

INTERVIEW WITH
Eugene J. Lyons
by
John E. Wickman
Director

on
April 19, 1971

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
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Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of
Eugene J. Lyons

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Eugene F. Lyons

Donor

April 19, 1977

Date

James B. Rhodes

Archivist of the United States

May 4, 1977

Date



DR. WICKMAN: This is an interview with Mr. Eugene Lyons on April 19, 1971 on his several roles in the Eisenhower administration. Let's start with as much of your background you want to put into this before you got to the White House. What were you doing before you entered the Post Office?

MR. LYONS: I was vice president of Merck and Company which is a medicinal chemical manufacturer in New Jersey. I was told that Eisenhower had named a committee composed of Douglas Brown, who was dean at Princeton; Larry [Lawrence A.] Appley, who was president of the American Management Association; and the president of the National Industrial Conference Board to find someone who would set up a personnel department in the Post Office. At that time the Post Office Department had no one of any high rank who was familiar with modern personnel administration. And I was asked to come to Washington; I was not acquainted with either the Postmaster General, Mr. [Arthur] Summerfield, or the President. But, on the recommendation of this committee, I did accept the challenge of the job. It, frankly, paid less than half what I was then receiving. My first meeting with the President, and I was very awed as most people would be going to the White House, and the



President talked with me a little while and then he said, "Mr. Lyons, do you think you owe something to the United States?" Well there was only one answer to that. I said, "Yes, sir." And that's how I came to be appointed. It was an interim appointment because the Congress was not in session at the time, and so I received an interim appointment and then the next year was confirmed by the Senate.

WICKMAN: What kind of situation did you find in the Post Office Department when you got over there?

LYONS: Chaotic! It was an unfortunate situation in many ways because the rank-and-file postal employees, represented by very strong unions, almost unknown to the general public, but certainly well known to the Congress, had managed to get the salary structure so that it didn't pay any man to accept a supervisory position. And my first task was to set up a salary structure which would give some incentive to the employees to accept supervisory jobs. And the first task was to put in what's commonly known in industry as job evaluation. And historically I was the first assistant postmaster general in charge of personnel. I also hold some sort of a record as being a member of an administration that spent, as an



individual, more hours testifying before a congressional committee than any other man, I'm told, in the history of the government. And this was all in an effort to provide a workable salary structure.

WICKMAN: Besides just setting up a system in this area in the Post Office, were there any other problems that you ran into? Obviously you had to have possibly some legislation, new legislation passed.

LYONS: Well this, of course, new legislation was most necessary to provide a modern salary structure, and that was the most important piece of legislation. It went on for many months. At that time the Congress was controlled by a Democratic majority who listened to the postal unions much more than they listened to the administration. And it was necessary for the President to veto a salary bill that was passed by the Congress--one of his, in fact, first major vetoes, and probably one of the most controversial vetoes that he exercised during his whole eight years in the White House. The veto was upheld by a close margin, and then another salary bill was passed which met the objections of the President and was signed into law known as Public Law 68.



Then the major problem that the postmaster general had, which was also partly a personnel problem, was decentralization of the postal service into these regional offices which are, of course, still in existence, with a personnel manager in each of the regions so that there was a great deal more coordination and also a great deal more listening to the needs of the employees than there had ever been before.

WICKMAN: Before this time what were they doing, running all of their personnel activities just through the postmaster?

LYONS: No, unfortunately the postmaster had very little to say about it. Everything was run from 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue, the office of the postmaster general in Washington. If a postmaster needed a typewriter, he had to send to Washington to get it, and sometimes he didn't get it for a year or more. It was just bogged down in a terrific amount of red tape with the postmasters having very little authority. And one of the major problems in realigning the personnel setup was to give those postmasters authority to run their offices. And President Eisenhower was very strong for delegation of authority. He knew how to use a staff and



he wanted his departments of government to be decentralized to a point where the postmaster would have authority akin to what the old colonels used to have in charge of a military installation--to be held responsible, but yet have the authority to run their business. And, of course, that was the major change that occurred in the postal service during his administration.

WICKMAN: Now while you were in the postal department, is this the only thing you did in personnel management or were you assigned other tasks by the postmaster general?

LYONS: The postmaster general ran his department in many ways similar to the way the President ran his. He held frequent meetings of his assistant postmasters general so that each one knew what the other was doing. And, of course, so many things that are done in business or in government involve personnel administration. And if we were headed for trouble in the Bureau of Operations of the Post Office Department or the Bureau of Finance or the other bureaus, I knew what they were doing because of these meetings, interchange of information and I could warn them, and in many cases make



changes which made it easier to accomplish what they were trying to accomplish. Because everything we did in government, the same as in private industry, has to be done through people, and if you don't have the cooperation of those people--. And all of us learned a great deal both from the President Eisenhower and from the postmaster general in realizing the importance of the civil servants.

WICKMAN: Before our discussions you talked about working with President Eisenhower on his message. You want to go over that again?

LYONS: Well, this veto message of the first pay bill that was passed during his administration for the postal service didn't meet his requirements nor the recommendations of the postmaster general, which were based on my analysis of the situation. And since I had been the one testifying to such a large extent before the Congress for this bill that the President wanted, when the bill was passed totally unacceptable, he asked me to help prepare the veto message. A draft was made and then he called me to the White House and he and I



sat alone in the Cabinet Room and read over the draft. I made some suggestions and he wrote them down personally, and they were incorporated in the veto message. Later, of course, the veto was upheld.

WICKMAN: In that particular process, how long did it take? Was this something you did in over two hours, three hours, or five, or two days or--

LYONS: The veto message, the original draft which I wrote at the Post Office Department and then sent over and then it went to his staff, the President's staff, among those who wrote some of his speeches, and they changed quite a few things in it. Then another draft came back. The time I spent with the President himself, to get the final version of it, was not over half an hour.

WICKMAN: I see. What kind of impression do you have of that meeting? What was he most concerned about? Was he more interested in language or the program or--

LYONS: Well, first I discovered that he knew a lot more about personnel administration than I had ever believed. I



had been engaged, most of my career, from being director of industrial relations for the Curtiss Wright Corporation and then vice president for personnel of Merck and Company in this field. And I was amazed that he understood position evaluation and the importance of a salary structure that paid people for their skills and their knowledge. And some of his writers apparently didn't understand exactly what we were trying to get at in vetoing the bill. We wanted to leave clear what the President would accept as well as what he would not accept, and it was in this area that he asked me for the language that would make this clear to the committees of the Congress.

WICKMAN: While you were in the Post Office Department, were you over at the White House frequently?

LYONS: Yes. Not to see the President but to see the man that many called the assistant President--Governor [Sherman] Adams. We had a great many meetings because of this highly controversial change in the whole structure of the postal service. Governor Adams had in many of the other staff of the President at the times these meetings were



held. And I spent many, many hours with him in explaining to him, Governor Adams, exactly what it was that we felt was necessary for the postal service, particularly in the personnel management field, which was the most controversial field.

WICKMAN: Now you were in the Post Office Department before you went on the White House staff for how long--was it six years?

LYONS: Six years, yes.

WICKMAN: And then you went into the White House as special assistant to the President for personnel management.

LYONS: That's correct. I succeeded Rocco Siciliano. Originally, when I came to Washington I had agreed to stay only two years, and then I expected to go back to my position in Merck and Company. But I discovered that it was absolutely impossible to grasp the structure of the government in that time and know where to go for what and know enough to be able to overrule career employees of the government when I thought they were wrong. Two years was just getting started. At one time I



talked with the President about the possibility of asking men taking Cabinet jobs to stay the whole four years because I felt they were wasting their time to go down for just two years.

WICKMAN: In other words it would take that long for them to become effective in their job.

LYONS: Correct.

WICKMAN: Now if we can go back a minute to when you made this change from the Post Office Department to the White House, was this on the postmaster general's recommendation?

LYONS: As I understood it, as Mr. Summerfield told me, the President asked him if he would release me to accept this--

[Interruption]

LYONS: Well, the President had approached the postmaster general as the postmaster general told me and asked me if I would come and Mr. Summerfield said, "Of course you can't refuse that sort of request." So that's why I moved over there.



WICKMAN: And what did you find when you got over there as far as that job was concerned? I was interested here in your initial reaction to the job that was to be done as personnel management in the White House.

LYONS: Well I felt that the job in itself, its duties, responsibilities, was not clear-cut at all and that something should be done to clarify exactly what this position was. Although there had been an executive order issued, it did not go into very much detail and left a very broad generalization that gave rise to a lot of questions as to how much authority the job had over the other departments of government and their personnel functions.



WICKMAN: Is this when you prepared a description of the job, or did that come--

LYONS: That came later when I knew more about what the President himself expected of the job. When I began to get clear on that, then I thought something ought to be written down to bring together the executive order which created the position and the President's verbal instructions to me from time to time as to how he wanted me to function.

