

Esther E. Peterson, Oral History Interview—JFK#3, 2/11/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Esther E. Peterson
Interviewer: Ann M. Campbell
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Biographical Note

Peterson was a legislative representative for the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO (1958-1961); Assistant Secretary for Labor Standards (1961-1969), and Director of the Women's Bureau (1961-1964) in the Department of Labor; and Executive Vice Chairman of the President's Commission on the Status of Women (1961-1963). In this interview, she discusses the President's Commission on the Status of Women; the anachronistic nature of the Labor Department Women's Bureau; consumer affairs and protection; and involving of women's organizations in working for civil rights, among other issues.

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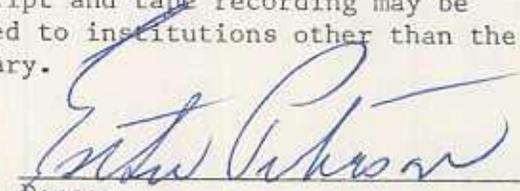
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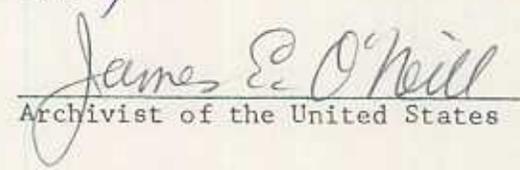
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Esther E. Peterson—JFK#3

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Third of Three Oral History Interviews

with

Esther E. Peterson

February 11, 1970
Washington D.C.

By Ann M. Campbell

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CAMPBELL: Mrs. Peterson, in July of 1962 the President [John F. Kennedy] issued an order for equal opportunity in the federal service. What was the background for this directive? I believe I've read that in April of that year the commission asked for a review of the Civil Service practice.

PETERSON: You're talking about the executive order that was issued, 11246.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

PETERSON: Well, the background of that is that there was a recommendation that came from the President's Commission on the Status of Women that something had to be done in the federal service relative to sex discrimination. It was a very ticklish question because a number on the commission felt that sex discrimination should be connected with the racial question. Others felt that it should be separate. I remember that Dick Lester [Richard A. Lester] of Princeton University, who was chairman of the group, had felt that we should have a separate executive order, one where we started with industry using their best efforts because we didn't really know yet how to define discrimination on the basis of sex. There are so many myths and so much trouble and so much data lacking about it. So an effort was made to have a separate executive order. It just didn't get to first base. It was, oh, a roundabout and terribly difficult thing. And then, finally,

we pressed to get sex part of the regular executive order, amend #11246. And I saw more foot dragging on that than on almost any issue I've worked on in government.

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It just would get lost every time¹.

CAMPBELL: Lost where? In the White House?

PETERSON: In the Department of Justice. I think it was in the Department of Justice where it got lost.

CAMPBELL: Did you work with somebody particular there at Justice?

PETERSON: Well, we were working with Burke Marshall who was good.

CAMPBELL: Marshall.

PETERSON: Burke Marshall we worked with. Oh, gee, I wish I didn't forget names. I mean there are so many of those fine young attorneys. Some of them were not so fine. Mary Eastwood [Mary O. Eastwood], who was the person with whom I worked most over there, is a person who will remember all of those details, the ones we worked with and what they did. I'd have to get out notes and things to look that up, but I do remember that that was really, really rough. We just made a lot of enemies because we kept pressing for sex inclusion in Executive Order 11246. And finally we were able to get it in, but it was rough.

CAMPBELL: Do you recall if Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] was involved at all?

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PETERSON: Robert was always good on this. He was very good on this. And when he was attorney general, he was fine. He helped us in many, many ways. I felt

¹ Let me just state in general what the situation was, for the record. We established the President's Commission by executive order. The members of the commission felt that equal opportunity for employment ought to be a basic right of women and they stated that very clearly in their recommendation, and, that to secure that, there should be an executive order that would so state it. That did not work out. We could not get that through and later on, the Executive Order 10925, the one on equal employment, for equal employment, was passed and it was that executive order that we got amended finally to include sex, or when it was written, to include sex. It was getting sex into that executive order which was the problem because, I think, as I recall, some place in the transcript, that it kept dropping out and we had to keep putting it back in. And then it finally became part of 11246. In the interim, with all, during all of this, of course, was the Title VII debate on the Hill, which I think I describe in another section of the report, but the thing to be clear is that basically, the commission was patterned off after the civil rights document. The recommendation of the committee was to have a separate order for women, the feeling being in many part of... [Esther Peterson, 2/19/79]

that he was one of the least complicated men that I had ever worked with as far as working with women is concerned, even less than Jack.

CAMPBELL: He finally put down an opinion, didn't he, in June before this order was...

PETERSON: He helped us on practices in the Civil Service in relation to an office being able to designate whether they wanted to hire a man or a woman, and that was definitely the Attorney General who worked with that. Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] was the one who came up to Hyde Park to announce the decision.

CAMPBELL: Did you sense significant opposition to your drive in other parts of government out of the Justice Department?

PETERSON: Oh, yes. A great deal in State [State Department]; a great deal in... Well, State, I guess, and the whole foreign service area and in the military. You see, at the same time we were trying to get a number of positions listed in the military opened for women. And there, too, we ran into these odd, strong preconceived notions of a woman's place and what women can do. It just took an awful lot of hammering for that. Hardest was getting changes in the military so women could advance in rank. We worked with DACOWITS [Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services] on the issue and won.

Commerce [Commerce Department] was certainly not the... Hodges [Luther H. Hodges] was good when he was there, and things were a little bit freer under Hodges than they were afterwards. I'm just trying to think. Agriculture [Department of Agriculture] was pretty good because Dorothy Jacobson [Dorothy H. Jacobson] was there and she influenced Orville Freeman [Orville L. Freeman] a great deal, and that helped in that area. Treasury [Treasury Department] was, no. We had trouble with them on the tax bill; we had trouble with them on, oh, a great deal. Treasury was not, certainly not female-minded. Just roughly those are the ones that come to my mind. And of course, Labor [Labor Department] was always the best as far as that goes, even though there were problems there. And Civil Service Commission had to be pushed. What others are there? Have I gone over them all?

CAMPBELL: Let's see. HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare].

PETERSON: Well, HEW was fine. Oh, yes, no problems. They were good. There were resistances when you would come to equalizing social security

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benefits and things like that. That was part of the trouble that we had in the Treasury also because this meant money and the same thing in relation to Social Security. I remember where we asked to have the retirement age the same for men and women. Well, it was not easy.

CAMPBELL: When you mentioned Treasury as sort of a particular problem, did you miss a good woman on the inside in Treasury with that...

