C-SPAN FIRST LADIES ROSALYNN CARTER
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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSALYNN CARTER, FORMER FIRST LADY: I have learned that you can do anything you want to. They used to ask me if I thought the first lady ought to be paid. If you get paid, then I have to do what the first lady is supposed to do. But you can do anything you want to. And it's such a great soapbox. I mean it's just such a great opportunity.

So I would -- I would advise any first lady to do what she wanted to do. If she doesn't want -- and another thing I learned is you're going to criticized no matter what you do. I could have stayed there at the White House, poured tea, had receptions, and I would have been criticized as much as I was criticized outside of -- for what I did, but -- and I got a lot of criticism. But you learn to live with it, as I said earlier. I mean, just live with it. You expect it, and you live with it and never let it influence me.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN, HOST: Rosalynn Carter, in a recent interview conducted for this series in Atlanta. She was her husband's political partner from their first campaign.

As first lady, she attended President Jimmy Carter's Cabinet meetings and championed women's rights and mental health issues, even testifying before Congress. Their partnership on issues has continued in their long post-White House years.

Good evening, and welcome to C-SPAN Series "First Ladies: Influence and Image."

Tonight, we turn the page. We're going to begin this part of this year-long series, biography series, by looking at the lives of the living first ladies, and Eleanor Rosalynn Smith Carter is our first of these, the wife of our 39th president.

Let me introduce to you our two guests who will be in our studio for the next 90 minutes to tell you about her biography.

Jay Hakes is a presidential historian and spent 13 years as the director of the Carter Library. Thanks for being here tonight.

Grace Hale is a professor of history and American studies at University of Virginia, and she specializes in the history of the South.

Nice to meet you. Thanks for coming tonight.

GRACE HALE, PROFESSOR: Thanks for having me.

SUSAN SWAIN: I want to pick up on Mrs. Carter's themes, and I should tell folks at home that she was gracious enough to give us an almost hour-long interview in Atlanta and throughout the program, we'll show you clips of it and we'll post the full interview online, so you can watch all that she had to say about her 10 years first lady.

But I want to pick up on that "things that I've learned" that she referenced.

One of the things that's fascinating is that the Carters' first visit to the White House was after he'd been elected and their inauguration. But we've heard that a lot in our first half of the series, when travel was difficult but it's unusual for the modern age.

What skills did she bring to this job?

JAY HAKES, DIRECTOR, CARTER LIBRARY AND MUSEUM: Well, I think in some ways, you know, the transition for her from Plains to the governor's mansion in Atlanta was a -- was a big transition. But there, she did get a chance to, you know, host parties, to take on issues and do the kind of things that first ladies do at the White House, albeit at a -- at a smaller level.

So, you know, in one sense, they were the Washington outsiders coming into a town that -- where they had not spent much time. But also, they had that experience as governor, that I think she used as kind of a foundation for what she expected to do as first lady.

(CROSSTALK)

SUSAN SWAIN: I want to stay with that theme for a second. We have many books on first ladies. This one is by John Roberts, "Rating the First Ladies". And here's what he says, "Under Rosalynn Carter, the Office of the First Lady completed its 20th century metamorphosis from a mere extension of the presidency into a vital White House organ.

"Previous first ladies had blazed the trail by campaigning, et cetera, but none had approached the job with the discipline and professionalism of Rosalynn Carter and her staff. For the first time, the first lady hired a chief of staff whose government salary and rank were equal to the president's chief of staff.

"Under Rosalynn, the full-time East Wing positions grew by almost 20 percent. But more important, she used the staff differently, organized the workings of the office to expand beyond traditional and social and entertainment functions."

JAY HAKES: Yes. I mean, you know, her -- when she grew up, almost during her entire childhood, the first lady of the United States was Eleanor Roosevelt. So one would have to think that that was a pretty powerful image of a first lady who did it differently than it had ever been done before, who testified before Congress, which is something that Rosalynn Carter also did.

And she wanted to be a serious player on the issues. She wanted the president to take her seriously. They had a close partnership. They communicated back and forth very openly, very candidly. She was not afraid to criticize him in private.

So it was a strong, kind of the modern era, first ladies get involved in the big substantive issues where you can make a difference.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, let me ask another theme throughout the series, and that has been of the role of women in society.

And I'm wondering, we've learned so often that the first lady really is a linchpin for changes for women in the country. What about women in 1976, and particularly, southern women and how accepting the public was of their involvement in politics?

GRACE HALE: Well, she became the first lady at a time of great change in women's roles and I think that, you know, that made her job challenging but it also gave her some really wonderful opportunities, which she really worked hard to seize.

I mean, I love a story that I read somewhere that she told, that it was a lot harder to learn how to be the first lady in the governor's mansion, because she had to train her staff, that they came from the prisons, to work in the -- to work in various capacities in the governor's mansion. And when she got to the White House, everybody knew what to do, so that it was a well-scripted machine, and that that was easier to do.

But, you know, she came into the White House at a moment when women's roles were really changing greatly across the country. And I think people were surprised that she was such an outspoken person coming from a background in the small-town South and that she really tackled issues in a serious way. I think she really made a mark in that way.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, in the 1976 campaign, those of you who were around for -- you'll remember the big question was, "Jimmy who?" And we're going to show you a bit of a campaign ad that the Carter campaign put together that picked up on this theme and involves Rosalynn.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

(UNKNOWN): In the final days, a group of Georgia supporters, often referred to as Carter's Peanut Brigade, flew in to New Hampshire.

DOT PETTY (ph), VOLUNTEER: Hello. Are you Mrs. Kyle (ph)?

KYLE (ph), NEW HAMPSHIRE WOMAN: Yes, yes, yes.

DOT PETTY (ph): I'm Dot Petty (ph), and I'm a volunteer from Plains, Georgia.

If we had snow on the ground like this, we'd be paralyzed for a week. We couldn't get out of the house.

(UNKNOWN): Her schedule was grueling, almost as tough as her husband's. Yet, through it all, Rosalynn remained an earnest and gracious campaigner.

ROSALYNN CARTER: People ask me every day, "How can you stand for your husband to be in politics and everybody know everything you do?"

And I just tell them, that we were born and raised and still live in Plains, Georgia. It has a population of 683, and everybody has always known everything I did.

(LAUGHTER)

And Jim has never had any hint of scandal in his personal life or his public life. I really believe he can restore that honesty, integrity, openness, confidence in government that we so sorely need in our country today. I think he'll be a great president.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: Grace Hale, what was happening in the country in 1976 that these outsiders from Georgia, who had not mounted a national campaign before, appealed to the public?

GRACE HALE: Well, I think that a lot of things are intersecting in interesting ways to help Carter and first lady, Rosalynn, in their rise in national politics.

I mean, on the one hand, you have the failures of the McGovern campaign and there's no interest in repeating that amongst Democratic officials. They want a candidate that's not going to, in their minds,

be able to be sort of pigeon-holed as representing a certain kind of liberal or left part of the Democratic party.

Carter, with his, you know, southern roots, his small-town background, they think he's going to appeal to people who wouldn't vote for McGovern or might be alienated from that part of the Democratic Party.

