

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview
Subject: Jim Hemphill
Interviewer: Stephanie Reynolds
July 19 and August 16, 2023

[BEGIN RECORDING PART ONE - July 19, 2023]

Stephanie Reynolds: Okay, so I've got the recording started. And first, I just want to start out by saying thank you for participating in the National Archives Oral History Project. We're documenting the history of the agency by preserving firsthand accounts of the people that have actually worked here. My name is Stephanie Reynolds, and I'm based out of our National Archives facility in Broomfield, Colorado. And I'm assisting the Historian, Jessie Kratz. Today is Wednesday, July 19th, 2023. And I'm speaking with James Hemphill, whose NARA [National Archives and Records Administration] career has spanned multiple different offices: the Office of the Archivist of the United States, Presidential Libraries, and the Federal Register. So you've got a lot of perspective here. So, first, Jim, would you just go ahead and get us started maybe by telling us a little bit about your background, where you're from, your educational background, that sort of thing?

Jim Hemphill: Nice to be here. Thank you for your interest in my story. I grew up in Pennsylvania, western Pennsylvania. I transferred from the college I was going to, to Georgetown in 1973, graduated in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in government. In my senior year, I had started interning in the office of Senator Mark Hatfield, a senator from Oregon. So upon graduation, I was hired on as a mail clerk and then had progressive promotions in that office, ultimately serving as his executive assistant for 12 of the 17 years that I worked for him. I've actually done a previous oral history with NARA about my experience serving on his staff during the time that NARA got its independent agency status, because Senator Hatfield was a great promoter of the National Archives and supported independence. I was the staff person who worked closely with Dr. Warner, the Archivist [of the United States] at the time, and others on the Hill on the congressional side in their efforts to bring that to pass. And just one interesting connection between that and my later career at NARA is, at almost literally the very last minute in the debate of that legislation, the remaining question was: Should the Office of the Federal Register be retained by the GSA [General Services Administration]? GSA wanted to keep it, and so we were pretty involved in negotiating that the Office come with the Archives in independence. And little did I know at that time—1985—that I would spend 25 years serving in the Office of the Federal Register!

I ended my career in Senator Hatfield's office in December 1991, when I came over to the National Archives as the Executive Assistant to the Archivist Don Wilson, serving in that role until October 1993. That's when I was detailed first to the Office of Public Affairs, and then to the Office of the Federal Register for about six months in July 1994. And then I competed for and was appointed to the position of Deputy Assistant Archivist for the Office of Presidential Libraries, in January 1995. And I served there until July 1995, when I was moved back to the Office of the Federal Register with the title Special Assistant to the Director and remained there for the rest of my career. I retired from the Office of the Federal Register about a year into the COVID epidemic, in January 2021. So the last nine months of my career were spent teleworking, along with the rest of the federal government and citizens of the United States.

Stephanie: Wow. So you've got a lot going on there from when you started out as the executive assistant then to Senator Mark Hatfield, is that correct?

Jim: Yes.

Stephanie: I got that right. Okay. And so I know this is your pre-NARA time, you know, but you've talked about how you were—this is when NARA was becoming independent of GSA. Can you talk a little bit about what your involvement in that was, any contributions and any discussions that were surrounding that whole time period of, okay, we're going to have NARA become a separate independent agency?

Jim: So I shared my memories about that in an oral history that NARA already has. So, just to summarize, I was a staff person there in Senator Hatfield's office supporting the independence efforts, and I don't want to overstate my role. It was driven, of course, by Bob Warner and people in the Archives who wanted the agency to become independent, and they were looking for congressional support. And Senator Hatfield was one of the people from whom they sought help. The Senator was chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, so he had a very powerful position from which to be helpful. This was in the middle of the [President] Reagan administration. And while Senator Hatfield held a much more moderate, liberal position in the Republican Party than the Reagan administration, he had some close ties in the administration and was able to run interference and help it in the process. That was very important because whenever you're separating an agency from another agency, the bureaucratic turf wars are going to be pretty significant, and you never know where your battles are going to come from, you know, because personal relationships and networks in Washington, DC, and in the government are a significant factor in policy-making. It is often very interesting—things will come out of left field. And we experienced that in the independence process.

So I worked at the staff level on this process. I don't want to diminish my role, but I also don't want to overstate it. [I was] monitoring pretty carefully what was going on. Any legislation has to go through both houses of Congress. So primarily, we were involved when it was on the Senate side, with our eye on what the administration's position was—the President could veto anything like this. And so we wanted to be sure that we're getting the administration's approval. And my recollection is that some folks who were pretty well-connected to the President through GSA were making the effort to at least hold on to the Office of the Federal Register, because it has an administrative role in government that NARA doesn't. NARA is a cultural agency NARA employees like to say, but they *keep* records, whereas the Federal Register is part of the administrative process in which records are *created*. And so an argument could be made for GSA's point of view. But the Office of the Federal Register did not want to stay with GSA, and we felt their arguments were strong ones. So, I actually can't pull out of my memory right this moment exactly some of the dynamics that went on.

But I have a funny, maybe embarrassing, but kind of interesting story from the night that Congress was going to pass the legislation on the Senate floor. That same evening there was a reception at the National Archives Rotunda for—I forget the exact group, but it was a pretty significant group, maybe the members of the private foundation that supports the National Archives. I was working pretty late trying to find out whether or not the Senate had passed it because it was caught up with some other legislation ahead of it on the calendar. And just before I left to go to the NARA reception, I called the cloakroom in the Senate, and was told, "Yes, it's happening momentarily." So I went down to the Archives, went in, walked up to Don Wilson, the Archivist, gave him the thumbs up and said, "It's passed." And so he stopped the conversations, called everybody's attention in the Rotunda of the Archives and announced that the Senate had passed the bill, and everybody cheered. And it was just a great moment. Except, Senator Dole [Senate Majority Leader] closed the Senate before the legislation passed that night because of the length of time to debate the other things going on. So I had given Dr. Wilson bad information. The Senate passed it the next day or the next legislative day. So, in effect, it was a wonderful opportunity to have provided bad information, because everybody who would have wanted to be in a room to celebrate together was there when they got the word. But it was bad intel. [LAUGHS]

Stephanie: It was just a little early.

Jim: So that was also a lesson to me to not pass on news that I didn't know 100 percent sure was true.

Stephanie: Yeah. That's a great story. [LAUGHS] So yeah, you do have that unique perspective then of the before and after of NARA's independence from GSA. As part of maybe learning about NARA's role and their mission, did that have any impact on you wanting to then come to the National Archives, or how did that come about?

Jim: I always, even when I was a young kid, loved Presidential history. When I made the decision to leave the Senator's office, I was looking for a job situation that would be more amenable to my marriage and family life, and also, I was hoping to move into the upper echelons of the bureaucracy. And so I went through a very structured exercise, actually, about who I was, what my gifts were, what my interests were. And I remember landing on my ideal job being the Director of the Nixon Library, not because I was necessarily a huge fan of Nixon, but because I'd been very aware of his administration in my college years and his papers were held by the Office of Presidential Libraries within the National Archives in Washington, DC. And it's just interesting that I came up with that as my ideal job and, although that position wasn't open at the time, I ended up at the National Archives, and for a period of time at the Office of Presidential Libraries. So NARA was always a place that had some interest for me.

Stephanie: Okay. And then do you think having worked on the other side, you know, helping the Senator and being a part of that process there when they became independent, do you think that helped you when you did start with the National Archives, that you had a little bit of background on them?

Jim: At the time of independence in 1985, I had no thought of going to NARA. But, yes, absolutely. I would encourage most staffers on the [Capitol] Hill who are going to have a tenure as long as mine to take a stint in the bureaucracy and then go back to the Hill. The Hill is populated by very young people, very smart people, very ambitious people, and very gifted. But they're young, and they lack a lot of experience. Now, some of them are naturally intuitive about a lot of things related to governing, but I really did not have a good understanding of the inner workings of the bureaucracy, particularly how hierarchical it is, and how you had to respect that kind of hierarchy or learn how to work within it, because the Hill, in contrast, is a very flat organization, at least inside Member's offices.

In a Senator's office, we were working for a single person. We had a mission. Like I said, people were young. You didn't have to have been there a long time really to be rubbing shoulders with very senior and seasoned people, including senior federal bureaucrats. One thing that I think I personally didn't appreciate is the immensity of the power I was wielding when I was a Senate staffer. I had no understanding of—I did at one level, but at another level I didn't understand the waves that are created within the bureaucracy when a member of Congress or somebody

from their staff calls an agency. And, you know, that's like stepping into a China shop in a very literal sense. And you can break China very easily. I had no sense of that. On the other hand, I don't think I had adequate respect for how nimble and powerful and skilled many senior executives are. Most of them have had to claw their way to the top. You know, the federal bureaucracy is very big. The organizations are very big, and people don't reach the top without working pretty hard at it. I had come to my position pretty easily. I'd gone from a college student into this role and, well, I think my work justified my existence there. I did a good job. But I didn't have to go through that kind of battle to get my position. So you have to respect that, and it's easy not to rise to the top in the Executive branch. It was easy for me, I think, to mistakenly apply what was true on the Hill to the bureaucracy at the National Archives where it's not.

Another thing about the National Archives, in specific, is that it's a very small organization by federal government standards, but it's the top of the food chain for the archival profession. Whereas engineers can get jobs in lots of other places, archivists can't. And so if you're at the top rung of the National Archives, you're at the top of your profession. And there is—again, that needs to be respected—but there's also the potential for an arrogant attitude among leaders, and a "We are the chief priests, and no one understands what we understand" attitude that, I think, hindered, at least when I was there, a lot of growth and opportunities that the Archives could have had.

So when I came into the Archives, what I didn't realize is how suspicious people were of me—a political person coming in at the very top of the agency, you know, having my office on "mahogany row." And while I knew I would have to prove myself, I didn't appreciate how negatively I was probably perceived from the get-go. And so that influenced my experience. Also at the time, the Deputy Archivist was Claudine Weir, a very, very competent person, but a very powerful person to whom the Archivist, at the time, Don Wilson, really had handed over most of the day-to-day internal agency operations, while he was trying to build outside support for the agency. He was creating a foundation for the National Archives. He was working the Hill. But he kind of let Claudine do what she needed to do. And she was a creature of this process of moving up the chain. And she was a pretty tough administrator. So here I was working out of Dr. Wilson's office, and I just assumed that there would be a greater respect for him and his office than there was, because people were loyal to Claudine. They were not necessarily loyal to the Archivist. And if he had forced his authority more significantly, that would have been different. But since they realized he had allowed her to, you know, pretty much run the internal organization, they weren't going to be damaged by—that she was the one from whom they needed support.

So all those dynamics I learned, after the fact, and probably learned too late to be as effective as I might have been. The resource, I think, that the Archives really failed to utilize of mine was the extent of my knowledge of Congress. And they could have put that to use, but I understand they could be suspicious of me. What was I going to do with that? You know, was I going to manipulate my way into something threatening to others? But honestly, personally, I was motivated to get to know the organization really well. So what I did was start traveling through every office in the National Archives in the Washington, DC, area, just going downstairs and upstairs, inside and outside the main Archives building, meeting secretaries, meeting people, you know. People would say, "I've never seen anybody from 'mahogany row' out here." And they, too, I think, were pretty suspicious initially. But over time, I think, I built a lot of good feelings for myself at the working level. Ironically, that only increased the suspicion of me at the managerial level, because you know, what was I up to?—and I get it now. At the time, I thought, what could be bad about a senior manager walking through an office? But if the executive assistant to the Archivist walks into your office unannounced and is walking around talking to your people, that's incredibly disruptive. They would have to 100 percent trust me for that to be useful. And, I think, they could have trusted me, but they didn't know that. And then Dr. Wilson did not support the effort: He got some flak for letting me do that. So he pulled me back from doing that kind of thing. And, I think, he lost a lot of the benefit of the eyes and ears that could have been put to good use.

Stephanie: Right. Yeah. With you going around meeting everyone and then, like you said, just your knowledge of Congress and how things work over there, that could have been put to better use, it sounds like. [It's] unfortunate. So when you came to the National Archives, it sounds like this is still very much a transition period for the Archives being an independent agency. Is that pretty accurate?

Jim: I would say that transition was pretty much completed. What I lived through was the transition from—I don't know quite how to say it. You might call it analog to digital, but it's bigger than that. It's from a more hierarchical, bureaucratic operation to one where, at least on paper, there's a greater attention to the workforce. And they have a greater voice in operations, but not as efficient, in some ways. So the processes are not as professional. That's what I would like to say. They're not as professionally performed, but they are far more efficient because of the digital and technology applications that we have access to. So, we no longer have secretaries, you know, but we don't have very well-written memos either lots of times [LAUGHS], and recordkeeping is problematic and not necessarily because people are worse at it, but just because we were in this transition of where work is done and who does it. So I would say *that* was the bigger transition that I observed. It was not being part of the

independence, but more of this change that was the change of the century, between the 20th and 21st century.

Stephanie: Okay. So when you came to the National Archives, what was your first position?