PETERSON: You know, I think that's true when I look back at it. We had Dorothy Jacobson in Agriculture who was good, and Katie [Kathleen Louchheim] tried hard in State, but I think she was really up against some pretty tough characters. And we had Evelyn Harrison in the Civil Service Commission—I'm trying to look at this—and I think that you were right that we had.... Now, we had Mary Eastwood in Justice, but she was down so far because women just didn't have much chance to get to the top. Had she been up at the top, I think it would've helped. I hate to think of it in terms like that, but there's no doubt about it that when women were there, they did help a good deal. In HEW Mary Switzer [Mary E. Switzer] was helpful at times, although she was not really directly involved. But Gardner [John W. Gardner] was excellent, really excellent. Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] was good when we started off, and Celebrezze [Anthony J. Celebrezze] was in part of the time of the life of the commission. And he was all right. I don't think he had any real philosophical feeling about this except he was very nice and decent. He didn't stand in our way.

CAMPBELL: In the subsequent enforcement of the President's order, was the Women's Bureau involved in that at all?

PETERSON: Only in helping.... Only in advising. It was just a matter of helping set guidelines and such things, but not in the implementation, no. No.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Was there any consideration or did your commission push at that time to extend this order to employers with federal contracts?

PETERSON: Oh, yes. Yes, you see, that is what this is, 11246.

CAMPBELL: Oh, I see. Well, then I suppose that my question originally about the earlier order which simply was for equal employment in the federal service....

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PETERSON: Oh, in the government. Oh, I thought you meant in the.... Well, I'll have to get those numbers straight. Maybe I have them wrong. Shall I get my notes? I don't know where they are.

CAMPBELL: That's all right. In other words...

PETERSON: Anyway, that earlier one and the federal government...

CAMPBELL: Yeah. The one which did come out of the...

PETERSON: But this one was for federal. That was the real victory because that's the one that really meant something. Oh, no. On the other—but still those things hold on implementing the regular.... Oh, why don't I remember those numbers? 11246 is the federal contract.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Yeah.

PETERSON: And the other is Equal Employment Opportunity within the federal government. The government shouldn't make contracts with firms that didn't have equal employment.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Which came out at the time of the commission.

PETERSON: That's correct. That's correct. And it came out without sex first.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. It came out first without sex and then in '62.... In our last interview, I recall that you, in discussing the interim report the commission put out, suggested that it was sort of issued in order to give fair warning to people as to the direction in which you were headed, the sorts of things you were doing. Do you recall any reaction to that interim report?

PETERSON: I don't think we got nearly enough reaction from it. This in itself was significant and bothered me. We got a lot of reaction when the final, the real report first came out, but we did a lot of work with the press, and we did a lot of work with women's organizations, and we really put a lot of effort on that. We really didn't get that kind of a response with the interim report. We didn't get White House response and that made part of the problem, that was part of the problem.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. So in other words, there was no response from that report which would've caused you to

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change your direction?

PETERSON: No, we didn't get.... I don't think so.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. How much involvement was there overall in commission affairs from the White House?

PETERSON: Well, at the beginning with Kennedy, there was a good deal because we had our first meeting over there and Kennedy came to the meeting. The Vice President [Lyndon B. Johnson] was active at that time. And I think Kennedy was genuinely interested in it and I think he saw it as a political asset as much as anything, you know, and as a basis for some of the legislative items that we had been

pressing, that we had wanted. Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] helped an awful lot and Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] used to consult on it a lot. But Mike, I worked much more closely with him over there. And the nice thing, then, was the door was always open. You know, it was just so splendid because you could get a reaction from the President without knocking down walls on a number of these little issues. So I felt that during the life of the commission, while we were working on it, before we'd given the report, we had good cooperation. And I'll never forget, when we sent over a rough paste up of the report—I have it still in the file—a dummy that I sent over to the President, via Mike, to see what he thought about it. And it came back with a suggestion that we put Kennedy's picture in it. That meant they really did like it. And then we had a lot of fun finding a quote to put under his picture. We went through speeches and speeches and speeches. And the most appropriate quote we could find came from a speech that he made in Denver. But it was a last minute thing, I remember it so well because the printer was ready and the report was ready but we had to get the picture and all was fine.

CAMPBELL: What sort of matters do you recall might you have contacted the White House staff on, on what sorts of things did you...

PETERSON: Well, I contacted them a lot on policy things such as, for example, the birth control issue. The point is, you know, that I'm a person and I'm part of the President's staff, and what I wanted to do was to recommend as far as we could go. But in the areas that were thorny, I needed advice on how far we could go. The nice thing was we were independent. The groups did move, but it did help me a good deal to kind of get a feeling of where we ought to be going.

CAMPBELL: Do you recall who would get involved, for instance, in advice on family planning matters as to the White House?

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PETERSON: Well, we talked to.... I think Mike and Ralph were the ones I talked with most on that issue. Mike was the counsel to the President. Kennedy worked a little differently from some of the others. Mike was the person I worked with most. He was the one who talked with the President; I would go with him if it were something important, but I always got answers easily. No problem with that.

CAMPBELL: In your large commission overall, were there people that were particularly active, particularly significant voices in writing the report, or was it really a group effort?

PETERSON: Oh, yes. Well, it was a group effort pretty much, but a lot of people were really involved. We were very fortunate in getting a good writer, Helen Hill Miller, who did the writing for us, and we had an editorial committee that really worked on it—John Macy [John W. Macy, Jr.], Margaret Hickey [Margaret A. Hickey], Helen Hill Miller and I. We four really wrote it. We would do a draft and then we'd

have a caucus and then each make our changes. Then Helen would rewrite it with the changes. We met so many Saturdays and Sundays, over and over again, just to get it done. Then I would usually have it looked over at the White House. They made no changes. In fact, I think Mike said, "Go ahead. You use your judgment on it." There was no censoring or anything like that. It was pretty low-key.

CAMPBELL: What was the relationship between the commission and the existing President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity?

PETERSON: Almost nothing.

CAMPBELL: Nothing.

PETERSON: Almost nothing, you know. This always bothered me a lot because I felt that one of the biggest problems we had was to see the interrelation between the two groups. The very fact that they'd see equal employment opportunity without seeing how it related to women bothered me. But it showed where we were, and it indicated how far we really had to go. I didn't go around banging, "You're leaving out the women." I tried other methods to bring us in, and I believe we made progress just about as fast as if we had been more aggressive about it. I know I've been criticized for not being more aggressive. But, you know, you use your own pattern of operation. I think I have a sense of what's possible.

CAMPBELL: Did you follow that committee...

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PETERSON: There's something else I think I should say. I myself felt that discrimination on the racial basis was so much worse than it was for women generally. I could not see dragging all women along on an issue that I thought more important. And if any woman needed help, it was the Negro woman. And the most important goal, it seemed to me, was to give opportunities to that race. The same thing happened to the Negro during the Title VII debate in the House.