Also, I think that he's a really interesting candidate because he is from the South, and yet he is publicly speaking out in support of integration, in support of the gains of the civil rights movement up until to that point, and that also really helps to create a kind of momentum behind them.

He's seen as a candidate who can bridge a lot of different divides, sort of draw in a lot of different people.

SUSAN SWAIN: That video references the Peanut Brigade. Who were the Peanut Brigade and what was Rosalynn's role in that?

JAY HAKES: Well, they were mainly friends of the Carters from Georgia who went to other states to campaign. And it was, of course, very impressive when they went into the snow-bound streets of New Hampshire. These Georgians are not used to the snowy weather,

But the advantage the Peanut Brigade had is they personally knew the Carters. So when you're going up to a voter and saying, "I'm asking you to vote for somebody that I personally know," that carries a lot of weight. And people would wear the gold peanut pins.

And with the Nixon's scandals surrounding Watergate, I think the idea of running as an outsider worked in 1976 in a way that it might not have worked in other years, but it was the right campaign for the right time.

GRACE HALE: Well, it really became the kind of standard way in which candidates would run after that. So I think in that way, too, it's very interesting that running as an outsider. What else could Carter do, being from a small town in south Georgia, but run as an outsider to Washington?

But it became a model for future campaigns. I mean, the Nixon campaign does the silent majority as the majority, right? Somebody is representing most Americans.

After that, you see many, many politicians running as outsiders, George Bush, the second George Bush, ran in interesting ways as a kind of outsider, drawing on his experiences in Texas. So it became a kind of model for the future.

SUSAN SWAIN: And we should say, not only friends, but the family -- the Carter family, Mrs. Carter, the sons, the -- Mrs. Carter's mother-in-law, all very much involved in making this a family affair.

JAY HAKES: Yes. As Grace mentioned, up to this point, people hadn't really figured out that they had to get outside of Washington. So not only did you have Jimmy Carter getting outside of Washington, but the whole family.

One of my favorite stories from Mrs. Carter was she and her friend Edna Langford, would go around the states -- and I think Rosalynn spent like 75 days in Florida. And they would go into a small town and they'd look for the tallest antenna in town, because they figured that was probably a radio station.

And then they'd drive up and say, "Would you like to interview us?" And they would actually bring a sheet of questions that they could ask.

So it was a very low budget campaign, but in that particular year, under the finance laws of that time, that was the way to do it.

GRACE HALE: They actually stayed in people's houses when they campaigned, all the different Carter family members. And I think that's really, you know, a very different way of campaigning than we see now, staying with people in the various small towns. They visited all over the country.

SUSAN SWAIN: Certain presidential candidates still do that in Iowa and New Hampshire, but after that, it get's -- it's pretty big, too large to do.

But let me ask you a bit about the learning the mechanics of a political science, as it were, because again, they've had only a little bit of experience in this.

When you read the biographies, their systematic approach to learning the mechanics is interesting. What I'm thinking about was that she would number President Carter's jokes so he wouldn't tell them to the same audiences, that she took memory classes, so that they would be able, as campaigners, to remember people's faces and names.

Would you talk about that aspect of their approach to politics?

JAY HAKES: Yes. I think both of the Carters really believe in doing your homework. So, like he would read Gary Hart's book on the 1972 campaign to find out what went right, what went wrong. And she would take meticulous notes. And when they ran for reelection in 1979 and '80, she pulled out all of these notes from the 1975 and '76 campaigns of just the names and the phone numbers of everybody.

So they sort of started off knowing that they didn't know how to do this, they'd never run for president before. But they did their homework and that was kind of a trait of the family.

And they would come home on Sundays so that they were always on the same page, the family members wouldn't all be off saying different things. They'd come back and compare notes on Sunday and then they'd head back out to the field, and it was a very powerful combination.

I can't believe the work schedule that she had during that campaign -- very little sleep and was visiting multiple towns in a day. And I guess growing up on a farm, you learn how to put in long days, but she was willing to make that kind of commitment.

SUSAN SWAIN: What's great about this series is your involvement. And we'd welcome that tonight as well. You can send us an e-mail, and you can -- sorry, not an e-mail but you can send us a tweet @firstladies, and you can also join our Facebook conversation, it's Facebook and the C-SPAN site on there. And that's already underway.

People are posting questions, and we'll get to as many of those as we can. And you can also call us, 202-585-3880, if you live in the Eastern or Central Time Zones, 202-585-3881 if you're Mountain, Pacific, or even farther West, and we welcome the conversation.

Well, Allegheny Tableaux on Twitter asked, "Did Rosalynn work before becoming a full-time politician's wife? Where was she educated?" We're going to learn about that next. We're going to visit the town of Plains, Georgia. How big is Plains?

JAY HAKES: About 600 people, small town. When she was there, it was dirt roads. Now, the roads are paved, but it doesn't look that much different today than it did back then. And they're probably

surprised they ended back up in Plains, because when they were young, their goal was to get out of small town.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, let's learn more about their early years by visiting Plains in this video.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

STEVE THEUS, CHIEF OF INTERPRETATION, JIMMY CARTER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE: Not much has changed here in Plains, Georgia, since the president and Mrs. Carter grew up here in the '20s and '30s.

If we were to take away this asphalt street here in front of the stores and have a dirt road right in front of them, it will look very similar to a photograph of Plains circa 1925.

The Rosalynn Smith Carter story begins here at this house. She lived here with her mom and dad, two brothers and a sister. And one of her favorite memories of this house is when her dad would come home from work, go into the kitchen and meet her mother, give her a big hug, swing her around the kitchen floor there and give her a kiss.

Rosalynn Carter lost her father at a very young age, and Jimmy Carter's mother, Ms. Lillian, helped take care of Mr. Edgar throughout his illness. She was a trained nurse here in Plains. And on the night of his passing, actually took young Rosalynn Smith out to the Jimmy Carter farm to be with Jimmy Carter's sister, Ruth.

This is the Jimmy Carter boyhood farm, and it's important to Ms. Rosalynn's story because she would have spent a lot of time out here with President Carter's sister, Ruth.

This is the room of Jimmy Carter's sisters, Ruth and Gloria. And when Rosalynn Carter came out to see her friend Ruth, this is where they would hang out together, play games, do homework and just enjoy each other's company.

Surely, when Ms. Rosalynn was out visiting President Carter's sister, she would have seen a young Jimmy Carter and had many interactions with him.

This is Plains High School. This is where Rosalynn Smith Carter and Jimmy Carter would have attended first through the 11th grade.

Her first memory of going to school here is she made straight As at first quarter. And she went home and she showed her dad, Edgar Smith, and her mom, Ms. Allie, the straight As, and she -- they were so proud of her, her dad gave her a dollar for her accomplishments.

Later on, in the 7th grade, a local businessman had a contest for the student who had the best grade point average throughout the year and whoever had that grade point average, he would give them $5. And in 1920s and '30s, that's quite a bit of money. And after 7th grade year, Ms. Rosalynn had won that $5 from the local businessman.

One of the activities that Rosalynn Carter would have been engaged in was basketball. She was so excited when she made the varsity basketball team here. We have a picture of her in her uniform and her Plains High School leather jacket, and I think it was a very good accomplishment for Ms. Rosalynn at the time.

