

President Jimmy Carter

Voice Over:

IT WAS A VERY DIFFERENT COUNTRY IN 1787 – THE YEAR THE CONSTITUTION WAS SIGNED. THIRTEEN STATES, HUDDLED ALONG THE ATLANTIC SEA COAST WERE HOME TO FOUR MILION PEOPLE. MOST OF THE FARMERS. NOW IN FIFTY-STATES, NEARLY THREE-HUNDRED MILLION AMERICANS ARE ENGAGED IN WORK UNIMAGINABLE TO THE MEN WHO MET IN PHILADELPHIA.

WHILE THE FRAMERS HERE IN INDEPDENDENCE HALL COULD NOT ANTICIPATE EVERYTHING ABOUT THE WORLD OF MODERN PRESIDENTS, ALEXANDER HAMILTON WROTE AT THE TIME THAT “THERE OUGHT TO BE A CAPACITY TO PROVIDE FOR FUTURE CONTINGENCIES AS THEY MAY HAPPEN.” THE GOVERNMENT CHARTER IS DELIBERATELY OPEN TO INTERPRETATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN TURBULENT TIMES.

Warren Burger: Gov. Carter are you ready to take the oath

WHEN GEORGIA GOVERNOR JIMMY CARTER SWORE HIS ALLEGIANCE TO THE CONSTITUTION IN JANUARY 1977, TAKING THE SAME OATH AS EVERY PRESIDENT SINCE GEORGE WASHINGTON, IT WAS A TIME OF DISILLUSIONMENT WITH GOVERNMENT ITSELF. HE WAS THE 39th PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES ANDTHE THIRD PRESIDENT IN FOUR YEARS.

Carter: Inauguration speech: This Inauguration ceremony marks a new beginning, a new dedication within our government, and a new Spirit among us all. A President may sense and proclaim that new spirit, but only a people can provide it:

Carter: We had had Watergate scandals where the President violated the Constitution and lied to the American people. We had had the Vietnam War where obviously President Johnson and others exaggerated our successes and didn't tell the people the truth. We had had the assassination of President Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. The CIA had been revealed by the Frank Church Committee to have committed atrocities in the name of our government, even plotting murders. So there was a great sense then of distrust of the integrity of top government officials and I think this greatly weakened, at least the executive branch of government in respect to the Congress. So there's no doubt that when I came into office people were looking for someone who would tell the truth and I

always did, by the way, and also someone who had not been so deeply involved in the troubles and controversies in Washington.

Cokie: And one of your first acts was to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House. Did that symbolize a new beginning in Washington?

Carter: For me it did. This was a highly secret thing. I had seen that not only was there a distrust of the government, but that there was kind of a fear in Washington which, fear may not be quite accurate, maybe concern about the general public among Washington officials and I wanted to show, first of all, that I trusted the American people and that they respected me. So Rosalyn and I and the Secret Service were the only ones that knew in advance that we would stop the limousine, get out and walk down Pennsylvania Avenue. But it was a symbolic expression of my trust in my own integrity and in my own safety on the one hand and also a demonstration that there was no separation encapsulated in a big black limousine between the incumbent President and the people of our country.

Cokie: You came in after President Ford had pardoned President Nixon. Was that still hovering over the Presidency?

Carter: I think so. I used the pardon authority very liberally in the number of pardons I gave. Some Presidents since then have pardoned practically no one because of the controversies involved. Others have abused the pardon. I think President Clinton is the most notable example of that in the last few hours he was in office. But I think the pardon right is one that's a very important one for the President and a very good Constitutional right.

Cokie: Why

Carter: Because there can be some gross injustices in the system of our courts in the United States. There can be some people who have been confined for life whose experiences in the prison have shown that they deserve a second chance and they could be useful citizens. And I think those are the main reasons that it can be important to have the pardon right. On the other hand I think the pardon has sometimes been abused. I won't go into any details but since I left office there have been people who were pardoned that I thought should have stayed in prison.

Cokie: Was pardoning President Nixon a good idea?

Carter: I think so. I noticed that on President Ford's 90th birthday he was asked that question, which was inevitable, and he said even in retrospect he doesn't think my victory over him was effected by his pardon, that he thought that during the 76 campaign that if he had not pardoned Nixon it would have been such a constant issue brought up by the news media and maybe by me that he was better off to get it out of the way even though he was criticized in some ways by....I think he did the right thing to pardon Nixon, yes, because it resolved that issue once and for all and I think President Ford, who has become one of the greatest and closest personal friends I've ever had in my life did the correct and courageous thing.

