INTERVIEW I

DATE: December 11, l985

INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM D. CAREY

INTERVIEWER: Janet Kerr-Tener

PLACE: Mr. Carey's office, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, D.C.

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K: I wanted to start by asking you just to tell a little bit about your educational and professional background prior to joining the Bureau of the Budget. And also I think I need a clarification on when exactly you came on board there.

C: I am a graduate in Public Law and Government from Columbia University circa 1940. I took a master's degree, also in Public Law and Government, from Columbia in 194l, went on as a Littauer fellow to the Graduate School of Public Administration at Harvard and took that degree in the summer of 1942, and was at that time offered a war service appointment in the Bureau of the Budget. This was one of the temporary appointments that the government was making during the war years.

The Bureau of the Budget was sort of a command post for the White House in relation to the funding of the national defense and war efforts and in matters of organization, particularly of the production and price control management programs that the government had put in place. I came to work for what was known as the War Organization Section of the Bureau of the Budget. It was populated by a dazzling community of professors of economics, of government, of public administration, political

science, and various other things including management, and it was a very heady atmosphere for a green youngster just out of graduate school. That was 1942, June 1942.

K: And you stayed at the Budget Bureau?

C: I stayed indeed. After the war, within a couple of years, a fair population of the war service appointees were competed into career positions. I was one of them, and my assignments in those years had to do with the reconversion of the economy, the planning of postwar arrangements for scientific research--

K: Then you knew John Steelman?

C: John Steelman was in the White House as the President's right-hand man, and I was one of a team in the small team of the Bureau of the Budget who worked very, very closely with Steelman.

K: Who were some of the other people?

C: Well, Elmer Staats was one. Charles Stauffacher was another. George Elsey was a third, and Wayne Coy, of course, as assistant director of the bureau at that time, was very much involved.

K: Yes.

C: So was David Stowe, I should add.

K: Is it true that some of those individuals, or that part of the reconversion process also involved taking a look at what educational institutions ought to be doing to provide technology--in short, the national defense in peacetime--or was that something that was considered out of your office somewhere else?

C: I think I can give you a reasonable answer on it. We were very much interested in data in the Bureau of the Budget and [inaudible] office in preserving the wartime relationship between government and fundamental research in the universities, less with regard to applied science, less with regard, perhaps, to technology. Very little as far as concerned national defense because we thought we had fought the war to end all wars, and now the proposition was to maintain the new infrastructure of government-*cum*-university cooperation in science that had been put into place during the war. We wanted to see to it that we retained as much strength as we could in that relationship, and this had a policy base in the [Vannevar] Bush report, which became known as "Science, the Endless Frontier," and subsequently in the so-called Steelman report of the President's Committee on Scientific Research and Development, which we were very much involved with.

K: Yes. Well, what was the main mechanism for maintaining that infrastructure? Funding? Contracts?

C: It was a very loose understanding rather than any formal policy for postwar science. We negotiated very informally with, for example, a batch of university presidents, people of the stripe of Detler Bronk; James Conant; Bush was involved; the people at the National Academy of Science were involved. It wasn't just the northeastern states cabal of universities by any means. It included the Midwest public institutions, the land-grant institutions, but the process was very much a shoes-off kind of a process. In those days, you could walk into what is called nowadays the Old Executive Office Building, and you didn't have to fight your way past security guards and metal detectors and have your morals checked through a computer. You just walked in, and this was an open-door

system. There was nothing adversarial in the discussions at all. We were as convinced as indeed the universities were that this was a very healthy business and that there was no way that fundamental science had a hope of carrying on without a disposition on government's part to pay the bills and to see to it that the unique American circumstance in which graduate research and graduate education were twinned would continue. This is the difference between the American system and almost any other system in the world, and we felt that that essential characteristic at all costs had to be preserved and that it was in the national interest to preserve it. Therefore, it came back upon government to do a very large part of it.

K: Was that the impetus behind the National Science Foundation Act, the act of 1950 or 195l?

C: Yes. That is right. The agenda included getting legislation to create a National Science Foundation. I was involved in that effort. This was the--

K: Was that difficult then to sell Congress on that idea?