This is the Plains United Methodist Church, and it's right here on these steps where President Carter asked Ms. Rosalynn out on a date for the first time. It's also here where they got married. So it's a very special place for President and Mrs. Carter, and a special place for Plains.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: So there's a look at some of the early life in Plains, Georgia. I'm going to let Regina Crumkey on Twitter asked the question, "How did Rosalynn and Jimmy meet?"

JAY HAKES: Well, as the park ranger, Steve Theus, said, they probably saw each other from a distance because Rosalynn was a friend of Ruth, his sister, but they seemed not to pay much attention to her.

But as they got older and it became known he was going to go into the Navy and travel around the world. I think she started to focus on him. And then, the first date they had which probably when she was about 17 and he was about 20, he went home and told his mother that he was going to marry Rosalynn after the first date.

It took him a while to convince her to marry him because she felt she was too young even though she was quite smitten with him. So they -- until this event happened, apparently they hadn't, you know, run into each other, but they were three years apart, which may be the reason.

SUSAN SWAIN: She married at -- him at 19?

JAY HAKES: Yes. Yes, so she was a young bride.

SUSAN SWAIN: Was she ever able to finish college?

JAY HAKES: She has, I think an associates degree from Georgia Southwestern. And, you know, that school is very important. Her mother went to that school, And today, the school has a caregiving program named after her and she's very active in that school so...

SUSAN SWAIN: Grace, I want to ask the second part of Regina Crumkey's question, "Where they both of the same religion" as a launching point to talk about, safe and religion and politics and his -- their political rise.

GRACE HALE: Well, they were always churchgoers, growing up in Plains and in their married life, attending different churches depending on where they lived, but his and her faith became really important when he was campaigning for national office, for the presidency.

And that was, again, a really interesting moment, a pivotal moment, just like for women's rights, a moment when Evangelical Christians, more conservative, theologically conservative Christians were really embracing the public sphere, coming sort of out of the kind of self-imposed isolation and really taking up a public life.

And Carter really spoke to them, a lot of people that would later find themselves as part of what we would call the new right or the Christian right. They -- some of those people, many of those people voted for Carter, and that was, for some of them, the first time they ever voted in a national campaign.

And so, they really foregrounded their faith especially after their -- Carter's experience becoming born again. They really -- they really put that at the center of their campaign.

SUSAN SWAIN: So the Carters wed and Rosalynn Carter became a Navy wife. What were those years like for her? And talk about the birth of their sons.

JAY HAKES: Well, he helped -- he was very active in the submarine program. In fact, he helped developed the nuclear reactors for the U.S. Navy. But he was at sea a lot, so they had three sons who

were born while he was in the Navy. I believe Jack was born in Portsmouth, Chip was born in Hawaii, and I think Jeff was born in Connecticut.

So she had a lot of jobs raising the sons, because Jimmy was not around a lot of the time, and she would run the family finances, which is a task she took on at the farm as well. So she was -- she was very busy, but she also enjoyed the opportunity to travel to all of these great places. I think they really enjoyed living in Hawaii, for instance. It was a very special experience for them.

SUSAN SWAIN: So Jimmy Carter was accepted into the nuclear submarine program, as you suggested working, I believe, with Admiral Hyman Rickover, the father of the nuclear submarine program. This is a cachet job in the Navy, but he leaves it. Why?

JAY HAKES: Well, you know, the -- I think the main reason is his father dies earlier than expected. His father, Earl, was -- passed away in 1953, and Billy was too young to take over the farm.

So it was kind of I guess a question that the farm might be lost to the family if he didn't go back. And then when he went back for his father's funeral, he found out that his father had been more active in the community, helping poor people and giving loans to people that needed help, and he'd never realized that as a child. And he thought, "Well, I could do more good back here."

The thing is, he didn't consult with Rosalynn on that question and she actually refused to talk to him on the trip between Schenectady and Plains. And he said after that he learned his lesson and he would never again make a major decision without consulting with her.

SUSAN SWAIN: So here she found herself back in Plains after getting out and seeing the world. But they put themselves full time into the peanut farm business and really used to it as a way to grow and to get around the state. How did that segue into their life in politics?

GRACE HALE: Well, they started off getting involved in local politics. It's a, you know, it's a well-worn path. Jimmy Carter became involved, I believe, with the school board there in Plains and used that as a jumping off point to the Georgia State Legislature. And from there, eventually, the launching -- two campaigns for governor, the first wasn't successful and the second was.

So they really used their sort of rootedness in Plains and I think their experience of the broader world, you know, coming together, helped them to get into national politics.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, let's invite our callers into the discussion, beginning with Steve watching us in Fort Myers, Florida. Hi, Steve, you're on.

QUESTION: Yes. Good evening. I was very fortunate to meet President and Mrs. Carter when they came to Fort Myers, Florida in 1994. The reason they came to Fort Myers is the fact that we presented President Carter with the Audubon Medal. And this was because of his work to pass the Alaska Lands Act which actually saved about 104 million acres of wilderness.

And I wondered if Mrs. Carter had any effect on his environmental policies because I know she certainly wanted to put forth some information to President Carter on some of his policies, and I wanted to know how much of his environmental policies she might have had information about and to at least make him form a certain policy.

SUSAN SWAIN: Was she personally concerned with environmental issues?

JAY HAKES: They are both avid outdoorsmen. They always have been and they always will be. They both love to fly fish, for instance, and so they've always had this personal connection to rivers.

When he was governor, protecting the Flint River was one of his priorities. And then he was involved in the environment in many ways as president.

They're also both very serious birders. They go actually around the world looking for species they haven't seen before and have quite a notebook of different things they've seen.

So the Carter presidency has generally been ranked by historians as for the environment, after Teddy Roosevelt and then President Nixon founded EPA and passed the Clean Air Act, Carter's sort of right up there behind them and most of the environmental rankings. And both of them have this great respect for nature and the outdoors.

SUSAN SWAIN: Keith is watching us in Greenville, Indiana. Hi, Keith. You're on.

QUESTION: Hi, Susan. How are you?

SUSAN SWAIN: Very well, sir. What's your question for us?

QUESTION: What was the reaction of President Carter and the first lady when he lost the election to Ronald Reagan in 1980?

SUSAN SWAIN: OK. Thank you. You're fast forwarding our story for us but what was their reaction when they lost the '80 campaign?

GRACE HALE: Well, I mean, they were -- they were devastated. You know, I don't really know what to add to that. Do you want to take that up?

SUSAN SWAIN: It was a hard-fought campaign.

GRACE HALE: I mean they were very, very devastated.

JAY HAKES: The election was not close, but until the last week or so, the polls showed it was an open race. But I think both of them realized before Election Day itself that it was -- it was coming. And it was -- it was hard.

I mean, she is very candid. If you read her memoirs, she doesn't really try to cover up how she feels about things, and she said everybody's, you know, pretended like they weren't bitter. "but I sure it was."

So you know, obviously, for anybody, what you put in to run for the office and you put into do that job, it's tough when you get a verdict like that from the voters. But, you know, they've come to peace with it and been able to make a great use of the rest of their life.