Cokie: Your first day of office you pardoned Vietnam draft evaders.

Carter: Yes I did.

Cokie: Why did you do that?

Carter: In a way I thought getting, bringing the constant and continuing altercation about the Vietnam War to a conclusion was important. And although I served eleven years of my life in the military, my father was in the first World War, my oldest son was in Vietnam, I thought the best thing to do was to pardon them and get the Vietnam War behind us and I think that's the main thing that President Ford thought to get the Nixon issue behind him and so that's why I did it.

Cokie: Now you did come as an outsider and your critics would say that you never got inside enough to work with the Congress. This Constitution does create these difficult checks and balances. Was that an issue?

Carter: Well the checks and balances and the separation of powers have been issues ever since the first president took office and I think it's a very wise decision that our founding fathers made to have those separations. After World War II when the President became so powerful, because of instantaneous movements of troops and because of instant communications in dealing with security matters, the Congress had decided after Watergate that they would monitor very carefully the activities of the Executive branch of government in executing laws that they had passed

VOICE OVER:

EVEN THOUGH DEMOCRATS DOMINATED THE CONGRESS, THE PRESIDENT OFTEN FOUND HIMSELF AT ODDS WITH HIS OWN PARTY. ON ONE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE AFTER ANOTHER, CARTER FOUGHT WITH CONGRESS.

One was the Panama Canal treaty, which was by far the most difficult political issue I have ever faced.

**Carter: from treaty signing: This agreement has been negotiated over a period of fourteen years under four Presidents of the United States.
Applause**

Sen. Strom Thurmond: I respond to that by saying that we bought the canal. We paid for it. We have sovereignty of it and we have it to the exclusion of Panama and we have it in perpetuity.

Carter: It was more difficult than getting elected President to get two thirds of the Senators to vote for this unpopular decision I had made. And the other was the normalization of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

Sen. Alan Cranston: There are Senators that I think are knowingly ahead of their people. They're a little concerned about reaction of the people if they support the treaty. They feel it's in the best interest of the country to do so. They're waiting to see which way the wind blows in some cases.

Carter: Deng state dinner: I'm gratified that after too many years of estrangement that our two countries have now grasped the opportunity to reestablish these vital formal links that exist between us.

Carter: As you remember, President Nixon went over in 1972 for a historic visit and declared that there was only one China. But he refused to say which China and then when President Ford was in office that issue still existed. The China we had diplomatic relations with was still Taiwan and I decided to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China. And the President has the constitutional right to conclude treaties. But, this is the mistake the founding fathers made, for the two thirds vote required in the

Senate. I would like to see a one, just actually a majority vote. That's one change I would make. But this went to the Supreme Court because Senator Goldwater who I greatly admired, he was a friend of mine, concluded that I had no right as president to conclude the existing defense treaty with Taiwan unless two thirds of the Senators approved the dissolution of that treaty.

Cokie: So what you're saying is, is, is getting rid of the treaty. It was.... What you were essentially doing was ending the Taiwan defense treaty.

Carter: Yes, which had in it a provision that after a one year notice either side could terminate the treaty, and I used that existed in the treaty to terminate it after a full one year notice. Goldwater took the position, with 24 other Senators I remember, the President could not end a treaty unless two thirds of the Senators approved and the Supreme Court ultimately had to make the ruling because District courts ruled with Goldwater and the Supreme Court upheld my position.

Cokie: I remember the Panama Canal treaty debate very well.

Carter: So do I.

Cokie: I'm sure you do.

Carter: I still have scars – laughs

Cokie: It was a very tough debate and very hard getting those two thirds. It's your view that that is a mistake?

Carter: Yes. I think the presumption should be that the President is speaking for the country in concluding a treaty but I would certainly approve the requirement that a majority of the Senate, a 51% vote would be adequate to approve a treaty. But this way one third of the members of the Senate can block any treaty that the President has concluded. I think that's a mistake.

Cokie: Uh, I do remember thinking at the time though, and this is unusual for me because I'm partisan to the House over the Senate, but were it the House that they would not have ratified the treaty because of the next election coming up That this was a constitutional result of a six year term and the Senate being more removed.

