JIM FALLOWS
EXIT INTERVIEW

It is November 14, 1978. This is an interview with Jim Fallows, the Chief Speechwriter for President Carter. The interview is being held in room 492 of the Old Executive Office Building. [The] interviewer is Lee Johnson, [Presidential Papers Staff].

JOHNSON: All right, what I thought I'd do is start out with just a few questions on things that happened to you before the campaign. Maybe if I set up what I want to do then we'd get a little better idea. Do you want to talk a little bit about before the campaign, some things relating to the campaign, then spend the bulk of our time just with basic functions as speechwriter and then just a few things on life-style and attitudes toward working in the White House. So let me just start out with a quickie. You're a Californian. How did you end up East? How did you get out to Harvard?

FALLOWS: I grew up in Redlands, California, and my parents had been from the East, naturally. I was born in Philadelphia and moved out to California when I was three or four. And, I, just by chance, ended up going to Harvard. My father had been to medical school there and had been a place that I had always had in the back of my mind, being on this side of the country, more or less, since then. It was fall of '66 that I went to college; except for two years immediately preceding my coming here from [the] fall of '74 until the time I joined the campaign in June of '76, we lived in Texas when my wife was in graduate school.

JOHNSON: [Is there] anything in particular in your background that interested you in journalism?

FALLOWS: I had always been interested in one way or another in working my will upon the world, and that has attracted me towards politics and journalism and public speaking and just generally getting out my view of how things should be. So, that was why I felt content before in journalism. I'm looking forward to it again or just having a voice, of being able to say how you think things are going, right or wrong.

JOHNSON: When you were in high school, were you interested in things like debate, public speaking? Were you involved in speaking yourself...

FALLOWS: In high school the main things I did were, one, to play tennis, but two, to be on the debate team and enter these oratory contests. So that was really the main thing I did in high school. I had done none of that in college and had never really been interested in writing speeches until by fluke I got involved with Carter and don't plan to do it anymore. I find that a very different kind of activity than speaking yourself.

JOHNSON: But basically you have, over the years, been more interested in your own speaking. So speechwriting really is a kind of aberration.

FALLOWS: Yes.

JOHNSON: I don't mean to put words into your mouth...

FALLOWS: It is true. It has been for me an extremely valuable vehicle through which I have been able to spend two-and-a-half years now seeing the way things work and for that I will always be grateful. But, I will be happy if I never write another speech in my life. I can give you my brief theory on that, which is, in most other kinds of writing your goal is to define your meaning as precisely as you can--To use the most vivid examples to rule out all ambiguity. That's exactly the opposite of what you want to do in speechwriting most of the time. Usually you want to define things only so clearly that half the people will still agree with you and not use any illustration that will offend anybody, and not have any idea which is unsettling in any way. And I have no contempt for that. That's the way democracy works. But, I just don't want to do it any more.

JOHNSON: There's a difference, somewhat, between substance and style though, isn't there? In that I know you've been quoted as saying you try and write speeches which are straight-forward, clear, precise, etc., so it's not completely a different world.

FALLOWS: No. And in fact, that gap is smaller when you're writing speeches for Carter than for some other people because he has his difficulties as a speaker, but one of his strengths is that he likes things in fairly plain style. But even given that, there is the irreducible fact that any politician--Carter, I think, is better than nearly any other politician in stating plain home truths. But even then he can't offend people most of the time; he can't say, "I don't know the answer to this; nobody knows the answer to it"--he can't saythings as baldly as he could if he was writing something for himself or I could if I was writing something for myself. Obviously, it has more impact if it comes from him than from me. But that's the trade-off.

JOHNSON: You were the editor of The Harvard Crimson, then you--in fact you even quoted yourself, I believe, in the article that Human Events had so much fun with. Were you quoting yourself? Was that your editorial [that] you talked about?

FALLOWS: No. That was somebody else's editorial. I was the editor of the Crimson during a great time of troubles at Harvard. It was a time of troubles in the nation, but that meant to everybody else in the paper, I was Adolf Hitler, and to the University administration, I was a dangerous subversive. It was a very difficult time.

JOHNSON: Yes, yes. How did you--I'm a little unclear on how you got from Harvard into free-lance writing.

FALLOWS: Immediately after--well, in the summer after I graduated I worked for Ralph Nader in a project down in Georgia. That fall I went to Oxford. I had a Rhodes scholarship and I spent two years there studying economics. In the summer of '72 I came back to the U.S. again because [of] a project Nader was running. It was his Congress Project.

JOHNSON: The Congress Project, right.