I still think I was right, but I don't know. It's a personal conviction I have. Maybe I was wrong, I don't know, but I'd worked on the race question so hard and I felt so strongly about it. The Negro woman was so disadvantaged I didn't want our pressure for largely white women's progress to hold her back. And then I think actually we white women by comparison had it pretty good. I don't believe in discrimination and I've worked hard against it, and I didn't want to cloud the big issue, the real issue of the question of discrimination on the basis of race. So I must say I didn't press that point.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. You didn't.

PETERSON: In all honesty, I don't think the Betty Friedans would have agreed, but that's the way I felt.

CAMPBELL: I had a few questions about specific items in the report. It was recommended that a federal program be established “to survey, summarize, and disseminate research and statistics on women’s education, fostering inclusion in new studies of separate data on males and females.”

PETERSON: Do you know who pressed that the hardest?

CAMPBELL: Who?

PETERSON: Senator Aiken [George D. Aiken] of Vermont.

CAMPBELL: Really?

PETERSON: Yeah. It was very interesting. I remember a very passionate plea he made at one of the meetings for this. And I think this is partly because he’d sat on the education-labor committee [Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee] and he found everything clumped together. You know, grouped together so much that we didn’t have separate statistics, really, on what was happening to people.

CAMPBELL: Who did you have in mind here, your Bureau of

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Labor Statistics, Office of Education?

PETERSON: No, HEW really, and cooperatively with the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the census. I think a lot of us felt that we did not ride the Census Bureau nearly enough to get a lot of the basic data, and to do some sampling for us. You see, I find that one of the biggest problems is getting data to support programs that you want but that are new. I found that throughout my experience in the Labor Department, issues such as effective wages for child labor (which really needed to be brought up to date), for example, effective overtime wages for women, all these laws and practices had been established and people would say, “Oh, we crossed that bridge.” Yet we had no supporting up-to-date data to really make any changes if they were needed. And this is true in relation to education, too. You always have data on the things that you’re doing, but you don’t have data for the justification of new programs to meet changes. Right now, for example, I feel that when we talk about guaranteed income, for example, we need to know how many people are working full-time and are also on relief. I can’t find that statistic. I’ve been asking people for it. It doesn’t exist as near as I can tell. It does for New York, but if you tell Ohio that it’s the same in Ohio, well, that’s out. We do know about Defense people. There was an article in the paper the other day on how many people there are in low grades in the Defense Department and how many are having to quit the army to go home and support their families because they can’t support them on army low-grade pay. They actually

were eligible for relief. So my point is that we just don't have the data and the kinds of information we should have on so many issues.

CAMPBELL: So this was, then, a general problem that...

PETERSON: Well, it was specifically in relation to women. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Yeah. Would you have looked most often to the Bureau of Labor Statistics to solve that sort of problem?

PETERSON: Well, within the Labor Department, if it was in relation to working women, yes. As for education, I think we might ask Labor Statistics—maybe HEW would give them a grant, you know—to do the technical work on it as we always were doing back and forth. But it depended on where the responsibility would rest. And it actually would rest in Education.

CAMPBELL: Then, in your section that concerned women in the law, there was a rather strong suggestion

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that test litigation should begin regarding laws which discriminate against women. Did you have a particular issue in mind here?

PETERSON: Oh, yes, very definitely. We had the issue of weight-lifting laws; we had the barring of certain occupations from women, night work, hours, those laws that had been put on the books as protective labor legislation.

CAMPBELL: As protective.

PETERSON: You see, we felt that that was the issue around which the commission was really organized and we wanted to see if we could counter some of those old protective legislation laws which are still as big a problem today. I mean, they still are real issues: whether or not women are persons under the Constitution; whether unequal treatment is legal; and whether classification by sex in employment situations is really constitutional. So we pressed very hard for that.

CAMPBELL: Had you consulted Justice about it or...

PETERSON: Oh, yes. In fact, we wanted Justice to intervene in some cases. And that, ooh, that's hard. It's way down on their priorities.

CAMPBELL: List of priorities.

PETERSON: Way down on the list of priorities. There were a number of times when we

asked them to intervene in cases, but we weren't successful.

CAMPBELL: How about the White House? Would you have gone to the White House?

PETERSON: Well, they would pretty much say, "What does Justice say in a case like this?" I don't recall going to the White House on asking Justice to intervene. I don't recall using that route at all, no.

CAMPBELL: In the employment section of the report—this is, I think, back to our first bit of discussion tonight—it's concluded that "the most feasible tool for directing employers' attention to the importance of equal treatment for women would be an executive order." The White House was aware this was coming out in the report...

PETERSON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

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CAMPBELL: But had not, I suppose, agreed for the...

PETERSON: Well, you see, implementation is a long way from words. But we all felt if we got it in the report first, then it would lead the way toward getting the order through. And actually that's how we did get it through finally, just by that pressure. And that's the one that really got them to squeak. I mean, articles, newspapers, oh, it was just full of things from that finding.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Did you have any advance reaction from the President on this or any anticipation of what he might have done had he lived?

PETERSON: Had he lived? Oh, I think he'd have been with us on that. Yeah, I think he would have been with us. Bobby, you see, influenced him a lot, and that group—Burke and Bob and some of those around there—we never had trouble working with them.

CAMPBELL: I think it was an interesting remark you made that Robert Kennedy was, did you say, easier with women?

PETERSON: Easier. Uh-huh.

CAMPBELL: Could you expand on that? It's a difficult thing to get hold of.

PETERSON: Yeah, I don't know. Well, in working with him, you know, you never felt like he was treating you specially because you were a woman. You were a worker, a person. If he needed to give you hell, he gave you hell. If you did all right, you know, okay, it was an easy relationship. He would use the same language

with me that he'd use with somebody else. I learned this during the campaign. And I find that easy. You're comfortable when you work with a person like that. You're comfortable working with a person when you don't have to think, "Oh, dear, how is he going to react? Now do I have to do it this way or that way?" I didn't have any of that with Bob Kennedy, not a bit.

CAMPBELL: Did you sense any overall plans for future action? There was not long after your report was submitted until the President's death. Did you sense any definite plans for action as a result of the commission's report?

PETERSON: Well, I think we all in the different departments were going to pick the recommendations and get them woven into the legislative programs that came from each department. And we

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weren't as successful in that as we should have been. We really ride herd on it, nor did we have—our interdepartmental committee was kind of a flop.

CAMPBELL: You know, I wanted to ask about that because it was appointed just about the time the report was submitted with lots of cabinet members. And with the addition of a couple of cabinet members who had not sat on the commission; Rusk [Dean Rusk] and McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], then were.... Was there some particular thinking behind their inclusion now?

PETERSON: Well, I think that after the report came out, we found there were so many things that needed to be done in many areas. That was why. And you see a lot was uncovered during the work of the commission which we hadn't known about before. And of course, the cabinet members always sent their representatives. Once in a while we'd see them at functions, but not at any very substantive meetings. No, I think the interdepartmental committee was kind of an anti-climax.