Carter: I have said many times that's the most courageous vote has ever cast in the history of our country because it was right and two thirds of the Senators agreed it was correct to vote for it. There were twenty Senators who voted for that treaty in 1978 who were up for reelection. Of the twenty only seven came back the next year and the attrition rate was almost as great among incumbent Senators in 1980 two years later. And it hurt me a great deal, obviously in the reelection campaign because the overwhelming sentiment among highly motivated voters was that this was a give away program and that we should not have given away our canal.

Cokie: But you had the support as you said. It was a much more bipartisan Congress. Senator Baker was the minority leader and he was very much on your side.

Carter: He was, almost habitually. In fact I think the records will probably show that Senator Baker approved my positions on controversial issues maybe more than the majority leader, Senator Byrd. But the difficulty that came after the treaty was approved was getting the House to pass legislation that would change our relationship with Taiwan because that involved commerce and trade and financial inter relationships and so forth which were under the purview of the House and the Senate. But the fact is eventually the House members realized that if they didn't approve the legislation that our relationship with Taiwan would be severely damaged rather than continue not with full diplomatic relations but with the commerce clause completely implemented.

Cokie: You've written that under the Constitution, the President has much more authority in foreign affairs and therefore decisions can be made more quickly and usually with more immediate results.

Carter: That's certainly true.

Cokie: Camp David was of course the great triumph of foreign policy in your administration. Was that an example of what you're talking about where the President could act pretty much unilaterally?

Carter: Yes, I think there was not any opposition or dissension inherent within the Congress concerning what we did at Camp David. The big opposition was obviously normalizing relations with China which I did unilaterally which is my constitutional privilege and the Panama Canal

treaties. But there's no doubt that I negotiated at Camp David with Begin and Sadat very well aware that anything that I said at Camp David as a contribution of the United States of America would basically be upheld by the Congress and the President did have that authority to negotiate. So yes the President's right to conduct foreign affairs, to recognize any government in the world that he chooses, to appoint diplomats and to withdraw them from the office on the spur of the moment – those kinds of things are extremely important to the ability of a President to negotiate a peace agreement.

Cokie: Um, when you were negotiating that agreement at Camp David it was a very difficult time, were you even worrying about what was happening locally, the American people's response? Or was it completely dedicated to finding peace in the region?

Carter: Well both because my role as President, really for the first time, was to take a balanced position between Israel's government on the one hand and the rights of the Palestinians on the other and to deal equitably with the Egyptians. And so this was a highly controversial thing for me to do. In fact I had only been in office two months when I publicly called for a Palestinian homeland, which was a revolutionary proposition in those days so it was highly unpopular, but while I was immersed in Camp David negotiations, which was a full time commitment for thirteen days, I was really much more concerned with the reaction of Begin and Sadat, one representing Israel, the other representing the country that was the most serious challenger to Israel and represented the Arab world than I was with domestic consequences to what I decided at Camp David.

CARTER: from Treaty Signing: The framework document proposes a five year transitional period in the West Bank and Gaza during which the Israeli Military Government will be withdrawn and a self governing authority will be elected with full autonomy. It also provides for Israeli forces to remain in specified locations to protect Israelis security. The Palestinians will have the right to participate in the determination of their own future in negotiations which will resolve the status of the West Bank and Gaza and then to produce an Israeli/Jordanian peace treaty.

Cokie: Um, what's your reaction now in terms of what's happening in the Middle East?

Carter: Despair and disappointment, disillusionment. I think the opportunities that we had at the end of the Camp David accords in 1978 and 79, the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, which has stood intact. Not a word of that treaty has been violated now in 24 years and the subsequent agreement that was worked out by the Norwegians at Oslo. All of those spell out the premises on which a fair and just solution to the mid east imbroglio could be predicated or built which would protect the security of Israel, have normal relations between Israel and all her neighbors and give justice to the Palestinians, all those dreams of those days have gone down the drain now. And my hope is, my prayer is that the road map to peace, so called, will be successful.

Cokie: And do you see a role for the American President in this?

Carter: Yeah, I think there's no way that the two sides will ever come together in a spirit of equity or security without the United States and its President personally being deeply involved. I think that's crucial.

Cokie: If Camp David was the great triumph, the Iranian hostage crisis was the great tragedy. Immediately after the hostages were taken you were able to put a few things in place in terms of freezing assets, all of that. Again, did you feel there was a constitutional question there?