WICKMAN: When you took over the job, what were the major problems or immediate objectives that you had to work on?

LYONS: Well perhaps the largest problem immediately confronting the whole government was the fact that during the depression years, in the '30s, the government had been able to get into the civil service what I call the cream of the crop. They would be able to get the top graduates of universities, men with very great ability. These men remained in the service because they had such a stake in the retirement program by the time that things opened up in other fields for them. And just about beginning in 1960 those men were ready for retirement and there had been no effort made by the departments to find replacements for them. And so my first task was to set up a replacement structure so that the Cabinet officers and their assistants-- What's our term? Political appointees--assistant secretaries, assistant postmasters general and so on would look at their organization and find someone to put in training behind the top civil service people who really keep those departments operating. And that took a long time. And the first executive order that



the President signed was one which I prepared directing the Cabinet officers to start on this task, and then I went to each department of government.

Incidentally, there was rather an odd thing happened. Not having prepared letters for the President's signature before or executive orders, my secretary, who had had some experience in the White House too, typed the order and then underneath it, for the signature, typed the President's name. And when I brought it in for his signature, the President looked at it and he said, "Well if they don't know me well enough now to recognize my signature, there's no use signing anything; so please never have my name typed underneath my signature."



WICKMAN: As you went from department to department on this, the beginning of this task, did you encounter any resistance on the part of the departments?

LYONS: Not so much resistance as a sort of lethargy. They were worrying about day-to-day problems and not what was going to happen to the government perhaps when Eisenhower's term ended or later than that. But after considerable

assistance from the Civil Service Commission people and others, we did get them to start moving so that they had, at the end of the administration, tables indicating at least some successors that might be considered for the jobs that the top civil service people would vacate in the next two or three years.

WICKMAN: What other problems or objectives while you were in this particular slot that you think of, you know, besides-- did this occupy the two years that you were there?

LYONS: Oh, no. There were many, many day-to-day problems in various departments of government. The President invited me to sit in at Cabinet meetings, and Cabinet officers often had programs that would affect, one way or another, the personnel administration in their organizations. And where those programs would appear to cause serious personnel problems, the President would invite me to comment on them. The President was very religious about holding Cabinet meetings weekly, and almost every one there was something that involved personnel administration. And then, of course, I had to work closely with the director of the budget, then



Mr. [Maurice] Stans, because we had set up a plan whereby we would have the Department of Labor make surveys for us of salaries for certain key positions, starting with clerks and going up to directors of various kinds, to provide information as to what industry and business were paying for jobs comparable to those held by civil servants in the government and thus give us some basis for recommending salary increases and helping the Congress have some idea of what was proper to pay for what jobs. And that, of course, is still going on and has resulted in a great many increases over these inflationary years.

WICKMAN: One of the areas we were talking about earlier was this period then when the Eisenhower administration came to an end and the Kennedy administration started. I wonder if we could just go over that for the two weeks that you spent with the Kennedy administration. One of the things that we already know from material we have in the Library is that the Kennedy administration patterned some of its White House operation very directly from the Eisenhower administration. This is why I was not really surprised to have you



say that they asked you to come back for a short time, because they seemed to rely very heavily--I don't know why, but maybe the Kennedy Library people will find out why some day--they relied very heavily on the models that had been set up in the operation of the White House. So if you'd like to comment on that--when they approached you and how.

LYONS: Well, in the first place, while President Kennedy had appointed a number of his Cabinet officers who would have direct liaison with the Eisenhower Cabinet members prior to the end of Eisenhower's term, that is between the election of Kennedy and his inauguration, he had not appointed White House staff to any extent. He had not appointed anyone to succeed me as assistant to the President for personnel management, and there was no indication of whether he wanted to retain that particular function or put it somewhere else. So after my resignation which took effect at the end of President Eisenhower's term, I was still in Washington and hadn't moved yet. And President Kennedy called me and asked if I would come down to the White House for a couple of weeks to explain my function to Mr. [Lawrence] O'Brien, who he had



then decided would take over that responsibility that I had. So I agreed to do that, at no pay of course, although I did have a White House car. And I spent the two weeks explaining the functions of the office and the current problems which I foresaw coming and expressing the hope that whoever succeeded me would continue to press for this executive development program in the career service, which I had initiated at the direction of President Eisenhower, and would also pay some attention to Panama, from where our next major personnel problem appeared to be coming.

[Interruption]

WICKMAN: You left off the last tape with Panama--if I could just jog your memory back on that. You had said that you had advised the Kennedy administration that there was a problem growing in Panama. Could you pick up on that?

LYONS: Well what had happened down there over quite a few years, the employees in all skilled jobs were imported from the United States and a great majority of them belonged to a union. The positions were really very fine positions for



them down there because they got not only the same high salaries which were paid to skilled union people in the United States, but a substantial percentage cost of living, so-called foreign service allowance over that. So that they wanted very much to keep these jobs; they handed them down from father to son and the unions refused to attempt to train any Panamanians for the more skilled jobs, particularly in the machine shop. International Association of Machinists dominated the structure there and there had been a few little incidents which indicated that the Panamanians were going to attempt to change things substantially in the Zone. They were going after a change in the treaty that gave the United States control of the canal. And it was obvious to us, and I had sent one of my staff down there to look the situation over, that there was going to be trouble and that one of the principal sore points was this lack of training for other than menial jobs for the citizens of Panama, although many thousands of them worked in the Zone, in the United States zone, the jobs they had were all the menial jobs. And they were not being given any training which would enable them to advance at all. And they resented this very much. And I



explained, or tried to, to Mr. Kennedy's representative that we were headed for some serious trouble down there if we didn't do something about it. And that had been my next major project to try to persuade the military to force action in the training and advancement of Panamanians; some of them were very easy to train. It wasn't anything that was impossible at all.

There were many other things that I had hoped that would be continued vigorously, particularly the executive development program for the career service, that is those career people in the top jobs just below the assistant secretaries and political appointees. I think there was a misunderstanding on the part of President Kennedy as to the functions of my office.

WICKMAN: How did they seem to view it?

LYONS: Mr. O'Brien seemed to think that it was involved in the selection of political appointments. And it really had nothing whatever to do with that except that President Eisenhower normally would send over recommended appointments with a request that we check to see whether the people were



qualified to perform the job that they were recommended for. Many of these recommendations, of course, came from members of Congress and also from Cabinet officers and others. These were in the prerogative of the President; they were not career service jobs. And we had nothing to do with originating the appointments or passing on the political end of it, only as to whether the man's background would indicate that he could perform the job to which he was being appointed.

WICKMAN: Let me ask you about that just for a moment; we'll go back to this transition. But, as you recall, as a kind of a generalization I suppose without getting too specific about it, but did you find a great gap frequently in the backgrounds of the people who were recommended for appointment or was it fairly easy, you had pretty good backgrounds to deal with? I was wondering what the caliber of--



LYONS: Generally speaking the caliber was reasonably good. We'd have problems, of course, many times in attempts at political rewards by members of Congress to people who had, for example, managed their campaigns or something of that sort and simply weren't qualified for the job which the

Congressman was so strongly recommending them. But we were always able to explain why and this enabled the President to say, "No, not that particular job, because we need someone with this and this and this kind of experience. Will you please submit another recommendation?" And it usually worked out quite well.

WICKMAN: One of the cases that came to mind and I don't know if your office was involved with this or not, but you may have been in one way or the other. But there was in the Eisenhower administration a case in Kansas City, Missouri where you had an acting postmaster for about two and a half or three years, I think, at least, and the appointment was never confirmed. I was just wondering if that might have been one of the cases in point. The individual had been a congressman and was nominated I think for the postmaster's slot, but it never was confirmed; so he wound up as acting postmaster for about two years. I don't know if you--too specific a case

LYONS: No, that isn't. I had more to do with postmasters when I was in the Post Office Department than I did when I



was at the White House. What actually happened, we had set up, as part of the personnel program of the Post Office Department, with the Civil Service Commission, certain requirements for the appointment of postmasters. We were taking them completely out of the old political reward system, because we could see what was happening to the postal service in that with the rapidly increasing volume of mail unless we got men who knew what they were doing, we were going to have a breakdown in the mail service. But as you recall, except for the first couple of years, the Congress was controlled by the Democrats during the six years of President Eisenhower's administration. The chairman of the Post Office Civil Service Committee in the Senate was Olin Johnston. Senator Johnston held up during the second two years of the first Eisenhower term all confirmation of postmasters, obviously with the thought that, if President Eisenhower was not re-elected, they would be in a position to appoint hundreds of postmasters who had been nominated by the Eisenhower administration, replace those with people that they wished to reward. And we had great difficulty with that and that was the reason why, in a number of major offices, Los Angeles



was one, others, where we had appointed men who we were sure and the Civil Service Commission was sure were highly qualified did not get confirmed until after the beginning of the second term of President Eisenhower.