GRACE HALE: It was a pretty fragile victory though. In '76 when he won the office, it was a pretty small victory. So I think it was, you know, in some ways, a surprise victory.

SUSAN SWAIN: And before we leave their governor's years, Dave Murdock on Twitter wants to know, "What major accomplishments did Rosalynn and Jimmy make for the State of Georgia that maybe has been replicated by other states?" What can you point to -- either of you could take that?

JAY HAKES: Well, I think in Georgia, there was a major reorganization of the functions of state government, so there were fewer agencies. He was the first one to set up a film bureau to attract films to come to Georgia, which has become a big thing.

He was very active in international promotion of business and trade, and the environment, which we've already mentioned.

He only served one term as governor because at that time, the Georgia constitution did not allow anybody to run for a second term. So that's why he only served the one term. And, of course, the reason he was ether going to retire from politics at that point, I guess, and run for president.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, go ahead.

GRACE HALE: Well, I think the one of the things that's interesting about his governorship is that he really didn't run as particularly liberal on issues about racial integration and the civil -- the legacy of the mass sort of civil rights movement that had, you know, rocked the South in the years leading up to and even when he was first running for governor, for the first -- the first campaign.

He really didn't run as that liberal on these issues but once he became the governor and perhaps in part because he knew he wasn't going to have to run again in Georgia where a lot of voters were not -- white voters were not going to support those kinds of views, he really made a tack -- a turn -- a tactical turn, really nurtured the career of a young Andy Young at that time and really began to really moderate what had been some pretty traditional white Southern views before that.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, Sheldon Cooper has a question about race about the first lady, "Growing up in the south during racially tense time, what views did Rosalynn have on equal rights and human rights?"

JAY HAKES: Well, she was very impressed by Lillian Carter. I don't think we've mentioned Lillian Carter yet, but...

SUSAN SWAIN: Known as Ms. Lillian during the administration?

JAY HAKES: Yes. Yes. And she was a major force through the whole town of Plains because she was a nurse. And whereas the prevailing attitude was that, you know, African-Americans had to come through the back door, the schools were separate. as far as Ms. Lillian was concerned, everybody was equal and she had to carry out her nursing responsibilities that way. And everybody saw that. And one of Rosalynn's sisters was named after Ms. Lillian so there was a respect for her.

So even at this time, although the prevailing culture was of a segregated society, I think both of them grew up with sort of a basic sense of fairness that said this isn't the way things ought to be. And then, of course, as they travelled around the world, they also broadened their perspective.

GRACE HALE: Well, I would add, though, that neither of them were amongst the white southerners that stood up against the kind of segregationist as to way of life. I mean, they may well have had their personal views that these things aren't fair, but they were very quiet about those personal views.

And that's what I think is really interesting again about his governorship is that's when you start to see that kind of change in the Carters.

JAY HAKES: You do have to distinguish between sort of joining the civil rights movement but they also supported going -- even his father supported the selling of land to African-Americans. That was one of the major forms of discrimination that was pursued. And Earl Carter actually sold some of his land to African-Americans.

And then when Carter ran for the school board and state legislature, or the state senate, one of the issues was the closing of the schools over segregation, and Carter was very strong about not shutting down the schools. So within Plains, those were the kind of issues that were being debated at the time.

GRACE HALE: Yes, but then he thought about actually endorsing George Wallace when he was running for president.

So I think it's a complicated story, but I do think that in the end, they make the journey. And to me, that's what's interesting. as a historian to watch the kind of change over time on the positions of the Carters on these issues.

SUSAN SWAIN: Michael is in Vicksburg, Mississippi and you're on the air next.

Hi, Michael.

QUESTION: Good evening. Two months ago marked the Carters' involvement in the 30th anniversary of the Habitat for Humanity and I just wanted to know how did they become involved in that organization initially?

JAY HAKES: Well, Habitat, as you may know, that was founded in Americus, Georgia, and Americus, Georgia, is only seven miles from Plains. So the people that founded Habitat were well-known to the Carters, were friends with the Carters and the Carters really liked the idea.

So what they agreed to in the early years was that their name could be used for the organization for fundraising and things like that.

And then they spend one week a year working on Habitat projects. Many of these days are abroad, and these are not just photo ops, they actually go out and they're both quite good with tools.

So they go back to their first days of Habitat and they're still active. They spend 51 weeks a year working on the Carter Center, but they do have -- have made a major contribution to Habitat.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, before we get into the White House years, we have to add one more person to the story and that's the birth of Amy Carter. She was born in 1967. So the Carters arrived at the White House with a young daughter and their sons off doing other things and with their lives.

But the inauguration was cast as the People's Inaugural, and we've got some video of what became iconic of the time, which is the president and the first lady getting out of their limousine after their ceremony when they were coming back to the White House and actually walking Pennsylvania Avenue. How important a symbolism was that?

GRACE HALE: I think that was important in a lot of different ways. I mean, in part, they were sort of prompted to do it, at least as I've heard of the story, you could jump in here if you want to, that by a congressman interested in physical fitness issues and urged them to think about it.

But it became really a symbol of his desire to -- their desire to connect with people, to not present themselves as kind of elite above the people, to really be in touch with ordinary Americans. That's really how it played out in terms of the inauguration. And I believe she's spoken about people along the way just weeping as they walked by and shook hands and spoke to people. So it clearly was meaningful to people who were there.

SUSAN SWAIN: One other bit of symbolism, she wore the same gown for her presidential inaugural balls that she wore in Georgia. How -- what's the thinking there? What's she trying to say?

JAY HAKES: Well, you know, I think they'd decided they wanted a less imperial presidency, and the walking down Pennsylvania Avenue was an impressive thing because it was a surprise. The Secret Service only allowed this because it was kept secret.

But it's interesting because they, to some extent, disagreed about certain aspects of the imperial presidency. She didn't -- he didn't want "Hail to the Chief" to be played at all, and she thought he'd overdone that too much. She thought it maybe it ought to be played a little bit more. So he was very adamant about reducing the imperial nature of the presidency. She thought maybe we should do some of that, but maybe not quite go so far.

SUSAN SWAIN: And we saw on that clip, the transition with president and Mrs. Ford. This was also a very tough campaign, The Fords were devastated by their loss and that (inaudible) as President Carter and Ford struck a friendship after each were in office. Did Rosalynn and Betty Ford have a friendship?

JAY HAKES: Absolutely. The friendship really starts when President Reagan had been wounded, you know, shot seriously before President Sadat was assassinated. So he could not go to the funeral because of his condition. Vice President Bush couldn't go, so he sent three presidents, Nixon, Ford and Carter, and that's where they really bonded.

And the same thing happened with the first ladies. Mrs. Carter spoke at Betty Ford's funeral, the family asked her to speak. Susan Ford is on the advisory committee that Rosalynn has at the Carter Center on mental illness. So that there is a very close bond between the families and maybe part of it was they both went through the trauma of failing to be reelected.

SUSAN SWAIN: Now, the White House was a busy spot because two of the sons and their wives and children moved in?

JAY HAKES: For part of the time.

SUSAN SWAIN: And Amy was there and then...

JAY HAKES: Yes.