FALLOWS: Which ended up being ill-starred. At the end of that time in September, I was not sure what I wanted to do with my life. I had been planning to stay in England for one more year until this Nader project came out.

JOHNSON: This was in September of '72 now?

FALLOWS: Right.

JOHNSON: Okay.

FALLOWS: And just on a lark I applied to Charlie Peters who is the editor of the Washington Monthly and thought that it would be worth spending some time giving journalism a try. If that failed I could always go to law school like everybody else and have a stable profession. So, I ended up getting a job there because somebody was leaving. So [I] spent two years working full-time for the Washington Monthly and doing some free-lancing, which I look on as a luckier break along the way then joining up with Carter, which was lucky too.

JOHNSON: You said immediately after graduating that you had spent some time on a Nader project in Georgia.

FALLOWS: Right.

JOHNSON: Did you have any contact with Carter or any of his people at that time?

FALLOWS: Sort of. That was the summer that he was running for governor, [the] summer of '70. So, I saw his campaign through the whole evolution of it which showed me a different side of Carter than I see now because it was a very gloves-off and quasi-racist campaign he was running. So, I had that oblique view of Carter. I know that after--when Carter became governor and he spent a lot of time on environmental sorts of issues--he did end up reading the book that I wrote about that time in Savannah and spent a lot of time with a man named Rock Howard who was head of the Georgia Water Pollution Agency. So, that was the extent of the contact. I only know that because when I first signed on with Carter, he said, "Yes, and I know all about your work; I read that book."

JOHNSON: What particular book was that?

FALLOWS: It was called The Water Lords. It was published [in] '71 by Grossman publishers from Bantam Books.

JOHNSON: Now this related to--

FALLOWS: It was about Savannah.

JOHNSON: Oh, it was about Savannah directly.

FALLOWS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Exclusively?

FALLOWS: Exclusively, but in a sense it was supposed to be a model for how things went in the world at large. It was a town which was more or less run by the big paper mill that operated there, and so it was a talk about how that mill affected the economics of the town and the pollution and the life of the stream and the smell in the air, etc. etc.

JOHNSON: And the President said he had read that.

FALLOWS: That's what he said the first time I met him, which was in August of '76.

JOHNSON: We'll get into that a little bit more later. Let's get you into the campaign of '76. How did you become involved in the first place? Now, I thought I'd read somewhere that you became involved around June of '76. Is that correct?

FALLOWS: Right. That's right. In the fall of '74 I moved to Austin, Texas, because my wife was in graduate school. In June of '76, I was still there working for the Texas Monthly Magazine and doing some free-lancing, and I got a call from someone named Steve Stark who worked on Stu Eizenstat's staff at that time. And [he] said that they were--this was about the time that Carter looked like a cinch for the nomination even though it was six or seven weeks before the convention--starting to recruit a general election campaign staff. [They] said, "Are you interested in working as a speechwriter?" It was an idea out of the blue to me, but I thought that I had always wanted at some point in my life to spend some time in politics just to understand it better. I had never done it before. On July 4, I flew out to Atlanta to be interviewed by Eizenstat, Al Stern, who was then his deputy, and Orin Kramer, who was then also a deputy of his. Then I came back to California where I was visiting my parents then. About three or four days later they said come on board. So, later in about the middle of July, I came out to Atlanta and started work.

JOHNSON: I've read in a couple of articles, and I guess this ties in with what you just said, that your job was to write issues-oriented speeches. Can you comment on that a little? Did you have specific issues that you were instructed to write on, or was it more ad hoc?

FALLOWS: There has never been a neat way for dividing the assignment of the speeches among the different writers because the speeches tend to come in clots. One month there will be a lot of stuff about Germany because there's going to be a trip to Germany, so everybody has to do that. The next month, everything will be about inflation. So, there are no rigid boundaries. Among the people who I now work with, I

know more about economics than other people, so I do nearly all of those. Jerry Doolittle does more humor than anybody else because he's funnier. Carol Conner does some of the cities and party stuff because she has more experience in party politics than I do. It is true that during the campaign my ostensible position was being a writer on the issues staff. That was why I was interviewed by Eizenstat. As it turned out, I ended up working with Pat Anderson, who was then our head speech-writer. We just rode around together on the airplane and ground the things out.

JOHNSON: Right. That's the question I was going to lead into. What was the organization? How many speechwriters were there? I know you worked with or for Patrick Anderson, and then it was you and how many other people were involved in it?