WICKMAN: I see. That's a very interesting point because I think it's one that isn't really understood and again I'm not sure that the manuscript material really brings it out as to why there was this very obvious lack of confirmation on the part of some of these.

LYONS: Well this was also true of some federal judges, not in such numbers as was the case in the Post Office because during the second two years of the Eisenhower's first term, there were many, many retirements in the postal service. People who had been appointed by Postmaster General [James] Farley during the Roosevelt administration had reached the age where they wished to retire. That was one thing that, incidentally, Postmaster General Summerfield was very proud of--he did not fire postmasters that were appointed by Jim Farley. I got acquainted with Mr. Farley during my service in the Post Office Department, and he was very elated that



Mr. Summerfield did not follow the old precedent of making practically a clean sweep of postmasters. They were supposed to be under civil service anyway. But yet these retirements came very fast because of age, particularly in many of the larger cities. And we had quite a job finding men who would take the job at the salary that was offered, and we persuaded them to take it as a public service. We had a millionaire in Los Angeles, for example, an engineer to take over the Los Angeles post office, and he saved that post office from chaos. And yet he wasn't confirmed for a couple of years after he had been appointed. And that was unfortunate; I think it hurt the postal service a good deal. And I had hoped that President Kennedy would follow with the appointment of career postmasters in the same way, but unfortunately that was not true.



WICKMAN: During the transition talks that you were having with Larry O'Brien, how were they set up? Was it O'Brien and somebody else or three or four staff people or what?

LYONS: It was mostly just Mr. O'Brien and I. We met in my office, or what used to be my office, and went over things.

Of course I introduced him to the small staff that I had, and it was very small. I only had a half a dozen, but they were good men.

WICKMAN: Were some of them kept on by the--

LYONS: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, a couple of them were strong Democrats so there wasn't really any good reason to fire them. And most of the secretaries, at least for the time, were kept on. I don't know how long in some cases. After a time the whole structure was changed and the chairman of the Civil Service Commission--

WICKMAN: John Macy?

LYONS: --John Macy became both the personnel adviser to the President as well as the chairman of the commission. Eisenhower didn't feel that would work, and I don't believe it does.

WICKMAN: Yes, I was going to ask you, because that is a question that has been much discussed in the years since it was done and will probably be even more discussed when historians and political scientists get into more material.



But I would just like to have your opinion on that arrangement. You said you didn't think it would work, and even from this point of view it obviously didn't work very well. I was just wondering if you want to elaborate on why it wouldn't work.

LYONS: Well, first place the Civil Service Commission is a bipartisan body. The party in power names two of the commissioners and the third is supposed to be of the opposite party. The Civil Service Commission has such an enormous job in properly doing what they're supposed to do with the career service itself that to involve the chairman of that commission in some of the problems that the President as head of the executive branch has in selection of his appointees seemed to me a mistake. In other words I don't believe that the chairman of the commission has the time to pass on the qualifications of political appointees. Even though my job had nothing to do with the selection of those political appointees, it did have something to do with the evaluation of them as to whether they could do the job that they were being suggested for. I think when you mix up a strictly career service function with that you're heading for problems.



Then, too, such matters as how much salary increase should be given federal employees is not a function of the Civil Service Commission. It gets into extreme controversy at times and the President needs someone experienced in the field of personnel administration to consult with his Cabinet officers, make the surveys or have them made and after consultation with the Bureau of the Budget, what's practical and what the administration should recommend to Congress. If the Civil Service Commission, which is supposed to be outside completely of the political field in that sense tries to do that too, the commission is getting itself into controversy that will help to destroy its usefulness in the job it's supposed to do. And that's the reason that I feel that it just doesn't work.



WICKMAN: You mentioned earlier that several times you were called into meetings with President Kennedy and Clark Clifford. How did that come about?

LYONS: First it came about because we thought originally that Mr. Clifford would have the naming of some people to work with us in the transition. And my job was one of the

ones that was left out of the calculations as to who would come over there. So I was called over by the President's appointments' secretary to sit in with President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and Mr. Clifford, my first time theoretically to explain what the function of my office was. And I didn't get a chance to do that at all, incidentally, because the conversation between President Eisenhower and the new President-to-be, President-elect Kennedy, was entirely on other matters. But I was there and so, of course, I heard some of that conversation.

WICKMAN: This was while President Eisenhower was still in office.

LYONS: Oh, yes. Yes. It was when Mr. Clifford, who was the first emissary of the new administration, came over to see some of us.

WICKMAN: Clifford was sort of the transition officer in this thing?

LYONS: He was the first contact officer I would say with the newly-elected administration. He had not accepted any



position officially with the Kennedy administration at that time, but evidently President Kennedy had a great deal of faith in Mr. Clifford and Mr. Clifford knew his way about the White House because he'd been there before. And he came over to discuss the transition problems with us. And the other reason that I was involved was because most of the burden of the transition from one President to another rests with the senior civil servants. They have to familiarize their new bosses with what goes on in the department and the current problems and what the jobs are. So I had been asked by President Eisenhower to meet with the top career employees of the government. We had that meeting in Williamsburg, and I tried to explain to them as much as I knew about the plans of the new administration and also what I felt their job was in helping in the transition.

WICKMAN: That was never followed up on though.

LYONS: No, it unfortunately wasn't. I'm sure that individual Cabinet officers did follow up with the senior civil servants in their departments individually, but, as a general whole, it was not and it was not coordinated at the White House level.



If you will recall, President Kennedy didn't believe in holding these regular Cabinet meetings which Eisenhower did; so there was no way that you could coordinate the change except by individual departments.

WICKMAN: In this meeting that we're talking about between President Eisenhower and President-elect Kennedy and Clark Clifford, the one in which you didn't get to talk about your operation, what did they get off on? Why didn't you get to that?

LYONS: Well the question of Cuba came up. Prior to the change in administration, there had been pressure from Cuban nationals who had escaped or came across to the United States after Castro's beginning to change over there, and they wanted to take some drastic action, invade Cuba. And President Eisenhower had not agreed with that. The one part that I recall most vividly was that he told President Kennedy that he had had some experience with overwater landings and that the Cubans weren't ready for anything like that.

WICKMAN: These would be Cuban exiles.



LYONS: The Cuban exiles were not anywhere near ready for anything like that, that it would be a disaster if they tried it. And he was speaking then as a military man as much as being President.

WICKMAN: And so at that meeting you just sat through that one.

LYONS: That's right. It didn't last very long, and I was only in at the last part of it anyway because they had had other subjects before I was asked to come in. All that happened from my point of view was that I just got to mention that there was such an office as assistant to the President for personnel management and that was all. And President-elect Kennedy didn't pay much attention to it because he was concerned with a lot more vital, important problems than that I guess.

WICKMAN: Well then was there another meeting while President Eisenhower was still in office? I mean, did you come in again?

LYONS: No, not with President Eisenhower. I did see Clark Clifford once again, but he didn't go into the subject



thoroughly at all. And that was why the White House called me and asked me if I would come back after the transition, that is after President Kennedy had taken office, and sit down with Kennedy's representatives and explain more what was going on in that office, which I did for a couple of weeks.

WICKMAN: Then when that was over, why--

LYONS: That was the end of my connection with it.



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Eugene J. Lyons

by

Thomas F. Soapes
Oral Historian

on

March 19, 1976

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of
Eugene J. Lyons

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Eugene J. Lyons, of Colorado Springs, Colorado, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of personal interviews conducted on April 19, 1971 and March 19, 1976 at Colorado Springs, Colorado and prepared for deposit in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Eugene F. Lyons

Donor

April 19, 1977

Date

James B. Rhodes

Archivist of the United States

May 4, 1977

Date



This interview is being taped with Mr. Eugene Lyons in his home in Colorado Springs, Colorado on March 19, 1976. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Mr. Lyons and Dr. Soapes.

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DR. SOAPES: First of all, Mr. Lyons, would you tell us where and when you were born and about your formal education.

MR. LYONS: I was born in Colorado Springs. I'm one of the few natives of this city. I was graduated from Colorado Springs High School, and then I went to Rose Polytechnic Institute at Terre Haute, Indiana to obtain an engineering education. My father had died and my mother was injured in an automobile accident so I had to leave school at the end of my sophomore year. I went into newspaper reporter work by accident and stayed for fifteen years in newspaper, going from reporter to city editor, most of the time being spent as a police reporter in Moline, Illinois. I was a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune and the Des Moines Register, and became interested in aviation and learned to fly. I was offered a position with the Curtiss Wright Corporation at St. Louis as publicity and internal affairs manager, the title being that. I was there at the start of the war. I had taken reserve officer training while in college and was



notified that I would be called up at the start of the war, just before the start of the World War II. But the president of the Curtiss Wright Corporation discovered that almost all his top employees were reserve officers and it was a question of getting airplanes or getting his men, and he obtained deferments for all of them. After St. Louis I was named assistant general manager of the Curtiss Wright plant at Columbus, Ohio where the SB2C dive bombers [Curtiss Helldiver] were made. I was then promoted to director of industrial relations for the airplane division of the Curtiss Wright Corporation and moved to Buffalo, New York, where I remained until the end of the war when I joined Merck and Company in New Jersey as director of industrial relations. After two or three years, I was made a vice president in charge of personnel and a member of the Merck management committee. I suppose I obtained some national recognition in the field of personnel administration because I was invited at various times to speak at Princeton University and at Berkeley, California to the California Personnel Administration Association and to meetings of the National Association of Manufacturers, principally I suppose because I had some



different ideas of dealing with unions than were then prevalent. I was active in the National Industrial Conference Board. And I later found out that these activities at Princeton, with the Conference Board and with the American Management Association resulted in me being recommended to Mr. [Arthur] Summerfield as assistant postmaster general for personnel.