Carter: I never doubted my ability to carry out threats. Within a few weeks, two weeks, I think, of the taking of the hostages, I sent the Ayatollah Homeni a message from me that if you injure a hostage we will eliminate entirely Iran's trade with the outside world. And if you kill a hostage we will take military action against your country. And I sent this message to Homeni through, I believe, seven different channels, primarily the Swiss government and the German government to make sure he got the message. He never injured a hostage and he never threatened to kill a hostage as a response to that. In fact one hostage, I think from Maine, developed a numb arm and Homeni immediately released him so there would not be an allegation that the Iranians did it – So I had no doubt that my constitutional right as the President would have resulted in the complete carrying out of that threat to terminate all trade between Iran and the outside world and to, I could launch a military attack instantly if I chose, which I could have destroyed Iran's oil wells and their military forces. In the process it would have resulted in the deaths of all the American hostages so I was reluctant to

do it. But I had no doubt Constitutionally the right and an obligation and the authority to carry out my threat.

Cokie: And you would have had the support of the Congress on that.

Carter: Absolutely, there's no doubt about that.

Cokie: But then you finally did decide to rescue them

Carter: Yes

Cokie: with operation eagle claw and that was a disaster.

Carter: Well it was a – yes it was a very great disappointment to me. We, I think the operation was beautifully planned. The fallacy in it was that we had eight helicopters. Six were necessary to extract all of the hostages. We thought we might lose two of them. One turned back unexplainedly to the aircraft carrier. We lost two more which meant we couldn't extract all the hostages. We would have to leave some of them behind which would have resulted in their death so we terminated the expedition which was a great tragedy for me and in the process of course the hostages stayed until a number of months later.

Cokie: Until Ronald Reagan took the oath of office.

Carter: Five minutes after he took office the hostages were free. The morning of the Inauguration at ten o'clock in the morning before the twelve O'clock deadline all of the hostages were in an airplane at the end of a runway in Tehran ready to take off but the Ayatollah Homeni had sworn that they would not be released until I was no longer President.

Cokie: I remember that day so well. I remember being at the Capitol for the Inauguration and hearing in my headset that the hostages had been released.

Carter: Well I had people ready to come and tell me when did the plane take off and at five minutes after twelve the plane took off. All the hostages were free – one of the happiest moments of my life.

Carter: Just a few moments ago, on Air Force One, before we landed at Warner Robbins, I had received word officially for the first time that the aircraft carrying the 52 American hostages had cleared Iranian air space on the first leg of the journey home and that every one of the 52 hostages was alive, was well and free.

THAT WAS AFTER JIMMY CARTER'S PRESIDENCY HAD ENDED.

VOICE OVER:

AT THE BEGINNING THE GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA HAD ARRIVED WITH A NEW IDEA: LET THE PRESIDENT'S CABINET PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN GOVERNING THE COUNTRY. THOUGH THE CONSTITUTION SAYS NOTHING ABOUT A CABINET, EVERY PRESIDENT SINCE GEORGE WASHINGTON HAS APPOINTED EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT HEADS. CARTER WANTED TO INCREASE THEIR POWER.

Carter: I made the ultimate decisions but I met regularly with my cabinet and as you know, I had Presidential press conferences regularly as well more than any other president has ever done as far as frequency was concerned. The way I ran the foreign and defense policies of our country was every Friday morning I had a full hour and a half session, with me, the Secretary of state, the secretary of defense, the vice president and the national security advisor, the CIA director and Jody Powell, the press secretary. Every Friday morning and we spent a full hour and a half discussing any matter that involved defense or security or foreign affairs. And they would present their ideas, their proposals and I would make a final decision. Dr. Brezhinski would keep notes and that would be the end of it until the following Friday and then on Wednesday the national security advisor and the secretaries of state and defense would meet to see if and how my directives had been carried out and to make sure they were cooperating with each other. And then they would prepare the agenda for the following Friday. It was done every week and so it was a very intimate relationship between me and the members of the National Security Council on a continual and sustained basis and there was never any disagreement or misunderstanding between state and defense and the national security advisor on what our policy was on even transient things that came up concerning defense or foreign affairs.

Cokie: Unlike today. Yeah, that's true. Even when President Clinton was in office I urged him to do the same thing but he never did so far as I know and so I don't think there was any doubt that Cy Vance when he was secretary of state and Dr. Brezhinski and Harold Brown, the three top leaders – they were like a three person team. Sometimes they didn't agree with each other and they would bring their differences to me on Friday morning. I made the final decision.