C: Well, it wasn't nearly as difficult as it could have been because science was riding high in the estimation of the population as a whole. The general sense was that it had made a difference, the conversion of fundamental knowledge into applications and into technology had made a difference in the outcome of the war, and that we had a whole new technology base, that we had to search for what it could do for the civil economy.

So the atmosphere was very, very good. There were leaders at that time in Congress who were very much interested. The questions really had to do more with almost the constitutional position that a National Science Foundation would occupy, and

there we did indeed run into serious trouble because [Warren] Magnuson and [James] Priest and others in the House, with considerable egging on by the university constituency, wanted to make the director of the foundation an appointee of a board of trustees. This is the way, of course, that things are done in universities: the regents pick the president, and the foundation was a foundation. Oddly, though, this was to be the first federal foundation, and we in the Bureau of the Budget had quite an internal battle about what to do when this bill came to the President to be signed.

We finally resolved it in terms of recommending a veto on grounds of clear accountability to the president. This was to be a government agency, even though it was called a foundation. It was to operate through appropriated funds, and our conclusion was that there should be no ambiguity, and the president accepted that position and vetoed the first bill, much to the shock of the universities and even to members of Congress. But the veto was not overridden, and we had to start again, and we negotiated the arrangement that now operates.

K: How much of this concern with preserving this relationship between graduate research and education and the government support of those things under schools that the developments leading up to the National Defense Education Act? Can that be regarded as being part of the same continuum, or was that--there's so much of that the--? I ask because so much of the commentary is focused on the launch of Sputnik as being literally the launch, the rocket that gave life to the National Defense Education Act, but were there undercurrents that maybe have gone unnoticed?

C: No, I think not. We had fairly relaxed about the so-called manpower supply situation. We didn't have really a good database, I think, for judging what was going on, but it wasn't until Sputnik that we began to realize that more investment, more strategic investment, in training scientific and technical personnel would be needed. I remember the day after Sputnik. I was at home with the flu. At that point I headed a division in the Bureau of the Budget dealing with science and labor, manpower, and a good many of the civil domestic programs, and I had a call from the director who had just come back from a meeting with President Eisenhower and Sherman Adams. He told me over the telephone that the President felt that the Russians had gone one-up and that he was going to be taking an awful lot of heat and he wanted some action. And out of that came such things as the appointment of [James] Killian as the first science adviser in the intimate areas of the White House around the president instead of off to one side, and the National Defense Education Act, and the escalation of the initial R&D testing for the Vanguard satellite that had been programmed into the International Geophysical Year program. So there is no question in my judgment, as I look back, that it was the externality of Soviet proficiency in high altitude technology that came as a great shock and probably did us a favor, depending on how you view the world.

K: You were head of the manpower, science, and labor?

C: Yes.

K: That included education as well?

C: Yes.

K: Was that through the Kennedy Administration as well?

C: My tenure there as head of that division went up through 1958. I think it was at that point that I was appointed as executive assistant director of the bureau, which was the senior career position, and it was non-statutory and what, in effect, it came down to was the principal or chief operating officer of the bureau. So I more or less slipped out of the substantive side and was more concerned with the structure and organization and staffing of the bureau and arranging a sort of quick response to things that had to be done to meet the President's or the Director's ad hoc priorities, which "ad hoc-ed" morning, noon, and night. So that represented a change. Subsequently, of course, well, it was four or five years later that I was appointed assistant director, which was statutory and policy-level. I went up and out of the career service at that point.

K: Okay. So--

C: And back into substance.

K: --that put you back into substance. Okay.

I came across something--it may have been in Hugh Davis Graham's book on the transformation of general education policy [*The Uncertain Triumph: Federal Education Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Years*] or something like that--that you were appointed assistant director maybe in the summer of 1966. Does that sound right?

C: Yes.

K: And one of your responsibilities was to trouble-shoot in governmental interagency problems.

C: Quite right.

K: What does that mean?