I did not know Mr. Summerfield nor did I know President Eisenhower. However, I learned that in endeavoring to find people to fill certain positions, the administration had engaged ~~Mackenzie~~ ^{McKinsey} and Company, management consultants, and that I had been recommended for this position in the Post Office, which incidentally was the first time in the history of the postal service that there was an assistant postmaster general for personnel, although the Post Office had some 600,000 employees.

After speaking to the National Association of Manufacturers at Greenbrier I was contacted by telephone one Sunday by the postmaster general and asked if I would come to Washington to discuss an important position in the administration. Well I was shocked because, as I said, I had no connection with



politics at all. But I talked it over with George Merck, who was the chairman of the board of Merck and Company, and he said, "Well, you better go." So I went to Washington and was further stunned to be taken to the White House by Mr. Summerfield and presented to President Eisenhower. Summerfield had told me something of the problems that the Post Office faced because there was no training program, no salary administration setup, no job evaluation, no safety program, and he felt that modern personnel administration was desperately needed in the postal service.

President Eisenhower greeted me with his characteristic grin and without wasting any time at all he said, "Mr. Lyons, do you think you owe something to the United States?" Well, of course there was only one answer to that. I'd been very fortunate in a career, I was making a lot of money (that is for me it was a lot of money), and I had to say, "Yes." And after discussing it, I agreed to come to Washington for two years. I couldn't get away from my job at Merck and Company until the first part of October of 1953, and I did come to Washington at that time. I very quickly discovered that it would take me a long time to learn enough about the postal



service to even be able to direct the civil service people instead of having them direct me. That's the start of my service with the Post Office Department.

SOAPES: You said just a few minutes ago that you had some different ideas about how to deal with labor unions than were then prevalent. Could you briefly outline to me what your views were on that?

LYONS: I had felt that most companies, particularly the larger companies, were waiting for union demands for the things that were needed in their particular company so far as employee benefits, salary structure, and wage structure, and so on were concerned. The company negotiators, many times, were lawyers, and their idea was to wait until the union made demands and then make counter proposals. Even though they knew, or should have known, that what they were doing was making the union the champion of all the employees and their loyalty being directed to the union rather than to the company that they worked for. And I believed very strongly that loyalty to the company for which you work is an invaluable asset to that company. And so I suggested and



followed that in many ways, or tried to myself in researching the desires of the rank and file employees, finding the things that were really needed, and offering them at the opening of union negotiations to them, and publicizing that offer among the rank and file employees. In other words, I didn't wait until a professional union negotiator started demanding things. Not that we didn't refuse a lot of things; we had to, but then it made a little different atmosphere in the negotiations.

SOAPES: You found this a generally successful approach?

LYONS: Well I was supposedly successful as a vice president for personnel, and I worked with Dale Yoder at the University of Minnesota and others, although my own formal education was not--I didn't even have a bachelor's degree.

SOAPES: Now when you got into the Post Office Department, you worked directly for Summerfield and answered directly to him?

LYONS: Yes.

SOAPES: What were the biggest problems that you saw when you



came into the Post Office?

LYONS: Well the first major problem was very obvious. The postal unions, National Association of Letter Carriers, and the clerks, were very powerful politically. They were able to get salary bills through the Congress, and of course at that time Congress set, directly, all the salaries in the postal service, without any regard for what the management of the Post Office thought should be the salary structure. The result of that was that Mr. Summerfield found at the outset that it was very difficult to get the rank-and-file postal employee to accept a supervisory job, because the supervisor got very little more than the carrier or the clerk. He found that there was great difficulty in keeping highly-skilled postal clerks because their salary was exactly the same as that of a letter carrier. And so he asked me if I would try to put in some sort of a job evaluation setup and try to get it through the Congress. At the same time I was starting a training program--there was no training program in the postal service--and a supervisory selection program, and a safety program. But I did spend most of my



time on this salary problem. I employed a number of people who knew something about job evaluation and we did a thorough study of postal service jobs and evaluated them on a ranking basis and then proposed a salary bill to the Congress. The hearings were held by the Post Office and Civil Service Committee of which Tom [Thomas J.] Murray of Tennessee was the chairman. It was a large committee, twenty-five as I remember it, and I testified before that committee for weeks. I was told that it was the longest hearing an individual had ever had before a congressional committee because the letter carriers' organization particularly were strongly opposed to this job evaluation. It did result in some highly-skilled clerks being ranked higher than a letter carrier, and traditionally their pay had always been the same. But I did get the bill through the committee and from the committee through the House of Representatives, which of course was controlled by the Democrats.

SOAPES: This would have been 1955?

LYONS: Yes. In the Senate we ran into great difficulty



because Senator Lyndon Johnson was the majority leader and he listened to the then president of the letter carriers' union and followed his recommendations and advice rather than that of the postal service management, or even of the House committee which had held these lengthy hearings and defeated the bill and instead passed a flat wage increase, which then went to the House and was passed in the House. I recommended a presidential veto and President Eisenhower agreed. He had me over there on two occasions to discuss the language of the veto. My original draft was revised by one of his speech writers and the President wanted to be sure that what was said was sound from, I suppose you'd call it a technical personnel administration standpoint. And this was an extraordinary thing to me. I sat with him in the Cabinet room and there's only the two of us and sitting across that Cabinet table, and he had the veto message and I had a copy and I made suggestions and the President wrote them down on a yellow pad and incorporated them in the veto message. And of course I was quite proud of myself being even in the same room with the President of the United States. The veto was upheld.



Senator Olin Johnston chairman of the Senate post office committee contacted me and said, "Well, what will you agree to--we've got to give these employees a wage increase." So we got the bill through, not exactly as we had hoped, but a good bill nevertheless, and the postmasters' organization--there were two postmasters organizations incidentally--and the supervisors' organization were delighted. And from then on it was a lot easier because putting in training programs and safety programs is not a difficult task because I didn't have to deal with the Congress on every phase of them. And we succeeded in getting what we considered to be a much improved personnel administration system in effect in the postal service.

In the meantime I had, of course, discovered that two years was just a start and that it takes longer than that to become knowledgeable enough in the workings of the federal government, this gigantic bureaucracy, to be effective. And so I was asked to stay on and agreed, which meant of course that I was giving up my association with Merck and Company because I couldn't expect them to hold a position of a vice president in personnel open indefinitely. I had taken a fifty



percent reduction in pay when I joined the federal government, and sometimes I regretted that and particularly because I had to relinquish my stock options in Merck and Company and be very careful that I didn't even think of investing in anything that the Post Office Department had any business relationships with, a company supplying uniforms or anything else.

SOAPES: Did this financial consideration weigh very heavily on you? Was this a major sacrifice? I know a lot of public officials do have to make some very serious sacrifices.

LYONS: It was a major sacrifice for me, yes. At that time, an assistant postmaster general's salary was the same as that of a congressman, House of Representatives, \$15,000 a year if I remember correctly at that time. And, of course, that was, that's worth perhaps double that in dollars now. But I was making over \$30,000 a year at Merck and Company with prospects of making a lot more because of the stock options and other things that the company had decided on.

SOAPES: Who was the principal staff man at the White House that you had contact with, or did you communicate directly with the White House from your position in the Post Office?



LYONS: Yes, at times. The one that I first had the most contact with when we were going through this fight on the salary was the governor that--in the vicuna coat--

SOAPES: Sherman Adams.

LYONS: --deal came up and Governor Adams left. So then part of it was with the President's appointments secretary, who was a New Jersey man during the first term.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: We discovered in the interim that the person we were referring to was Bernard Shanley. Did you have a lot of contact with Shanley?

LYONS: No. Just occasionally I talked with him. And of course when we were having this problem with the Congress on the wage situation, appointments with the President were made through Shanley.

SOAPES: I'd like to talk for a minute about Arthur Summerfield. We don't know a great deal about him. Can you give me a sort of a capsule sketch of the man--his personality, his work



habits, how it was to work with him?