FALLOWS: Mainly it was just the two of us. The genealogy of speechwriting as I understand it is that Carter more or less had nobody until about March of '76, at which point he hired Robert Shrum who lasted for a week or two. After that, Pat Anderson had just about that time done a flattering article about Carter in The New York Times Magazine. And so he and Jody arranged a deal and Pat came on in April of '76. And I came on in July. In theory I was not in Pat's organization, but he was my boss because he was the main speechwriter. Theoretically, Si Lazarus, who is now on the Domestic Policy Staff was also going to be a speechwriter. But that didn't work out, and so, he ended up doing more policy work. There was a man named Bill Keel who was an old friend of Pat's who stayed in Atlanta and was the administrator of the speechwriting empire, trying to coordinate assignments. But during nearly all [of] the four months, from the convention to the election, Pat and I were the two people who traveled around and wrote speeches.

JOHNSON: Let's see if we can get the chronology together and also your reaction to being asked to be the Chief Speechwriter. I'll just leave it at that and let you kind of fill it in. I mean, you were evidently aware that Patrick Anderson was not going to do it. But were you contacted directly by the President or how did this happen?

FALLOWS: At the end of the campaign I was in a great dilemma about what to do because I knew first, that I didn't want to write any more speeches ever. Second, it was clear to me that even though I hadn't enjoyed writing speeches in the campaign, it had taught me a lot.

JOHNSON: You hadn't?

FALLOWS: No, I had not enjoyed writing them. It's not something--well, I will go into that more later on. But even though I didn't like being junior speechwriter, it had been worth seeing those four months in the campaign. That time was well invested. And so, I was trying to figure out whether this would be a good time to join the government in some other way for a year or two--In theory, that I would never have the opportunity than I did then to get it under my belt. While I was mulling these things over in my mind, I got a call from Carter, from Plains, and he said, "Jim, I'm wondering if you'd be interested in working with me on speeches?" And so, I said, "Well, I'm honored that you

asked. I'd like to think it over for a day or so." I did, and then called back and said, "Yes, I would like that." The reason why I decided to do it is it was clear to me this was the best job I could get in the administration. Speeches were not something that I especially was fond of, but there was no area of policy where I had enough credentials to get an equivalently substantial job. I thought it was a job [where] I could see more of a range of policy, see Carter, and just regulate a landscape. So, I decided to do that. Shortly after that, I heard that Pat Anderson was leaving. I have no final knowledge of what the causing factors were on each side. But Carter called me up about a week before it was announced that Pat was gone.

JOHNSON: So, he had asked you directly to be the Chief Speechwriter before you knew that Pat Anderson was leaving?

FALLOWS: Yes, right.

JOHNSON: Oh, that must have created a certain consternation within you, must have not quite--

FALLOWS: Well, it helped that I was back in Texas between the election and the inauguration. So I was out of this great maelstrom of envy and ambition that was going on.

JOHNSON: Who's going to be where and who's going to play what role and so forth. I find this interesting for another reason. I'd like to back-track for just a moment. You said that the President called you directly. I assume you had quite a bit of contact from July on, but how often were you with the President on a regular basis?

FALLOWS: The way the campaign plane was set up was it was not like Air Force One. It was a normal commercial plane. And Carter would sit up in the first class section, usually with those curtains closed, with almost always Greg Schneiders and Jody Powell and nobody else. So, during the course of the day there would usually be five or six speeches, and I would have to talk with him usually two or three or four times each day, never for extended periods. It would be more, "Here's the speech for Buffalo and we took your advice on this and this, and what do you think we should do about that?" That's three or four of these--two or three or four-minute conversations during the day. So, I think never in my life I have had [an] extended conversation with him. There's only one extended conversation that I have sort of overheard, which is the first time I met him in August. I had gone down to Plains with Ralph Nader, my former employer, and sat there in the room while the two of them talked for three-and-a-half hours, which I found greatly illuminating, but I've never had that kind of talk with Carter myself.

JOHNSON: Let's move on from the campaign itself then. We've got you as Chief Speechwriter now. [Let's] get into just basic functions of writing speeches. I think it was in Martin Schram's book where he talks about the campaign speeches, that Carter was a man who insisted on redrafting and redrafting and redrafting. Is that true of the speeches that you've been doing for him as President as well?

FALLOWS: I have to answer that in two different ways by discussing categories of speeches and the cast of Carter's mind.

JOHNSON: Fine.