C: What happened was that beginning with Kennedy but escalating very fast when Johnson succeeded, the White House, in effect, took over policy leadership from the cabinet and the agencies. Joe Califano came over to assault the barriers. The Kennedy people had invented task forces but on a small scale compared to what was to happen later. Califano and Johnson undertook to drive domestic policy innovation at very, very high speed.

The sequences were such that task forces were brought into being, task forces of outsiders, to come up with brainstorming proposals to deal with education and children and health and cities and water and air and almost everything. They were driven very, very hard to work. Their reports went directly simultaneously to Califano and to the Bureau of the Budget and, of course, to the agencies concerned. The pickup on execution, implementation through legislation, was very, very fast. The President was very impatient. Bills were sent to the Congress. They were passed very quickly. New programs came into place impacting strongly on state and local governments and counties. They were largely in the form of categorical grants-in-aid, adorned with all kinds of requirements and conditions mandated into the acceptance of the money. There were constituencies who were delighted, and they were putting pressure on the states and on the Congress.

We got ourselves into a position where the number of the categorical grants in aid grew to be something between four hundred and five hundred, money pouring out from that many sources with all kinds of differing requirements, tailor-made, impacting on urban finance, on state finance, on state agencies and urban agencies, on county agencies. And a great deal of troubling confusion resulted. When these task forces were put to

work dealing with domestic questions, characteristically they were made up of social scientists, experts in housing or education. The remarkable thing is that as savvy a politician as Lyndon Johnson was, he overlooked the importance of including governors, mayors, into these task forces.

K: Why was that an important [inaudible]?

C: Oh, terribly important because the execution was out there. The satisfaction of the client was out there. The resources really were out there in terms of human resources. The obligations of the gut states and cities were escalated because they had matching provisions. There were things that they had to do. They had to appropriate; they had to tax.

At one point, we in the Bureau of the Budget--one of my jobs was to assign staff members as secretaries of task forces. This was so that somebody would know what was going on, and the secretaries were supposed to be channels back to the Budget Director on the one hand and to Califano and his people on the other, and score hits and runs in the first inning and the fourth inning and the ninth inning and see how these things stood.

Well, it got to the point where task forces were being created that we never even heard of, after a while. We weren't sure that the White House knew how many there were. We were getting very, very worried. But meanwhile the governors and the mayors and the county people were getting quite angry. They were complaining in their conferences and in public and in the press that they were being left out on the planning, the staging, the execution. They were just being handed all of these wonderful programs

with no involvement in the public administration. Therefore, they couldn't point out needs again for fiscal responsibility, for accountability, documentation, for evaluation.

The President had a special assistant for intergovernmental relations, and for the life of me, his name does not come to mind at the moment. He had been a state governor, a fine man, and these governors and mayors and the county people couldn't get at the President, but they could get at the coordinator for intergovernmental relations with their fury. We had to get into it in the Bureau of Budget to attempt to rationalize this monster that we had created. We had pointed out all during the task force operations that, "Yes, the social objectives were fine; b) that they were going to cost an awful lot of money." While the President in the adjoining room was putting expenditure ceilings on the budget that wouldn't accommodate the cost of the programs, we were pointing out that all we had were flimsy sheets of paper with rough drafts of legislation written overnight and ballpark cost estimates and no details as to how programs would be organized and run. This made no difference.

K: To Califano and to--

C: Or to LBJ. Absolutely no difference at all. You do that later. "Well, let's get this done, and you work it out. You fellows will work it out afterwards." Well, it never got worked out afterwards, and the legislation never had the necessary provisions, and so you had an almost insurrection by the governors and the mayors and the county officials, and many a delegation came to me to tell me their troubles.

I remember meeting one day with the county people and listening to them and trying to calm them down. By this time they were looking on the White House as their

enemy, and here was the President thinking that he was going to make a social revolution, and the two things just were not connected. I remember one of these people, I think it was Bernie Hillenbrand, who was the director of the National Association of County Officials. He said, "You know, if you could just get the man to instruct his cabinet officers, his agency heads, to work with us in launching the programs, in putting them out there, in putting a system together. . . ." And I ended the meeting there and went into my office and called up one of Califano's people, and I asked the question, "What would the reaction be if we got the President to require that the agency heads with Great Society programs had to consult with state, local, and county officials before issuing any new regulations or procedures or systems?" And the answer I got was, "The old man would go out of his mind. Don't you dare!"