LYONS: Well Summerfield started out as a letter carrier and he became a dealer for the General Motors Corporation, in fact the largest General Motors dealer in the United States. His home is in Michigan, of course. I knew that he was involved in Michigan politics and that he, I guess, ran the General's first campaign for the nomination and then for the presidency. He was a very astute businessman and I believe did more for the Post Office than any of the modern postmasters general. I recall one incident that is amusing. There's a corridor in the old Post Office Building at 12th and Pennsylvania, and it's lined with the pictures of postmasters general starting out with Benjamin Franklin. I was walking down that corridor with Mr. Summerfield and the former Postmaster General [James] Farley. And Farley was looking at those pictures and he turned to Summerfield and he said, "You know, Art, there have only been three great postmasters general in the whole history of the postal service."

And Summerfield looked at him, he said, "Well, Jim, who was the other one?" [Laughter]



Farley said, "Benjamin Franklin."

Well, that illustrates as well as I can Summerfield's wit and his astuteness in politics, because he was friendly with a great many Democrats as well as Republicans.

SOAPES: Did you ever talk politics with him?

LYONS: No. Strangely enough, although the Post Office was reputed to be a beehive of political activity, it was not. Summerfield was anxious to really do a good job for Eisenhower in the postal service, and it was Summerfield who decentralized the postal service. When he came there and I did, the postmaster in Colorado Springs that wanted a typewriter had to write to Washington to get it, to get authorization to buy a typewriter. And so, with my own background in management, we discussed for many days what to do about this and decided that we would set up regions, and we set up fifteen regions and appointed regional directors for each of those regions. We obtained most of those regional directors from the ranks of the postal inspection service because the inspectors had had broad experience--most of them had come up through the ranks and were the cream of the postal service. And in each



one of those regions, in addition to the regional director, there was a personnel manager and then a safety man and a training officer, so that we had an entirely new personnel administration setup in the service. All of this, of course, took a long time. It was not possible to do that overnight. Great care was taken in selecting the regional directors. And I'm sure that in most cases there was no political consideration given, particularly, because as I've said, most of these were postal inspectors and they were eunuchs as far as politics were concerned; they had to be under the Hatch Act.

SOAPES: But you generally found Arthur Summerfield to be somebody who went at his job with great dedication, who understood what he was about in the Post Office.

LYONS: Yes, he's a good administrator. And I'm afraid the Post Office hasn't had one since. What one of my great regrets is that almost everything that I accomplished was destroyed when [Lawrence] O'Brien became postmaster general. Incidentally, it was O'Brien that I was supposed to indoctrinate into my position at the White House. He was, unfortunately,



not versed in personnel administration in any way and he didn't stay there very long and he was appointed postmaster general. And most of the work that I was doing was placed on the chairman of the Civil Service Commission, who was a strong Democrat and who was appointed chairman by President Kennedy.

SOAPES: Are you saying that the work you had been doing in the Post Office then became more political in the Kennedy administration?

LYONS: Much more so.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: In case we didn't get that on the other side of the tape, I posed the question to Mr. Lyons as to whether there was a change from the Eisenhower to the Kennedy administration in that the postal personnel work that he had been doing became somewhat more political in the Kennedy administration, and he agreed with that proposition.

LYONS: Yes, that's true. Incidentally, as far as I know,



only one of the members of my staff is still in the postal service, and strangely enough it happens to be a woman who I made head of our position evaluation work.

SOAPES: What was her name?

LYONS: Gee, I can't--her first name was Ann, but I can't think of her last name at the moment.

SOAPES: Well perhaps you can fill that in in the editorial process.

LYONS: I can look it up. Ann was, I think one of the highest ranking women in the administration.



SOAPES: How big a staff did you have working for you at the Post Office?

LYONS: My immediate staff was just five. Then we had a staff function in directing the personnel managers in the regions. When we decided to do the position evaluation work, naturally we added a number of people in the staff at Washington, although they were lower-grade civil servants. I had no political appointees under my direction; they were all

career government employees. My deputy assistant postmaster general came from personnel work in the State Department, and all of the rest of them were similarly career people--Art Weatherbee. He later became an ambassador and has now retired.

SOAPES: Did you find any problems working with these career people, that they had an ingrained set of ideas that were somewhat counter to ideas you were trying to promote?

LYONS: Yes. For the first two years I was afraid to make actual direct orders, because I wasn't sure that I was right. This was government and I'd been in private industry all my life. And I just didn't know enough to countermand the methods that had been in use for a hundred years in the postal service. And when I finally, after a couple of years, had enough confidence in my own judgment, then I made converts of an awful lot of career people in the postal service.



SOAPES: What kinds of things did you meet resistance on from them that you really had to give a hard-sell education to?

LYONS: Well, for example, all through the South there was

considerable racial prejudice in the postal service, and I had to hit that pretty hard for awhile. Actually, in some instances, it was easier in the southern states than it was in some of the northern states to--. There was also the inherent feeling among the postal employees that everything that was done in the postal service had a political motive behind it. It was hard to change that concept. And, of course, job evaluation was an unheard of mystery, and the only thing they had ever heard about it was from the Civil Service Commission's system and they didn't like that. So there were a great many--what I would call tendency to shuffle papers. I guess for the amount of getting something done there was twenty times more paperwork involved than there was in private industry, and I tried to streamline that. I never did by any means wholly succeed, only very partially. There was a tendency to delay any difficult decision of any kind, leave it on the desk and shuffle it around for awhile, and if-you-don't-do-anything-you-don't-get-into-trouble philosophy that--

SOAPES: Don't rock the boat, don't make waves.



LYONS: Yes. That's enough with--

SOAPES: You mentioned the racial problem. I know there wasn't anything called affirmative action as we have today back then, but were there any efforts made in the Post Office Department in terms of further integration, getting more minorities into the postal service?

LYONS: Yes. If you remember, President Eisenhower had appointed Branch Rickey to a committee that worked out of the White House to take complaints of racial discrimination. We received those first in the Post Office and then, if we couldn't settle them or didn't settle them, they went on up to this committee of Branch Rickey's. And in all the time, there was only one complaint that ever went that far in the postal service, and we were quite proud of that.



SOAPES: Is there anything further about your Post Office experience that I haven't covered before we move into your White House appointment? Forgive me--I'm not an expert on Post Office matters or personnel management. Is there anything you'd like to add?

LYONS: Well I suppose I could talk for three hours about the postal service and the problems we had and what we tried to do to solve them. I doubt if it would be of any great interest to any historian. The department, when Mr. Summerfield became postmaster general, was very heavily overmanned. We were told that the reason for that was that, in the presidential election, the postal service had been used to give jobs by the many thousands to deserving people who would vote the correct way. I remember one case that was flagrant in Chicago. I went to Chicago to look over the Post Office Department, and I found that they had so many clerks employed that there wasn't enough places for them to work in the building and they spent most of their time in the restrooms. The restrooms were packed. And if anyone bothered to look up the record they found that Mr. Summerfield had reduced the employment by some 80,000 in the first four years. He was bent on either eliminating completely or greatly reducing the postal deficit, and in that he was prodded by President Eisenhower, who felt it was a disgrace to have the Post Office losing so much money. I don't know how he would feel if he saw it today. But we made considerable



progress in that regard. We operated with many thousands fewer personnel, although the mail load was increasing every year. We had, as a consultant at first, Mr. Maurice Stans, who later served as director of the budget for President Eisenhower. And Mr. Stans set up the accounting system in the postal service that made it possible for us to find out, instead of after a year, how much money we were losing a month, after the month was over. In other words he set up a modern accounting system in the postal service, and I think that prompted the President to appoint him as budget director.

SOAPES: Did this accounting system help you greatly in your personnel work?

LYONS: No, not particularly. Except that it did tell me to some degree where we were overmanned and where too much overtime was being put in--and I had to go find out the reasons for that, whether it was the lack of proper machinery or the lack of a good postmaster doing the supervisory work. You see, until Mr. Summerfield was postmaster general, a postmaster didn't seem to need any qualifications to become



a postmaster except a loyalty toward a political party and an activity in that political party. We insisted on administrative experience in every postmaster that we appointed, which is another evidence that politics was not the primary consideration in even the appointment of postmasters, which it had always been as far as I know in the past. But we got some fine administrators in the Post Office Department, men who had had a great deal of experience at business and attempted to run a post office the same as any other business, and it enabled us to save a lot of money.

I wasn't in the Post Office for the primary reason of attempting to save money, although Summerfield was, but a good personnel administration program does, in itself, save a lot of money. We reduced accidents to a point where we won National Safety Council awards three years in a row, and of course that means a great deal in costs. That personnel program was the reason that I was given that distinguished service award, and I suppose part of the reason that Eisenhower asked me to move to the White House and take over personnel administration for the rest of the government.



SOAPES: How did that appointment to the White House come about? Who first approached you about it, do you recall?

LYONS: Let's see. The general that succeeded Adams--

SOAPES: [Wilton B.] Persons?

LYONS: Persons, General Persons, and the President approached Summerfield and Mr. Summerfield approached me to ask me if I would be willing to do it.