SUSAN SWAIN: ... the nation also got introduced to Ms. Lillian and to President Carter's brother, Billy?

JAY HAKES: Yes. Ms. Lillian was really the celebrity. When the Democrat National Convention was held in the summer of 1976, most of the delegates had already met the Carter family except for Ms. Lillian because she had stayed home to take care of Amy. So when -- she was the Carter family member that people hadn't already have met, so the big push at the convention was because I -- can I get to meet Lillian Carter.

GRACE HALE: Well, it was exciting to be in elementary school at this time. I grew up in Georgia and to watch them go to the White House and for Amy to grow up in the White House. It was -- it was a really exciting thing to watch if you were a kid. And she seemed right there in the center of all of the events and I remember thinking about that a lot as something that was really exciting.

SUSAN SWAIN: As a mother with a young child in the White House, how did she approach protecting young Amy from the press, the public interest, that sort of thing? We have a photograph right here, it looks like kind of like coming down the stairs from the Blair House, and you can see how young she is. How did they approach parenting?

JAY HAKES: Well, I think that they felt that all their kids should be able to have a private life if they wanted to, and Amy certainly did.

You know, if you're a kid in the first family, you've got Secret Service protection, so it's a little hard to just blend in, even if you'd like to.

But I think the press in general respected that, you know, and realized that a child shouldn't be exposed to, you know, the kind of press that their parents, you know, get. So, you know, I think it worked out well.

But it was very hard to move to Washington and then to have to move back, and.

SUSAN SWAIN: We have one photograph we're going to put on screen that struck most of us. And this is Amy Carter going to school, and we'll put it on the screen here so you can see. The phalanx of reporters on this little tiny character going off with her Snoopy bag to school. They made a decision about public school nonetheless, even though she would be more exposed to this sort of thing?

JAY HAKES: Yes. And the other thing I should say is that the Carters were relatively young occupants of the White House, and then Amy was very much the young daughter. So it's a little unusual for a president -- it's not unique, but it's unusual for presidents to have a daughter that young, So, it is kind of exciting for the whole country.

SUSAN SWAIN: She was eight, nine -- nine when they moved in?

JAY HAKES: Something like that.

GRACE HALE: Yes. You know, the decision to send her to public school was really, you know, was really a decision that many people commented on and it became very politicized. But it was really, in many ways, an example to the nation and in some ways a rebuke of a lot of white southerners who were sending their kids to segregated private schools at the time.

SUSAN SWAIN: Before we leave the family, I want to talk about Billy Carter, the president's brother, because he occasionally became a political issue for the president, in what ways?

GRACE HALE: Well, he didn't seem to, you know, understand how a new, sort of pervasive media coverage was not necessarily going to be always his friend.

But would you like to add to that?

JAY HAKES: Yes, I mean one thing...

GRACE HALE: He got in trouble a lot.

JAY HAKES: One thing with Billy was that he was a little bit equivalent to Amy, that he'd been the last child. And so, there's a big age separation between the two brothers.

Billy became an issue in 1980 over issues related to Libya. There were all sorts of investigations, and no charges wherever filed or anything like that. But it did create some distractions during the -- at crucial points of the campaign in 1980.

SUSAN SWAIN: He also chose to try to commercialize the connection.

GRACE HALE: Yes.

JAY HAKES: Yes.

SUSAN SWAIN: I remember Billy Beer...

GRACE HALE: Billy beer, yes.

JAY HAKES: Yes.

SUSAN SWAIN: ... at that time. And so, what was -- did that strain the relationship with his older brother, the president?

JAY HAKES: I don't think so. I mean, Billy was a popular figure around Plains. He -- you know, he had a good sense of humor, and he's a smart, smart guy.

But he, of course he, you know, originally was going to take over the farm and run the farm, and then never did, you know, assume that position, so that had to be hard although he did end up running it a lot of times when they were off campaigning.

SUSAN SWAIN: Steven (ph) in Louisville, Kentucky. Hi, Steven (ph).

QUESTION: Hello. And how are you all this evening?

SUSAN SWAIN: Good. Thank you.

QUESTION: Well, I have a few things to say.

First of all, this lady is a little bit special to me because I was born the first year that he was in the White House, and the week that I was born, they had the National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas. And Mrs. Carter and Betty Ford and Lady Bird Johnson, as well as Maya Angelou and all those women convened. I think it was the first time that the U.S. government ever sponsored an event like this for women in particular. I think it's the only time, if I'm not mistaken.

And I know that in particular on women's issues, Carter was the first U.S. president at that time to appoint more women to office than any other person at that time.

Some other things I wanted to add, the arts -- this administration was very good to the arts. "In performance at the White House" was started in 1979 on PBS. They hosted the First National Poetry Festival in 1980.

And also, as far as her image is concerned, I've done some research on first ladies, and I know this lady is interesting, because I think out of all the recent first ladies, it seems like she's not as well-known.

And I think the reason is, is because she was so ahead of her time. She was so multifaceted in her approach as first lady. She didn't just stick to one issue. And I think the press really was upset with her because of that.

SUSAN SWAIN: OK, I'd jump in at that point. Thanks very much. Obviously, you've studied and know a bit about this White House. What would you like to say to her?

GRACE HALE: Well, you've highlighted a really important historical moment, and that is that National Women's Conference was really a historic event. It was the first event of that kind that was put on by the government with the support of the president.

And it was a real moment of the kind of mainstreaming or, you know, sort of broader acceptance of the goals of the women's movement. And it was really, really an amazing event.

And it's indicative of the kind of things that Rosalynn did. I mean, she really did refuse to stick to one event. She championed women's rights, she campaigned for the ERA, and she also kept up her interest in issues like mental health that she had worked on back in Georgia.

And so, that I think is indicative of her sort of in many ways, creating a kind of modern first lady role.

SUSAN SWAIN: While she pursued her own causes, she also stayed very much involved in the president's issues, and, as we said at the outset, attended Cabinet meetings.

We have clips next to show you where both the President and the first lady talked about her participation in those Cabinet meetings.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

J. CARTER: So Rosalynn and I arranged to have one official lunch together in Oval Office every week. So we would kind of postpone all the things that could be postponed that were official in nature that dealt with the government of the United States of America or international affairs or health or welfare or housing or transportation, and we would discuss those things in our official meeting in the Oval Office once a week.

When I learned, for instance, that Rosalynn was still a little bit frustrated and not knowing enough about what was going on, as she was never hesitant to let me know when she was frustrated -- and she hasn't changed since...

(LAUGHTER)

... then I decided there would be nothing wrong with Rosalynn attending the Cabinet meetings. And so, I've invited her to attend the Cabinet meeting. She sat in the back of the room in an unobtrusive way. Nobody much knew she was there except me. I was constantly aware that my wife was watching me.

ROSALYNN CARTER: What a lot of people don't know is that the Cabinet meets and they have staff around the room. But I sat by Max Cleland, he was in a wheelchair and he's not a Cabinet member, anyway. He was the head of Veterans Affairs when I sat by him next to the door.

And I went every time I could that the Cabinet met, because it was -- I thought it was necessary for me to know what was going on and why the decisions made and so forth. And so that I could explain to people in the country if -- as I toured around.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: And we have a photograph of the Carters conferring.