Well, I hung up and turned around to my typewriter, and I drafted a very brief one-page memo from the President to agency heads telling them to do just those things. Then I went in to see Charlie Schultze, who was then the director, in the next office, and I said, "You're going down to the Ranch tomorrow to see the man, and you've got lot of stuff to take with you. Do you want to give him a shot at this one?" And I gave it to him, and he said, "Sure." He put it in the stack, and he came back a couple of days later, having had to plod around the mud on the Ranch. He was cleaning off his shoes, and he said, "Well, I tell you what happened. The President was swinging in the hammock, and he had a glass of Dr. Pepper in one hand and a fan in the other, and ever so often, he'd put one or the other down, and I'd hand him a piece of paper, and he'd look at it and say, 'Yes,' or 'No,' or initial it." And he said, "Finally, I came to yours. And I passed it up to

him, and I said, 'Now, Mr. President, let me tell you the background of this.' And the President said, 'Don't waste your time, Charlie. This is right. I'll sign it.'" He signed it, and that was that, and that put a new process into play, and it did considerably help to bank the fires and to get the President out of what was developing into a very unpleasant jam with the governors and the mayors and even the county people.

K: What was the view from the perspective of the Budget Bureau of the task force operation?

C: We admired it. We admired it for the creative policy options that emerged from it. We had every year in connection with the preparation of the State of the Union message been soliciting ideas and suggestions and proposals from the departments to deal with these problems that we knew were there, but all we got were tired, old, retreaded ideas. We heard about everything a hundred times, and none of it really amounted to more than band-aids, and when the task force system was thought up, it was like a fresh breeze blowing through the policy-making system. We liked it very much in the Bureau of the Budget. We were enchanted with it. This meant a whole new quality of government in public policy, and as far as all that went, we were very, very pleased.

However, the pleasure was considerably diluted by the disorder that came with the White House process, and I think I've already alluded to this. We would be called over in one way or another several times a day. The Director would be over in Califano's office listening to the newest idea. He'd come back and say, "Guess what's going on now!" And "This is changed, and that's changed, and we've got to get the numbers quick and see what it means!" And then the phone would ring: "You've got to come back,

Charlie. We've got another task force for you, and the President is insisting that we give him an answer and language and so forth on this tonight." We simply couldn't tune the review process to a rate of speed and quality that was compatible with the driving that was coming from the White House.

I used to go to a lot of those meetings to represent the Director, who was usually off at other meetings. We'd go into Joe's office, and there would be a crowd in Joe's office and a lot of noise coming out through the door, and then that crowd would leave, and some of my colleagues would come out looking worn out, and then the next bunch would move in. And I'd go in there, and here would be a new deck of cabinet officers, all summoned to race across town and arrive in Joe's office, not knowing what we were going to be talking about, and you were dealing typically not with just the Secretary of HEW. You were dealing with him, but you were also dealing with the Director of OEO, and the Secretary of Labor, and the Attorney General of the United States, and a bunch of White House speech writers, and there was the Bureau of the Budget.

Joe was marvelous. His energy, his ability to fight off exhaustion, was incredible, and we'd get around the table there--there'd be up to a dozen of us--and we might work from five o'clock in the afternoon until midnight or one in the morning or two in the morning, the President sitting in the next room, the phone jangling, Joe leaping from his chair even while the President's on [the phone], "Sir!" Then grabbing his jacket off the floor and slipping it on as he ran into the next room to get the latest set of instructions. And we'd look at each other, and we'd bargain and negotiate, and then Joe would come back with the latest word on this or on something else, and then you would stagger out of

there in the early morning hours and go home, and you weren't safe once you got home because Joe had all those telephone operators in the White House to track you down.