Jim: I was Executive Assistant to the Archivist, which is a staff role. And all my career—this is pretty important, because I think I have a good fix on it and maybe other people who are in staff roles don't. And this comes out of my growing up in the [Senator] Hatfield office. I always understood that I did not have power in and of my own, or authority in and of my own position. I was always using borrowed authority. So I would pick up the phone and say, "This is Jim from the Archivist's office." "This is Jim calling on behalf of the Director of the Federal Register." "This is Jim from Senator Hatfield's office." And so staff extends their principal's ability to hear, to see, to speak, to touch, to walk, to talk. But it's always the principal for whom you're working and whose authority you're using. That applies not only for a staff person, but for a staff office. And I think we should always bear that in mind how it is different from the operating offices where, even in the Office of the Federal Register, the Director of Publications has authority in the position to do certain things. Any position can have a staff clustered around the person holding the position. But that staff needs to always remember that they are using borrowed power, not their own. But because staff are so closely, intimately sometimes, in daily contact with the person holding the position of power, and sort of gets to know instinctively that person's personality and their likes and dislikes, they can speak without, maybe, being specifically authorized, but nevertheless doing things that the principal would agree to. But then you can sort of step over into misbehaving by feeling like you have the authority to tell people what to do. And I see that has happened very much in NARA. I'm sure it's in every organization—but in NARA, there's been the tendency of some of the staff offices to take control over the operational units in a way that they don't support the offices. They put onus and burdens on them—even though they are providing some support, they're more frequently demanding things from the operations offices. So I think any healthy organization needs to get that right. And I think that's been a consistent problem at NARA.

Stephanie: So when you were the executive assistant, what were your responsibilities? What did your day to day look like?

Jim: So, we're still talking about the Archivist, or at the Office of the Federal Register?

Stephanie: For the Archivist. Yeah. For the Archivist.

Jim: I wrote things for him. I reviewed things for him. I wrote speeches. He gave me a couple of special assignments: one was to study the National Historical Publications and Records Commission [NHPRC] to do an efficiency study on its operations, and to produce a report that he used to make some changes in the NHPRC. He also assigned me the project of exploring and implementing TQM, Total Quality Management, principles in NARA. TQM is sometimes called the 'Japanese Way' or the 'Deming Way.' It was how the Japanese auto industry grew up out of the ashes of World War II. And it's a very well-respected methodology and way of thinking about management. Japanese cars were selling well, and GM [General Motors] was losing market share. So people were asking: "What is their secret?" And they'd hear the word TQM. So it was becoming a buzzword that was beginning to filter into the government, as many trends do in the government. My work on TQM was a casualty of the Archivist/Deputy Archivist relationship dynamic. Because it was an internal NARA initiative but initiated without the buy-in of the Deputy Archivist, it had no support or future.

But also, what was developing at the very same time—and it's a little related, but not entirely—was strategic planning in the federal government. So it may be hard to believe, but that was a novel concept in the early '90s. And, as it often is in administrative and management things, the Defense Department had really been one of the innovators of this. So I remember that a retired admiral came and gave a presentation that really knocked the socks off a bunch of NARA leaders. And so NARA then, you know, was going to do strategic planning. And then during the Clinton administration and under Al Gore's "Reinventing Government" initiative that became a mandate—strategic planning. And Congress eventually passed legislation that required it. But the strategic planning sort of washed over TQM, and that assignment, like a number of assignments I was given, sort of dwindled away. And I think it was Dr. Wilson's honest effort to make good change, but those internal changes needed to be managed by his deputy archivist, because that's the person to whom he had given the authority. And I was not in a line position, so I was just this outlier. And I'm not saying it was malicious. I'm just saying it was, I think, that they didn't really know how to utilize me. And also, NARA was a very closed organization. I mean, the leaders had grown up with each other. Outsiders often would say, "It took me 20 years to feel accepted . . . I'm still a new person, new to the Archives or an outsider." And I don't—it's probably much less than it was back then. But I experienced a number of those kinds of things. Another responsibility I had was to write a "Managers Monthly" newsletter. So I would collect information from all the managers and then produce a monthly newsletter, which was, I think, pretty valuable, and especially out in the field where there was a sense of disconnect. So those are the kinds of things I did for him.

Stephanie: Do you know if they still create that Managers Monthly?

Jim: No. No.

Stephanie: They don't?

Jim: No.

Stephanie: Huh. I wonder why. That would just keep them abreast of things that are going on or share best practices or stories or . . .

Jim: Well, I think today, I don't—so I'm two years away from NARA. I don't know whether the ICN [Internal Communications Network] is still there, but there are so many new social media-based or computer-based ways to communicate. Back in the day, I mean, just think about it. There was no email. I mean, there was *no* email. So the only communication was to pick up the phone, which you're not going to do lightly with senior leaders—you know, a Director might talk to the Archivist, but the Archivist is not going to talk to lots of those reporting to him frequently—I mean, he just doesn't have the bandwidth to do that—or send out memos, you know, paper communications and all the limitations of that. So the Manager's Monthly was useful in its day. And, I think, newsletters are still valuable, but it would be a different form today.

Stephanie: Right. Yeah, we do have a lot of different newsletter-type communications that go out. You're right. But yeah, just that format has changed over time.

Jim: And maybe it's a point to say this—and here I might be showing my generational, whatever, stuck-in-the-mud-ness—but to me, the plethora of those communications diminishes the force of them. There's so much information in so many formats. And it seems to me, it would be smart to somehow minimize those or give authority to some and not to other areas. But my experience, too, is that younger people are used to that kind of plethora of inputs and can handle it maybe better and understand how to sift through it. But maybe it's a negative. I don't know.

Stephanie: Yeah, I can definitely see, like, you're just inundated with information nowadays, right? So it's either you shut down and you just don't read it anymore or, I guess, maybe you learn to be more selective in where you spend your time, right? Yeah.

Okay. So in your position as executive assistant to the Archivist, you were there from when? 1991 to about October of '94? Is that what you said?

Jim: Yes, I held that title officially until October 1993. Well, actually I was detailed to the Office of Public Affairs in October 1993, and so I effectively no longer served as Executive Assistant to the Boss, even though my title remained that for two years, I guess.

Stephanie: Okay. So I believe that the Archives II facility in College Park opened in 1994. Do you recall any of the planning and decisions and things surrounding the opening of that facility?

Jim: Yes. So, the election of Bill Clinton was an earthquake event in the Archives. I don't know whether it was his election that kind of created an opening for—there was some dissatisfaction with Don Wilson as Archivist. I honestly don't know all the details. I don't know if it was purely partisan, or if it had to do with other things. And there were some problems going on, internally, with the Archives that I don't think were his fault. There were some people that were misbehaving.

Anyways, in that mix of soup that was happening, some folks on the Hill, I would say, took advantage of the opportunity to make changes they wanted to make. One of which was, I think, to kind of behead the leadership of the Archives. And I don't know who all the targets were—it was Don Wilson, but it may have been Claudine and some others that were there. I don't either remember, or I may not be privy to all of that. But clearly, there was stuff going on.

When President Clinton was elected, meaning the transition from Republican administration to Democrat administration, and, I think, also a new majority on the Hill, then this was an opportunity for big change. And so, interestingly, the Deputy Archivist at the time was Ray Mosley, who was ultimately my boss at the Office of the Federal Register for about 15 years. But when Don Wilson left, instead of Ray being named Acting Archivist, Trudy Peterson, who was the Assistant Archivist for the National Archives—the archivist who was over the main body of historical records—was named Deputy Archivist and, therefore, Acting Archivist. And it's my understanding or belief, she was closely connected with certain parts of the Clinton administration. And that's not a negative thing. That's just, you know, any good bureaucrat would develop their political ties. That's necessary to operate well. But I think also, Trudy was very ambitious, hopeful of being named the Archivist of the United States. She would have been the first woman to that position. She was a strong leader and gifted. But ultimately—Trudy kind of opened the door, I would say, to the Clinton administration bringing political appointees in, which was a new thing to the Archives we'd never had. For most agencies in a transition, you've got a political person coming in during transition, and then you get all your political appointees. Well, NARA doesn't have political appointees, or didn't up until that point. And we got at least four over a period of two years. And some of them had significant positions in the Clinton campaign and were very rabid Clinton supporters. And again, I'm not saying that

negatively. I'm just saying, you know, they were all in on the Clinton agenda. And they were young, most of them, or not experienced in government either. So they were like me in that inexperience of the bureaucracy. But they were unlike me in that they had really strong political ties.

One of them moved into my office, and the gentleman and I who had been in that office, were moved downstairs into the Public Affairs office space, which was a very symbolic and real diminishment of our stature and authority, which is okay. But without changing—you know, I still carried that title. And for a while, I thought, this was going to be good. I was ready to serve Trudy. But it became very clear that she had identified me and Don Neal, who was the Director of External Affairs, as people she didn't want assisting her. And so both of us, literally, went downstairs and, eventually, the position of head of the public affairs office was assigned to another political appointee, Shirley—I'm forgetting her last name right off hand. That office already had a press officer, Susan Cooper, who had been there a long time and knew the agency thoroughly. So Shirley was kind of layered on top. And Shirley was a force. She wasn't going to be pushed around. And yet, I don't think she ultimately was very effective. She, too, was a bit of a bull in a China shop, as it affected NARA. And I think, ultimately, there was a sense among the career staff that “this, too, will pass.” I mean, people began to realize there was a lot of noise at the front end and, you know, there had to be kowtowing to it and appreciate it. And they did some things that were valuable. But most bureaucrats know they can outlast the political appointees. And I think there was a sense of that happening.

In the Public Affairs Office I had less to do, but I retained the editorship of the Manager's Monthly. We also put out the Annual Report, which at the time was a thick booklet reporting on the activities of each subunit of the National Archives. That, like many other sacrosanct parts of the agency's life, were dramatically transformed or eliminated as a result of the increasing availability of technology within the agency. But a highlight of my time in the Office of Public Affairs was planning the dedication of the Archives II building in College Park, Maryland. We planned, I think, a really spectacular event. That's one of the pleasures of my life. And yet, it was bittersweet, because I don't think that was appreciated. And it sort of capped for me kind of a period of disappointment, of where I was going to be at.

Stephanie: So that was done when you were kind of detailed to the Office of Public Affairs?

Jim: Yes, and that occurred for about a year. And then I was detailed over to the Office of the Federal Register. Actually, I was detailed twice. That office had some—I forget. Someone had left and so I was sent over to help. But I think honestly, I was a big whale that they didn't know what to do with! I mean, being a GS-15, they had to do something with me. And so this was

where they found a place for me. And I went over to OFR [Office of the Federal Register] and I, literally, moved from unit to unit to learn about the entire office. There were, I think, six units at the time, and I spent about a month in each unit, and I loved the work they were doing, and I really respected it. It felt like a place where all this noise that I'd been living with and around for two or three years was just not important. And at the end of the day, every workday, the Office of the Federal Register has to produce a book called the *Federal Register*. And it's a 150-page newspaper-style book. And having to get that done at the end of every day cuts through a lot of the nonsense because people there understand that when they're being told that someone needs something, they realize that they need it now, that's it's real. And so I have a lot of respect for those folks. They're really, really good. But they also are in an environment where they—you know, not a lot of people in the federal government see the product of their work every single day. And they produce not only the *Federal Register*, but they produce the Code of Federal Regulations and Presidential Papers volumes. So there were really tangible things that could be done, and it was a breath of fresh air to get into an environment where we were really producing something.

Stephanie: And in between there, you said though, you were at the Presidential Libraries, or you were . . .

Jim: Yeah. So this first time of service at the OFR was a detail, and I was still—I mean, there weren't any positions open at the Office of the Federal Register. It was a great opportunity to learn about it, and I think I helped them. But you know, what was the long-term play? And at that time, the Office of Presidential Libraries was headed by an Acting Director, Dick Jacobs, a long-time NARA employee, who had held various roles at senior levels. The Deputy Archivist for Presidential Libraries, Pat Borders, a long-time deputy, retired during that time. And I looked back to the effort I had made to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up [LAUGHS], after I left Senator Hatfield's office, and remembered it was to head up a Presidential Library. I just thought, what a wonderful place to land, so I applied for the Deputy position. And there was, actually, some interesting background to my being selected for that post. I've learned later that—and this is how I came to understand how I had been viewed in the agency—some people involved in that selection said, "I didn't realize how qualified you were," that, you know, I was the best candidate for that role. I was really well-suited by my experience, for being a Deputy Archivist in the Office of Presidential Libraries. So, I landed in a job I loved. And I was there for six months. And then, on a Friday [LAUGHS], I was called to the Archivist's office and told by him: "The Office of the Federal Register has a need for somebody to help them. And so we're going to detail you over to the Office of the Federal Register." And I said, "When?" They said, "Well, Monday."

Stephanie: Oh my gosh.