SOAPES: This was '58, '59?

LYONS: Well there's a letter there from President Eisenhower that gives the date. I had to resign as assistant postmaster general because that was a congressionally approved appointment, and I had to submit a formal resignation for that and then that gives you the date there, I think.

SOAPES: This letter is dated December 24, 1959.

LYONS: That's when I moved to the White House.

SOAPES: You succeeded Rocco Siciliano?

LYONS: Yes.



[Interruption]

SOAPES: Now you succeeded Siciliano.

LYONS: Yes.

SOAPES: Did you know him at all? Did you have a transition period with him where you worked with him?

LYONS: Oh, yes. I had known Rocco for quite a while. He was with the Department of Labor prior to taking the position at the White House. Rocco was a lawyer, and he talked with me several times about that, the first opportunity to get back into his law profession where he could really make some money, he expected to take it, because he'd made some sacrifices in coming into the administration also, and he felt that he really needed to make more money than he was making.

SOAPES: What kind of a workman was he, personality? I don't believe we've talked to anybody who really knew him very well.

LYONS: I think Rocco tended to let things slide rather than



make waves. He was quite loyal to the labor unions because of his background with the Department of Labor and prior to that also.

Among other things that I was asked to do when I moved over there was look at the salary structure in the whole government and make a recommendation as to how much increase and why. In the meantime the Civil Service Commission, with the assistance of the Department of Labor, had, and at my request in part, started making surveys of what they considered similar positions in private industry. But it was very difficult to obtain an accurate comparison, and Rocco was enthused about this idea which I had presented at a meeting of the staff at the White House. It was while I was still an assistant postmaster general. And we had several of these meetings with White House staff members, usually chaired by General Persons, and discussed budget problems in connection with salaries and what should be done about it. I had had a strong feeling that clerical help was paid far too high in comparison with private industry while other jobs were paid too low. And I thought that maybe a survey of some kind might make it apparent where changes should be made in



the whole government salary structure. And those surveys were started a couple of years before I went into the White House. They resulted in recommendations for considerably higher salaries than I felt were justified in some instances. For example, personnel managers in the federal government were compared to personnel managers in private industry. Well in private industry personnel managers are negotiating union contracts among other things, and they're paid much higher for that kind of industrial relations activity that is not the responsibility of a personnel manager in the federal government. I felt that, although loyal to personnel administration personally, that it was not right to start comparing those kind of jobs because they were so different. So Stans, being a very conservative budget director, felt that I was a hundred percent right and that we shouldn't raise some of these categories as high as it had been proposed.

Then we had problems with the CIA, not with their salary structure but with what happens when a CIA agent's cover is blown and he's no longer of any use to the federal government's intelligence activities. But I'm getting into work at the White House rather than the postal service.



SOAPES: Right. Well, I'm wanting to move into that. What was your basic job description when you went into the White House? What was the scope of your responsibilities, or was it defined?

[Interruption]

SOAPES: I think we were talking about your basic duties at the White House, the scope of your responsibilities.

LYONS: Well there wasn't a specific job description when I moved into that office. I was told that, overall, the position was the same as in the Post Office Department in the sense that I was to be, for the President, the chief of personnel administration, which meant that instead of just one department of government to be concerned about I was supposed to be concerned about all of them, except the military where my concerns were limited. I did have a great deal of concern with the civilian personnel in the military and there's an amazing number of them. I was to be concerned with training in the federal government overall; with salary administration; with the safety programs, which I attempted



to center in the Department of Labor because my staff at the White House was very, very small. I only had three men and a couple of secretaries so that I had to work through the personnel managers of the departments rather than trying to do anything directly.

I did attempt one major program pretty much directly and that came about because I noticed that we were getting a large number of retirements of top civil service career employees in the higher grades--the 15, 16, 17, 18 levels--and I wondered about that. I discovered that what had happened was that during the Depression, the federal government was able to employ very high-caliber people, and they did an excellent job of picking out outstanding people. These people remained in government service because by the end of the Depression they had so much of a stake in it, although most of them could have made a great deal more salary outside the federal government as industry and business expanded. Because of all of those people being employed during the Depression years and having this great ability as compared to most civil servants, they had risen to these top responsible jobs in the career service and we were losing



them. And it was apparent that we were going to lose a lot more just because of age and retirement in the next eight to ten years. So I approached the President to approve a management development program which involved training people to take over the positions that these individuals occupied upon their retirement, but to start doing it three or four years before the retirement date, because I had found that there had been very little if any training to fill these positions in advance and that the man put into them was put in cold and needed a lot of help from those above him in order to do the job that his predecessor had done. And I did develop that program and it was placed into effect the last year that I was there. I do not know whether it was continued or dropped after the end of the Eisenhower administration.



The problem with the CIA resulted from the difficulties that ex-CIA employees had in finding other positions. Mr. Allen Dulles was then the head of the CIA and he asked me to come over to his office and discuss the problem with him, what could be done. It turned out that what was happening was that a certain number of very reliable, long-experienced

agents were being, what he called "blown," their cover blown, and they were no longer of use. The office in Washington could only absorb a very few of them in administrative jobs so they had to let them go. And the men had great difficulty in obtaining private employment because they couldn't say what they'd been doing for the past ten years, or five or whatever it was. And so I suggested a severance pay, up to a year at least, and then that they should be able to tell their employer that they did work for the United States government and refer them to the head of the personnel organization in the White House who would then check as to their reliability and so on with the director of the Central Intelligence Agency or whoever, his deputy or somebody over there. And then a letter would go out on White House stationery saying that this man had served the United States honorably and well and was a good prospective employee or something of that sort. And that seemed to at least alleviate the problem without entirely solving it.

We had then, as now, problems in Panama that were somewhat urgent. Those resulted because of a union, the International Association of Machinists, who had handed down jobs



from father to son in Panama and were very reluctant or absolutely opposed to training any natives of Panama for the higher skilled positions in the Canal Zone. Those positions, and the machinists had a position, not just a job in Panama, because of the allowances that were made and the very high pay that they received. And as I said, the jobs were handed down from father to son. We had those kind of problems, persuading them to at least put in an apprentice program. And I really don't know what happened to that after the end of the Eisenhower administration. I can't think of anything else that I had the direct responsibility for while I was over there, because I was in the White House itself for less than two years.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: At the Library we have the records of your office and there's a great many names and applications and references of individuals there. How did these names come to you? Who brought them, how were they referred?

LYONS: I'm not sure what you mean. I don't recall.



SOAPES: The file has a great many names of individuals who were seeking positions in the government.

LYONS: Those were not from my office, I'm sure.

SOAPES: They didn't come from you at all?

LYONS: No. I'm sure that those must have come from Robert Hampton, who is chairman of the Civil Service Commission now. And one of the mistakes that President Kennedy and O'Brien made in discussing matters with me was the assumption that I was the channel through which congressmen and others sent the names of deserving Republicans for appointments, and I had absolutely nothing to do with that. The only thing, on occasion, Hampton would tell me that somebody on the President's staff or the President himself wanted to know whether I thought that this individual was qualified to do the job. He may have been recommended by the Senate minority leader or someone like that. But Eisenhower had always insisted and he insisted at Cabinet meetings that, while it was all right to hire Republicans where it was reasonable to do so, that the man had to be able to do the job capably and



that was the first consideration and not his political party. And once in a while I'd get something like that from Hampton, an inquiry whether I knew whether or not this man was qualified. But I had none of the applications for positions with the federal government. That was not my job at all.

SOAPES: You were dealing in the administrative, the--

LYONS: The broad personnel administration field.

SOAPES: And when a name was referred to you, it was simply, look at his background, should he be able to do this job?

LYONS: Right. And that whole file went right back to Mr. Hampton's office usually unless the President's principal assistant, somebody wanted it, wanted me to comment on it, and in that case it went back to him instead of to Hampton.

SOAPES: We do have the records from Hampton's office as well and--

LYONS: Now I'm not sure that Rocco Siciliano didn't do that. I don't think he did, but he might have.

SOAPES: The file is of Siciliano and you; it's all been



meshed together into one, the way we got it from the White House.

LYONS: Well I did nothing of that and it was quite a clear understanding when I accepted the job and resigned my job in the Post Office that that wasn't part of what I was expected to do.

SOAPES: Okay, I'm glad to have that straightened out so we know something about where some of that material might have come from.

We've mentioned the racial problems, the way of dealing with those in the Post Office. Was this program you mentioned with Branch Rickey continuing while you were at the White House?

LYONS: No. It may have been continuing, but on a very low key if it was. I had nothing directly, after moving to the White House, to do with that because it went through the various departments of government and then to Rickey's committee rather than through me. I did have what might called general supervision over the Civil Service Commission. Instead of the commission going direct to the President, they went through me.



SOAPES: And you had developed this program for developing executives, career people. Had the Hoover Commission had any impact on that program or impact on what you did?