Cokie: You did have a moment when you basically fired a lot of the cabinet. I remember that day well too. I was on Capitol Hill and it was like a brush fire going through the House of Representatives. Did you hear what happened? Did you hear what happened? Was that – why did you do that?

Carter: I think in retrospect that was a mistake on my part. We had reached a crisis in the country primarily because of the energy issue. I had labored over that on a domestic basis to the exclusion of a lot of other important issues and we had a deadlock on energy policy. Ultimately I think we got almost everything I wanted but at that time I felt that we needed to have a renovation of the basic government itself. So I was very eager to and did keep almost all of the cabinet officers but a few did decide to resign. I gave them an opportunity to resign and then I asked a number of them to stay on, a few I didn't ask to stay on and they did step down. I think in retrospect it should have been done instead of a cabinet in its totality. At one time I should have handled the individual cabinet officers on a private and individual basis.

Cokie: And over a period of time.

Carter: I think so.

Cokie: Because it was too dramatic.

Carter: It was too dramatic.

Cokie: You talk about your press conferences and of course the Constitution does provide for a free press. In terms of the hostage crisis, do you think the press went overboard?

Carter: The press went overboard but I have to say that the general public did too. You know there were yellow ribbons everywhere in the nation. And I was obsessed with the hostage crisis as well, so I can't blame anyone else. But every night Walter Cronkite would say "113 days of the hostages being held", and Nightline was founded a program because of the hostages. The country was obsessed with the 52 who remained and so was I. I would meet regularly with all the family members of the hostages. We would pay their way to come to Washington so we could give them an up to date report, sometimes secret, top secret concerning top secret matters, at least confidential matters related to the hostage crisis and what I was trying to do. So I think the whole country was obsessed so I can't blame the press for being extraordinarily obsessed because the general public, the international community and the White House were all deeply involved in getting those hostages, everyone home safe and free and they all came home safe and free.

Cokie: We're hearing a lot right now about intelligence and intelligence gathering and failures of intelligence, perhaps in Iraq. Were there—was it a failure of intelligence in Iran?

Carter: I think the whole world was surprised when the Shah was overthrown.

Carter: Iran because of the great leadership of the Shah is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world.

Carter: And I never had any preview of his actual ejection – I'm trying to think of the right word – from Iran itself and his deposition in favor of the Ayatollah Homeni. Earlier though, in the last week in – in 1977 my first year in office, I talked to the Shah and told him I was deeply concerned about his abuse through his secret service, SAVAK of civilians who were demonstrating against his regime. They had fired into a crowd and killed about 250 people and I told him he was making a serious mistake in not having people's positions expressed. He said I was naïve about it, that I was exaggerating, this was only a tiny 1% who were communists who were trying to overthrow his government and they had no justification. So I had a personal encounter with the Shah about what he was doing but I was amazed when he was actually overthrown and I don't think any intelligence agency in the world had any premonition that that would happen.

VOICE OVER:

IT ALL SOUNDS FAMILIAR—CHARGES OF FAILURES OF INTELLIGENCE AND OF DISTORTIONS OF INTELLIGENCE TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT’S POLICY

Cokie: There was a charge made that the intelligence was cooked to support your energy policy. Does that just happen in every administration?

Carter: I don’t recall that but I can’t deny that there were allegations made about almost everything concerning energy. Energy was a hard fought battle where I think we eventually prevailed in almost every case.

Carter: We must face the fact that the energy shortage is permanent. There is no way we can solve it quickly.

Carter: but it was charged with horrendous political connotations and I don’t have any doubt that that might have been alleged but there were never any distortions made so far as I know concerning energy or any other issue and so far as I know all the reports we made to the public were true reports.

Cokie: Did your view of covert activities and secrecy change in the course of the Presidency once you were inside and looking at what was going on?

Carter: I tried to mandate then and since I left the White House a maximum openness in reports and to declassify as much information as was possible. And I have been certainly aware of the fact that since I left office there has been a re-imposition of a great deal of secrecy of material that should be made public, but I tried to have as much openness as possible. I would like to declassify all my records from the White House. But as you probably know there has been a directive from the White House since then that a lot of the records left over from even earlier than me or earlier than President Reagan should be kept secret for some reason so I’m in favor of openness.

Cokie: But why do you think they are doing that?