FALLOWS: The relevant facts about Carter's mind as it relates to speeches are: First, that he lived most of his political life without any speechwriters. Jody may have helped him when he was governor but there were no official speechwriters until Shrum came in early '76. So, he was used as governor either to writing them himself or to extemporizing. The second relevant fact is that whenever possible he feels much more comfortable extemporizing rather than reading from a text. Sometimes in the campaign we would take recorded transcriptions of what he'd said extemporaneously and stick them into a text. And the paragraph which had flowed so smoothly when he said it off-the-cuff, he stumbled over when he read from a text. He just hates to use texts and hates to practice to improve his delivery. The third relevant fact is if he had the time, he'd still write them all himself.
Now, given all that, there are three different sorts of work that we've done with different levels of input. The first is the major speeches--an inflation speech, an Annapolis speech, a Notre Dame speech. On almost all of those Carter has done extensive rewriting. The only times he hasn't are when the thing has come to him late enough that he hasn't had the chance to do it or when he has drafted substantial portions of it in his own hand. Therefore, it's not gone through redraft after redraft. The second category of speech which I think is more numerous or more frequent for him than for other Presidents is off-the-cuff remarks. Whenever he can get away with it, he prefers to have us just give him talking points rather than a text. The third category, which interferes with us not at all, is redrafting written material. In the first week of the administration he got a message to Congress about the economic stimulus plan. He looked at the thing and called up Eizenstat and said, "I can't understand this. But you're asking me to sign it and send it out for people to read?" So, from that point on we had a charter to rewrite all the stuff that went out in his name. He almost never touches that.

JOHNSON: I think you have in part answered this but let me get into some of this about input. You seem to be saying that he would prefer to do it all himself if he could but let's take a typical speech if you will--I guess we'll call this a hypothetical typical speech. What would the input be from the staff, the input be from other White House staff members, and even going from that, how much input would come in from sources outside of the White House?

FALLOWS: Instead of trying to choose a typical one let me just tell you about the latest one which is this inflation speech.

JOHNSON: Fine, if you could use that thing about input and tie it in also with just taking it from the moment of conception and right up to the point of delivery if you could play with that.

FALLOWS: I think the inflation speech is as good an example as any, and in places where it departs from the norm, I will explain that. The first way the inflation speech was different from the norm is that it was a vehicle for focusing policy. In other administrations, especially in Kennedy's and in Johnson's and in Nixon's, the speech was the main way of bringing policy arguments to a head. That's not the case for Carter. Carter speeches are a much smaller deal for Carter than they were for previous Presidents. And it's only in rare cases--well, in those cases where there's a new policy to announce in a speech as in inflation or energy that's kind of an accident or an after-thought. Many more speeches are the main vehicle to pull policy together as Carter says we need a new welfare policy or we need to sit down and have a Presidential Review Memorandum on something else.

We had known for the last couple of months, I guess from July or August, but at some point during the fall there would need to be a new inflation policy and a speech to announce it. And Carter had this Economic Policy Group working together. Throughout August and September, I would meet with Charlie Schultze to get the gist from him of how the policy was going along, and what the points were we wanted to make. I guess in the first half of September, that is a little more than a month before the expected speech time, I sat down with Rafshoon, with Schultze, and with Stu Eizenstat and talked for about a half-hour about what the speech should do. In nearly all cases of domestic policy, Eizenstat plays a very large role in our lives and sort of dictates to us what the policy points are to get in there.

After our talks I went back and wrote up a little proposal memo to Carter about what the speech should be--that it should be about this long; it should try to set this tone; it should be organized the following way; it should avoid the following points; it should be divided into these sections. Since Rafshoon is now my organizational supervisor, I sent it to him, and he signed it too; it went in to the President. Two days after he got back, Rafshoon, Greg Schneiders, and I sat down with Carter and talked with him for about fifteen minutes in the Oval Office about what he wanted. And his advice was vague as it usually is. I think something which accounts for our difficulties is since he's not used to transferring his thoughts to other people, he doesn't explain himself as fully to his writers as he should. So, he said, "Yeah, I like this, I don't like that." From that point on, the next step was for me to work out the draft based on the information (policy papers) I got from Schultze, mainly, but also from Stu. I worked up two or three drafts myself, showed one to Schultze for technical accuracy, and then from about the fourth or fifth draft on started passing them to Eizenstat, to Rafshoon, and to Schultze, just to get on each one their rounds of comments. By the time we got to the seventh or eighth draft, it was time to get it back to the President because everyone was moderately content.

JOHNSON: So, you went through a series of maybe three or four drafts with no input at all from the President?

FALLOWS: Yes. And it's almost always that way because he wants everybody to reach consensus among themselves before he bothers with it. Again, I think that is a profound mistake because consensus among various advisors means that you get a

porridge of a speech; that everybody jams in their favorite idea; any controversial idea is sanded away. And so you get something which is bland. But that's what Carter wants.