I can remember Wilbur Cohen telling war stories before he left about how he'd be called without warning by Juanita [Roberts who would] say, "You get over here. The President wants you right away!" And Wilbur would leap into the elevator and grab whatever papers he thought might be talked about, and the car would get him over there. He'd go in, and here would be the President in the Cabinet Room haranguing a crowd of people who Wilbur had never seen before, and the President would say, "Well, come in, Wilbur. I was just talking about what we're going to do to clean up the rivers of America, and I want you to tell them what we're thinking about." And Wilbur would say to me, "Bill, I never heard of this before, but," he said, "I'm a member of the cabinet," and he said, "The President has got his jaw in his hand and he's looking at me, so I would tell the group what we were going to do." And the President would say, "That's fine, Wilbur. Thank you very much. Now you may leave," and he'd say, "Bill, we'd have a program." And the message would go up in a month.

He said, "I've been awakened in the middle of the night by Califano, and, you know, it's cold," and he said, "I'm groping for a phone, and I'm hunting my glasses, and a voice says, 'Wilbur, are you awake?' And I'd say something back, and he'd say, 'This is Joe.' And he says, 'We're going to talk about how big the deductible should be under Medicare.' And I'd say, 'Joe, do you know what time it is? It's four o'clock in the morning. I'll come down. I'll come down the first thing'-- And Joe would say, 'No, Wilbur. The President has told me that he wants the answer now, and he wants the draft

on the legislation on his desk at eight o'clock. We've got to do it now, Wilbur.'" So Wilbur said, "I'd pull the bedclothes over my shoulders, and I'd sit there, and we'd work it out." But he said, "We didn't go through the Bureau of the Budget, Bill. There was no way to get a meeting, and that's why you guys were getting surprised all the time."

Well, this is somewhat of a dramatization of the way life was, and it wasn't always that manic, but it was that manic often enough to be vivid in my memory. It's a wonder we didn't make more mistakes than we did, but I have to say in perspective that most of the President's initiatives were right. They did address the new problems of a changing society, the problems of equity, fairness, opportunity. He believed very much in all of it. He believed it right down into his shoes, and this was his opportunity. And what I think we did was to kind of build a Tyson's Corner of policy and program edifices without working the traffic patterns and the underground utilities and the wiring and the infrastructure out, and set ourselves up for a reaction in the 1970's and for what has gone on since in terms of dismantling and returning responsibilities to the states and cities.

It might have been possible to rationalize and straighten it all out before Johnson left if it hadn't been for Vietnam; the predicament we had was that Vietnam overtook the domestic policy agenda. The President would not recognize that this was happening. He would not face up to the macro-economic consequences of fully funding his domestic agenda, which, of course, starts off cheap and then gets very, very big and very expensive in succeeding years. He wouldn't face up to that problem and, at the same time, to the costs of the Vietnam conflict, which were getting out of hand and out of control. He wouldn't let us project in the budget the additive costs of the Vietnam conflicts, and he

insisted on underestimating them, believing that they really weren't going to happen, and out of that, along with his refusal to propose tax increases, landed us in an inflationary disaster.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

K: [Inaudible] caution the White House, you know, slow the pace down?

C: Yes, we did. I would sit in Joe's office looking at the latest beautiful domestic initiative, and I would say at some point, "Joe, this is great on the terms that we are looking at here, but the man has laid very severe strictures on the size of the deficit. There's no way around it, Joe. We can't deliver these numbers to you. You've got to tell him that. Charlie's trying to tell him that." It made no difference. It made no difference.

K: Why? Why wouldn't it?

C: The President had a block. The President had a block. His whole heart was in this domestic agenda. His whole heart. And his heart, I think, triumphed always over his better judgment. You know, I would come back from those meetings, and we would say, "Well, look, if there are thirty-eight task forces at work, and they're all coming up with budget requirements that have to be overlaid on the ongoing base." And I said, "Over here we've got military things, and here we've got the President screaming that he wants last week's expenditure ceiling reduced by ten per cent."