Carter: I can’t say with complete objectivity. I think there are some decisions that have been made recently that the White House doesn’t want to be made public. And I think the evidence in the case of Watergate, which brought Nixon down was not what was actually done but the effort to

conceal it. And I think what President Clinton did – he didn't ultimately suffer any consequences from what he did but the fact that he lied about what had been done or misled the public about what had been done. So I think that the evidence that we had and I think in the Iran Contra consequences of President Reagan – it's not what he was actually doing but the fact that he tried to conceal it. And a number of people were sent to prison because of that. So I think the concealment of facts is almost invariably a mistake in the long run and sometimes has immediate consequences adversely for those who concealed the facts.

Cokie: We've talked of course around the energy crisis but it was such a huge issue.

Carter: It was.

Cokie: And I wonder how you deal with something like that when it's such a global issue. You're President of the United States but there, these oil prices are driving inflation up, ruining the economy but you have no control over it. How do you deal with that?

Carter: That was a very difficult thing. The disruption of the oil supplies from Iran and Iraq after the Iraqi war began caused a dramatic reduction in the total supply of oil on a global basis and that's why the price of oil more than doubled in less than twelve months so that was something over which no leader in the world could have had control.

Cokie: And do you think it distorted our foreign policy – to be worried about oil prices?

Carter: No I don't think so – I think it was unavoidable that we should be worried about oil prices and as I've just mentioned we did everything we could. The only thing we couldn't do was to end the war on Iran. I deeply resented Iraq's invasion of Iran. They did it because Iran was weakened because of our partial embargo concerning the hostages and Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, which condemned publicly and still resent. After I left office, by the way, President Reagan quickly normalized diplomatic relations with Saddam Hussein and gave him some support, the Iraqis, in their war against Iran. But at that time the termination of oil supplies from those two countries was the disturbing factor on the overall global oil supply market and prices which was uncontrollable unless we could end that war.

Cokie: And then on the home front in trying to deal with energy conservation, trying to raise prices off gasoline or taxing gasoline you ran up against special interests.

Carter: Utilities must promote conservation and not consumption. Oil and Natural gas companies must be honest with all of us about their reserves and profits. We will find out the difference between real shortages and artificial ones. We'll ask private companies to sacrifice just as private citizens must do. All of us must learn to waste less energy.

Cokie: Is what you've seen with political money and political committees and all of that – is that something that is outside of the Constitution or is it implied by the first amendment and the right to petition congress?

Carter: One basic issue that was Constitutional in nature but was never highly contentious when I was the President was does the federal government have the authority to mandate a nationwide policy on deregulating the price of oil or controlling the price of natural gas or should this be a state issue. And I decided it was a federal responsibility and obligation and we passed laws accordingly. Before I left office, some of them were passed after I was defeated but before I left office we had a pretty good overall success. But that issue about federal authority to mandate matters over which the states had previously had control were Constitutional in nature and the Supreme Court and others have upheld that right of the federal government to have uniformity of oil and natural gas policy.

Cokie: As a former Governor when you where there, how did you see federalism? Did you view of federalism change?

Carter: (Laughs) A great deal. One of the reasons I ran for President was that back in 1973 was the oil crisis. 1973 was when we had the oil boycott by OPEC against countries trading with Israel and I saw the Congress passing laws that I thought, many of which were ill advised. And as a Governor I had to implement those ill advised laws and I thought I understood them as well as even the prominently mentioned candidates for president – Ed Muskie and Ted Kennedy and Scoop Jackson and others, I can't name them all, and I thought I was as highly qualified concerning domestic affairs as were they and that's one reason that inclined me to run

for President. But I did see a great need for the federal government to participate in aiding the states in doing extraordinary things like to deal with poverty stricken families and to deal with a uniform energy policy and to deal with the Alaska lands issue which had been festering for twenty years, and to deal with strip mining laws and environmental issues. I saw those things as a very important obligation of the federal government even though it did encroach on what had previously been considered to be states rights.

Cokie: So you see it differently depending on where you, where you stand depends on where you sit?

Carter: Exactly. That's true.

Cokie: Let me ask you about a couple of extra constitutional things one, the role of the First Lady. That is something that is certainly not in the Constitution but Mrs. Carter certainly played a very important role in your administration.

Carter: Yes she did.

Cokie: Tell me why that meant so much to you.

Carter: One of the things I learned as Governor was that a person in extreme authority – a president or a governor, can become isolated and arrogant and impervious to criticism or dissent or disagreement even among one's own tiny and highly trusted group, And Rosalyn and a friend named Charles Kirbo had unimpeded access to me and no restraint about...