JOHNSON: Did any one particular person have veto power over these kinds of changes or did it depend on the issue itself? I mean was there any kind of organizational veto or issues veto?

FALLOWS: It's a settled negotiation that depends mainly on personal relations between the people involved. Now I know that Stu has much more power over domestic policy than I do. If he feels something is very important to go in there then it makes sense to me to bow to him because he is going to win ultimately. He knows that if I tell him something is really clumsy and sounds terrible that I will probably finally win on it.

JOHNSON: So, in other words he would have substance veto and you would have style veto?

FALLOWS: But veto is too official a word. It's all a matter of negotiation and persuasion. And if anybody felt strongly about something in the draft I sent in, I would put a little asterisk saying Charlie Schultze thinks the sentence should go; or Stu thinks this should be rephrased, [etc]. So, [in] as many areas where we could argue with each other, we'd reach agreement on. [In] areas where somebody felt strongly, one way or another, we just put in the text as a disagreement. Carter, I think, enjoys that kind of multiple choice selection for him. He sees the range of choices on the speech.

JOHNSON: But there wasn't the kind of playing off of one advisor to another that we read about when we read about Roosevelt, for example?

FALLOWS: No. No, that happened later on in this speech. And I will talk about it more generally in a minute. Carter had said since there had been such grievous leaks about the inflation plan, there was virtually nothing secret about it anymore except for this real wage insurance program and for the actual budget deficit number. Carter said, "Keep it in [the] White House," and told me to deal only with Eizenstat and Schultze until about four or five days before the speech was given. The speech was given on a Tuesday. On a Thursday before that, Carter called a meeting in the Cabinet Room with Blumenthal, Marshall, McIntyre, Strauss, Schultze, Eizenstat--the usual cast of suspects. Rafshoon and I were there too and passed the speech around and people talked about it. From that point on, there was vigorous negotiating, mainly by Blumenthal, whose outlook was different than Schultze's and Eizenstat's about the budget deficit and other things. So that happened late in the game--the normal jockeying among advisors.

JOHNSON: So, you bring it in to him now, and you've reached the consensus and then what happens, he takes one more look at it, makes his own changes?

FALLOWS: He takes at least one more look at it. Usually, he first hears about the speech when we first talk about it. Usually after he gets his first look at the draft he has fairly substantial comments to make: "It's too long. I don't like the first third. What about this point?" They usually are very intelligent editor's comments about where it needs to be strengthened and where it needs to be weakened. I then take it back, do another draft, and then go through the same compromising deal with the policy people. We give it back to Carter. From that point on he usually hand-edits it himself. And then when he has something that he is entirely satisfied with he passes it out to the policy people and to me, saying, "If you have any fundamental objections to this tell me. Otherwise, if you're in doubt about changing it or leaving it, leave it." So, he usually edits it twice. Once in gross and once carefully.

JOHNSON: Now, copies of that go back to all of you or just to you then?

FALLOWS: To all of the policy people and to me.

JOHNSON: And to you. And then you do a final kind of style-edit then?

FALLOWS: No. Unfortunately we don't do that. I think, Carter, who can be a man of eloquence extemporaneously, has a wooden ear when it comes to working with a text, but that's the way he wants it.

JOHNSON: In talking about the process there seem to be long periods of time where the President was not involved at all or all the other people were working with him. Maybe I just didn't catch this at the outset of what you were saying, but the actual initiation of a major speech, would you say that that's always from Carter himself or almost never from Carter himself?

FALLOWS: It is from him a minority of the time.

JOHNSON: In other words, one of his advisors will send a memo saying, looks like we're going to have to have a special speech on this. I think this would be important, too.

FALLOWS: And a large and alarming percentage of the time the cause for a speech is the Scheduling Office. They arrange for reasons out of the blue a trip to Kansas and plug in three speeches even though there's nothing to say. If there was a single thing I would change, it's that. But that has not been within my power to change. So that is a large force for speech-making, especially during campaign time, of course. A second and more justified force is the policy people say, "Look, there's political trouble on this flank; we have to deal with these people," or "Our waste and fraud policy is about ready. We need to announce it in a speech." That's the other main source. Now and then Carter will feel, "I have to talk on this subject," but not very often.

JOHNSON: Can you remember any speeches either during the campaign or the Presidency which were exclusively Carter speeches. That is, he felt so strongly that he

wanted to just sit down and write it himself and didn't really want any interference from anybody?