CAMPBELL: Then, also, after the report, a citizens' advisory council was formed which seemed to basically be composed of members of the commission, then again, with the addition of Anna Halsted [Anna Roosevelt Halsted], I believe, and the gentleman from Filene's. What did you anticipate that this group would do?

PETERSON: Well, let me go back a little bit. You see, originally when I talked to Kennedy, we had said that there would be the commission, then there would be the report, and we would not have any bureaucratic holding-on. I had wanted the Women's Bureau to become the staff to guide in carrying out the recommendations and to issue progress reports. I think I said that the other day. And I felt kind of strongly about that. The commission felt differently. You see, here was a commitment made by the person who really worked to get the commission started, but I certainly had no right to speak for all the rest. But there was a different feeling in the

commission, and that grew out of a feeling—a feeling which I would agree with—that there should be some overview, some ongoing, “Here, look at all this that needs to be implemented. Well, what’s going to happen if you don’t have somebody who measures progress?” So there was a recommendation that we do set up an advisory council, which was to meet two or three times and review progress made. It was to get reports and review progress and say what we are doing and where we should do more. Then there was to be the interdepartmental committee which was to see that we keep our own house in order. So it was lovely on paper, and I think a lot of good work was done too. I think the council was set up in a way so that it was not as independent as it should’ve

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been and, therefore, did not really have the freedom to do what it might have done. And then we had staffing problems, really not being able to get the kind of service that was necessary.

CAMPBELL: What stood in the way of the council’s independence?

PETERSON: I’ll have to look at the way the executive order was drafted because I remember we had a lot of questions at that time. We didn’t want a group where we’d have it completely independent unless it was so established that this was an independent advisory body, too. And yet, when it had been so much part of the government, there was a feeling of—and don’t kid yourself, there are a lot of these areas that were a little touchy—a wanting to keep it somewhat within bounds and also within the scope of what the recommendations had been. So we didn’t start getting into new territories.

CAMPBELL: What was the impact of the report on the Women’s Bureau?

PETERSON: Well, I guess it depends on who you ask. I’d felt, as I’d told you before, that the Women’s Bureau itself was an anachronism, but that we had to have a group that would really be watching and pressing for our recommendations in all areas of government and employment. But I always felt that as long as there was this bureau, they could say, “We take care of women in the Women’s Bureau.” So women weren’t really considered in the employment and other areas in or out of government. I think my feeling was that, my point of view was *more* feminine, *more* militant because I wanted to be really putting force where you needed it, in the apprentice bureau [Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training], in employment bureau [Bureau of Employment Security], in manpower, in Social Security, in workman’s compensation [Bureau of Employees’ Compensation], so we would not find, “Oh, dear, they just did a pamphlet and woman isn’t even mentioned in it.” And find no effort being made to carry out the recommendations. You see, if we were into the real organization, if we were warp and woof and insisted on including the subject of women in the policy level, then we’d have accomplished the integration where we wanted it. So there were philosophical differences. And the real problem there, I think—I have to be honest about it—was that the person the president appointed to be director of the Women’s Bureau and I had very different, opposing philosophies. And that made it extremely difficult for me when I had visualized turning the

Women's Bureau into the staff arm of this commission, keeping that budget and all, and making it the operating group and the staff group to see that the

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recommendations were carried out. And then I thought the research studies and things that the Women's Bureau do should be done in Labor's research department—the statistical gathering and the conference gatherings—so that those functions would be carried out in the normal way. There was such a conflict between the Women's Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Standards, which was doing the same thing. There was a lot of duplication. And I thought one thing I'd like to do while I was there was to get these areas integrated. But there was a real philosophical difference.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Yeah. Did the staff at the Women's Bureau increase as a result of the commission?

PETERSON: Well, it did at the time of the commission, but then it went... Well, we lost some, I think, after the commission, yes.

CAMPBELL: In other words, duties weren't increased to the extent that the staff grew.

PETERSON: No. No. But you see, part of the work that we did there—equal pay, for instance, and we did an awful lot on minimum wage.... I was working very hard on minimum wage, but that wasn't just for women, you see, except women were the largest number not covered by the law. So there was a lot of good substantive work going on, but no, staff wasn't really increased.

CAMPBELL: In 1963 I noticed that you were still designated as acting director of the Women's Bureau, and then Mrs. Keyserling [Mary D. Keyserling] was appointed in '64. Was there an active search all of this time for a successor for you?

PETERSON: No, there really wasn't because our plan had been somewhat that we'd eased this thing, you see, and could get a civil servant as director—and I had a person I was hoping would get the appointment—so it would not become a political football. I felt that was one of the real problems. During Mary Anderson's days, as I had studied the bureau, it was kept out of politics pretty much, and then it became a political issue. And then it became just, "Here's a job for a woman." And I didn't like that. I think that's downgrading. So I was hoping we would get it on a civil service basis and have somebody who would implement it in the direction that I had pointed out to you. But it was interpreted wrongly as, "Oh, Esther wants to hold on to everything," and it really wasn't so. It was a matter of trying to make it right. And then it began, "Oh, we've got to preside," and, "We won't preside at the dissolution of our bureau." You understand what that is.

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CAMPBELL: In our previous interview, you noted that your bureau had budget problems, as do we all, I suppose. Who did you deal with on budget problems? With the Bureau of the Budget directly or with somebody within the Labor Department?

PETERSON: Not originally. When I became assistant secretary, then I began dealing with the Bureau of the Budget a little bit more and dealing directly on the Hill. But earlier, it was within the Labor Department pretty much. You know, first, of course, was the finance office and then the budget officers and then the secretary.

CAMPBELL: Did it come to a question of whole programs being accepted or rejected, or was this just a question of the size of things?

PETERSON: Well, there was always a question of the duplication of efforts between the Bureau of Labor Standards and the Women's Bureau, that our bureau would do work on minimum wage and Labor Standards would, too, and that there'd be a different philosophy. One would say you have to have it this way. So we were speaking with two voices, and this was very bad. The differences showed most in the relation to state legislation, e.g., different views on night work, weight lifting. This is another thing we tried very hard to correct, to have a policy. But then we ran into these great resistances where, oh, in these bureaucratic groups when nobody will budge and each says, "I am right." And so you get to fighting in parallel directions rather than.... And I had big regrets about this because I hoped that this would've been cleared up somewhat.

CAMPBELL: When you were made assistant secretary and then eventually Labor Standards came under your charge, was it easier to deal with that sort of thing then?

PETERSON: Well, I was in a position where I should've been able to do it, but I tried and I couldn't cause then the Women's Bureau was pretty well on its solid basis again, and Mary [Mary D. Keyserling] was very good and very effective, but we just had a different philosophy of ways of doing things. And that made it difficult, made it very difficult.