Jim: So clearly, there's a backstory, right? And, clearly, this was not a benign thing. I was being moved out. Honestly, I have some understanding, but I don't fully understand what went on. I think I crossed wires, crossed swords with the Director of the George H. W. Bush Library that was being organized at the time. There was a woman in the Office of Presidential Libraries who had a very, very strong political network with all the Presidential Libraries—and realize, Presidential Libraries are a kind of 500-pound gorilla in the room that is the National Archives, because the people that support those Presidential Libraries are people who have been in the senior positions in the White House. So even though, on paper, it's a subordinate organization within NARA, it's an outsized, powerfully outsized, organization. One Director had been communicating in backchannels with the woman in the central office. And I simply, from my perspective, told him that I wanted him to communicate through me or, at least, to be sharing the information he was sharing with her. That's the only thing that I know for sure. I know that irritated him. I don't know if that led to him getting people to have me moved, but I believe it was. Of course, maybe I wasn't doing a good job. I mean, I thought I was. I think I was. I was the new kid on the block in the Office of Presidential Libraries. But that was a very sad event for me, because I really thought I had landed, finally, in a position where I was happy and where I could make a difference. But I believe in God's control over things, and that's not what it was to be, but it was a hard pill to swallow.

Stephanie: Okay. Yeah, especially since you mentioned at some point wanting to become a Director of the Nixon Library. And so that was kind of a gateway into being able to do that. And so, yeah, I don't know what happened there.

Okay. So then you said from there, you went over to the Office of the Federal Register.

Jim: [TAKES A PHONE CALL] Sorry.

Stephanie: That's okay. So when you did go over to the Office of the Federal Register, what was your position there?

Jim: Well, it was a detail for two months. And then I got paperwork that created me as the Special Assistant to the Director. So, once again, I'm in that supporting role with a very poorly defined job description, and the kind of position that not everybody is sure they understand, and not one that had been there before. And this is not a history about me. It's my history at NARA. But I will say, I think one of the learnings I've had about myself is that my gift is supporting someone in a leadership position. I get how to do that well, I guess I'd say. And so

that's well-suited for me, whereas being in the top job maybe is not my gift. There are a lot of special talents a person needs for that. And maybe I would have liked to have held that role but, probably, I wouldn't have been as good in it. And the fact that I was not able to hold on to the position in the Office of Presidential Libraries—you know, another person with a little more political . . . little "p" skills [USES AIR QUOTES] maybe could have done it. So a person in my position in something like this, again, I had to—it was really important for me to prove to the office that I'm not a threat, particularly to the senior managers there. Again, it's a very small organization, so as you climb the ladder, the positions get much, much more competitive and, so again, my M.O. [modus operandi] has been to just go out and get to know the people and, you know, get to understand their jobs so that when I'm communicating with the boss, I'm sharing information they may not know, and I'm sharing accurate information. I'm not just making judgments off the top of my head. And when I'm responsible for telling people what to do, passing on directions from the leader, that I get how it impacts them and can maybe encourage us not to make policy decisions that are not smart. And you can only do that by really understanding the organization at the street level. And so that's what I did. And that's, I think, how I built cred [credibility] with the organization and with the staff. You know, not everybody likes you. And my job isn't to be liked, but it is at one level to be liked in the sense that that helps the Director. If they feel like a friend, if they feel like they can share with me, and I'm not going to immediately turn around and say word for word to the Director what I was told, but maybe say, "Hey, there might be some problems going on in that particular office or with that manager." And again, I'm not trying to toot my horn. I'm just saying that the fact that I stayed in that role that long, I think, is an indication that it was a necessary role in the organization, and that I was probably well-placed to be doing it.

Stephanie: Yeah, it sounds like by making those connections, you were helping the Director and the program itself make better, more-informed decisions. So that would be very vital, I would think.

Jim: Hopefully.

Stephanie: Yeah, so then you were at the Office of the Federal Register for . . . how long was it? 26 years or so?

Jim: 25 years.

Stephanie: 25 years. Okay. So kind of taking a step back for a minute, can you just give a very brief overview of what the Office of the Federal Register does, because I feel like it's very

misunderstood sometimes. And so, maybe future people reading this transcript will get a better idea of what it is that they do.

Jim: That's a great question. I wish the office had been called the Office of the Code of Federal Regulations. I think that would solve a lot of the mystery. So the Code of Federal Regulations contains all the regulations that federal agencies issue to implement the laws that Congress passes. So our government is founded on "We the People," who agreed to a constitution, and we separated our powers. And one of the powers is to legislate. We gave that power to Congress. Congress passes laws. We gave the power to execute the laws to the executive branch. And in executing the laws, some of those agencies are given the authority to write rules, which actually have the force and effect of law. So if you don't pay your taxes under IRS [Internal Revenue Service] rules, you're going to go to jail, right? If you violate EPA's [Environmental Protection Agency] environmental regulations, you can be fined or go to jail. So rules and regulations (those words have the same meaning) have the force and effect of law, but they're written within the executive agency. And by 1935, the federal government was growing in size, and a lot of these regulatory agencies formed to combat the effects of the Depression were starting to issue regulations in areas of our economy and society in which the U.S. Government had never acted before. They had regulated railroads for a while already, and there was the Sherman Antitrust Act. But a lot of the newer New Deal agencies were doing a different kind of regulating. And there grew to be a real concern that this was extra-legal, perhaps even unconstitutional. How is it that an executive agency was writing what was, in effect, a law? And another concern was that regulation-writing was being done in the dark. Now in the legislative process we can go to the Capitol. We can watch what goes on in Congress. We can write our congressmen. But when a bureaucrat in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the AAA, was writing rules affecting farmers, who elected that person? And can I call that person on the phone? Can I write that person a letter? What obligation do they have to the citizenry? And also, some of those regulations were actually being written almost in the dark. So the regulated population didn't even know what they were, but were being called on the carpet for violations of regulations that were unknown to them.

The net result of this was that Congress passed the Federal Register Act, which declared that henceforth, and first of all, we're going to collect all the regulations in one place, the Office of the Federal Register, then (as a result of an amendment to the act two years later) we're going to codify all those regulations in a new series, the Code of Federal Regulations. That's why I think it would have been better to call the office the Code of Federal Regulations Office.

Second, the act declared that from now on, before any agency issues a regulation that takes force, it must be published publicly in a new government publication, the *Federal Register*, so

that citizens can have access to it. And then in 1948, that law was further amended by the Administrative Procedure Act that said, "Not only do you have to publicize those rules, but the process by which they're going to be created has to include notice to the public and an opportunity for the public to provide comments on proposed rules." So now, when the EPA issues a regulation, they have to first issue it as a proposed rule, publish it in the *Federal Register*, give a period of time for the public to comment, and then address those comments when publishing the final regulation with the date it will take effect. And when the final regulation is published, it is codified in the Code of Federal Regulations. There are so many regulations issued by agencies that the *Federal Register* is published every single day of the week. And you can go to the *Federal Register* and look at what regulations are being proposed and what regulations are being finalized. The Code of Federal Regulations now consists of about 280 volumes of regulations—a huge volume of regulations, and we're constantly publishing those. That's the primary duty of the [Office of the] Federal Register. We had some additional duties: publishing papers of the President and publishing the laws that Congress passed, actually binding them in the Statutes at Large, which is the compilation of all U.S. laws. But the primary duty is that related to federal regulations.

Stephanie: Okay. And so then what were you doing within that office?

Jim: So the office is headed by the Director of the Federal Register, which is a statutory position. The Office of the Federal Register's Administrative Committee—it's kind of an unusual animal—consists of the Archivist of the United States, a representative of the Department of Justice, and what used to be the Public Printer, now the Director of the Government Publishing Office. It used to be the Government Printing Office or GPO. So all through its history, the Office of the Federal Register has had this very tight partnership with the Government Printing Office, originally to print. We would gather all this information, and then every day, literally, a human being would walk this paper over to the Government Printing Office, and they would typeset it and print the *Federal Register*. And then they also printed the Code of Federal Regulations.

One of the interesting parts of the OFR is that, historically, it had a greater sense of connection to GPO than it did to NARA. NARA supplied its administrative support, handled personnel matters, was our pay master, and wrote the rules by which we would operate internally. But in terms of the policy of the Federal Register, that was not NARA's job, except for the Archivist who was one of three people who—and this continues today—to be the actual policy-making authorities. The Director has a pretty significant role, as well. He's also the Secretary of that administrative body. So the bottom line is, he is the Director of this Federal Register operation or process—system.

As his Executive Assistant, I was doing all sorts of things on his behalf. I did a lot of writing. Every Director I've worked with has had a senior team, usually three or four people. And I always was a member of that team and sat in on usually weekly meetings. So we were planning. We were executing. There were a number of times when I was called on to act as one of the unit chiefs when we had a vacancy. I served as the Acting Director briefly during one absence of a Director. I also had a really interesting role, which at first seemed insignificant, but—which turned out to be very interesting—related to the OFR's involvement in the classified activities of the government. This involvement wasn't because we publish any classified material—we don't—but because back in the era of the nuclear threat, Cold War, if there was going to be a disaster, then there was the need to gather federal agencies to a location where they could continue government operations. And obviously, that structure of operations was a classified activity. That took on a whole new meaning after 9/11. So, I can share a little bit of that later, perhaps.

Stephanie: Okay. Yeah. So was that when you were Acting Director or . . . ?

Jim: Yes, I was the person who was designated as the “continuity of government” person from the OFR. and I had a top secret clearance and access to classified materials and spaces.

Stephanie: Okay. Okay.

Jim: Yeah. But I handled our staffing, and matters like performance planning, reporting, budget, accounting, requisitions. Another thing that I think would be significant to touch on is my role as project manager for what became eDOCS, our electronic editing and publishing system. So where I really experienced the transition of analog to digital was at the Office of the Federal Register. I lived that change and was pretty deeply involved in that.

Stephanie: So what did that entail?

Jim: So when I got to the Office, there was one automated process, and it was basically the equivalent of you still doing all your work on paper, but keeping track of it in a tracking system. So we had a computer that was doing tracking of the paper flow, but the paper was flowing absolutely 100 percent manually and as paper. People were using stampers to stamp documents, and different colored pens to do editing and the like. By the time I left, we were receiving documents through an online portal. We were publishing 100 percent electronically with no paper and publishing it online, although we still have to, by law, publish a paper-bound volume. But we went from 25,000 subscriptions to that book, to less than 1,500 by the time I left. And those 1,500 were only libraries. Nobody was getting the *Federal Register*, except

online. And so now, federalregister.gov is the go-to place. Also, the Code of Federal Regulations process, which literally used to be cut and paste—cut out the language from the *Federal Register*, paste it on pages, send it over to GPO, where it would be typeset to create the books—that codification and publishing process is 100 percent digital. The regulatory language out of the *Federal Register* was physically transposed into the Code of Federal Regulations when I got to the OFR. By the time I left, the office was absolutely 100 percent doing electronic editing of those books. And all of those books are now online, those 286 books. And they're not only online as static volumes, but they are changed daily. So every change that happens in them, because rules become effective each day of the week, is available. And you can go back and see what the status of a regulation was on some date in the past. It's truly a Herculean effort, an unsung effort, a critically important effort. It's one that anybody who's involved in the regulatory processes of the government, and people in the legal profession, understand the significance of it.

Stephanie: It just seems so much more efficient and handier to be able to go online to view all of this.

Jim: And the staffing went from 120 people to about 50 now, and we're doing double, maybe even triple the amount of work in terms of pages published—tripled the workload and cut the staffing by more than 50 percent. It's a living example of the benefits of technology. But we fought hard for a lot of those wins, both in bureaucratic terms and in figuring out the technological solutions. In my experience, everybody outside the process underestimated how complex what we do is. I've explained it to you. Maybe you feel like you understand it. I hope you do. But the twists and turns that are involved in that are really significant. And it takes place in a highly regulated environment—think of a bank that is changing its processes or a retail business that's deciding to upgrade. You know, they do it for efficiency purposes. What if the law constrained them in many ways as to what they could do. So not only are you building a new system, but it has to also comport to a whole host of laws. And that's what we had. We had our struggles with contractors and others in that process.

Stephanie: That sounds like a very significant undertaking. Were there any lessons learned once you implemented this?

Jim: Oh, boy. You know, I think there's a swing from one extreme to another in all of this. Let me give you one example. Organizations can be integrated horizontally, or they can be integrated vertically. And both are good solutions, but both have their downsides. So inevitably, in a horizontally organized organization, somebody is going to come along at one point and say, "The real problem in this organization is that we're not linked vertically." So they'll go through a

reorganization effort, and now you've got a vertical organization. And that works well, and it fixes the problems associated with horizontal integration. But eventually, the problems with the vertical organization will be identified, because you don't have the horizontal problems anymore. And then the brilliant person will come along and say, "What we really need is greater horizontal integration and less vertical." And so it'll go back. So it's not that one's wrong. It's just that both have their limitations, and the operations of it within the federal government was like that.

So let's reflect upon how technology came into our office lives. It came in with a computer on somebody's desk or a fancy electric typewriter or whatever. And who became the experts dealing with that technology? Well, the people were kind of geeky, you know, who liked that stuff. At the National Archives they were archivists who had this skill set, or in other agencies they were people who were specialists in a particular occupation, but they also had this extra interest or talent, right? So what was really good about that model is that those people understood their organizations intimately, so they would not make mistakes in designing technical solutions, because they would remember, "Oh, on Wednesdays, we have to take a left. So I've got to build in that left turn on Wednesdays into this program." Whereas, the contractor knew nothing about it, and would just say, "Oh, here's a one-solution-fits-all" or was dependent upon subject matter experts not forgetting to include a particular need when defining requirements.