We were absolutely stymied, and the deadline would come, and we would have to compose a budget message that glossed over these problems, that took an optimistic view on financial capability and the strength of the economy, on the military situation. The State of the Union message would go the same way. It would be filled with goodies and

new starts, and it would minimize the consequences of the military involvement, and it made us feel very, very badly about what we were doing. We were there as the President's staff. When he made a decision, we had to shut up and go along. He was a very dominating president, and he had his troops in the White House, and they were his first lieutenants, and we were just really boxed in.

I can remember going to those meetings in the White House in the middle late 1960's and trying to participate in a meeting when the whole building rocked with the chant of thousands of young people outside in the street, "Hell, no! We won't go!" "Hey, hey, LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?" That stuff just rocking the White House, and here we are in this unreal situation. It was really an unforgettable, very trying period.

K: Was morale bad at that point or not?

C: Oh, I wouldn't say morale was bad. No, morale had been bad in the Bureau of the Budget in the early Eisenhower years. It got better, very much better, under [Maurice] Stans, as the last of Eisenhower's directors. It became wonderful with Kennedy, and for the first Johnson years that continued. It was just the breakdown, really, of the policy management process in collision with the Vietnam conflict that really sent the whole thing up in smoke, and I think we've been paying for that ever since. You had a tremendous leader, a great leader, in LBJ, a great social vision. But he was a very determined politician. He brooked no opposition, he forgave no opposition, and it made life very, very difficult.

K: You said morale improved beginning with Stans in the late Eisenhower years. Why was that? What made the difference?

C: Well, I think it was the quality of the man. He came in; he had been deputy postmaster general. He was an accountant, ordinarily a profession of rather narrow views, but he was a superb executive. He knew how to motivate people. He completely changed the climate of suspicion of the career staff that his predecessors had brought with them. He restored, I think, the stature of the professional staff relative to the White House, the President, and he left the bureau in a condition that the Kennedy Administration was delighted to find it in.

I can remember during the Kennedy-Nixon campaign I was approached by a former staffer in the Bureau of the Budget who had gone to work for Senator Kennedy, and he came to me and suggested that we have lunch. He told me that he thought it only fair to warn me that "When, quote, 'we win' unquote, we're going to clean out the reactionaries in the Bureau of the Budget end to end." So when they came in, they appointed David Bell, who had been a staff member, and--

K: Was this the same David Bell that went to the Ford Foundation?

C: Yes.

K: Oh.

C: --and they appointed Ted Sorensen, and they appointed Mike Feldman, and they had Dick Neustadt. They looked us over and spent about forty days down the hall as our guests while we did the last Eisenhower budget and State of the Union, and they saw the performance, and nobody left on the career staff.

K: I was going to ask, am I wrong in saying that a good part of the staff were people who had been brought in under Roosevelt and Truman? How could they be classified as--

C: Some of the senior people had been, yes, and the others, most of the middle level and junior people, had been recruited from the best universities with Public Administration, usually Public Administration, and Political Science backgrounds. Some had been brought in laterally from other agencies. We put a great deal of emphasis on quality and potential and no emphasis on politics or ideology. None whatever. I was never asked in the twenty-six years that I was there where I stood in terms of my personal politics, and nobody else ever was. It's a very different situation today, you know, it would be a very, very different situation.

K: Well, at that time, didn't the bureau sort of pride itself on its independence--is that the right word?--from the political issue? I mean, people viewed themselves as analysts of issues as opposed to partisans?

C: I think that's true. I think that's exactly right. That's what we did do. We regarded ourselves as the President's professional staff. We understood that he would have a political staff, and that's the way it should be. But through the five presidents that I worked for, in either low or high positions, we stuck to our guns and to what we thought was in the president's interest even if he didn't think so. We would go to work on an issue. We'd sit down in front of him with some cabinet officer who was in opposition, and we'd tell him what the question was and what the opposite views were and where we came out. Then he'd hear the other side of it, and whatever his decision was, that settled it. I think we won our share. We didn't win them all. And I think we had respect from all of those presidents. I think that's the case today in terms of the esteem that OMB is

held in at the White House, but as far as the staff process goes, it does not hold a candle to what we had.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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