Cokie: What they might say

Carter: ... personally confronting me. So when I did make a decision that was controversial people who disagreed with me strongly and didn't want to come and directly confront me as the exalted President of the United States would go through Rosalyn or Kirbo and they would present their dissenting views. So Rosalyn became deeply knowledgeable about the issues that came up during my presidency. She had campaigned full time and independently of me when I was elected president So Rosalyn was highly educated and and knowledgeable about almost all of the issues I faced except some that were highly secret and couldn't be revealed to her. And so

that was one reason she became so interested. I finally, because Rosalyn permeated me with, bombarded me with questions almost every evening at supper time about what's happening now, what does your cabinet members think, what do you – I told Rosalyn – why don't you sit in on the cabinet meetings in the background and you can hear what the debates are and then you'll be..

Cokie: And then we can talk sports at dinner.

Carter: Laughs – And then we or even watch a movie after dinner or something. So Rosalyn began to do that and later when I couldn't go to as many countries as I wanted to – And we had a very serious problem with one of the top cabinet officers in Columbia being deeply involved in the drug trade – I sent Rosalyn down there to represent me. And she visited hospitals and talked about elderly and children and so forth but she also dealt with those issues, So Rosalyn became very knowledgeable and very influential and when we had the problem of refugees coming out of the aftermath of the Vietnam War I couldn't go to visit the refugee camps, I sent my wife to represent the United States of America. She never had any authority but she was very helpful to me and I think played a role of activity that certainly at that time was unprecedented and I'm grateful for the fact that she did it.

Cokie: Ever since Abigail Adams, however, there have been certain complaints about First Ladies, that nobody elected them and nobody can fire them. (Carter laughs) Do you think that's fair?

Carter: Well, I think it's fair and the President is always accountable for what the First Lady does and what authority or responsibility she is given just as he is about his own activities and so I think if the First Lady was ever called upon to do anything that was improper or illegal the public condemnation would be an adequate restraining force.

Cokie: The Vice President. The Constitution says the Vice President presides over the Senate and breaks a tie and waits for the President to die, but you decided to use the Vice President in more roles than that.

Carter: Yes. There had never been a vice president who had, who was given the authority or responsibility that I gave Fritz Mondale. When I asked Fritz Mondale to be vice president after I considered a group of very

wonderful people, I told him to set down in writing what he would like to do as vice president. And he visited Nelson Rockefeller and he visited Hubert Humphrey and he talked to a lot of other people and he finally gave me a book of things that he thought he might like to do or things about which he wanted to be informed. And I eventually adopted all of them. I was shocked to find out that no other vice president had ever been briefed on the use of the nuclear weaponry that would have to be used within 26 minutes if the United States was attacked. He was not even in the line up and no previous vice president had ever been included in the lineup. It went from the President to the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State

Cokie: Wow

Cokie: And you had the benefit of the also of his advice and counsel.

Carter: Yes, and Fritz had been involved in the Senate and in Congress as you know before I got here. He was familiar with the ways of Washington which I wasn't. So he was my avenue of communication and advice concerning dealing with the Congress and was very helpful.

Cokie: You say you didn't have any conflicts with the judiciary when you were in office, but there was one important case, where there was at least in what I read that there was a little conflict inside the administration and that was over the Bakke case and what kind of brief to file. This was an affirmative action case involving the university of California at Davis where a white student sued saying that he had been passed over for a minority student. We're still seeing that today with the University of Michigan cases. What is your take on where the Constitution stands on these questions?

Carter: I think the Constitution is basically viewed on a specific issue, but it does imply that American citizens should be treated fairly and equitably. And I agreed with the Bakke case and I also agreed with the recent decision of the Supreme Court that said affirmative action in generalities could be pursued but you couldn't have a rigid quota. So I don't think there's any doubt that the era up till 1865 of slavery and at least a hundred years more of official racial discrimination under the separate but equal ruling of the US Supreme Court has had a devastating impact on the quality of education and the economic standards and and the social standing of minorities in this country, particularly the African Americans and I think they deserve some opportunity to come out of a household that is still poverty stricken and has

no books in it and to compete and have the opportunity in good colleges to go to law school or to get advanced degrees. So I think that affirmative action in some form without rigid quotas is still badly needed in this country and I hope it will continue at least for the next decade or more.

Cokie: When you're talking about poverty stricken households, obviously you've spent a lot of your time worrying about that and your commitment to human rights has been such a fundamental part of your being. Is that out of your faith or is that some combination of your faith and these American institutions in which you've served.