But the problem with homegrown techies is they are eventually out of their depth. And as a computer science guru, you needed people who had a lot more smarts about what was available, [who] had their eyes out into the field, because the in-house techies were operating sort of on the basis of, "Oh, hey, I read in *Time* magazine, that there's this new computer program; I wonder if we could use it?" Well, that's not a very good way to develop a system. So now we began to hire people who were computer specialists. But the loss there is, like I just said, they didn't have the subject matter expertise. So now you have to have someone outside the agency come into it and interview the expert in the agency about what they do. Then that person goes to the programmer and tries to repeat everything. The programmer designs something, brings it back through that person to the group, and they sit down and go, "Well, you didn't make it go left on Wednesdays." And they acquire disdain for the programmers and the program being developed. The sharing-translating-implementing-reviewing process goes back and forth. And so it's just such a laborious, slow process. I often thought we should temporarily backfill some of our subject matter experts, put them full-time on the job of communicating directly with the programmers, and then they could get it right earlier. And then when they roll out the thing, the subject matter experts would resume their jobs, because it was easier to teach people the job to do for three months than it was to teach this person

whose last job was designing an accounting system, and now they're at the Federal Register trying to design a publishing system. So in a perfect world, that would have been my solution.

And what happened then—and I think this happened all throughout the government in different time frames—agencies began to say, "Oh my goodness. In Office A, they've purchased IBM computers. In Office B, they've purchased Apple computers. In Office C, they've purchased Comcast computers. And these systems don't talk to each other, and we have to support all three. It's crazy—and no way to run a railroad. So we're going to build an office on top of all this—Office of Chief Information Officers [OCIOs]—who will now manage all this. And they'll scoop up responsibility for operating all these systems. Well, first, we're going to have a single platform. Everybody's going to use the same machines. Again, it's a necessary thing, but it's how you do it, right?

Eventually, Congress mandated CIO offices, and they have become very powerful offices. But remember, they are staff offices, not operations offices, and remember when I talked earlier about staff positions that should learn to support rather than direct? CIO offices are, to me, some of the worst offenders. They are, in my experience, very cocky, and some are very poorly informed. Clearly, I'm giving you my experience at NARA. They don't have the best people, although sometimes they have very good people. And they're very "directive-oriented" with an attitude of, "You're working for us. You have to do this and that." Admittedly, they've got some legal structures they have to abide by, reporting and similar requirements, including all the procurement rules. I get that. But that's something you have to learn how to do well. That's your occupation. That's your calling. You can't just say, "Because it's hard, I'm just going to make you work for me." And I think that happened at NARA in a really bad way. The development of the Electronic Records Archive (ERA) was really a poster child example of things not being organized well. So I don't know whether I'm answering your question. But I'm laying the foundation for explaining that in some ways we, at the OFR, were fortunate in the development of our electronic systems.

The OFR's partner agency, the GPO is basically a factory, a printing factory. So any systems being developed had to work "on-the-ground" in an environment in which those processes were tested again and again, every time something was printed. When they brought technology in, at the end of the day, you look at a printed page—Does it look right or not? Is the system printing right or not? So it was very easy to, well not easy, but the process of bringing that in was validated by ground-truth on a daily basis. And they were a very big organization, with a lot of resources whose electronic material was being funded by the income from the *Federal Register* "page rate" paid by the publishing agencies. The agencies pay to publish in the *Federal Register* a page rate that goes into a pot of money, and that money then is being used to

support the publication of the *Federal Register*. We were not dependent upon appropriations or budget decisions within NARA to fund our development. We were kind of shielded from NARA's bureaucracy until, maybe, the last five years of my tenure, when NARA became much more aggressive about wanting to be in control of the eDOCS system. And that was a very dangerous thing, because eDOCS is the system that made the *Federal Register* able to be published every day and to be put online every day. And it took some scary events, I think, for some of NARA's IT [information technology] people to appreciate that we weren't just fighting for our territory—it wasn't just a turf battle. We were fighting for good operations and the good of the people who need the *Federal Register* and Code of Federal Regulations information.

Stephanie: Yeah, it sounds very complex, right? And you have to have the right people talking to the other right people, I guess.

Jim: Yes.

Stephanie: That doesn't always happen, does it? No.

Jim: No. I mean, that's life.

Stephanie: Yeah, that's true. Well, I would be remiss if I didn't bring up the year 2020 in terms of the last Presidential election that took place. We really started to see the OFR in the media more often, and I think, again, people didn't really understand what the Office did. But do you have any comments on that and the impact of what was going on at that time in terms of the certificates and things like that?

Jim: So, obviously, I've not even touched on the fact that a very interesting responsibility the Office of the Federal Register is to be, basically, the administrative office for the Electoral College, which simply means that every four years when this Electoral College process happens, we are the office that receives the certificates and passes them on to the Congress, if Congress doesn't receive theirs directly. It's just very interesting, and we kind of look forward to it. It's a fun role. Every election, I would say, there have been some specious certificates, you know, usually just sent by some crazy person somewhere who literally has mental health issues and is sending in a certificate saying they've been elected President. We actually keep those certificates or have them vetted. But the real certificates are those that carry the seal of the appropriate official in the state, usually the secretary of state, sometimes the governor. And our legal counsel is the person who directs these operations under the director of the Federal Register. I actually was in transition during the 2020 election cycle. I left the office in January 2021, so I missed some of the action.

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: I just would say, for most people, this Electoral College is an entirely new thing that they've never been aware of, even during election season. But for those of us involved in it, we completely understand and are familiar with this routine operation that had been going on from our office since the '50s. And before that, the State Department handled it. I mean, there's just no question in our minds about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of various certificates and how people have tried to manipulate it. And what I don't think we ever envisioned is that officials involved in the process would be perpetrators of a political attempt to do something based on partisan political reasons. So I guess I'm showing where I'm coming down on this. But I just, I don't think there's any possibility of misunderstanding the legal situation, the legitimacy of the process. And now I'm—I wasn't in the states where there were allegations of voter fraud so that, you know, I can't speak to that, but I just think the attempts to produce incorrect, false certificates is just so obvious. It's almost a no-brainer that thinking the system is broken has been able to be continued only by the repetition of lies. Just repeating something, if people are saying it so often, it's got to be true, you know? But there's no "there" there, from my perspective.

Stephanie: Yeah. So with all of this happening and swirling around the Office of the Federal Register, was there any change in maybe communicating to the public on what the role of the office actually is and that this is a routine process and, well, anything like that?

Jim: If you go back to the Gore/Bush election in 2000, our legal counsel at the time sort of took on the title, Dean of the Electoral College. And he appeared on news broadcasts, and we were really aggressive about putting out information. We very much saw ourselves as an educational organization and, I think, wanted to be that. But the controversy was in the ballots, not in the validity of the states' certificates of voting results. Our process was never called into question. That particular legal counsel had left the office by the next election, which was less controversial. And then our budget and staffing resources were diminished, and we just didn't have the staff to do more than just manage the paperwork. What we did do, though, prior to that election was really tighten up our internal processes and document them. And I'm thankful for that in light of what happened in 2020. We now had a very well-documented statement of what we would do and where materials would be kept and how they would be processed. So I think that was fortunate, because it could have been perceived that there was some manipulating we were doing or bias that we had, had that process not been written down beforehand. We didn't change the process, just documented it better.

Stephanie: Right.

Jim: So I just don't think we had the capability within our office to do the kind of public relations/public education work on behalf of the Electoral College process—you've got to realize there are only a very few people involved in that. And it's not a heavy lift, but it's not like 400 people are available to go on *Meet the Press* or design a media strategy. [LAUGHS]

Stephanie: Yeah. Okay. That's interesting. I was wondering if it was more about changing or better communicating what the role was and—yeah, not that it's going to change your mission or your policy per se. It's just communicating.

Jim: And also, we can't take a position on whether the Electoral College should or [should] not exist. Right? We're agnostic. We are just saying, right now, it's a part of the Constitution. It's part of the law. And so we have to implement it. Because a lot of people were proposing to eliminate the Electoral College, we had to be careful that we didn't step into that policy debate and tried not to.

Stephanie: Okay. Yeah. Trying to stay nonpolitical, nonpartisan, non-everything, right?

Jim: Yeah.

Stephanie: Yeah. Hey, I'm seeing I have one more minute left on the interview, but I was wondering if you would have just a quick chance to talk about . . . You kind of mentioned the classified records earlier . . . if you wanted to add anything about that?

Jim: It might be useful to spend some more time later.

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: And I need to really be careful how I speak about that, because it has classified aspects to it. So . . .

Stephanie: Sure. Okay.

Jim: I want to be careful.

Stephanie: Okay. Do you want me to set up another time for us to talk?

Jim: That'd be fine, unless it's too much.

Stephanie: Unless it's too much? What do you mean?

Jim: Well, you were expecting an hour and a half, and if it turns into three hours, it may be more than you want [LAUGHS]. I'm not sure that what I have to share is all that significant, you know.

Stephanie: No. [LAUGHS] It's more about trying not to take up too much of *your* time. But if you're willing to set up another time, then I'm more than willing to do that. And so, how about I go ahead and stop the recording now, and then I can send you some possible dates and times that might work to continue the conversation?

Jim: Good. Sounds good.

[END RECORDING PART ONE]

[BEGIN RECORDING PART TWO - AUGUST 16, 2023]

Stephanie: Okay. Hi again. Thanks for participating in the oral history project. I'm here again with Jim Hemphill for part two. Today is August 16th, 2023. And I'm Stephanie Reynolds. First, I just want to recap what we covered in our last interview session, and you can correct me if I've got anything wrong, but I just wanted to do a quick recap. So last time we talked about your experiences as the executive assistant to Senator Hatfield, who was a big promoter of NARA gaining its independence. And then as you joined NARA, I believe after 17 years, then you joined NARA as the executive assistant to the Archivist of the United States Don Wilson and some acting positions as well. And then you were detailed to the Office of Public Affairs and then to the Office of Presidential Libraries, where you were the deputy archivist. And then you landed in the Office of the Federal Register, where you were for 25 years until your retirement. You were an Executive Assistant to the Director there, and you also helped with moving the *Federal Register* online. So hopefully that was a good recap. Is there anything that you want to cycle back to or to clarify based on what I just said or anything else that you thought of, you know, in between today and your previous interview?

Jim: No, I think that's a good summary. I'll stand by what I said.

Stephanie: Okay. I want to make sure I got it right, too. Okay. Well, one of the things I wanted to ask about was the National Archives Foundation and the establishment of the Foundation . . . what its purpose was, what your involvement in it was. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Jim: Yes. So I would say in about the 1992 or '93 range, the Archivist Don Wilson was very interested in obtaining support for the National Archives in the private sector—the idea of public-private partnerships was growing in popularity at that time. And, of course, coming out of the Presidential Library world (Dr. Wilson had been the head of the Gerald Ford Presidential Library), he had experience and a lot of knowledge about those kinds of arrangements, because most of the libraries have a foundation that provides a lot of support, both financial but also what I call small "P" political support that is very useful to the libraries. Dr. Wilson felt that the National Archives itself could use that kind of supportive group. And he, of course, was well connected with some prominent people and historians and others, and with people with money.

So early on in my tenure with him, this was one thing that he asked me to work on. We prepared a charter for the Foundation, and we reached out to potential charter members. There were several meetings with a variety of people early on exploring the willingness of these folks to chip in some money to go to their networks and look for additional resources which would support things like public programs, major exhibits, speakers, and to lobby on the [Capitol] Hill and explain at budget time why the Archives was a valuable investment. This Foundation continued to develop after Dr. Wilson left and was an important legacy of his tenure because the Foundation had made possible a number of exhibits and physical improvements to NARA facilities since it was established. Once John Carlin was appointed Archivist to succeed Wilson, I was no longer a part of that, but I thought it was an interesting piece to explain that really the initiative for that came from Don Wilson. And then, of course, the Foundation has been a significant part of the Archives' public programming since then.

Stephanie: Interesting. So the model for the Foundation was based off of the Presidential Library Foundation?

Jim: Yes. I would say that was a pretty good model. There were some differences, but it provided the understanding of what could happen and how it could be set up.

Stephanie: Okay. What goes into creating a charter, the initial charter for the Foundation?

Jim: I think I have a copy of it here. I'm not sure. [LAUGHS]

Stephanie: Really? [LAUGHS] Okay.

Jim: No, I can't put my hands on it real quickly. But it was an agreement about who would do what and the extent to which we would rely on private resources. And then, of course, any time you get into the governmental space, you're dealing with regulations governing the expenditure of funds. And one has to be very careful about giving people benefits or preferences not available generally based on their involvement. It could be as simple as bringing somebody in for a special tour. I don't think that would cross any kinds of lines. But if you're beginning to give significant gifts to people that use public resources, you know, you can't use appropriated funds for that. But sometimes there is a place for that kind of thing—promoting the organization or funding things—that either the Archives didn't have the money for, or would be prohibited from using appropriated funds for. So all of that needed to be laid out and clarified. And the charter laid out how often the group would meet, how it was organized, who would be in charge, you know, how they would relate to the Archivist, because it wasn't a statutory organization—an organization set up by law.

Stephanie: Okay. Was there a board then with it, too?

Jim: Well, initially that was the whole Foundation. But what was envisioned, and what developed was that the public was invited to become members, much like those who join "Friends of the National Zoo."