CAMPBELL: You had in the bureau an extensive publications program, the results of which I've seen in some instances. Was this an unusually large publications program for the Labor Department?

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PETERSON: I don't think so. No, I don't think so. Not if you look at it in total volumes. A lot of this was very useful, I think because there were no other groups

that got a lot of these basic materials and data together. What we would do was get the materials from BLS and publish it. A lot of that was not primary research as far as the Women's Bureau was concerned. And BLS research could be put out by somebody else. The main thing was to see that it got out.

CAMPBELL: And was disseminated.

PETERSON: Sure.

CAMPBELL: Was it your innovation to send out regional directors for the Women's Bureau?

PETERSON: Well, there had been regional directors, and yes, I went to Congress and asked for those, and was able to get them. I felt that we had to begin to make contacts. Again, this was part of my overall plan, the hope that we would have women's experts in every regional office who could work with manpower, with employment—it would have fit in with an overall pattern. And they did develop it. I think probably the regional offices were far more effective, sometimes, than even the national office because they're right on the operating level. And I'd hoped that we would eventually have a field person in each one of the regional offices.

CAMPBELL: The manpower development and training program [Manpower Development Program], I believe, included a significant number of women trainees. Were you involved in drawing up plans for that at all?

PETERSON: Yes. Well, we had to, in our overall meetings, you know, when these things would be planned. That's where we had to be sure that we saw that the Women's Bureau was involved. And yes, I think we were influential in helping with that.

CAMPBELL: I think Mr. Henning [John F. Henning] came into this a little later after it was kind of established. I believe you last time had a little bit to say about a comparison of Mr. Wirtz [W. Willard Wirtz] and Mr. Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg]. How did things change then with Mr. Henning as under secretary? How did you find him to work with from the Women's Bureau point of view?

PETERSON: Well, he's.... I guess very honestly, he was a good trade unionist, but pretty old-fashioned in his attitude toward women. He was certainly

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not one to be liberally oriented toward women—much, much less than Bill, who had War Labor Board [National War Labor Board] experience and NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] experience and a completely different philosophy and intellectual outlook on it. You know, Henning, a very nice guy and all that, but.... I remember

talking to him once about trying to get the apprentice regulations so that women would not be barred and he just didn't see much to that. He thought there'd be real problems if we tried to get women apprentices.

CAMPBELL: Did you have significant contact with the President's Advisory Committee on Labor-Management Policy?

PETERSON: I had almost nothing to do with that. No, no, no. I remember thinking lots of times that we ought to try to—just one of those things I didn't press and didn't get done. It's the sort of thing you think about and you look at the agendas, and I'd go to the secretary's meeting and I'd hear all these things and I'd think, "How can I press this, too?" You see, in relation to the priorities of the time, I couldn't in my conscience justify pushing for influence on that, too. Not that the problem wasn't important, but you have to kind of weigh it in relation to other problems and priorities.

CAMPBELL: Within the bureau, finally, BEC [Bureau of Employment Compensation] comes over under your wing, and you just mentioned last time that you did realize there were some problems there. I thought it might be useful if you could discuss them just a little bit.

PETERSON: Well, the problems were an awful lot in the delay of people getting their checks, the confusion. I was upset when I'd get letters that would come to me for my signature, cold, brutal letters saying, "There's not a thing we can do for you." And I couldn't see why. And yet, when a congressman would call, boy, they could, you know, get cases expedited. So I felt very strongly that we really needed to have a good scientific look at the bureau, at the flow of cases, where were the bottlenecks, what were the problems, and were they ours or were they somebody else's. Or were they the other agencies', which we found was true. A lot of it was the processing of a lot of claims, but the point is to be sure that deserving people get their just dues. It was in that area pretty much—on the processing of claims between the time they were filed, the time people got their pay, and what they did in the interim—these processes really affect the life of a worker. And when I began to look into the bottlenecks in the process, that worried me.

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CAMPBELL: Yeah. Then Bureau of Labor Standards also comes in under your wing and you...

PETERSON: We did a study, by the way, we had a firm come in and do an analysis of the workmen's compensation.

CAMPBELL: Did you?

PETERSON: That was one of the last things we got through, and I'm not sure whether their recommendations were put into operation. But, oh, the resistance—to

have somebody else come in and take a look at us and criticize us: it's so hard, just so hard.

CAMPBELL: At Labor Standards I believe you suggested last time there was a bit of a PR attitude about some of the work. What did you mean by that?

PETERSON: I don't remember that. What did I say?

CAMPBELL: A question perhaps of a little lack of actual concern and a bit of a PR urge to....

PETERSON: Well, I think there is a lot of that. I think there's too much of it. I remember when I first came in I found that they were getting a lot of publicity for advocating taking doors off refrigerators in vacant lots, for example. And it's good publicity and right that they should be taken off. But I kept wondering, "Is this the way we decide a program? Is that our job, or is this the police department? Should we be the ones to give a citizen something to get those doors taken off in empty lots?" Now if it's around workplaces or something like that, that's different, where we would have an obligation, but not just everywhere! People said, "Oh, this is terrible because look at the lives we're saving," and I'm criticized for that. But that wasn't my point. My point was that we were supposed to be doing what our mandate from Congress stated, rather than work toward nice pieces in the paper. Some government agency should prevent refrigerator door hazards but I felt that when we had so little staff, we should use all our influence toward urging the states to do the kinds of things they should do for their working people. This is one example but it's a very far-out example.

CAMPBELL: Generally, were you pleased with press relations out of the Labor Department?

PETERSON: We didn't have much press with the Labor Department, actually. I think my press experience was largely with the commission and also through consumer work. We'd have some from time to time, but we had

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so little that I was not conscious of it.

CAMPBELL: How about the press and the commission, was that satisfactory for you?

PETERSON: We had very good relations there, just fine really good. I thought we had good press on the commission report.

CAMPBELL: Let's talk a little bit about consumer affairs. In the very first part of 1964, you were named to direct what was then called a new effort in consumer

protection by President Johnson, but you'd not been inactive in previous years in that regard. How would you characterize the concern for consumer affairs in the Kennedy White House?

PETERSON: Well, I think Kennedy was interested as was evidenced by the fact that he gave this real consumer speech during his campaign. And I'll never forget when I saw it on the front page of the *Times* in column three—I can still see it—where he made a tremendous speech on what he would do and what he believed in. It was a beautiful speech.

CAMPBELL: Had you been involved in that at all?

PETERSON: No, no, not at all.

CAMPBELL: You know who was?