The late 1970s were a time of many challenges internationally and domestically. As we've done in many programs, we have a list of a number of the major issues during that time period to show you, to demonstrate what the president was working on, including some of these issues such as the Panama Canal Treaty, the energy crisis -- and those of you who were around will remember the long gas lines that people suffered through.

Inflation was high, and there was recession going on. Mortgages were in the high double digits at that time for homeowners. I mentioned the Panama Canal Treaty, the Camp David Accords, the negotiation of the SALT II Soviet missile treaty and of course, the big issue that framed the latter half of the Carter White House was the Iranian hostage crisis.

For her part, Mrs. Carter was very much involved in mental health. And just one month after taking office, President Carter created the Mental Health Commission.

How did Mrs. Carter get involved in mental health issues?

JAY HAKES: I think the pivotal point for her was when he was running for governor of Georgia and so many of the people that came up to her on the campaign trail with things they want her to work on mentioned problems that they had in their family and particularly the stigma that was attached to mental health issues.

And so, that was the beginning of it, and she had a very strong mental health program in Georgia and then she had that at the White House.

SUSAN SWAIN: Let me take a call, and then we'll learn a little bit more about the announcement of the Mental Health Commission.

Barbara is watching us in Nashville.

Hi, Barbara, you're on the air.

QUESTION: Yes. This is Barbara Lavender (ph).

And in 1976, we were invited to the White House, cousins in the music business and we got invited to go to the White House. And then after that, the ladies got to go to see the Congress, which you just mentioned, they were discussing the Panama Canal Treaty. And it was just a great event.

But that night, it was so -- it was just so wonderful, being at the White House and meeting with all the -- and it was a governors' meeting as well.

And then, we had done campaigning for President Carter through some of the towns in Alabama along with Tammy Wynette. And it was just a wonderful event, and we just really loved President Carter and Mrs. Carter. And they were just so gracious.

SUSAN SWAIN: Thanks very much.

Well, we learned that her interest in the arts was much broader than just southern music, and national. But did they, in fact, reach out to that constituency as well?

GRACE HALE: Well, it was interesting during the campaign, again, the expansion of the media during this time, a lot of musicians from the South endorsed Carter's campaign.

And I think most interestingly. and perhaps forgotten today, Southern Rock was really at its peak. Capricorn Records were headquartered in Macon, and musicians like the Allman Brothers Band were headquartered there in Georgia. And a lot of those musicians became supporters of Carter and helped spread the word of his campaign.

So it was a broad interest in the arts. He listened to classical music, but he also had a -- they both also had an interest in more sort of vernacular southern music as well.

SUSAN SWAIN: The people who keep these kinds of statistics say that First Lady Carter had three dozen specific interviews with media organizations and had 22 press conferences during their term in office. We're going to see one of those instances when she talked to reporters after the president signed the executive order establishing the Mental Health Commission.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSALYNN CARTER: As you probably know, for the past year and a half, or a little more, I have campaigned all over the country. In my biographical sketch, I had a little paragraph that said that I was interested in mental health.

And so, everywhere I went, if people had a good program, they wanted me to see it. I had a chance to see things happening all over this country that are good. I also had some things happening that I thought needed help. I hope, for the establishment of this commission, I know that we can give some of that help.

We have a chance to do great things in our country. Well I thought until today that I was going to be the chairperson.

(LAUGHTER)

And I got a little...

(LAUGHTER)

... I got a little note from somebody that said "according to the Office of Legal Counsel of the Department of Justice and so forth, that prohibits a president for appointing a close relative, such as a wife, to a civilian position. A civilian position may be unpaid, as well as paid. Justices advise that the 20 members of the commission including the chair will, in fact, be serving in civilian positions. There is, however, no problem with you being designated as honorary chairperson."

(LAUGHTER)

So I'm going to be a very active honorary chairperson. I intend to -- we're going to have -- we have office space in the Executive Office Building, which is very close. I will be spending many hours a week there. I will be traveling. I will be involved in the fact-finding process, traveling over the country for hearings in the next six months. I intend to be active.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: I'm watching that, and it's something of appreciation for Hillary Clinton being involved in the health care debate during their White House years. So this -- again, this evolution of the role of first lady, but it runs into legal limitations.

GRACE HALE: It's a challenge. It's really a challenge. And it's -- I think, particularly challenging during these years when Rosalynn is trying to navigate these roles, because women's position in society as a whole is changing so rapidly across the '70s.

And so, she's, you know, not only got to negotiate the difficulties of being the first lady in the media all the time, but also really a time when women themselves are very much disagreeing about what the proper role for women in society is and arguing about it.

It's not just the time of feminism, after all it's the rise of right conservative women's backlash against feminism and critique of it. And so, again, I think Rosalynn has a difficult job there.

SUSAN SWAIN: On...

JAY HAKES: You can see in that clip that she wasn't going to let that legal opinion close her down. So she, you know, was able to do it, and, you know, had a great impact.

You know, she was so committed to reducing stigma for mental illness, to getting it treated as a medical condition. And in her own sweet way, she was running that commission.

GRACE HALE: And her issues really are still very much with us. I mean -- and recent health care reform is just winning some of the goals that she was working on back in the '70s.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, they -- she had a signature piece of legislation that made its way through the Congress. Can you talk about what that did, and what its legislative trajectory was?

JAY HAKES: OK. Well, the Mental Health Commission issued reports in 1977 and 1978, and then in 1980, you know, fairly late in the Carter presidency, they passed the mental health bill, which was basically requiring that mental illnesses be treated like other illnesses.

Interestingly enough, just in the last few weeks, that has made into the final rules of the Affordable Care Act, and Secretary Sebelius came down to be with Mrs. Carter to announce that at the Carter Center.

So you have to have a lot of patience in the public sector, and she has been frustrated that more has not happened at a faster pace. But, again, I think Grace said she's been ahead of her time on a lot of these issues and now, some of them are coming to fruition.

SUSAN SWAIN: We have a photograph of Mrs. Carter testifying before a Senate subcommittee on mental health issues.

And from that, we'll take you to her talking in the present day in this interview she gave us in Atlanta just recently about her disappointment about the legislation and what happened to it after it passed. Let's listen in.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSALYNN CARTER: I got upset with the press, because they covered my mental health work the first few meetings I had. And then they never showed up anymore. And one of the things I wanted to do is bring attention to the issue and how terrible it was and what few services there were.

And -- but -- and thinking, just getting it out in the public, that's what I did in Georgia, developed a good program in Georgia, by the way.

But they just didn't come. And so, one day, I was walking in the down floor -- down (inaudible) floor in the White House and met this woman who was one of the press people. And I said, "You don't ever cover my -- nobody ever covers my meetings in the...

She said, "Ms. Carter, mental health is just not a sexy issue."

And that would -- and that I didn't like. But I never did get very much coverage for it. But we toured the country, found out what was needed to develop the legislation, and passed the Mental Health Assistance Act of 1980.

It passed through Congress one month before Jimmy, as he says, was involuntarily retired from the White House, and the incoming president put it on a shelf, never implemented it. It was one of the greatest disappointments in my life.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: That's Rosalynn Carter talking about her frustration with the implementation of the signature legislation of one of her major issues.