Stephanie: Okay. Interesting.

Jim: You know, in more recent years, prominent individuals—a name I'll mention is Cokie Roberts, the journalist, was a huge supporter of the Archives, and she, behind the scenes, was on the Foundation. And there have been others on the Foundation. I think maybe the author, David McCullough was on the board. And then there have been some philanthropists on it.

Stephanie: Interesting. And you said that it was created around 1992 or so?

Jim: Yeah, those foundational documents were in that time period.

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: They're in the records of the Archives.

Stephanie: Yeah, I'll have to check that out. So that was mainly for, like, getting public support for exhibits and public programming, you said?

Jim: Yes.

Stephanie: Yeah. Okay, great. Another thing that I wanted to follow up on was you were providing weekly updates to some management officials, something like that? Could you go into more detail on that?

Jim: Yeah. So it's kind of interesting that in all of my roles at the Archives, when I've supported the Archivist or the Director, at one point or other, they felt a need for some kind of regular communication, either within the whole organization or within the leadership sector of the organization. The first iteration of this was with Dr. Wilson, who created what was called the Managers Monthly. Remember, this was pre-email, pre-cell phones, and the way people got information within the organization was, you know, inter-office deliveries in reusable manila envelopes—we called them “holey Joes” because they had holes in them to see and not throw one away if it wasn't empty. If you weren't on the distribution list to receive something, there could be lots of information you were missing. And if your supervisor didn't provide that information, there weren't other means to get that easily. So communication was very different 30 years ago than, of course, it is now.

And the Archivist felt that he wanted to make sure that his managers and supervisors—and that would be down to, I think, the GS-12 level—would get this newsletter weekly or monthly. Initially, it was a monthly newsletter, and it contained just brief paragraphs about important things that were going on, both up and down the organization. So the Archivist would be sharing information about what he was doing, including what he was going to be doing that month. And we would solicit information from the various units to share up the hierarchy telling what they were doing to be able to share it with the organization. And I got super great feedback on that as a really smart thing the Archivist had done, because there just was—if you ever did surveys, they would always talk about poor communication. Probably every survey in every organization, that's the number-one thing. But that was number one definitely in the expression of concerns. So this was a really useful thing that I thought was a smart, smart thing to do. It continued on through one of the Acting Archivists, and then after I left, it wasn't carried on.

But when I got over to the Office of Federal Register, at some point—I believe it was when Ray Mosley became Director—he asked me to prepare a similar thing, which was called The OFR Directors Weekly, and it, again, was a gathering of information. And I guess the reason I'm—I

mean, lots of organizations have newsletters, but I think my position as being at the table with the senior leadership when decisions were made and my kind of being out there on the floor with people, which happened both at the National Archives Building and at the Office of the Federal Register, gave the Weekly a little more credibility. And it was a little more substantive than many newsletters I've seen. So it wasn't just, you know "Jim had a birthday; Mary had a baby." But it was also, primarily—I mean, we tried to cover some of those things, but it was pretty substantive. And we were really attempting to make everybody better equipped to do the things they needed to be doing. So I really enjoyed that role.

Stephanie: Yeah, you said that they stopped it after you left. I don't remember when they would have stopped doing that, if they would have done anything similar?

Jim: There was an earlier version, now that you pressed me a little bit. Back, I'd say in the early '70s maybe, or sometime in that timeframe, there had been an organ like that that had gone out in the National Archives, and so that was one of the reasons people remembered that and liked that it was being renewed. I think that was part of the impetus that we—that used to be a really good means of communication that we don't have anymore. So I think it's like lots of electronic newsletters. I mean, it played its role during the time that it was in place. Whether or not it's been replaced by other useful things, I mean, certainly it has, but that was one specific kind of thing that served a good purpose. Oh, another point to make is that when staff were contributing news for the *Managers Monthly*, it was really kind of one of the only times that the managers down to that level of supervisor, I think, were made to feel like they were part of what was going on. So much else was just top down. And this was a bit more saying, "We want to involve you in the decision-making." And so we're specifically not sending it out to folks below you, not because we don't want that information spread, but we're respecting the roles you have as a supervisor, and you deserve to kind of have insight. And then, you know, they could share it with others if they wanted to.

Stephanie: Was this being sent to regional managers?

Jim: Yes. Yes. That was the other thing. That's another reason why I think it was particularly useful, because it was a way to create the sense, you know, of "One NARA." We didn't use those terms back then, but . . .

Stephanie: Yeah.

Jim: . . . create that sense of we're one agency. And [CROSS TALKING].

Stephanie: Do you think it . . . [CROSS TALKING]. Go ahead.

Jim: No, I was just going to say, it also really illustrated to me how diverse the mission of the Archives is and how difficult, in some ways, it is to attempt to find a unified mission outside of the unity of administrative support functions that has to be there.

Stephanie: Do you think for what you were putting out, the monthly and then the weekly, do you think it took someone with your type of personality? You seem to be one that, regardless of where or what position you're in, you like to go out and meet the staff and talk to them and learn about things, whether it was always appreciated or not. But you seem like you were that type of person. Do you think that's what helped make that such a success?

Jim: Yeah. Yeah. But I mean, I think lots of people have those gifts. But if you're going to create something like that, you should staff it with a person that, you know, can do it in an appropriate way. Because of the fact that those types of communications that come out from the main office can be perceived as fluff sheets and nothing substantive, and so they aren't really useful means of communicating. So that's why it was important, I think, to have that. I wasn't—and the Archivist and the Director were not simply trying to propagandize, they were also trying to make this organization a more holistic, well-functioning up-and-down kind of organization.

Stephanie: Okay. Well, in this way, you're getting other perspectives that maybe you wouldn't have heard initially, and you're sharing those perspectives through the newsletter-type thing. So . . . yeah. Today, I'm sure that you're familiar with the ICN [Internal Collaboration Network].

Jim: Uh huh.

Stephanie: And it seems like things are shared through there nowadays. I don't know if it's agency-wide, or if it was just within [the] Records Management [Division], that we have the Friday Roundup. And so there are just emails that kind of have a summary of what's going on, what staff are working on. So we do have different avenues of communication. But I don't know. What do you think of those types of communication, like the ICN or sending out mass emails?

Jim: Well, I think this is generational. So you may be getting a generational take on this. I like to know what the official organ is, and then that's the thing I can go to and count on. And as these things are multiplied, and there's a plethora of them—what I was concerned about is that people would be putting up critical information at places to which other people were not going. And unless you tell people “You must see this, you must read this thing, you must go to this site

once a week,” you have no guarantee it is seen. There's a large swath of people that just, for whatever reason—they're too busy, they're not interested, they don't know about it—are not going to see things. So when you do that, you know, you have to have multiple ways of communicating. I know that I felt, towards the end of my career, that the agency was putting things up on the ICN, and then we were being told to go to the ICN to get that, where I don't think that was an effective way at the time, at least, or the best way. Some people were using it as the official place to put things, and others were not. So I think it's growing pains. You know, as we moved into this whole world we're in, we had to learn how to do it differently. But it's always dangerous once you get a cell phone, once you get something, and you start using it, to assume everybody else does it. In my personal life, you know, things that happen, I'm not on—I don't have a Facebook page. But for a lot of people, that's how they communicate news. And so they send it out on Facebook and presume that the whole world knows it. I've often found I have surprising gaps of knowledge about a good friend, maybe they got married, or something important happened in their life that I didn't know about. And so I think it's similar to that, that if communicators aren't careful to know their whole audience, they can miss some of that audience. Those aren't very profound, but it's just . . .

Stephanie: Yeah, I totally agree. I mean, everyone has their preferred method for putting out information or receiving information, and so you may be having gaps in there. And who's receiving that message? I'm the same as you. I don't have Facebook either. And so, you know, I have family members that forget I'm not on Facebook. And so they share all these things, and then I'm the last one to find out. Right? So there are pros and cons to technology, social media, and all of that stuff today—methods of information.

Jim: Yeah.

Stephanie: Another thing I wanted to circle back on . . . there was a study that, I believe, you conducted for the NHPRC. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Jim: The NHPRC is the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The Commission supports the publication of non-governmental documentary materials, and they provide grants to small groups that have editing and archival projects. It's a very small commission that has, I think, or used to have a budget of about \$12 million. Its budget was always at risk. When created it was placed under the auspices of the National Archives. And so my knowledge of the NHPRC started back in my days working for Senator Hatfield. The Commission has a Senate member and a House member and a member of the Supreme Court, and some really interesting people as members of the Commission. Senator Hatfield was the Senate member, and I would go with him to meetings, or I would attend on his behalf. Those

meetings, I think, were quarterly. So by the time I got to the Archives, it was a Commission that I was familiar with, kind of surprisingly. Senator Hatfield had been a very strong supporter of that Commission's budget. During the Reagan years and in subsequent administrations, it has frequently been zeroed out in the annual budget submission to Congress. And then it's somebody on the Hill that has been the savior of the Commission's budget. And Senator Hatfield was that savior for many, many budget cycles. So it was a Commission I knew about. Shortly either before or after I arrived, the Commission got a new Executive Director, Jerry George, a real energetic Director. Incidentally, during the time I was with Senator Hatfield, the Commission's Director was Frank Burke, who was Acting Archivist after Bob Warner, the father of NARA's independence, retired. I had worked with Frank Burke on the Commission. Anyways, Jerry George felt that their grant processes needed attention. And so I spent about six months working, interviewing, meeting with the staff, meeting with grantees, meeting with people in the historical community about how the Commission was functioning and how it could function better. I produced a bunch of recommendations, and they were implemented, which gave me a great deal of satisfaction, not only personally, but because the Commission's processes were improved. And Jerry was very supportive, and the Archivist was very supportive when that report came in.

But one of the things I wanted to mention is, even in that world, the electronic, the digital-world era was beginning to make an impact. Documentary editing involves reviewing, annotating, and publishing material in large hardbound volumes, such as the huge number of volumes of the Papers of Woodrow Wilson, the Papers of George Washington, and the papers of other significant Founders [Founding Fathers] or important people in our history. Well, those are very labor-intensive efforts, and they involve printing, and they involve all that goes into producing books, a lot of which is not adding anything to the scholarship necessary to produce them. It's just that once the scholarship is done, there is a lot of work putting it in a format that researchers can use. Well, now we have, you know, things are moving into being created in digital mode. Computers were being brought into that process, and in two ways: one is you could digitize old stuff, but secondly, new stuff was not being created in paper. And so a lot of small archival and historical organizations out in the states were grappling with that. They might have this neat collection, some small archives or in college or universities, and think "wouldn't it be neat to digitize that and have it available for their researchers that way?" And so they would come to the NHPRC for grant money. But the time of the life cycle of the development of these new editorial ideas was like back when VCRs and Betamax were being developed for videotape. There needed to be a determination, you know, about what are going to be the standards? And so the NHPRC was pretty deeply involved in helping form what the future was going to look like in that area of documentary editing and archival work. So that was what that was all about.

Stephanie: Wow. That's a lot. So, what is the intent of the Commission? Is it so that they're providing grants to enable research that people want to do that they wouldn't be able to do otherwise? This will help them get that done?

Jim: It's to provide the documentary evidence that researchers would need. The Commission used to be called the National Historical Publications Commission, and it was really formed to gather the papers of the Founding Fathers and publish them, because that's how scholars did research, right? They needed to get the primary documents, primary evidence. And so documentary history has a long, storied history. But then, at least two things happened affecting the profession. People began to feel that these are all the books of dead white men, and maybe our history is a little more diverse. And maybe what we should also be looking at is not just the Founders—and with no disrespect to the huge work they did—but there are others who made a mark on our history—for instance, Mother Jones, the labor organizer, and Emma Goldman. Historians wanted to gather the documentary materials from some other more diverse people as well.

A second thing was that people began to see the need to help small institutions preserve important and interesting records for which they didn't have adequate resources, for example, to get a photograph collection in order. The Commission began to issue grants for this records preservation work. Each state was to create a historical records commission, and then those state commissions would examine proposals and then submit those they felt were worthy to the Commission for consideration for a grant. While I was involved in the Commission, it was beginning to shift from simply funding an important project to funding efforts that would advance the documentary editing and archival professions broadly—projects that had application in other places.

So there were grant requests coming directly to the Commission, and then there were grant requests coming from the state organizations. Today, unless there have been changes, it's this organization that helps produce and make available the documentary materials of significant people in the United States' history whose papers are not collected by the National Archives, because they weren't federal employees. Right? And secondly, to support—and these are with micro-grants, I would call them. These are not \$2 million grants. These are \$40,000, \$50,000. So this is the kind of money that really helps an organization do some really neat things. And that was one of the criteria for examining these grants is, how can this money be leveraged in other locations? So we're going to support this group that's doing microfilming, because they're microfilming in a new way that maybe other archives can use. So it's, to me, a really good use of minuscule amounts of federal dollars that have significant impact.

Stephanie: Okay. I think we have it listed under our budget every year. And so that's funding that comes from Congress, that they're allocating whatever towards this Commission. Okay. And was this started then under GSA, when we were still part of GSA?