LYONS: Only to a very limited extent. The Hoover Commission recognized that despite the changes in Cabinet officers and under secretaries that occurred with each change of administration that the real continuity of the federal government was the responsibility of these top career service people, which was obvious to me after I'd been there a couple of years. I was violently opposed to future two-year appointments at the assistant secretary level because I felt that it takes that long to know enough about how the government works to be able to contribute significantly to it. And I really opposed those short-term type of agreements where an industrialist would agree to come for two years and that's all.

SOAPES: Didn't they make a recommendation for a separate senior civil service?

LYONS: Yes. I didn't think that was practical. I thought that attempting to designate the cream, I suppose you'd call



it, and finding men of sufficient ability without making serious mistakes in selection was just an impossible type of program for the federal government.

SOAPES: You mentioned to me several times perhaps on the tape and several times off the tape that you did attend Cabinet meetings regularly.

LYONS: Yes, when I was at the White House I attended regularly. I attended quite a number of them prior to that, at times as a substitute for Mr. Summerfield when the deputy postmaster general was absent too, and when the subject concerned something involving the Post Office Department.

SOAPES: What types of personnel matters would come up at the Cabinet meeting?

LYONS: Most all types of personnel problems came up. It was very difficult for any Cabinet officer to install a new program of some kind without it having some effect on personnel administration in his organization. If he was attempting a different type of a program that required different skills than he had, you had to consider where you're going to get those skills



and are you going to try to take them away from some other department by putting a higher grade on them than that department has. And that way you can get into all kinds of controversies, as you might know.

SOAPES: Did you find that the Cabinet officers were actively concerned with the personnel management field, and did they understand it, did they know what they were doing in the personnel field?

LYONS: Well, some did and some didn't. Of course Summerfield did because I was with him so long, and he knew anyway because he had a very large operation in Michigan in his distributorship for General Motors automobiles. And he knew that personnel administration was important and you'd get into trouble by ignoring certain things. I felt that some of the Cabinet officers were inexperienced in that area and were, at times, likely to do things without considering their effect--whatever they did--the effect of it on the personnel administration in their own organizations.

SOAPES: What about Chris Herter in this field?



LYONS: Chris Herter was--I don't want to be unkind to the guy--but he had a lot of theory but no practical experience and I couldn't use him. He was there for a very short time and then I dispensed with his services.

SOAPES: Yes. This is Chris Herter, Jr.?

LYONS: Yes.

SOAPES: What about his father as a secretary of state; was he any different?

LYONS: Well you know who he succeeded--

SOAPES: Yes.

LYONS: --and he suffered by comparison. I think he did an adequate job, certainly not a brilliant job.

SOAPES: Were there other people besides Summerfield who were very strong in this field?

LYONS: I don't think of anyone offhand except Richard Nixon himself.



SOAPES: What makes you regard him more highly in this than other people?

LYONS: He didn't speak very often in Cabinet meetings, but when he did he appeared to have a complete grasp of his subject and he was able to present it in a minimum of time and very clearly, and he seemed to understand the basic elements of personnel administration fairly well. And I was shocked at his selections when he became President. I heard from him a number of times because we were invited at Christmas and other times to his home in Washington, and of course I met his daughters and I thought extremely highly of his wife. I believe that Nixon was very popular with the assistant secretaries in the government. I don't know whether he made a deliberate effort to cultivate them or whether it was just being Nixon. When he made a foreign trip, he always held a meeting of assistant secretaries and under secretaries to brief them on what had happened and why, and he did a remarkable job of extemporaneous speaking that I admired. I had something to do with Nelson Rockefeller because of Nelson's service on some committees, and I felt that he and Nixon were at swords'



points a good deal of the time, and I felt that Nixon was right and Nelson was wrong.

That was just one man's opinion and I never had any experience with Nixon after he was elected President. He was kind enough to send me his autographed book, Six Crises, and he wrote to me a number of times when he was in office. I made certainly no attempt to get back in government; I didn't want anything. I felt eight years almost was plenty. But when I saw some of his appointments I was frightened because a couple of those men were working in his campaign in 1960--his first campaign against Jack Kennedy. And I was asked by the Republican National Committee to make a number of speeches in Nixon's behalf while I was still at the White House. Apparently the charm of the name "The White House," somebody going out from there, had more prestige than others in the minds of these rally promoters in various parts of the country. And I made speeches in Illinois and several other states--California and several of them.

SOAPES: I believe we have some copies of those in the records.

LYONS: I, of course, checked with the President's office



before I did any of that, just to be sure that it was all right with him. And the costs were all paid by the Republican National Committee; they weren't paid by the government. So we kept pretty clean on it, the way I put it, but I happened to run into a couple of these men--

SOAPES: Bob Haldeman?

LYONS: Yes, and I didn't like them. And the fellow that was a television expert, so-called that he had--advertising, television, from California. I thought, gee I hope if he's elected, he's not going to appoint those gentlemen to high positions. I thought Eisenhower did, by far, the best job of selection of any President in my memory because, if the check that was made on me is any example of what was done with other appointments, certainly he was very thorough. And he didn't appoint people unless, in major positions, unless he felt they could do the work--that were capable of doing the work and had showed by their past business or whatever experience was needed that they could do it. I know that in my case they had a full FBI field investigation and I was only an assistant secretary level; I wasn't at a Cabinet level



or deputy level. Because I heard from it after I came back here a couple of years that they'd gone clear back to my high school days. And I think he was very careful in all his major appointments in that manner. Usually I think a President appoints his Cabinet officers and then pretty much lets them dictate assistant secretary level and so on, and it was very evident that Eisenhower didn't do that. While he, of course, went by their recommendations, but he had to be personally assured that the men that had those jobs were capable of doing them and had a clean record.

SOAPES: I'd like to talk just briefly about some of those people. You've mentioned Maurice Stans several times and I believe you worked with him very closely when you were at the White House.

LYONS: And the Post Office.

SOAPES: You said he was a very conservative man in his economic views. What type of a man was he to work with, his work habits?

LYONS: I thought he was one of the most capable men that I



had ever met. I was absolutely certain that he was entirely honest in every way. I was in his home many times, as he was in ours--he and his wife and his adopted children. It would be unbelievable to me that Maurice Stans could do anything that was dishonest. He was, of course, an accountant among other things. He was a very strong man and could back up his recommendations with facts as a rule. As I said, I think he was on the conservative side, if there is such a thing. I'm not sure what's in the middle of the road and what's left and what's conservative, but fiscally I know that he felt that the United States as a country would be much better off if the budget was balanced and the reckless spending was stopped and that a lot of the members of Congress had suddenly found themselves in the most lucrative jobs they'd ever had in their lives and that their only consideration was to get re-elected. And Maury was a very, very hard worker. Hours meant nothing to him. And he kept in office Staats, Elmer Staats, who was a red-hot Democrat. And he had to keep Elmer in check a lot of the time, but he kept him anyway because he was capable of doing certain things that Maury felt that he ought to, didn't want to lose him for that.



SOAPES: You've mentioned Nelson Rockefeller--that you seemed to think that he was wrong. Was Rockefeller a disruptive force in the administration, would that be a fair term?

LYONS: Toward the end of the administration he was because he had ambitions for the Presidency and it was pretty obvious. And he did some things, like attacking the defense budget, that really upset President Eisenhower because Eisenhower had not been notified. And I happened to be at the Cabinet meeting when that came up and Eisenhower was not notified when that occurred.

I was also at the Cabinet meeting and the later meeting with the congressional leaders after the U-2 flight was knocked down in Russia and the congressmen came over. Eisenhower accepted full personal responsibility for it. That was so dramatic to me that I made a note of some of the things that were said there, and I assume that you've gotten the same thing from others, but it struck me so strongly. This is May 26, 1960. One of the things that happened was that they had the congressional leaders there at this breakfast and Senator [J. William] Fulbright was a little critical



of President Eisenhower for publicly assuming full responsibility for the U-2 flights. And President Eisenhower said that the only thing he knew that could be done was that he might be impeached, in jest I was sure. But he wanted to know, other than that, how he could punish the CIA or the State Department for the U-2 flights. And Rayburn answered him and said, "Well, I guess we could impeach you, Mr. President, but it's not worthwhile with the short time remaining of your term."

[Laughter]

SOAPES: I hadn't heard that story before.

LYONS: Hadn't you?

SOAPES: No, I hadn't.

LYONS: Well, I was there and I put it down because I thought it was so amusing.

SOAPES: Well, you were there; what was the tenor of that meeting?



LYONS: It was friendly, and I don't think there was any thought that Eisenhower was really at fault, but I think there was some thought among some of the Democrat leaders in Congress that there might be some political advantage to their party in that event. But I was at quite a number of meetings various times with the leadership of the Congress and with the exception, possibly, of Senator Lyndon Johnson, President Eisenhower seemed to get along very well with most of them.

SOAPES: What was the problem with Johnson?