FALLOWS: The Inaugural Address was the clearest one in that category. I was not involved first-hand in that, but that was in preparation [at]just the time when I was signing on and Pat was checking out. My understanding is that he pretty much wrote that himself. He sent a draft to me down in Texas, and I note for the historical record that my contribution was to add the first line congratulating Ford. My career has been down-hill since then. But that in its style and its thought is the purest distillation of Carter there is. There are some others of that sort--the November energy speech on TV. About three weeks before that speech, I had been working with Dick Goodwin, whom Jody had agreed to have come down...

JOHNSON: Goodwin is the one who worked for Kennedy--and McCarthy for a while?

FALLOWS: Right. And with Johnson too, and who is supposed to be the best speechwriter there is. And he and I worked for about a week on an energy speech, saying it's been half a year since we began this program, nothing's happening, [etc]. Carter was dissatisfied with it. And within one day, [he] wrote a speech more or less in his own pen which Marty Schram described as the worst speech ever given. And it was not a successful speech. That was a kind of turning point for my office because it showed Carter that he could not still do it all himself--That when he wrote a speech in a day it was an exceptionally poor speech. A more successful speech that he largely wrote by himself was the Annapolis speech. That was more successful, in a literary sense. It was not as awkward as the November one. In an intellectual sense I thought it was not successful because he got a memo of recommendation from Brzezinski and one from Vance on dealing with the Russians and kind of glued them together. I remember some newspaper men, I was watching it with them--and the first part of the speech was Vance's conciliatory part and then he shifted tone. And one of the newsmen said, "And now, war!" Because that was a peace and war speech. He wrote large sections of the Panama Canal TV speech himself, but that was not the only one of these that he wrote himself because he cared about it that much was the Inaugural Address. The others were ones where he was dissatisfied with what we had given him. [He] wanted to do it himself.

JOHNSON: I find that somewhat interesting in reading the Schram book on the campaign. He talks about Carter being torn between wanting to do the acceptance speech at the convention but also wanting to get as much input from wherever he could. And I got the feeling from that book that that acceptance speech was really kind of a combination of a lot of his own ideas plus input from all over the place--People calling people on the phone and saying, "What do you think about this?" "What do you think about that." People coming in saying, "Let's put in some things about ethnics, the background of the Democratic Party, and so forth." And what you seem to be saying is that when he came up to his next most important speech, I guess the Inaugural Speech, he decided to go pretty much on his own?

FALLOWS: Right. I was not involved in that acceptance speech, so I don't know anything first-hand about its origin. There are cycles that Carter goes through on the input question. Every couple of months he will get all heated up and want us to consult a wide variety of experts to get their advice. And inevitably we'll get it and he'll always throw it out and do whatever [he] intended to do in the first place. And that's not wasted effort because those people feel as if they're important. They're being consulted. But it's a perfectly predictable, natural cycle to go through.

JOHNSON: Is there any particular speech or series of speeches that you worked on that you find particularly personally rewarding? You feel that this was really your baby. You really...

FALLOWS: There was one in that category which was the famous lawyers speech in Los Angeles. That was one [in] which the conditions were propitious for that, in that Carter's biases and my own are identical on this point. He had given a Law Day speech in Georgia four years ago bemoaning the social insensitivity of the lawyers. So when this came up, I think I sent in a memo saying this is an opportunity to do this same sort of thing. And he told me in the beginning that you know, yes, I should go ahead with that. And I sent in a detailed outline, the first third of which, or the first half of which was talking about ways that lawyers should spread their services more fairly. The second half was talking about how, in general, we need to rid ourselves of the need for lawyers. There are too many things that you need lawyers to do. So the answer is not to give a lawyer to every poor person but to make sure that nobody needs them as much. So he was all enthusiastic about that. And he said, "The most important thing about the speech is that no lawyers can work on it." So that made me almost uniquely qualified among the whole staff here. So I worked on that and he had seen drafts along the way. And I finally got a draft the day before the speech, and [he] told me he was severely unhappy. He hated it. It was too shrill. It didn't reflect the judgment that had been put into it. But he didn't change it and gave it. Of all the speeches I've ever done, that's the one which came out in the form closest to the way I had put it in. And I was not out there in Los Angeles to hear it, but Rick Hertzberg, of my office, went on the trip [and] said that all the reporters were coming up and said, you know, "Fabulous," "The best Carter has ever done," etc. But, the newspaper reports were all about the first half, saying that there needed to be more lawyers, not about the second half saying there needed to be less lawyers. And so, it came across as being different in tone than I had intended. That is my one moment o success, the lawyers speech.

JOHNSON: Okay. You're being too humble. Did you see any change in this process of what we've been talking about, the development of speeches and so forth from the time when you first began and say, fairly recently?