Jim: I forgot. I think it was in the '50s. I forgot the history. I'm sorry. But generally, after the NHPC had been created, and after it was supporting the publication of the papers of the Founders, the Commission made the recommendation that the papers of the sitting Presidents be collected in volumes, like those of the Founders. And, in another ironic connection of various parts of my career with one another, the executive order issued to commence the Public Papers of the Presidents Series placed the responsibility for publishing them with the Office of the Federal Register—where I one day would serve. I've forgotten a lot of that history. I'd have to research it. Yeah, I used to know this.

Stephanie: Okay, that's fine. [LAUGHS] I think we have Founders Online today that talks about the various Presidents and . . .

Jim: Yes.

Stephanie: Yeah? So maybe that was a product of that?

Jim: Yep. Yep. That's right. So those books have been converted now into digital resources. So now you don't have to go to Princeton to look at the Papers of Woodrow Wilson, or even to a library. You can sit in front of your computer and pull those up.

Stephanie: Mhm.

Jim: And those books are very expensive to purchase. Those are not things that you and I could afford, you know, the entire set of Woodrow Wilson Papers. [LAUGHS]

Stephanie: [LAUGHS] Yeah, I'm sure. And so then a part of this study that you were working on, you're just checking to see if everything is working well and if there's anything that can be added to it or changed?

Jim: Right. Right. So the study had a lot to do with process, but there were a lot of the processes that needed attention and, particularly, needed attention given where the Commission was going to be going in terms of this whole new world. For example, once the

Commission approves a grant, there is the responsibility to oversee and monitor the use of the funds to ensure they are being spent properly.

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: It's worth mentioning.

Stephanie: Yeah, I think that's very neat. And this is yet another piece that kind of ties you to the National Archives when you were working on that also, and learning about the agency and stuff too.

Jim: Yes.

Stephanie: Very cool. Okay. The other thing I wanted to mention, so at the end of our conversation last time, we were talking about your time at the Office of the Federal Register and how they were starting to move things online. And I know that there were several major projects that were going on around that time. Could you talk about any of those?

Jim: Yes. I can't remember where we left off, so I may repeat myself a little bit. So the first thing I want to talk about is eDOCS, the electronic editing and publishing system. When I arrived at the OFR in 1995—I was detailed there first in 1994—they had already obtained a system that was used to track documents, but the documents themselves were being received, processed, edited, and published completely manually, at least on our side of the street. And when I say our side of the street, the other side of the street is the Government Printing Office, now the Government Publishing Office. So we would get all of this material ready for publication, literally walk it across the street in a black suitcase, and then the key punchers there—later computer operators—would type all this information in. Our editors would review the pages, okay them to print, and then they are run on the presses, so a very traditional paper-based process.

eDOCS was intended to not simply track the documents but be an electronic means of ultimately ingesting the documents, moving them along the process, processing the documents, sending them to GPO, receiving them back from GPO, giving final review and publishing them, but still in paper format (because that is required by law). I was the project manager of the first eDOCS project. So eDOCS is an IT project. And what makes this kind of interesting also is not just what we ended up producing, the eDOCS system, but the time frame in which this project was happening, because it was happening during the time that NARA was growing up and standing up its IT operations, and IT was moving from—and I may have said this

earlier—from being run by people who were archivists with kind of a geek side to them, or just liked technical things, to professionals trained in information technology. And I think this is true across the government that initially, the computers in offices were being supported by people in those offices who just kind of liked it.

And then, of course, computers had many phases of coming into our lives from an unconnected desktop computer to an office system, where the drives are maintained in the office, and then back to personal computers but networked and with mainframes maintained centrally and away from the office using the computers. So it was kind of an in-and-out-growth process. One of the aspects of that is that lots of different solutions were being discovered or designed within an organization, lots of different solutions. And so at some point, that became wasteful, inefficient. We were buying lots of different kinds of computers from different kinds of people and different systems, and in some instances the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing. Maybe they're doing the exact same thing, but they weren't. So again, this is in the broader world. Government and private sector organizations were building their capacity to run this. So, you know, no large organization would leave the accounting department to individual offices. Right? We run our budget out of a central office, and now we run our information technology out of a central office. But that was not where it started.

And so, as we were building our eDOCS system—and honestly, we were doing it quite a while before NARA was doing centralized systems development, and the reason was NARA didn't have quite the need we did. NARA was receiving 25-year-old records and processing them and putting them in Hollinger boxes and putting them on bookshelves. Initially, they only needed computers to track this work, not to do it. But we were publishing a magazine every single day, a 150-page magazine, the *Federal Register*. We were publishing more than 120,000 pages of books in more than 250 volumes—the Code of Federal Regulations—every year. So we had an on-the-ground need to make sure our processes were working well. And my point is, we got into the development of systems earlier than NARA did. So by the time NARA was beginning to feel like it had to get the profusion of computers within the agency under control, and one of those places we need to get under control is what's happening over at the Office of the Federal Register, we were pretty far down the track. And so there was a dynamic that went on for, I'd say, a decade of a fairly high degree of resentment toward Mother NARA's oversight of the project in ways that weren't helpful. There was a sense that those setting up NARA's IT infrastructure were always trying to find out what we were doing, but not in useful ways or for useful purposes. And so we spent so much time just, you know, reporting stuff without getting the help that we needed from NARA, which was financial sometimes, and in other ways.

So the reason, I think, that the eDOCS development project succeeded was that we were able to use the resources of the Government Printing Office. As I already explained, under the regulations of the Administrative Committee of the Federal Register we had access to the funds from the "page rate," the rate agencies paid GPO to publish material in the *Federal Register*. So we got a lot of our funding for eDOCS out of that. And so NARA really couldn't . . .

Stephanie: Can't complain. [LAUGHS]

Jim: Yeah, couldn't complain and also had less control over it. I mean, really, it was nobody being bad. It was just, in the end, NARA has developed, like all organizations, a very large IT organization, and there are now laws that govern what must be reported, and there is a lot of oversight on that. And we can't be out there doing anything other than participating as we should. But because this was being developed while this historic change was occurring, it was quite a frustrating experience. And it often felt like we got it done in spite of our agency rather than because of it. But in the end, we have exactly what we envisioned: It is possible not to have a single piece of paper involved in the production of the *Federal Register*. An agency can prepare a document, send it to us, it's ingested, and it's moved through the process, which is a very complicated process. I mean, the other point I should make is these are legal documents. These are not just Word documents.

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: These are the kinds of documents that you take to the court and record. That's their nature, like laws. And also, before they're published, they are entirely confidential. So there's a lot of security involved. There's a lot of integrity that needs to be 100 percent. So on paper, the eDOCS system looks like a relatively simple off-the-shelf document management system. And that, by the way, is what I think the folks from NARA IT would often see. They'd say (we thought), "So you're saying you're so special and so different. You know, it's just a document management system." Well, yes and no. So in the end then, it's the workhorse of the *Federal Register*. And also I would say we went from, I don't know, 80 employees down to 40 or 45, and we're producing double the volume of work.

Stephanie: Wow.

Jim: So that was the eDOCS system. I was project manager part of the time, and then we had project managers from NARA come in. But I was always deeply involved in that.

Stephanie: Okay. And so they still use that today . . .?

Jim: Yes.

Stephanie: . . . the eDOCS system? Yeah. Okay.

Jim: So a second system that was developed, and it developed under the radar, and I don't think it has ever been understood for the amazing thing it is, is the electronic Code of Federal Regulations, the e-CFR. The Code of Federal Regulations is the set of regulations that govern our lives and the regulations issued by agencies such as NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], the IRS, by every agency of government. They're the documents that govern, for instance, how planes are operated in the sky, FAA directives. Critical, critical stuff to our lives. Of course, regulations have a bad reputation, but the fact of the matter is we're glad for the ones that we like, and then we hate the ones that we don't like. But they have a role. And as I said, there are now, I think, 185,000 pages in 260 volumes. So this is an enormous body of material. And each book or each title—the Code of Federal Regulations is divided into 50 titles or 50 topics—is revised and reissued every year. So if you had a collection of the CFR in your library, you would have the books from the previous year with covers of one color. And slowly during the year, they would turn to a different color as you replaced the old version with the new version.

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: But there is a complication: a regulation takes effect whenever the agency determines it takes effect. So your volume of a particular set of Code of Federal Regulations may be out of date as soon as you have it on your shelf, because there may be two, three, 200 new regulations. The means to figure out what is the current status of a rule was a very complex process that people hired lawyers to do. What we did—and I was not deeply involved in this, so I don't want to take credit for it, but I want to publicize it—was to convert all of that into electronic files that were accessible online. And that was an enormous task, and then to update those on a consistent basis so they were up-to-date, and finally to create a daily point-in-time system whereby you can look at the status of the regulation at any time in the past, as well as see what is pending to be effective in the future. So it is just a phenomenal resource, and it was incredibly complex to create, and it is complex to maintain. And that was done not by contractors who came in to do it for us. This was done by government employees at the Office of the Federal Register and the Government Publishing Office, and it's up on GPO's website today. It's like having all of the laws of the United States available. Of course, they should be available. What more important material is there that we the people should have access to? And yet, until a few years ago, you could go to a library and look at it, but you also probably had

to call a lawyer to figure out, you know, what's going on. So we've taken huge strides, but I'll stop there.

Stephanie: We use that almost daily in our job.

Jim: Oh, okay!

Stephanie: So we greatly appreciate that it's in there. We used to go through other . . . I forget. There was a university, I think, that posted regulations, but you just never knew which was the most current. So it was always very confusing. And so now this is our go-to source. So it's great. Now, who maintains that then? Is it GPO?

Jim: Between GPO [CROSS TALKING].

Stephanie: Or between both GPO [CROSS TALKING]. Okay.

Jim: Well, our office is responsible for the content. I mean, the content is prepared by the agencies, but once a final rule is published and given an effective date, then we maintain the Code, and we use GPO computers for the platform where the e-CFR resides.

Stephanie: Okay. So kind of a mix of both agencies working together on that.

Jim: Right.

Stephanie: Yeah. Okay. That seems like it would be a big job to keep up with all of the regulations, with all the agencies, you know? Yeah. Big job.

Jim: Now, the third system is the actual *Federal Register* itself. I think I said early on that, in some ways, I wish the office was called the Office of the Code of Federal Regulations, because ultimately that's what we're producing. The *Federal Register* is a way station for documents on the path toward becoming a regulation. It's the place where agencies publish proposed rules and then receive comments. So every day, there's probably 150 documents being published by federal agencies in that category. We're also publishing executive orders and notices. So included are not just proto-rules but also agency notices that are important or need to be published. So, it's a very dense book. When I got to the Office of the Federal Register, there were 25,000 subscriptions. Probably 20 percent of those went to libraries or maybe more than that. Maybe another 60 percent went to law firms who were tracking that, or maybe colleges—I don't have my percentages right. And then there were a few individuals, maybe a thousand

that had subscriptions to the *Federal Register*. But it's not a book that one reads through—it looks a lot like the *Congressional Record*, printed on newsprint-like paper. Very, very dense. Three columns and mind-boggling and sleep-inducing text [LAUGHS]. But important stuff. But it is also something that very few people are aware of, much less the regulatory process it was created to support. When I used to teach classes on the *Federal Register*, I would use this example to explain the process: I'd say, "You know, when you drive down a street, and you see an orange sign posted on an empty plot of land with the word 'HEARING' printed boldly on it, you realize you're being notified that somebody wants to do something with this land. They're trying to do something that is different from the way it's zoned. And you have an opportunity to voice an opinion about what they want to do with that land. There's going to be a hearing to listen to the public about whether this should happen or not."

Stephanie: Yeah.

Jim: And if you're like me, you think, "I'm probably not going to like what they're going to do with this land, but I don't have enough motivation to go to the hearing and find out what it is and express my opinion. Well, a *Federal Register* document is kind of like that orange sign. It's the notice and comment process. Agencies are issuing regulations. They are very significant. They're going to make a difference in our lives, some of them a big difference. And they're giving us notice that if you want to have a voice in the development of this regulation, now's the time, and here's who to contact, and here's the deadline. And then when all of those comments have been received, they're going to publish a document in which they're going to respond to all those comments, and they're also going to publish a final regulation. And so this is your democratic opportunity or your opportunity to be involved in the democratic process. Now, all of us in our lives have roles and groups that represent us in those roles. Like if you're a teacher, you have an organization that represents you. If you're a union member, you have unions. You know, if you're an archivist, you have archival organizations. And these associations are paying attention to these regulations for us, hopefully. So most of us trust that if there's something really, really significant, I'm going to get some kind of communication from somebody, or I'll read it in the paper that this thing that I have concerns about is pending. But, nevertheless, I would say the more Americans that are aware of the regulatory process and can participate in it, the better. It's just, the more eyes involved, the better. So making it accessible was a real challenge. And books are not the way to make it accessible. Well, the way to make it accessible is a website: federalregister.gov. And that's ultimately what we produce—a means to view online the book that we publish every day. Presently we have regulations that require that we continue to print the book in paper format, but that is becoming an anachronism that, one day, is likely to end.

Stephanie: Oh.