Carter: I think it's certainly compatible with my Christian beliefs on compassion, on love, on forgiveness, on justice, peace. There's no doubt about that. But I think my own obsession with human rights on a global basis and civil rights at home has come from my childhood. When I grew up in a community as a lonely white child with only black playmates and my mother was a registered nurse, almost equivalent to a doctor and I was immersed in the black culture of life until I went off to be in the Navy. And I saw the devastating effect on their lives of official racial discrimination when they could not vote, they could not have, they couldn't serve on a jury. They couldn't go to a decent school. They didn't have school busses. White kids did. The black kids got the cast off books that the white kids had already used beyond repair. I saw that, that was part of my early life and so when I did achieve a position of prominence and influence I think it permeated my consciousness. When I made my brief eight minute inaugural address as Governor I announced that the time for racial discrimination is over which now sounds mundane but at that time was revolutionary. It was 1971. And in two weeks I was on the cover of Time magazine because I made that simple statement. So I think that my background and my knowledge of the intimate relationships with black families in whose homes I spent many many nights and ate with them and slept with them and so forth was a foundation of my later commitment to human rights.

Cokie: You've written that your most vivid impression of the Presidency remains the loneliness. Why is it so lonely?

Carter: Well, You have to remember that no matter who the President might be, the issues that come to the Oval Office on the President's desk that have to be decided one way or the other are the kinds of issues that cannot be

resolved by a mayor or a county commissioner or a governor or a state legislator, They have to be decided ultimately by the President and if they were easy to resolve they would have been resolved at a lower level of government so they get to be very important and controversial and difficult and the President is the only one who can make a decision. I kept on my desk “The buck stops here” that I inherited from Harry Truman. And that’s one of the reasons I use the word loneliness. I spent more time in prayer when I was President that I would just be wise enough and to make the right decisions than I ever did in any other four years of my life.

And I tried to avoid isolation. That wasn’t the point. I wasn’t isolated because I was surrounded by friends and supporters and staff members in whom I had complete confidence and a very supportive family, but the ultimate decision should I go to Camp David, should I launch a military attack against Iran, should I normalize diplomatic relations with China, should I permit the Panama Canal to be given to the Panamanians to operate. Those decisions can only be made by one person and so there is loneliness there.

Cokie: Despite all the checks and balances.

Carter: Despite all the checks and balances. And the checks and balances are reassuring because you have an innate feeling that if I do make the wrong decision here the two other branches of government can ultimately correct a serious mistake that might be detrimental to the integrity of our own country.

VOICE OVER:

THE ULTIMATE FORCE FOR CORRECTION IN POLITICS IS THE ELECTORATE—AS PRESIDENT CARTER LEARNED THE HARD WAY IN 1980 WHEN RONALD REAGAN—THE OUTSIDER FROM CALIFORNIA—DEFEATED HIM, JUST AS HE—THE OUTSIDER FROM GEORGIA—HAD BEATEN PRESIDENT FORD

Cokie: You know you talk about President Ford becoming a good friend and one of the things that has struck me in the course of these interviews is that each of you has in some way defeated another. I mean you defeated President Ford, President Reagan and Bush defeated you, President Clinton defeated President Bush and then President Bush defeated Clinton/Gore, so

it's remarkable this system that here are people who have waged incredibly intense battles against each other and yet the civility still prevails, 29:26

Carter: And I think the US Constitution and its relatively unchanging nature for more than 200 years has been the foundation on which we can survive a very unpleasant election on occasion and a deeply grieved loss and an exhilarating victory and we all feel that we're all part of a team and that the principles of the United States of America, despite the exigencies of the moment and the political encounters that cause dissension and sometimes animosity for a brief period of time are overcome because of America and what it is and the Constitution of the United States is the basis for that stability, for that integrity, for that ongoing commitment to the same wonderful principles.

Cokie: Thank you Mr. President.

VOICE OVER:

Today our dominant international challenge is to restore the greatness of America, based on telling the truth, a commitment to peace and a respect for civil liberties at home and basic human rights around the world.

PRESIDENT CARTER'S DEPARTURE FROM WASHINGTON DID NOT END HIS PUBLIC SERVICE. HIS WORK TO END CONFLICT AND SUPPORT HUMAN DIGNITY AROUND THE WORLD EARNED HIM THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR PEACE. THANKS FOR BEING WITH US, I'M COKIE ROBERTS.