PETERSON: I had nothing to do with it. Well, I know that when he got in.... I know that Lampman [Robert J. Lampman] of Wisconsin, I guess he was and some of the fellows of the Bureau of the Budget—I think that Ralph could tell us who—and some of the people who were writing his speeches. No, but I was not involved in that at all. But I was very pleased. I thought, "Oh, brother, I wonder if he'll do this?" when I read it. And then, of course, when he was elected, the consumer pressure—Persia Campbell [Persia Gwendoline Crawford Campbell] especially and Lena [Caroline F. Ware] and Colston Warne [Colston E. Warne]. And these were all people I'd worked with and knew, but not in this capacity. And they—I'm sure that they're the ones who kept pressing. "What are you going to do about this?" And then Walter Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller] got involved in it and agreed to have a consumer advisory council, but the President had agreed that he would appoint and have them affiliated with the economic council...

CAMPBELL: Council of Economic Advisers.

PETERSON: And they would report to the Council of Economic

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Advisers, be part of their budget and that's when he got Helen Kinoier I think to be the chairman. But they were working very closely with Walter, and that was a rather unhappy situation.

CAMPBELL: Oh, it was?

PETERSON: I think because they—I think they wanted a direct line to the President, for one thing. They didn't want to be subservient to the council. They didn't want to have to go through the council to the President. They wanted to make their own representations. I believe in one of the big sessions with Kennedy

they asked him to have a person who was.... And now I don't remember the time sequence in all of this at all. But it was during the commission days, because I remember one night at a cocktail party—these funny things that happen to you—when we were talking about the women's question. I had just completed a series of conferences around the country to get rank and file women talking so we could develop a basis for some of our studies. So we had a number of regional conferences, that's one of the first things I did in the Women's Bureau. And the reason was so we could say, "Well, look. We've talked to women here and we've talked to women all over the country and we got local people involved." And I was hoping to reorganize the program around the actualities of what we found. I remember feeling pretty good about those conferences because I got enough from them to establish the need to do the kinds of things that I was hoping to do, lay the groundwork for work I thought should be done. And I remember it was Lena Ware who said at the party, "You know, this is what we need in the consumer movement. We need something. Esther, you ought to do that. Why don't you." And I've often wondered, I often felt like, I was going to ask Lena if they gave my name to the President. I'm just not sure. I don't know really. But I remember that cocktail party and I remember Lena saying, "This is what the consumer movement needs. It needs some national visibility." Well, I don't recall when it was, but Ralph Dungan called me and asked, "Don't you want to come over and be a special assistant to the President?"

CAMPBELL: This is President Johnson now.

PETERSON: No, no. This is Kennedy.

CAMPBELL: Oh, this is President Kennedy?

PETERSON: Oh, yes. This is President Kennedy.

CAMPBELL: Oh, this is very interesting.

PETERSON: This is President Kennedy.

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CAMPBELL: And what was your response at the time?

PETERSON: Well, my response was.... I can't remember just when they were thinking about—when was this? I think it was October. Oh, gee, it's hard to....

CAMPBELL: This followed the consumer message to Congress I suppose in March of '62.

PETERSON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But much later.

CAMPBELL: This was in '63 probably. Yes, I think October 1963.

PETERSON: Oh, yeah. This is in '63. This was not long before Kennedy died. Then later, in December they called me about doing it with Johnson. And I'm trying to think just to be, oh, absolutely honest about this, whether he actually said he was a special assistant to President Johnson. I know Ralph talked to me about it first—when Kennedy was still the President—about what to do. And I remember talking to Bill about it, to Bill Wirtz, and talked around. And I said, "Well, look, I'm an assistant secretary of Labor. What, you know, what would I..." And I remember Ralph saying, "Oh, goodnight, assistant secretaries are a dime a dozen," or something like that. I can't quite remember. And then all the other tragic events happened. That it first originated with Kennedy, that's the thing that I think is important.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. That's significant. Had you been involved at all in the March '62 message to Congress, which...

PETERSON: No.

CAMPBELL: Not at all?

PETERSON: No.

CAMPBELL: ...which recommended it. How about in the composition of this consumer advisory council, which Dr. Ware was involved?

PETERSON: Yes, I was. Then I got very much involved with it before I went down to the Johnson ranch. Then Walter Heller and I, we worked at it, and Agnes Wykins helped me. And everyone helped a great deal, Walter helped a great deal, and that's when we drew up the program and what the release would say and what the executive order would say. And Arthur—I consulted Arthur over at the Justice

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Department.

CAMPBELL: Arthur?

PETERSON: Arthur Goldberg.

CAMPBELL: During the Kennedy administration, Senator Hart [Philip A. Hart] had a truth in packaging bill that came up. Do you recall what the White House position was on that bill?

PETERSON: Well, it was cool.

CAMPBELL: Yeah.

PETERSON: It was cool. It was a rough bill. The food industry, you know, was really furious about it, was very furious about it.

CAMPBELL: How was your involvement justified in testifying for this bill as an assistant secretary of Labor?

PETERSON: Well, I testified—didn't I testify.... Did I testify first as assistant secretary? I'm trying to think...

CAMPBELL: I think so, yes.

PETERSON: You know more about it than I do. How did we justify that? Wasn't I.... No, I testified twice on it, didn't I?

CAMPBELL: Yeah.

PETERSON: No, I remember now. I did it first as assistant secretary, that's right. Oh, I think that's because of a.... I remember that now. We felt pretty strongly that it affected wages.

CAMPBELL: Oh, wages.

PETERSON: Oh, yes, very definitely, and I think I said that in my testimony if I remember correctly, that, you know, you can bargain and bargain for decent wages, then you lose it by the slippage in the market. Yeah, I remember now. Yes, I do remember now.

CAMPBELL: Senator Hart, during the Kennedy administration, succeeded Senator Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] as chairman of the Antitrust and Monopoly Subcommittee, and I think promised at that time to make the subcommittee a more powerful voice for the American consumer. Had you felt

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Senator Kefauver was less than enthusiastic about consumers' things?

PETERSON: Oh, no. I think he was very.... You see, he was such a pioneer in this. He really, really helped bring it on.

CAMPBELL: In 1961, I think, the basis for the consumer price index was changed. Was that something you would've gotten involved in at all?

PETERSON: I would have but I didn't.

CAMPBELL: You didn't.

PETERSON: I wasn't involved in it then because I was—that's before I was involved in consumer issues.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. In our earlier interview, you suggested an interesting thing, that perhaps at times, the NAM-Chamber of Commerce group would tend to perhaps give legislation you were involved with even more trouble because you'd been on the other side of the fence for so long. Do you feel that was a significant problem?

PETERSON: I think so because so much of their literature said I was in Walter Reuther's [Walter P. Reuther] pocket and, you know, little remarks like that. And when I was confirmed, this was a labor woman. "This isn't an ordinary person, this is a labor...." You know, there was a lot of that in it. I think they used it as an excuse.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Did you feel that other people similarly associated with the labor movement would have similar problems? I mean this is...

PETERSON: I suppose so. I guess that's just part of being connected...

CAMPBELL: Of a labor person.

PETERSON: A labor person.

