk we were all sitting at the desk. So the President said, "Well, Doug, what brings you here this morning?"

He said, "Well, Mr. President, it's the Alaska statehood problem. It's been our impression that you had a negative attitude toward it and we would like to make a presentation why we believe that it should come about."

And the President said, "Fine."

And Doug said, "Orme Lewis, the assistant secretary, is in a better position to comment on this than I am."

And Ike switched his chair around like this and looked at me and he said, "Mr. Lewis, this better be goddamned good." Well, between us gals, a presentation to a court always unnerves a lawyer. But if you want to talk about being unnerved, there were a few seconds there that I was utterly unnerved. And then I started in and he was free with his time.

I talked for about twenty minutes. And at the end of the time he said, "Thank you. But you've missed a very important point." He said, "Alaska is only a moment from Russia"--and my recollection about this statement is a little hazy in the sense of whether he made it to us sitting around the desk or whether he, when he stood up, he stood near the door and talked with me and just told me privately. I can't recall that. I know he did the latter. I think he did the former, but I'm not sure. He may not have announced to them the results. He may have just announced them to me as we stood near the door. In any event, what he said--no wait, I'm beginning to remember a little bit more. He stood near the door and said, "The difficulty here that you haven't taken into consideration is the fact that the federal government can't just go into a state without speaking to the governor." He said, "With two countries as close together as that under circumstances that are as touchy as they are between Russia and the United States particularly, but in any event, you find yourself in a position, the military, in which the President believes that they should move into the area, but very quietly. If they go to

the governor, it has to become a highly public thing. The governor may be very antagonistic. He can't keep them out, but he can certainly make their lives pretty miserable." And he said, "As long as it's a territory we can do that. But if it's a state, we can't. We're then faced with the problem." He said, "Come over here." And he went back to the desk and he said, "You've got that big map." And I've still got the map, I think. It's a large map of Alaska and he took a pencil and drew the line around and he said, "now if we had control of this area, we'd have no problem." But he said, "Otherwise we're sunk."

So that ended it and I got up and I walked out and I turned to Sherman Adams and I said, "Sherm, why in the hell didn't you tell me? This guy was a military man; I figured you would know and let me know that this was a problem." Well this was a perfect example of not enough conversation, instead of too much conversation. He didn't say this in so many words, but in effect what Sherm said to me was, "I would have thought that he would have told me; so I didn't ask him." He didn't say that, but in effect that's what I got out of our short conversation as I was leaving the office. What did occur and a great many of people don't realize it

when the next year came around--you couldn't think up an answer to this problem overnight, it was a matter of days just before Congress, we needed him to say, "Give statehood." I had to say to the Alaskans--

[Interruption]

LEWIS: Well, going back a little bit--we had to act quickly then. It was too late to come up with an answer so that the President would say to the Congress, "Let them in." I couldn't say to the Alaskans the President was against it and therefore we were against it, because, if the President was against it, we were against it. Because if I did I probably would do away with any method of solving the problem. So I got chewed out by Alaskans personally, by wire, everything else, in every fashion known to man. It was quite an experience because here you were knowing all the answers and you couldn't use any of them. Anyway those who worked on this after I left took this fact and, if you read the statehood bill, this area is a part of the state, but it is in a sense of the word "withdrawn" by the federal government and it is its enclave. It's hard to say it in words because you have to read it to know--and in any event that was the way

the problem was solved and that's the way statehood came about.

SOAPES: And this area as defined is essentially the same one that Eisenhower drew on the map for you.

LEWIS: Yes.

SOAPES: I see we're running close to the end of my time, and we're getting close to the noon hour.

LEWIS: Well, you ask your questions quickly and I'll just give staccato answers.

SOAPES: Okay. Your relations with the Congress. Did you think that the Republicans in the Congress that were in the majority those first two years were supportive?

LEWIS: No, not at all. They had been in the minority position for so long that in spite of anything when a department appeared before them they were antagonistic to the department because they had been seeing wrong things in the department for so long. And not altogether by any manner of means, but to a great extent, I got a good deal more of my

cooperation out of the Democrats because they had been on the side of the departments over the long period of time and they were accustomed to helping the departments, while the others had been accustomed to putting their thumbs down on them and they just didn't have time to orient themselves appropriately. So I usually had to do more homework with the Republicans a thousand times over than with the Democrats.

SOAPES: Did you have a significant amount of help from the White House in congressional relations?

LEWIS: I never had any feeling of participation. I don't mean in the negative sense or a positive sense. I mean-- your question is interesting to me except for the Bureau of the Budget relationship which is White House relationship. I neither felt nor expected that I would have any relationship or help or hindrance from them. On rare occasions where I might have asked for some help, I was probably always asking it through the Bureau of the Budget. You just raised the question that I never--except for that Alaska thing--I have no recollection of going to the White House and saying, "Please help me with this."

SOAPES: That's a very interesting answer.

LEWIS: It didn't butt in with our affairs and we didn't butt in with their affairs except where we felt it was necessary. They were a lot to our department like Doug McKay was to me.

SOAPES: They let you go--

LEWIS: That's right. I had a good deal of trouble about a certain governor down in the Virgin Islands that came up very suddenly and since the governor was an appointee of the White House, I made a wild run over there. I called Tom Stephens who was the appointment secretary, and Tom was--Tom and I enjoyed each other for some reason or other but I would call and ask to see the President. He said, "Who in the hell do you think you are?" Swear like a Comanche!

And I would say, "Dammit, clerk, get me a date!" Something back and forth like that.

"How would three o'clock this afternoon be? Only five minutes."

So it would be. So I had one of those days. I had

very few, don't misunderstand, people in my position had no reason to go to the White House in the sense of the President himself except in the rarest of instances. I doubt that I had more than a half a dozen while I was there and today I probably wouldn't have any. But this governor situation, I went over--I was waiting to see the President--Sherm Adams came by and said, "What's the matter?"

And I said, "I want to fire a governor."

He said, "Well, come on, we'll do it." I went into his office and told him--no I didn't go into his office-- I stood up and talked to him right there. He said, "Have you got somebody else?"

I said, "Yes."

"Who is it?" I told him what the man's name was. He said, "Sounds all right. Have you got a clearance on him?"

I said, "Yes, I've got everything on him; I got it in one day's time. I had no trouble with that because he--"

He said, "All right, go ahead, do it, and we'll clear it through."

So in a week's time I had one governor out and another governor in and that kind of cooperation with the White House



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I had like that with no trouble at all.

SOAPES: Well, airplanes fly on schedule these days so I am going to have to end this, and we thank you very much for your time.