Jim: In developing our website, we had to make sure that it maintained the legal integrity of the content—remember, these are legal documents, so we couldn't just imagine a creative, snazzy website—and make sure that we distinguish between what was legal language and what was descriptive material about the legal content. And that descriptive content could not be commentary on the documents but simply descriptive and directional. So it was quite a process, and I give credit to our general counsel. His name was Michael White, who was in our office for many years. And he really had a vision for this and a heart for it and worked closely with a lot of people on this.

There's a fun story. I've forgotten the details of it, but in general, the development of our website was done by a couple of guys in a garage in San Francisco. They were just an upstart software company looking for a way to show off their programming skills. There was a challenge with a prize for the best re-use on the web of already publicly available data and, somehow, these two guys had found the limited data we had posted and said, "Could we see what we could do with that?" They did it, and showed us the product, and that led to a full-blown project which grew, and it ultimately produced the online *Federal Register*. That's another really just unsung accomplishment. The Office of the Federal Register is an amazing place with a very small staff that's really doing incredible stuff. And I'm very proud to have been a part of it.

Stephanie: Yeah, like you said, it's a very fundamental, democratic process. We should all know what's going on and what rules they're proposing and that sort of thing.

The public or groups, if they do want to write in or comment on anything, how is that process done? Is there a way to do that electronically? Does that go to the agency? Does that go to us? How does that work?

Jim: So another part of the federalregister.gov project was integrating into the website the commenting process, which—remember, we're the publishers of the document, but the comments are going to the FAA or the IRS or NOAA. And so bringing the comments into our system and then sending them out to the agencies was a very complex process. But yes, now all of that can be done digitally.

Stephanie: Wow, that's great. I mean, those are some major projects that you were working with. Yeah.

Jim: And yet I'll tell you, if anybody ever asked me what I do, I always liked to laugh to see how many seconds until their eyes began to glaze over. It's hard to make the work sound real, real interesting.

Stephanie: I mean, how did this even come to be part of the National Archives? Because, you know, when you talk to someone they're going to be familiar with a Presidential Library maybe, or you hold the Declaration of Independence. Where does this fit in? How did this become part of the National Archives?

Jim: There's not a real good insight into that in the legislative record. I think the most we know is that both organizations were created at the same time. So the National Archives was created in 1935, and the Federal Register Act was 1935. And so they were looking for a place to put the Office. There was some discussion about putting it in the attorney general's office because it had this aspect of creating records. I think maybe somebody said, "Well, we're creating this Archives. That's the organization that keeps the federal records." So it's not an entirely illogical explanation, but they are two distinct missions in some ways.

Stephanie: Yeah, I think just the public and probably even some of NARA's own staff aren't that familiar with the Office of the Federal Register and what it is that the Office does. And we talked a little bit last time about it being brought up in the news more with the whole Presidential . . .

Jim: Electoral College.

Stephanie: Yeah, that Electoral College process and all of that. And people just aren't really familiar with what it is that the Office does. And so you get asked all these questions, and they think that you probably do more than what you do. But, you know, it's . . .

Jim: I'll give you a brief history just so . . .

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: So, of course, the *Federal Register* didn't exist until 1935. The U.S. Government was much smaller and was not as deeply involved in regulating our lives. Maybe railroads were regulated in the 1880s, but you know, there was the Sherman Antitrust Act. But business was kind of left alone. Then came the Depression and the New Deal and the creation of many new agencies that were regulated. But what was not created was a process across those agencies for how they were going to be issuing regulations. And it was a very catch-as-catch-can process that

culminated, or that problem culminated, in a Supreme Court case in which a company was brought suit against them for violating some regulations. It went all the way up to the Supreme Court, at which time the Supreme Court asked in the discovery for the original signed document, and the Department of Justice or the agency that was to produce it didn't have the signed document. All they had was a copy. And secondly, what was discovered was the regulation that they had prosecuted the company on the basis of had not been in effect at the time of that prosecution.

Stephanie: Oh.

Jim: So, these procedural problems made the whole system fall. And the court decision in issuing their opinion said, basically to the government, "Get your act together. It is unconscionable that you can't even produce the proof that this document was ever signed, because anybody could mimeograph or Xerox a fake document."

Stephanie: Yeah.

Jim: The second thing that was happening was, as these regulations were being created, there was a lot of concern that they were being created in the dark and not in a democratic way. So these regulations had the effect of law and enforceability of law, but nobody got to vote on it. So there was a lot of this discussion going on. So to resolve that, there was a Federal Register Act where rules would be gathered, all the existing would be gathered in one place. The Code of Federal Regulations and new regulations would have to be published. Okay. So that's that history.

The Department of State used to have ministerial roles. So it wasn't just for foreign relations, but they held the Declaration of Independence. They were kind of the Archives, right? They published the laws of the U.S. They published the [United States] Government Manual. So, as a result of the Hoover Commission and the Reorganization Act of 1949, one of the things that happened was the General Services Administration was created, so an organization that will provide general services to the government out of various departments like the Department of State, were removed. Publishing the laws, the Electoral College. So the Electoral College is an administrative task that the General Services Administration was given. It had been done at the Secretary of State in the Department of State. Okay. That's 1949. Remember also, that that's when the Archives was brought into GSA, because archives were viewed as a general service. Okay? So now, the Office of the Federal Register, which is within the National Archives, is now under GSA. And in that process, some by law, but some by administrative action, the Director or the Administrator of GSA assigned to either the Office of the Federal Register or the Archivist

these ministerial things. So that's how the OFR has not just the Code of Federal Regulations and the *Federal Register*, but Presidential Papers, the Statutes at Large, the Government Manual. So thank you for letting me give you that.

Stephanie: Yeah, that's very interesting. I had no idea. Yeah, lots of moving things around and, yeah, trying to find the best place for us and for other areas, right? Yeah.

Jim: Yeah.

Stephanie: Very cool. Thank you for that. Okay, so we've got a little bit of time left here. I wanted to ask you a few other questions. So, let's see here. In your last interview, you did mention that you were designated as a continuity person in charge of the continuity activities. So like if there is a disaster in the government, you know, it still needs to be able to operate. So there's certain activities that have to take place and that sort of thing. So I was wondering if you could talk about that? And I think you mentioned something with 9/11. Just kind of talk about what was going on, and yeah, whatever you can tell us.

Jim: Okay. And I'll break this into pre-9/11 and post-9/11. So during the Cold War, the federal government had lots of contingencies to deal with the effects of a nuclear bomb exploding in the Washington, DC, area, including protecting the administrative processes of government. One of those processes is the Code of Federal Regulations and this process we have in the *Federal Register*. So I'll call it the *Federal Register* process. It includes the Code of Federal Regulations. So, I can't speak to the specifics, because I think some of that is still classified. But there were contingencies, and our office was a part of those. And interestingly, one part of it, which is not classified, was a standby set of Code of Regulations. So if the worst happened, you know, those regulations could be brought into effect. Some of those were standby in the sense they were written down, and if needed, could be pulled out by an agency head who might say, "Give me that standby regulation and sign it and make it effective." Others were standby in the sense that they were in the Code of Federal Regulations but were only activated by certain triggers, like the President would say, "I'm activating this section of the Code." So anyways, there was a whole separate Code created.

By the end of the Cold War, that whole system was beginning to go away. There wasn't the fear. And so by the time I got to the Office of the Register, we were still doing exercises, but it wasn't what I would call a real rigorous process. And what we would have put in place would have looked very 1950-ish, even though we were now moving into computers and the like. So again, another place where my career really spanned this movement from analog to digital is in this area of emergency preparedness. So we would participate in these, but, you know, the idea

that there was going to be the nuclear bomb, had a very big sense of unreality and a little bit of "Why are we doing this?" And if there were a bomb, would these plans even work (like when school kids used to practice hiding under their desks)—was that a viable option for survival?

Then 9/11 happened, and that contingency planning was triggered. Not the standby regulations, but the need to do what was in the contingency plans. And so what I would say is—well, I'll tell you a little bit about my experience of 9/11. Everybody has some experience, but I was in Washington, DC. I was walking from the Metro to the Office of the Federal Register, which is a four-block walk. This was September 11th, 2001. There were cell phones in use by then, and I heard a guy walking in front of me say something on his phone about a plane hitting a building. And I thought to myself, I wonder what kind of an accident he's discussing; maybe there will be something about it on TV when I get to the office. We had TVs in our office suite. I thought it could have been like there was an accident or something. Well, when I got to the building, I went up to our conference room and there were staff in the conference room watching the TV. The first building had been hit, and they were watching. And I joined them, and so we watched everything transpire in the conference room. Two things I remember in particular: One, of course, the Pentagon was attacked, and we looked out the window and were watching the black smoke coming off the Pentagon. We couldn't see the Pentagon, but we could see all of that. So, you know, it was a very real event. Then the second thing was, there was a lot of confusion about what was happening, playing out on the TV. There were discussions among correspondents, and reports and rumors. There was another plane, supposedly, and there was one headed to the Capitol. The windows of our conference room were parallel to 16th Street. So 16th Street is a north-south street that runs right into the White House. Our office sat on North Capitol Street, only 16 blocks west of 16th Street, and only 10 blocks north of it. We watched a jet basically come down 16th Street, and we had the sense of we're watching the plane that was going to hit the White House. Now, it turned out to be one of the military jets scrambled in defense of the city. But just such an unreal time like everybody experienced. Then I got a call telling me "to do what you're to do," which meant leave and go somewhere. And I went there, and that was just a very surreal environment. I will say it was a place where there were no windows, and I was there for two weeks initially.

Stephanie: Wow.

Jim: And all that time, we were watching this devastation on the screens in New York. And we weren't doing that just as private citizens. This was the U.S. Government functioning. And [it was] just incredibly surreal, and. . . . But the reason I mention that also is because the first time I got to come home, there had been a tornado come through the College Park area and into the neighborhood where I live just north of College Park. So when I drove in our neighborhood,

there was all this destruction. But it was—well, destruction is what I'd been watching virtually nonstop for two weeks. And coming home, I see all the destruction from the tornado around me, and you know, it was kind of difficult to differentiate between those two. So, I think what I would like to say is that what needed to be done post-9/11 was to take 1960s procedures, and—I'm talking now just about the Office of the Federal Register—and bring them into the modern times and develop processes that could work in the real environment in which we were operating. We needed to create a contingency so that if our main headquarters is not accessible, we could function. And so how is the *Federal Register* going to function, disconnected from GPO? I mean, literally, in the 60s, the plan was that people were going to get on the radio and read the *Federal Register*. That was [LAUGHS] how the public was going to find out things. So I really had an experience of being involved in the creation of the new processes that are now in place for that. And maybe I shouldn't say much more than that. It's . . .

Stephanie: [CROSS TALKING]

Jim: All I'll say is this: Our function is not a classified function. And I should say that about the Office of the Federal Register. We do not publish classified documents. You know, there aren't any secret documents in the Code of Federal Regulations. They just don't exist. I'm not saying there aren't secret documents, but those documents govern how the government should operate. There is no secret document that can control how you are to operate as a private citizen in an emergency. Those have to be public and have to be agreed upon through the public processes. So I hope I'm making that distinction between the directives that apply to the government and directives that apply to the public. So, we were in that classified environment not because our material was classified. We were in that environment because the originators of the sources of our information, and those to which we needed to communicate, had classified operations and needed to be in a classified environment. But at the same time that they were doing classified work, they also will be producing regulations that are peacetime-related or non-emergency.

Stephanie: Yeah.

Jim: We still needed to communicate with those agencies. So if their communications are down, if they don't have their headquarters in sight, they are somewhere else. We needed to be somewhere else with them or in contact with them. I'll just say one other thing. At one of the first meetings post-9/11 in that classified environment, where a lot of significant people were around the table representing the Cabinet agencies, we were going around, sort of giving a status of how things were in the various agencies. When it came my turn I said, "Well, the Constitution is being protected. It is under control." And everybody just sort of stopped, and it

was just kind of, "Oh, yeah. Wow." And just, here were all these important agencies, carrying out critical functions, dealing with the military, and all that. Then at the National Archives, what do we do? We push paper. So it just made me feel a little proud, and happy that, you know, we did have a little bit of a role there, because this massive edifice that is the United States Government all rolls out from the Constitution which we preserve.

Stephanie: Yeah. Wow. It's like the mic drop kind-of-thing. [LAUGHS]

Jim: Yeah.

Stephanie: [LAUGHS] Wow. So it was all about maintaining continuity and figuring out how this would continue to function and working with agencies and that sort of thing, it sounds like.

Jim: You know what? I'll tell you one take away from that.

Stephanie: Yes?

Jim: It really showed me that in emergencies, we're relying on people. Emergency response will function as well as the people are capable of functioning—individuals. So, in those situations, the people that rise really are the people who have guts, innovation, energy, expertise, because I would say the first league wasn't out on the field, initially. And it's because this whole thing had become kind of unreal—few people thought a nuclear weapon would be exploded, so the people assigned to emergency preparedness weren't, you know, when real-life crises occurred, those who were used to frontline action, and some were sort of saying, "What do I do?" And I think that's true in life. You know, a tornado comes through—you know, I have such respect for what's going on like in Maui [Hawaii] and other places where there's disasters—there are a lot of us that maybe wouldn't know what to do. We'd be sort of paralyzed by what it is. And whether it's war, whether it's disaster, whether it's some other kind of emergency, systems are not adequate. I mean, you can have all the procedures in place, and that's important, but unless you have people that use them, that have a sense of urgency—and I saw a lot of that in that process. And it was a really interesting lesson, or I don't know what to call it, but . . . It gave me a lot of respect for it. We all have our roles, you know?