CAMPBELL: There's a book out you've perhaps seen called *Women in American Politics* [*Women in American Politics: An Assessment and Sourcebook*] by Gruberg [Martin Gruberg]. I copied down a quote from President Johnson, which is reported in the book: "I like women singly, but I'm scared of them in organizations." What do you think of the effectiveness of women's organizations as a political force?

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PETERSON: Well, I think they can be very effective. I don't think they're nearly as effective as they can be, but they can be very effective.

CAMPBELL: How?

PETERSON: Well, I think the League of Women Voters is a good example, but I think they've got to know their stuff, and they've got to be realistic. I think just being a woman and not knowing the substance, the facts, is not worth much. But I have seen some of the most effective lobbying ever by women who do their homework and then really know what they're talking about. And I've had congressmen tell me, "Don't bring me a bunch of these well-educated women, Esther." You know, they're

well-briefed and very often a senator and a congressman can't be. Their staff people know all the details, but sometimes the top man can't know it all. Women in voluntary capacities have time and can do this. I had, during my time not only in labor but outside when I was in government, occasion to organize and get women to come in and brief them and dispatch them to the Hill and with great success. We really had some real successes. And I think they can be very effective.

CAMPBELL: You were called, I think, into service in the summer of 1963 to organize some work for the civil rights bill which was then pending. Do you recall who contacted you first about that?

PETERSON: Well, I think I contacted the White House first. I had read that the President was calling in groups. They were calling in ministers and lawyers. And I remember saying, "For goodness sake, why don't we bring in the women?" And who did I contact over there? I guess I talked with White [Lee C. White] about it. Yeah. And he was handling a lot of that at that time. Then I remember definitely—and I don't know whether I told this last time or not.

CAMPBELL: We didn't talk much about this at all.

PETERSON: We didn't.

CAMPBELL: No.

PETERSON: That I got the word that—I remember that the President was in Berlin at the time—he did want to have a meeting. And I had nine days to organize it, which we did. And then I got.... We had a hard time about who to get to be chairman and who should come. And I called Mildred McAfee Horton and got her to come. And then we got Pat Harris [Patricia Roberts Harris], whom I had

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worked with for ages on other things, and Cenoria Johnson [Cenoria D. Johnson] from the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and then I used the Women's Bureau people and we just plain organized it, that's all.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Well, in your selection of Mrs. Horton as chairman, what considerations entered into that?

PETERSON: Well, I felt that we needed a mature person, a person who had a national name. If it'd been Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt], why, that's who'd it have been, but we didn't have Mrs. Roosevelt. And I know we considered Margaret Hickey, but Margaret was not as identifiable as a person. You see, Mildred Horton had been with the WACS [Women's Army Corps]—it was WACS or WAVES [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, U.S. Navy Women's

Reserve]—well, anyway, it was one or the other, and then had been president of a university. See, and her husband was so active in the ecumenical movement. And so she had not only the practical government experience, she had the academic experience, she had the maturity, she had the national visibility, and she had this kind of religious background—and the President liked the idea. I had no problem selling the idea of having her be the chairman.

CAMPBELL: Was Robert Kennedy involved in the planning of this at all?

PETERSON: Oh, yes. He used to come to our meetings and help me over at my office.

CAMPBELL: Is that right?

PETERSON: He came over and met with the committee. He met with us.

CAMPBELL: This was before the big White House...

PETERSON: Burke Marshall came, and then, he came afterwards. But I talked with him about it a couple of times.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Yeah. What exactly was to be the purpose of the meeting?

PETERSON: Well, the whole thing was to see if we could get women to, first understand the issue, to see if we could get, even here in Washington, Negro and white women to sit down in the same room together and work on this problem. You know, we had done this in various groups, but not nationally. And then, to see if we could get these groups to really mobilize their women for the bill and for the desegregation that we were working for. So I think it helped.

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I should look at those old files again, but we did a number of things.... We drafted letters. Then we had each organization send them out. The BPW [Business and Professional Women] were the transmission belt for the letters. And we supported those who would help with integration. For example, in a town where a movie would say they would be willing to integrate, we would call the women's organizations in that town and get them to go to that movie that night. When there was a restaurant that was willing to integrate, we'd have these very fine women go and patronize that place. What we tried was a specific movement for these specific affirmative acts. And we tried a project which didn't work. We called it "Take a Hand," in which we wanted the white women to really go and walk to school with these poor kids when the southern women were yelling with hysteria, if you remember how awful that period was. It was a genuine effort, at that local level, to assist. And I think it helped in some cases. It's hard to tell, you know. But out of that, the thing that was good about that was that out of that grew...

[BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE 2]

...lots more cooperation between the women's organizations. And I think the WICS grew out of that, the Women in Community Service.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. There were some sort of residual groups formed out of the White House conferences, I think, called the National Women's Committee on Civil Rights.

PETERSON: On civil rights, that's right, the National Women's Committee, and we ran it for about a year.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. WICS came out of that. Had you ever, just in your position as ranking woman in the administration, been asked for special assistance in locating positions for Negro women? Was there a special concern about that in the administration?

PETERSON: Well, I think we just did it automatically. I mean several people asked me, but I was trying to do that always. No, this is very essential. In fact, I promoted it and tried to see if we couldn't do that very thing. I think I appointed the first Negro woman. I'm sure I did in the Kennedy administration, my job. She was written up in *Time* magazine.

CAMPBELL: There's a new article out in *Commentary* by a lady named Midge Decter that suggests, among

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other things, that the Kennedy administration made a shambles of White House congressional relations. As a person with a long experience in congressional relations, how do you respond to that? Do you agree with that?

PETERSON: I don't agree with it. I don't agree with it. Well, look, you know, some of it was good, and some of it was bad, it depends on the issue and all kinds of things. But no, I thought Larry [Lawrence F. O'Brien] was very skilled at it, and I thought Mike Manatos [Mike N. Manatos] was good, Harry McPherson [Harry C. McPherson, Jr.], all these fellows who worked at liaison.

CAMPBELL: What were the problems that ran through the whole three years, as you look back on it?

PETERSON: Well, you see, there were the problems of resenting this young man's being president. I mean anything that spilled over, I think, was part of that. And there was resentment of Bobby Kennedy, you know, and, "Who's he, telling us what to do?" But it.... I'm trying to think of any specific issue. I think that was the kind of thing that was an undercurrent, and you'd have that around quite a bit. Then you'd

have other places where you'd work with them very—well, it was just the whole political line-up carried there as it carried any other place. But I thought that Larry had a very good operation. At first it was rough for him. He didn't know an awful lot because I know how much Andy Biemiller [Andrew J. Biemiller] helped him. I mean really knowing the...

CAMPBELL: Is that right?

PETERSON: Oh, yes.

CAMPBELL: However, it did take the Johnson assumption of the presidency to get lots of important bills through, didn't it?