FALLOWS: There has been gradual change. As time has gone on, Carter has understood: (a) that he can't do it all himself, and (b) that he can't do it all extemporaneously. In the first few months, he seemed to think that he could give any policy speech without a text. What became clear after a while was not only that he would make mistakes sometimes if he did that as anybody on earth would, but also that

with policy speeches what you care about is not so much the audience right in front of you, but having a text that newspaper editorial writers, magazine writers, and other people will find eloquent so that they will write that Carter gave a good speech. And they're not going to go to the speech, but they're going to read the text. And so that the text becomes very important. That point got across. So there's been gradual progress towards a style of speechwriting and speechmaking which is more like the style every other President has ever had. There still is a great gap between Carter and the norm that I think will only partly be closed. But on the other hand, I think that it's partly because he didn't sound like other politicians that he was elected. That's part of his enduring appeal.

JOHNSON: You're getting into another area here of some interest. You're certainly aware that Carter has been criticized for the manner in which he speaks. And that raises another question that I wanted to get into. Your job was to write speeches, but were you involved in any way or was your staff involved in any way with coaching the President in terms of presentations? Were you involved in that end of it?

FALLOWS: No. The first omen I had of this was during the debates during the campaign because you read those hoary accounts of Kennedy and Nixon and their 1960 debates--how they both really steeled themselves for the ordeal and practiced and had all these exercises to limber up their minds. Carter would have none of that. He had a briefing book. He read it. He refused oral warm-up at least before the first debate. He may have done some before the second or third.

JOHNSON: Were you there for the...

FALLOWS: Yes. I was. And that is part of his general approach towards speaking, which is that he refuses to tamper with his unvarnished, natural style of delivering things. If there are improvements that he can make himself; if he talks into a tape recorder and plays it back and hears the ways that he can improve, he will do that. I don't know of any case in which he has accepted coaching. None of us after the first couple of months even bothered to mention it again because it was clear that there was no market for it. Rafshoon, I think, does a very delicate job of trying to introduce a little bit of it, but I'm sure it's much milder than Kennedy or Nixon or Ford did. Johnson, too, took speech lessons. But Carter will just have none of that. I think that's a mistake, but it's part of his traits.

JOHNSON: I was going to move away from some of the speechwriting per se, unless there's anything else that you think we haven't covered. I'd like to get kind of an overall reaction, kind of impression of your feelings, attitudes about working in the White House, working directly with the President of the United States. What kind of feelings has this elicited?

FALLOWS: Before I came here I had read all the novels and all the historical accounts about life in the White House, and I expected it to be an atmosphere of high drama and also of high peril. Neither of those did I find to be the case. The high drama I never

feel. The only time I felt high drama was I was in Camp David the last couple of days of those negotiations. I was hanging around the last day when Carter was talking with Begin. And that, of course, was extremely exciting and titillating. On some of the foreign trips it is exciting to land on this plane that says the United States of America and get out and you're in India or Poland or wherever. Most of the time I feel very little drama which I think probably is 90 percent to the good and it's ninety-five percent attributable to Carter's own manner. He's not an intimidating person. One of his great gifts is his ability to put people at their ease. So, I think he gets rid of that atmosphere of people walking around with the weight of the world on their shoulders. I say ninety percent to the good; I mean that people don't take themselves over-seriously which seemed to have been [an] occupational disease before. The ten percent to the bad is that they also feel lesscompulsion to do anything. It's a fairly staid and complacent group of people who are not really dying to reform the world. So, it's more time-servers. If there's a fault, it's a group of time servers.
The atmosphere of high peril also doesn't exist--this is one hundred percent because of Carter. He has made it clear that people are not going to rise and fall by virtue of Machiavellianism. He's not going to permit it. People can attack Blumenthal, but Blumenthal's not going to get fired. They can attack Costanza, and she's not going to get fired; she ultimately quits, but no one is going to supplant Hamilton and Jody and Rafshoon in that first stratum and everybody else is going to more or less stay where they came in. That is good to a degree. You spend much less time worrying about protecting your back. I think that can have been the case before. It also has its perils in the following way: If there is a single grievous flaw I find in Carter, it is his complacency about the people he has around him and the ideas that come to him. There's no passion in him to find better people, to find better ideas. He is satisfied with those he has. A lot of them are good but always they could be better. And so that is my largest complaint against him.

JOHNSON: One thing that you said that I caught on--you said that there seemed to be a real easiness about dealing with the man whereas in some reports you get the image of the steely-eyed, very tough individual, who if you weren't ready to perform for him you could be in real trouble. Now are the two both working or is this just a different impression that you have?