You mentioned women's rights issues. She was also a big champion for the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. They didn't have such great success with that.

But you -- would you talk a little bit more about the backlash from the Moral Majority, as it was beginning it to grow as well, for women's rights issues in the country?

GRACE HALE: Yes. Well, when the Carters took office, you know, there were only four states still needed to ratify ERA, and Rosalynn really got out there and campaigned. And it really looked like it would make it.

But, again, to return us to that women's conference in Houston, that was really a moment when the organization of the fight against ERA really became a kind of public -- public as well, and conservative women across the country had organized to get themselves elected as delegates to that women's conference. And they really began fighting back against what they saw as changes that they were not welcoming and really began to systematically campaign for ERA to be stopped, led by people like Phyllis Schlafly.

So it was a -- it was a kind of a difficult time there.

You know, in many ways, if you said that a -- that a woman from a small town in Georgia, somebody like Rosalynn Carter with her background, would be a champion of ERA and it wouldn't pass, you would have been surprised by that. And I think she really gave it her all.

She has also said that was a very disappointing loss for her as well, that that was not ratified. But the conservative women got really organized around the country and began to fight back.

SUSAN SWAIN: Jay Hakes, I wanted to talk to you about the use of the White House which we have learned through the course of this series is a deadly serious political business and how presidents choose to bring people in to the White House.

And if you look at statistics during the Carter years, the numbers are really impressive of people who were invited to official events at the White House. In 1977, 30,000, by '78, that had grown to 40,000, in '79, 85,000 and in the 1980, the election year, 100,000 official guests at events in the White House. How did they approach entertaining there?

JAY HAKES: Well, very seriously. A lot of these have a serious purpose because if it's a state dinner and you have the head of a foreign country, and if they were invited to a state dinner, it probably has some diplomatic purpose attached to it. And so, they served, you know, very fine American products, very fine wines. And you have to get all the protocol worked out.

A lot of it's to say thank you for people that have helped you in the campaign and then of course, in the election year, making sure you're touching all the bases.

They had some pretty great events at the White House in 1980. One of the callers mentioned the poetry conference which they had in January, I believe. And then they had all the jazz greats came in for a long concert with Eubie Blake, and that was another stunning event.

So, you know, as much as she was the modern first lady in adopting these big issues like mental health and ERA, she also knew that that didn't mean that she gave up the other part of it, was to make all this functions smoothly.

And as Grace mentioned, she had a very professional staff there to work with her, so that was a big asset.

GRACE HALE: And for the record, the Carter White House was a no hard liquor White House.

JAY HAKES: Well, I think that was more of a budgetary thing than it was aesthetics. They figured they could get better wines and better food if they didn't serve hard liquor. But, yes, that was one way of doing it.

They had to do this on a small budget. So, you know, the fact that you're doing more events doesn't mean you have more money to do them. So you do have to have -- be cost conscious about it.

GRACE HALE: But also, I think that it was part of where they were from, their kind of background. They didn't -- many people in the South, small-town South, white and black, who are people of faith, do not drink. And it was also a part of who they were, and they brought that with them to the White House.

And I think that was, you know, a cultural issue and also, again, a kind of class choice, you know, this isn't going to be an elite atmosphere. We're going to -- we're going to have more of the people's White House, and that was part of what they saw as something that they want to promote.

SUSAN SWAIN: In this next clip, Mrs. Carter talks about the media's reaction to this people's White House and what she saw as southern -- anti-southern bias in the media. Let's listen

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSALYNN CARTER: There is a bias against southerners, there was. I never would say that out loud when we were there, because I didn't want to think it and I didn't want other people to think it. But you had to keep proving yourself over and over.

It didn't matter what you did. You have great successes, and then you had to prove yourself again for the next success.

And I think it was, you know, I wasn't supposed to be sophisticated enough or something. But, you know, who wants to be sophisticated, I don't know.

I think there is a little bit of bias about the South. I remember after Jimmy was elected, there was a whole page cartoon in The Washington Post of the Carter family, Jimmy's mother, me, and there were haystacks. We had on straw hats and there was straw between our teeth.

(LAUGHTER)

And then I went from that to being steel magnolia.

But I thought that was pretty good, because steel is tough and magnolia is southern, so...

(LAUGHTER)

And then I was fuzzy. I was fuzzy for a while. And then I was most powerful. So I had a full range of images.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: Was she correct? Was there an anti-southern bias in the media while they were in the White House?

GRACE HALE: I think that she was correct. But, I mean, most people that had not -- that are not from the South had a kind of opinion of who white southerners were that were shaped by the media's coverage of civil rights unrest and protest and violence.

And I think that many people had those kinds of assumptions that were not from the south.

I should clarify -- and I don't know what she meant when she said bias against southerners, but it would certainly have been more of a bias against whites then against African-American southerners in kind of national media environments.

And it was also a time period when image of white southerners were all over popular culture. You had all kinds of television series as the "Andy Griffith Show," "Petticoat Junction," you know, all kinds of series across the '60s and into the '70s, you know, making comedy out of white southerner's rural lives. And so, that's part of it as well.

SUSAN SWAIN: On this concept of acceptance in the public image, she wrote in her memoirs, "Image, however, did become an annoyance that wouldn't go away. I thought that if I were working productively and accomplishing something worthwhile, the image would take care of itself. Wrong. I learned that labels are easy to come by and hard to overcome."

Besides the press, we should ask you to talk about the Carters' expectance by the national -- or the Washington establishment. The Georgians come to town campaigning as the outsiders against the political establishment, How did the establishment react?

JAY HAKES: Well, I think, you know, one, I would say, that no president or first lady has probably ever been totally satisfied with how they were covered in the press or how they were accepted in Washington.

You know, look at poor President Ford who is pictured as someone who tripped over himself all the time, when he'd been an intercollegiate athlete.

But, you know, they did -- you know, they did try to work around the Washington press corps to some extent. They felt like they could go directly to the press, the local press at the state and local level, and not deal so much with Washington.

You know, President Carter sold off the Sequoia which was this great boat where they would take people they were trying to influence in the Congress and other people down this nice boat trip down the Potomac River.

So, you know, they didn't do some of the traditional things that had been expected, again, related to this thing about getting away from the imperial presidency.

So, you know, there were some rough relations there. You know, Hamilton Jordan, his brilliant aide, had made some comment about they weren't going to bring in these Washington types into the administration. Well, they did end up bringing in people like Cy Vance and other capable people, but there was always a tension there.

SUSAN SWAIN: Michael's in Washington D.C.

Hi, Michael. You're on.

QUESTION: Yes, Susan. I wanted to follow up on the comment you made about hard liquor.

Now, is it my understanding that Mrs. Carter grew up United Methodist and President Carter grew up Southern Baptist, and there really wasn't -- is a distinction there with evangelical.

And the second part of it is, did they attend the First Baptist of Washington, D.C., when they were in D,C,? Or -- I know they attended Saint John's Episcopal, where all the presidents go to church.

SUSAN SWAIN: It's my understanding that after they married, they mostly attended Baptist churches and did attend First Baptist, but you might be able to clarify that.