PETERSON: Oh, yeah. But you see, that wasn't the.... That was the force of Johnson, who knew.... And he was awfully good at that; he was a master at it. And I think poor Kennedy had so many counts against him. Do you see, there were the sores and wounds from the primaries, from all of these other campaigns.

CAMPBELL: I think that your just general comments would be valuable in comparing the administrations, comparing attitudes, for example, on women's affairs.

PETERSON: Well, I don't think that Kennedy had any—he

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certainly accepted all the things that we did. There was no.... It had to be initiated from the outside, but it was accepted. I think Johnson had far more sensitivity to the importance of women. It'd be easier.... In fact, Johnson was one who really pressed this. I'll never forget when I went to the Hill on equal pay—this was before the commission—and he said.... Oh, I can just see him standing outside the elevator outside the cloak room saying, "Come on, Esther, now when are you going to get going on that? Let's get something really going for women." That never happened as far as Kennedy saying, "Get busy and do something for women," but it did from Johnson. So I think he did more to really get things going for women. And he's the one who insisted on appointing—that's what got us into trouble, because he insisted on appointing women so fast. For example, I think we could've found a better position for Mary [Mary Keyserling] where her talents would have been used a little bit better. And we might have been able to go on with the plan that we had in the bureau. But "I'm going to appoint ten," he'd say. He'd make these statements, and, by golly, we found ten women to be appointed, you know. And that's good, too. I don't know how to compare them because I'm torn. It just did require affirmative action and Johnson had the guts to say, "This is going to be done." And you know, he had a cabinet meeting. "I'm not going to make this a stag government," he said. Heavens, he had me come to the cabinet meeting. Kennedy never did that. So I really think.... And there I think Lady Bird [Lady Bird "Claudia Alta" Johnson] was so essential and Liz Carpenter [Elizabeth S. Carpenter]. I just think that she's a wonderful woman myself and I think she had great, great influence in all of

this. So I would say that with the Kennedy people—it was all right, and they did it, and they accepted it. But Johnson had far more real, real push.

CAMPBELL: Did you ever sense that Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] was a useful voice in the White House?

PETERSON: Yeah. Oh, yes. Well, I knew her during the campaign a bit, not during the White House. No, I didn't have any association with her during the White House days, just during the campaign a bit. No, and I think that's one of the essential differences, you see.

CAMPBELL: How about consumer things, certainly the publicity comes with the Johnson years, and yet there seems to have been the basis built in the Kennedy years?

PETERSON: Oh, the basis was really built, just like the basis for the status of women was built, with Kennedy, although a lot of the activity followed with Johnson. But the basis for the consumer was

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certainly with Kennedy. He was the first president who ever sent a consumer message to Congress. He spoke up for consumer rights in that speech and what he proposed there, there is still nothing better.

CAMPBELL: It's been suggested many places that President Kennedy simply really didn't have a high regard for the ability of women in general and was stingy in doling out federal appointments and things. Could you just comment on that general theme in the first place?

PETERSON: That's just so hard to say because I had worked with him all the time and I didn't have any problems, and, as I said before, I was never conscious of that while working with him. I never thought he asked me to do this or that because I was a woman. I never felt that at all, and not in the campaign when I was working with him and with Bobby. Some women may have had such experiences. I don't know. What am I trying to say? What did you ask me?

CAMPBELL: Well, simply, it has been written and conjectured that President Kennedy didn't have a very high regard for women in politics in general.

PETERSON: Well, you know, in a way I don't really believe that. No, because, look, the women did too darn much to help him get elected, and look at his mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy]. My land, if there ever was a woman that would influence him positively, it was his mother, and his sisters. Some of them have said they were frustrated because they could never run and do things too, and that may be so.

I don't know; I haven't read a lot of those things. My own experience is so positive with him, and I know we were working to get names of women worthy of appointment. The other thing you have to know is that those decisions are made on lower levels. So few of this gets to the President; only the final decisions on suggestions ever get to the President. He isn't sitting there thinking, "Oh, I'm thinking I've got to appoint some women." The pressure comes from people, and he probably wasn't surrounded with a lot of people who felt this way. I think, again, with Johnson it was different. He had Liz, he had Mrs. Johnson, and they had a press relationship that was quite different. So I don't....

CAMPBELL: Was this the sort of thing it clearly wasn't uppermost in your mind, you were too busy?

PETERSON: It wasn't really. It really wasn't.

CAMPBELL: Do you think it was the sort of thing that

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concerned anyone on the White House staff?

PETERSON: In the Kennedy White House?

CAMPBELL: Yeah.

PETERSON: As far as women are concerned?

CAMPBELL: Yeah.

PETERSON: Oh, I think it was there, but not of major concern, no. No, and I don't think even in the—I think it was a concern of the Johnson people, but I think one person would say, "Look, we've got to have a woman on that list." I think it means.... Johnson would always want to have some women on every list. Now, I don't think Kennedy ever did that.

CAMPBELL: Not that concerned.

PETERSON: I don't think so, but you see, there again, it just was substantiates, as I look back on it, Johnson had more, a little bit more vigor on that.

CAMPBELL: You have mentioned a couple of times something that I think future historians will find interesting, the idea of the Women's Bureau as an anachronism, sort of. Did you ever discuss that with the Secretary of Labor, with the President?

PETERSON: I did with Arthur, yes. Not as much with Bill as I did with Arthur because

it was with Arthur that we really planned all of these—the commission and what our overall plans were for it. And it was Arthur who decided to move me up to assistant secretary and then absorb the Women’s Bureau into this. In fact, Jim Reynolds [James J. Reynolds] testified that there would not be another director; this was only going to be one position. And Congress never held him to his statement because it was filled because it was a slot, you see. It carried an appropriation, so it was a natural one to want to fill.

CAMPBELL: With a woman.

PETERSON: Sure.

CAMPBELL: I’ve about come to the end of my list. Is there anything else you recall that we should put on it?

PETERSON: Oh, dear.

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CAMPBELL: Well, I did want to ask you about one of your publications I looked at with great interest. It was entitled *Women in the Eighty-seventh Congress*, probably one of a series.

PETERSON: Well, before I was director of the Women’s Bureau—I don’t know who started it, where it started, this little pamphlet—but foreign countries and groups all wanted to know about women and so they initiated this pamphlet. And it was very interesting that we just did it automatically. And it helped us get appropriations, you know. Bill Wirtz did not like it. He said, “If you’re going to do that, why don’t you do one for men? This is really discrimination.” But here is a case where I think it was justified because there are so few women in Congress and we do want to stimulate women into going into politics. This was kind of a little point of contention, but the women, they always loved it. We never has any problem with that.

CAMPBELL: It was a traditional thing, not your idea?

PETERSON: Yeah. I don’t know if they’re still doing it or not. Well, I’m sure there’re all kinds of things that one should think about.

[END OF INTERVIEW #3]

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