Stephanie: Yeah. And I guess some are better than others.

Jim: [CROSS TALKING] And police, they have a unique gift. And you saw that, and you saw people that knew what to do. So rapidly, there was a response. And then there were the

majority of us that just were so thankful there are people there that know what to do, because I wouldn't.

Stephanie: Yeah. I mean, I think there's some training involved, but I think you're right. You know, there are certain innate skills or something about what people can handle and react fast, you know, really fast to something. So, I totally agree with that.

Kind of along that same line, I wanted to ask . . . so I believe that you were the executive assistant to Senator Hatfield and then for the Archivist of the United States Don Wilson, and also to the Director of the Office of the Federal Register. Right?

Jim: Yeah.

Stephanie: Okay.

Jim: Five were [CROSS TALKING].

Stephanie: What does that say about you? Do you have some knack or skill for being able to support people in their role, of making them successful?

Jim: I think I've concluded that the gift I have is not so much being an innovative thinker. I'm not the person that should sit at the top of an organization and think big thoughts, but I am a person who can listen and kind of capture and articulate what others are saying in a pretty simple way for others. I think I have a sense of when I hear something that's right and something that's not right. I don't mean morally. I mean, this is going to work or this—I think I'm a good analyst of things. So, I think what I could do, what I felt best with, is if I could get with a visionary who is also willing to not just think big thoughts but was willing to take action, I could help that person figure out how to take the action or how to say, "Here's how to get from what you want to do to accomplishing it, but you've got to do this. You need to get up and make this speech, or you need to issue this memo, or you need to approach this meeting this way." I still think I'm pretty much a behind-the-scenes person. I can do the upfront to a certain degree, but there are a lot of people who have more skills than I do in that. But that's what I just kept finding myself falling into. So after a while, I realized that's my niche, I guess.

Stephanie: Yeah. Yeah. It sounds like the Archivist or the Senator or whoever may have this vision, and then you can help them determine how to get from Point A to Point B and to get that implemented.

Jim: Yes, or maybe articulate a problem, too. So a time when I didn't think I had the opportunity to have much voice, but I think I could have, was in the development of the strategic plans of the agency. That started to be a thing during the Clinton administration. And I think a whole lot of time was spent on the process—I think those documents can be critical documents. They can be so useful in an organization if prepared correctly and then utilized. But unfortunately, most of the time, people and organizations get completely caught up in the process, and it does become pretty much a document that's put on the shelf and not used to run the organization, or the only way it's used is in kind of a reporting way, not in a visionary way. It's used just to report on measurements that end up being an end in themselves. And I've been involved in the development of some really good, simpler strategic plans that were rejected, that I think would have helped to some degree. They would have been better. I think there was one NARA strategic plan that was really good. It was John Carlin who—and a lot of people have negative memories of that process—but he put together a good plan, and he worked it. And that was good for the National Archives. And it helped get us through a bit of a transition time. He used a phrase: Ready Access to Essential Evidence. Every archivist hated that term, “essential evidence,” because the law talked about “records.” But it was the only phrase I've ever heard that really captured the work of the agency as a whole really well. But it wasn't kosher. And so it was—as soon as he left, it was ejected. [LAUGHS] And, if you think about it, the phrase captures recordkeeping, archiving, the *Federal Register*, a whole bunch of stuff.

Stephanie: Yeah. Yeah. And from collecting that information, preserving it, making access happen. Yeah.

Jim: And having it ready, meaning very available.

Stephanie: When you need it. Yeah.

Jim: And evidence, because record evidence was kind of what the whole mass of stuff could be collected under. Anyways. . .

Stephanie: That's interesting. I wanted to ask . . . you've already brought this up several times, but just the kind of technological advancements and modernization that happened throughout your career. I know you've mentioned analog to digital. Can you talk about that theme a little bit, how the changes evolved, what some challenges were or some positive improvements?

Jim: Well, so positives: so much faster, so much more information, so much simpler, so much access, so much information, maybe even lifestyle, you know, can blend a little more personal and professional—maybe that's a negative as well. So all in all, absolutely, I'm glad I made it to

2023 and didn't [LAUGHS] keel over in 1990. But you can even see the transition in the records. You know, you look back at archival records up through the '60s, and they're just beautifully kept, and they're complete. And now, they're a mess. You know, people don't think about it. Part of the reason for that is that we no longer have the time to do so. Why is that? Well, for one thing, there used to be a position called a secretary. And one thing that has happened with computers, and I noticed that very much early on. When I was in Senator Hatfield's office, I had a Dictaphone, and I would dictate dozens of letters a day. Dozens. We had five people whose job was to sit with headphones and transcribe and type that all out. Okay?

Stephanie: Wow.

Jim: By the time I was at the Archives, I was doing all my own typing, backspacing as I misspelled things, you know. I was doing not just the thinking. I was having to do the technical work that had been done by a secretary. And so, things—the product—were much more sloppy, not as elegant, not collected as well. People weren't thinking about records, in contrast to when a secretary knew that part of the process was making three copies, and knowing where they would go and all that. So traditional recordkeeping just kind of blew up. And for a while, that was very concerning until we realized, after a while—because it didn't happen right away that this was possible—everything you've done is re-creatable. [LAUGHS] You don't really need, you know—. I can Google search someone's name, and I get access to a letter that I wrote you or an email I wrote you ten years ago, right?

Stephanie: [LAUGHS]

Jim: So a lot of stuff washes over, and there are other ways to do these things. But, you know, I miss some of that, the beauty of the archival research that . . . Yeah. Even at home, you know, your keepsakes might include birthday cards. Well now, maybe it's going to be an email you got from one of your kids. It's just not quite the same. I mean, it means the same, but not for the future. [LAUGHS]

Stephanie: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

Jim: I really feel that while the government and organizations were moving from no computers to these highly organized IT offices, there were a bunch of mistakes made, and it's too late now. It's maybe irrelevant, but I will say this, and I've seen this in other organizations outside of the government. It is a common practice for me, as an example, to have a process, and to be an expert in the process. We want to automate the process for efficiency reasons. So we go pay somebody who is a programmer, a very smart, smart programmer, but someone who knows

nothing about my process. In between me and that person, we put a project manager. And that project manager's role is to kind of know both our needs and have both our interests at heart. . . . And so what happens is, I tell the project manager, or somebody comes in and interviews me about my process. I do a brain dump of everything I know about this. Somebody captures it and sends it over to the programmer, and the programmer tries to interpret whatever I've said and send something back over the transom door, through somebody else's interpreting, and it lands on my desk, and it's nothing like what I need, you know? And so we just go back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. And I often thought—this is what I experienced in the Federal Register.

We had writer-editors who knew all the quirks of and directions that the process needed to go. And we were working through this very weird process. I often thought, "Why don't we hire some temps to do my work, because a lot of it is not specialty work." There's maybe 70–80 percent that I can teach somebody to do pretty easily. Okay? I'll go off and sit with the programmer—not the project manager—the programmer. And we will work together to develop something that really suits the user's needs, unfiltered by this project manager. And then I can go back to my desk. I can tell you all sorts of things there. I can tell you not only the process, but I can say, "Don't put the button there . . . put it over here," the kind of thing you never get to till far later in the process. That's understandable because we may only be designing the chassis of the car and we're not ready to design the radio buttons on the dashboard. But there may be some good reasons to have the foresight to know something about the requirements of the dashboard's radio buttons early on in the design process. Why not have access to those potential "assists" in the design process? If you put the radio in the trunk, when you show me the car and say, "What do you think of it?" you will destroy my trust in you and the design process.

Stephanie: [LAUGHS]

Jim: But I guess that's applying my analytical perspective to the extent I have any thoughts about how things played out. When I observed that process, I thought, "Oh, this is very unfortunate." I wish things were done differently. And then people need to be humble—everybody. We all want to take credit for stuff. And it's hard to admit mistakes. And so a lot of times, you get somebody like that in a position, and it can really be hard. And that happened a couple times, I'd say.

Stephanie: Yeah. Yeah. It probably changes the whole culture of the place.

Jim: Yeah. Yeah.

Stephanie: Yeah. Kind of around that, what do you think is your greatest accomplishment, or what are you most proud of from your time at NARA? You've done a lot of things in a lot of different offices, or a few [LAUGHS], not just one.

Jim: I hope I made people's work happy, you know? I hope I was a person that didn't make their days worse. At least, you know, they felt like I was trying to help them. I really wanted to serve people well. I wanted to accomplish things, you know? But, yeah. And it's funny. I think I had two reputations. I think I had kind of a negative reputation. This is probably way too personal for this. I don't know. But I think there are a lot of people who really would say, "He was a good person. He helped us, and he was for us." But there were people that, somehow, I just couldn't connect with. And probably behind doors, they were maybe negative about me. I never had bad motives. I didn't have enemies, you know. If I was in an argument with someone, it was just about the topic. It wasn't, "I hate you, and I'm going to make your life miserable." But I think that's so common that that's what a lot of people, maybe—because, I guess I have some passion sometimes, and maybe my passion comes across a little rough, perhaps. And I don't know. I don't know. That's a part that I never think about, honestly. So . . .

Stephanie: Well, I think we all get along with different personalities, right? So you can't be the only one. Do you remember your last day at the agency in 2021?

Jim: I turned off my computer in my home office, and I went downstairs and had dinner. [LAUGHS]

Stephanie: Oh. You were working from home.

Jim: Yeah. That was the end of my career. Yeah, it was really . . .

Stephanie: Wow.

Jim: The office did a really neat thing, though. I think two days before, they had an online "Zoom" retirement party, and so there were squares of most of the people on the staff on my computer screen. And some people said some things. I got a chance to say some things. I had watched a woman who had worked in the Federal Register for a long time and, you know, a lot of times retirement parties are kind of a laugh-and-joking kind-of-affair. But at one point, she stood up, and she just spoke to her experience and her career. And it was moving. It was just really nice. And I thought she deserved that, you know, and we deserve to hear this person who's been here a long time. Take ten minutes to let her reflect on her life. I wanted to do that,

so I did that. And I have a video of the thing, so that was very sweet. Oh, and they had a cake. They had a cake delivered to my house!

Stephanie: Oh my!

Jim: So I had that in front of me. So that was very creative. But my last day was very underwhelming. [LAUGHS]

Stephanie: Well, so this is during COVID, right? The pandemic? And so everyone was working from home at the time. Yeah.

Jim: I didn't talk about COVID, but like all the other organizations, we shut down. I mean, we shut our office, but we continued to publish the *Federal Register* every single day. We never missed anything. We had COVID in the office. We had a security guard who was at the Government Printing Office on Wednesday and died on Saturday from COVID. He was the guard who escorted our agency liaisons up to our office. So we were in fear of what was happening. And there were some other people in the GPO building that passed away. So those were very scary times. I remember someone saying when we first were sent home, "How long do you think it'll last? Two weeks?" And I remember rolling my eyes and saying, "Are you kidding? No way they're going to let us stay off two weeks."

Stephanie: Yeah.

Jim: Two and a half years later we're still . . .

Stephanie: Yeah.

Jim: Very strange, strange times.

Stephanie: Yeah, I think we all thought that. I went back into the office just the other day, and I saw the calendar was still open to March of 2020. So those are just reminders of, wow, everyone thought they were going to be right back. So, yeah.

Jim: Well, and I should say—this is not a policy statement—but it became clear that we did not need to have people in an office building. We have produced the *Federal Register* and the Code of Federal Regulations every day without fail for two-and-a-half years. And for two of those years, there were only two people in the office every day. Otherwise, all the other staff—45—were dispersed. So there is no need for them to come back to the office. Well, except for the

benefit of the fact that when you leave an office and go to your home to work, you still know what that office looked like, how it functioned as a whole. You know, for instance, that in November I have to do this, or you have overheard things others are saying or doing. But when you hire a new employee into that telework environment, they only know what you tell them. They can't "catch" any additional information from the office environment because they aren't in it. So it's so much more important to train people well in the online environment, because there's this big organization. There was all this stuff that was being done that was known generally by several staff members and no one had to say "Oh yeah, in November, we're supposed to do this." So, it will be interesting to see, if organizations stay in a dispersed environment, how they will learn to handle that kind of ingesting of new employees.

Stephanie: That's a very good point. Yeah, I think we were all kind of thrown into that position without knowing how this was going to work even. And so this is still kind of a new process where people are still figuring it out, right, even though we've been doing it now since 2020, I think. So, yeah. Well, hey, I kept you over our scheduled time. I hope that's not a problem. Was there anything else that you wanted to add that we haven't talked about yet?

Jim: I can't imagine there's anything left. [LAUGHS] No, I think this has triggered memories and made me think. So thank you for your interest. And thank you for asking me to do this.

Stephanie: Yeah. Well, thank you for agreeing to do it and to do two sessions, nonetheless! You had a lot to talk about. You've done so much. So it's extremely interesting to hear about all of this from different sides of the house, too, and your perspectives on things. So thank you so much. I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording now. Okay? Hang on just a second.

[END RECORDING PART TWO]