FALLOWS: I have seen both of those. In the times when Carter is mad and means to chastise you as he should, he is stern; but it's not like Lyndon Johnson, humiliating someone. You never feel that you're going to be cast out from the tribe because you've made a mistake. Again, I find it a very admirable trait of Carter's, that he understands human frailty. He says, "I've made mistakes myself, but you made a mistake this time and don't do it again." It's different from the way it's been before. And so when he's being either friendly or hostile, it's still not in a super power fashion; it's as an accessible human being.

JOHNSON: This is a little more personal, I guess, and you can take this as far as you want to or you don't even have to do it if you don't want to. You have worked over here on a very different schedule than the schedule that I thought you talked about. Working,

you know, like writing in the morning, playing tennis in the afternoon, etc. Did you find that a difficult adjustment?

FALLOWS: I find it very difficult, and there are a variety of reasons for my leaving now, none of them having to do with pique or with bitterness or anything like that. I feel no bitterness. I feel great personal loyalty to Carter even as I feel him deficient in some ways. I will vote for him again. Barring some great change, I will speak warmly of him. But the reasons for my leaving are my desire not to continue several things: Not to continue speechwriting, not to continue being away from journalism, and not to continue living a life at this schedule. I think if I did this for six more years I would not be married anymore. It has just been very hard on what is and will be a very strong marriage. My wife and I had been married for five-and-a-half years before I started this, and we'll be married for another fifty. But we would not be if I stayed doing this kind of work. Because, especially with a young child, I never see my son. I usually leave before he gets up and come home after he goes to sleep. I see him only on weekends. But on two-thirds of the weekends, I have to do something here.

So for the first few months what I hated was being a bureaucrat, getting used to the fact that my presence throughout the day, was what I was being paid for. I couldn't do the work at home; I couldn't do it late at night. I had to be there all day. Later on, what I came to resent was being there all the time, always being on call. So I was looking through my files last night trying to pull them together and saw Carter's little printouts from the first couple of weeks about staying with your family, which looks just ludicrous now. Nobody does that. So I'm sure that has been the case in all eras. There has to be some way to combat it because it really is destructive.

JOHNSON: Let me just ask you a quick, one final question. You are going back to journalism. You're going to be the Washington Editor of the Atlantic Monthly. Is that correct?

FALLOWS: Right.

JOHNSON: This is a terribly large question to ask as the last question, but, what kinds of things do you think will help you from having been here in your journalism in the future?

FALLOWS: It has been immensely valuable to me, not for knowing what Carter said to Brzezinski about the Shah of Iran. And not for telling me many things that were very different from what I expected, but for just fleshing out and rendering in three dimensions the things I'd understood in one or two dimensions before. The best example I can give is I'd heard before and even written about how in a bureaucracy, people's loyalties, your most urgent loyalty is to holding on to your own job. Your next loyalty is to the unit within which you work and next to the program which funds you and next to the department and next to the administration and then next to the nation after that. I understood that abstractly. I understand that in my gut now. And I can explain it much more vividly than I could before. So it is acquiring the store of experience to be able to explain things more convincingly and persuasively, to have that intuition about

which things are probably right and which things are probably wrong, which make sense in human and organizational terms and which ones don't. There have been a couple of things which have surprised me, too. I think now--I've come to think that the press has relatively far greater influence than I expected. I realized all during the last two years that most of my friends who were writing for magazines had more control ultimately over what Carter said than I did, because they were able to move in a spectrum of opinion which I couldn't do. So--

JOHNSON: Yet in ways, I mean as a kind of action-reaction so that the things that you plugged in--for example, you pointed out the speech you did on lawyers. Certainly that was an action which prompted enormous reaction, and in that sense you had a real input there.

FALLOWS: But that was a significant aberration. I know that my position would be much different if I had the same standing with Carter as people like [Ted] Sorensen had with [John] Kennedy or [William] Safire and [Ray] Price and [Lou] Cannon had with Nixon, but that's just not the case. I think if you are close to a President, then you do have great influence; if you are a cog in the machine, your influence is modest. And our position was much closer to the latter than the first.

JOHNSON: And that you would say has more to do with Carter's own background as wanting to rely on himself as speechwriter probably than anything else? Would that be accurate?

FALLOWS: Right. I think in this administration as others, people who count most on the President are those who have been with him for a long time, who were with him before he was famous. In other eras speechwriters have had that position. Carter has not had speechwriters for more than three years. Nobody has been with him more than three years, etc.

JOHNSON: That's about as far as I think I want to take it. Do you have anything else you want to add?

FALLOWS: No, you've asked good questions.

JOHNSON: Good.