LYONS: Mainly that Johnson wouldn't join in with the rest of them in casual conversation; he wouldn't say anything. And he would make no commitments. The President asked him to consider some particular legislative measure, and Lyndon wouldn't say anything. I was at a number of speaking engagements with Lyndon Johnson and his wife--we were both on the speakers' platform. He enjoyed talking to the unions at their union meetings, and at many of those I was asked to speak, too, for the administration, and I met him there. And I always had reservations, really. I just wasn't sure about what he really stood for.



SOAPES: You never saw this famous Johnson treatment that we heard so much about when he was in the White House when he was a senator?

LYONS: Well I saw him run the Senate a couple of times because I happened to be there when this bill, this salary bill which was very controversial--I had a number of other bills that I was there for, too--and I saw Johnson reverse a vote in the Senate that was going our way. Boy, he really ran the majority in the Senate, without any question. It was obvious, sitting up there watching him. I had a lot of adventures with that bill. It happened that an important part of it was coming up when the, what was it--the Puerto Ricans, or whoever went in there and shot from the gallery? Shot a number of congressmen? I was there at that time. I wasn't in the gallery; I was in the office of the minority leader which was right by it. I heard the shooting going on.

There was another incident at a Cabinet meeting--in May, 1960 according to my notes--that may be of interest because it illustrates Eisenhower's honesty. He said that a friend--a state Republican chairman--was seeking some sort of action that Eisenhower felt was not in accordance with the Republican



platform. The President quoted his friend as saying, "You are not so naive as to think that this (the platform) means anything?" The President said to the Cabinet officers: "I'd feel like a skunk if I ran on a platform and then discarded it. I read every word of the platform in '52 and in '56."

SOAPES: About the Republican leadership--Ev Dirksen, what was your reaction to him?

LYONS: Well I liked Everett Dirksen, I suppose partly because I became acquainted with him when he was running for Congress from Illinois and I followed him around on a speaking visit for the paper that I was working for. And I always admired his smooth voice. And he loved to make a speech, at that time he did anyway, and I guess he still did when he was in the Senate. But he seemed to be even popular with the majority. I mean most Democrats kind of liked Ev Dirksen.

SOAPES: Was he a cooperative man with the administration?

LYONS: Yes. Yes. He evidently admired Eisenhower and tried to do what--. Of course the Republicans were in the minority six of the eight years, so it was a harder job that Dirksen



had and also in the House, to get the type of legislation that Eisenhower wanted through the Congress.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: What about Charley Halleck--did you know him?

LYONS: Yes, again because of being involved in controversial legislation so much, the major one being that salary administration, but there were a number of others including pay bills for rural carriers and that sort of thing that I had to contact Halleck. And Halleck was quite a good friend of Postmaster General Summerfield; so we would see more of him perhaps than any of the other leaders in the Congress. Because he would occasionally come over and have lunch with us and discuss legislation that Mr. Summerfield was interested in. He seemed to be a very capable leader and able to--I guess you'd say hold the Republicans in line on legislation.

SOAPES: I remember I spent one summer in the late '60s working on the Hill--and I worked for a Democrat--and I remember his response to Halleck was, "He was a very smart and shrewd leader."



LYONS: I would agree with that. Some of the members disliked him though. They felt he was too rough at times.

SOAPES: What type of tactics would he use that caused them to feel that?

LYONS: I don't know, really. I really don't know. I suppose trade-offs that go on all the time in the Congress, particularly in the House. But Charley didn't always agree with his own party on some of things that they wanted to do. But I think he served the President well.

SOAPES: How about Bryce Harlow?

LYONS: Bryce, I think, is a very brilliant man, and again I had some contact with him in legislative matters, and he seemed to be able to influence some members of Congress despite a rather unimpressive physical appearance. He was very active in the effort to get Nixon elected over Kennedy. Apparently he had been given some responsibilities in that area by President Eisenhower, to be the liaison with most of the White House staff in connection with that election. Most members of the staff liked Bryce and respected his ability and knowledge of the Hill.



SOAPES: A man of good and careful judgment?

LYONS: Yes, I thought his judgment was generally good. I haven't kept in touch with Bryce as much as I would have liked to because I'm curious about why he bowed in and out of the Nixon administration. And I felt many times that it was probably a matter of getting along with [John] Ehrlichman and Haldeman and he just didn't go for some of the things that they were doing.

SOAPES: A very principled man?

LYONS: I think so. Bryce worked for Proctor and Gamble I think you know, and the major officers of Proctor and Gamble were very, well, highly honorable men, and I don't believe Bryce would have lasted with them if he hadn't been pretty decent chap.

SOAPES: Did you have much contact with Persons?

LYONS: Not as much as I had had with Adams. Of course I had some with Persons because I was over there. Most of our White House staff meetings, General Persons was there, and they wanted me over at the White House so fast that



President Eisenhower had left on a trip and General Persons asked me to come over and he'd swear me in, because there was a number of things he felt should be taken care of. He was very solicitous towards the end with the top White House staff in connection with any problems they may have had in finding other employment. My experience with him, he was a kindly man, for a military man.

SOAPES: Now you knew Adams and he has the reputation of being the gruff, rough sort of man, not too solicitous of other people's feelings. Was that your experience with him, too?

LYONS: Well he had a New Englander's way of--I think if there ever was a typical New England man it was Adams. And he'd say things in some of these meetings and he'd turn to me and he'd say, "Now do you want to talk again?" Things like that. [Laughter] But the White House staff liked him even though he was terse and at times had a temper, but they felt he was very capable. And I remember the year after he left we had a meeting of the top staff. We'd had a long meeting and afterwards they served refreshments and suddenly the idea came up, "Let's call up Adams." So we called him on



the phone and everybody there, practically, talked to him, and I think we had an hour's phone bill for that one--long distance phone for an hour. Which indicates that the White House staff did like him--that was the only reason I mentioned that. In spite of his rather terse, New England--. And some people, visitors to the White House, thought he was a cold type of a man, but he really wasn't.

SOAPES: Did you have any relation with John Bragdon?

LYONS: No.

SOAPES: Not at all. He was a public works man and I--

LYONS: No, I didn't have any connection with him at all.

SOAPES: What about Gerry Morgan?

LYONS: Yes. Quite frequently with Gerry. He was one of the senior men. Have you interviewed him and seen him?

SOAPES: We are working with him.

LYONS: Of course Gerry was another lawyer and he was of some



help to me in drafting legislation, telling me what he thought could be done and what couldn't be done. Seemed to have the confidence of President Eisenhower.

SOAPES: A reserved man from what I've heard of him?

LYONS: Not too much so with me at least. Gerry was always very pleasant and helpful in all of my contacts with him.

SOAPES: We've talked, of course, to a number of White House staff people and posing some of the similar questions that I've been posing to you, and an impression that I have gotten is that there were not too many weak links. Was that your impression, too, that it was basically a very competent staff?

LYONS: Certainly the top staff was, in my opinion, quite, very competent. As I said, I served on the management committee of Merck and Company, which is a very large corporation, and most of those men would compare favorably with the men that I was associated with in private industry.

SOAPES: One other name that comes to mind, Bob [Robert K.] Gray, cabinet secretary. Could you tell me about him?



LYONS: Well, I think Bob Gray was just as the term implies-- a secretary type. I had nothing in my area directly to do with Bob. He seemed in the grey area to me; that's about the best way I can put it.

SOAPES: Okay. You told me earlier that you knew Andy Goodpaster pretty well, that you would meet with him in the White House mess.

LYONS: Yes.

SOAPES: Could you give me a little line on his personality?

LYONS: Well, I think Andy was one of the best liked military men that's ever been around the White House. He didn't attempt to lord it over anybody; he was pleasant to talk to, and of course intelligent, I thought. I thought Eisenhower's son liked him--at least I got that impression--I didn't directly ask him of course. And I know that the President had great confidence in Andy.

SOAPES: Very competent man; knew his job and forceful within the administration?

LYONS: Pleasantly so.



SOAPES: How about John Eisenhower?

LYONS: John never said very much. I saw him quite a good deal but mostly in the mess; I never had any business dealings in that sense with John. He also seemed very pleasant, and at times embarrassed to be there. I at times think he felt that he should be in the field somewhere rather than around the White House, that the very fact that he was the President's son made him suspect in the rest of the military. I think he really felt that way, that he would rather not have been at the White House.

SOAPES: Was he readily accepted by the other staff? Was there any problem in his relations with them?

LYONS: Not as far as I know. But John never seemed to be at these top staff meetings that Adams held first, then Persons. I seen him quite a good deal around, but, as far as contributing to any of the subjects that might be coming up at these meetings, he just wasn't there.

SOAPES: Very low profile?

LYONS: Very low, yes. I think most of the White House staff would agree on that. Have you already talked to him about it?



SOAPES: We have done some work with him, but not a great deal. Well, I think that gets us to an appropriate point and we thank you for your time this morning.