JAY HAKES: I think that's the place -- I can't swear that, but I'm sure that's...

SUSAN SWAIN: I'm pretty sure that they did attend First Baptist. But some of their -- one of their sons joined the church first, and then they followed them there.

JAY HAKES: Today, they attend Maranatha Church in Plains, which welcomes visitors on Sunday. And President Carter still teaches a Sunday school class that the public is welcome to attend.

SUSAN SWAIN: So you go to Plains and go to church, you could have a lesson from the former president.

JAY HAKES: That's right.

SUSAN SWAIN: I need to move because I'm running out of time, but I want to get in an important part of her work as first lady, and that is representing officially of the United States overseas.

And in 1977, she was asked to represent the president and the country in a trip to Jamaica, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela. And on her return to the United States, she spoke to reporters with President Carter looking on. We're going to show you that clip next.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSALYNN CARTER: I bring you greetings from Latin America and the Caribbean. (speaking in Spanish).

(LAUGHTER)

I've done this for 2 weeks and I couldn't resist.

But, seriously, it was a good trip. This morning in Venezuela, President Perez said to me that Jimmy's Pan American Day speech and my visit to Latin America had opened new paths in inter-American relations. Instead of the paternalism that has characterized the past, we are ready and eager to develop, balanced, natural, normal and equal relationships.

I found goodwill and friendship everywhere I went.

They love you in the Caribbean and in Latin America. And every head of state that I spoke with without exception agreed with me on the importance of cooperating and consulting closely on the issues that concern you, Jimmy, and that concern us all, human rights, nuclear nonproliferation, economic development, arms control.

I think we've made progress in all of these areas.

I'm glad to be back home. I'm glad to be with Amy and with Jimmy. I'm going to convey all of this information that I have to Jimmy. In fact, I look forward to consulting closely with him on a regular basis.

(LAUGHTER)

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: At the onset of that clip, she spoke Spanish.

You have a little story about her Spanish lessons.

GRACE HALE: Well, she started learning Spanish when she was in the governor's mansion in Georgia. She and Jimmy took a trip to Latin America to promote business relationships with Georgia with various countries in Latin America, and they really began to study Spanish. And apparently, she really stuck with it.

And one of the things that they would do is read the Bible with each other at the end of the day, and she would -- they would take turns sometimes reading bible verses to each other in Spanish.

SUSAN SWAIN: And then, of course, there was her important role as the hostess for the Camp David summit between antagonistic parties as they were trying to reach agreement.

What role did she play during that?

And, just following on the last clip, what was the public acceptance in these countries of the first lady coming to represent the U.S.?

JAY HAKES: Well, you know, first on Latin America, I think it was -- that trip was somewhat misunderstood both in this country and abroad. That was a very substantive trip, because President Carter was trying to send a message, it's a new day for human rights. Just because you're an ally doesn't mean you can lock up political prisoners.

You can't deliver that message publicly, because people react against it. So by having her deliver it, it was more effective.

And at Camp David, the feeling -- President Carter had gotten the CIA to develop these very fine profiles of the participants, and he knew what made them tick. And so, he felt like they would all perform a lot better if their wives were there.

And Mrs. Sadat couldn't come, but she was in frequent phone contact with Anwar Sadat, And Mrs. Begin was there, and Mrs. Carter was there for the vast majority at the time.

So their being there was -- had a very specific purpose, that they were talking about things that would affect their grandchildren and their families, and having the spouses there would be a positive. And I think it turned out to be that way.

SUSAN SWAIN: Connie's (ph) watching us in Walnut Creek, California.

Hello, Connie (ph).

Connie (ph), are you there?

QUESTION: Susan -- yes, I am. Thank you. Mrs. Carter had strong views certainly about passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. I'm wondering, since that time, what her view is of the progress that women have made in politics and just in -- generally in society.

And has she ever made any comment about whether a woman could or should be elected president of the United States?

SUSAN SWAIN: Thanks so much.

Do you know the answers to those questions?

JAY HAKES: I think she thinks it's overdue to have a woman as president of the United States.

I mean, the Carters today are still involved to some extent in this fight because some parts of the Baptist Church don't allow woman to be pastors or deacons, and the Carters have withdrawn their memberships from those churches.

So -- and President Carter's next book is going to be about the rights of women around the world.

So they're still working on these issues.

But I think they're very proud. The Carters appointed a lot of women to the judiciary. Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed to the appeals court by President Carter, elevated to the Supreme Court by President Clinton.

And, you know, I think she recognizes there's been a lot of progress made, and they were able to be part of that progress.

SUSAN SWAIN: Of course, 444 days of the Carter administration and this country were consumed with the Americans that were held hostage at the U.S. embassy in Iran.

In our interview with Mrs. Carter, she spoke about those days and how challenging they were.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSALYNN CARTER: It was awful. I look back now, I have memories of just waiting for the press conference in Iran to say what happened that day because we had no idea what was going on. And the only way we knew what was going on was when they would come out and announce it.

And so -- and it was just, you know, thinking about and thinking -- we met with the families all along and thinking about the people whose family members were there and what it was doing to Jimmy's presidency, and it was awful. It was awful.

But -- and I would go out. I would go out and campaign. I had found out earlier that I could -- when a president goes out, he's so surrounded that people, he speaks to them, he says hello and so forth, but he doesn't get close enough to people to have conversations, you know, just normally, like you would otherwise. about what their hopes and dreams or what they thought about what I was doing or what Jimmy was doing, anything that could help them. I had learned that early when Jimmy was -- during his presidency.

And -- but I would go out and everybody would say, "Tell the president to do something and tell him to -- he's got to do something." I would come home and I would say, "Why don't you do something?"

And he said, "What do you want me to do? Do you want me to mine the harbors?" which a lot of people were talking about. He said, "And then have them bring out one prisoner every day and hang them in public?"

Well, maybe that's not the best thing to do.

And what -- you know, I wanted it over. And of course, he did too, everybody did, I mean, the people in the country. Every night a new TV program started, and nobody got over it at all. I mean, could get over it, or just think about it, because it was every day, every night. It was awful.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: Grace Hale, earlier, you commented on the role of the television media in shaping images of the presidency.

Here, we have a situation where every night, what became "Nightline" was, "America Held Hostage, Counting Down the Days."

What was the role of the media in focusing the country on this situation in Iran?

GRACE HALE: Well, we tend to think of our own day as uniquely -- the media's uniquely interactive and everywhere and pervasive. And, in fact, there was a real kind of advance in the '70s in the coverage that the media could do and their access to footage and how quickly they could get things on the air. Real leaps forward were made.

And you really saw that around the Iranian hostage crisis, not only because it was being reported in what, as you said, the show that would become "Nightline" was on the air every night, talking about the crisis, but also in the ways that the Iranian themselves were able to use the media to their own advantage to publicize what was going on from their end and to, in some ways, insert themselves into that kind of media conversation that maybe in an earlier era, the U.S. would have really been able to dominate. And so, that's part of that story as well.

SUSAN SWAIN: And Jay Hakes, it's ironic, sad -- I don't know what the description is, but today another event that CSPAN televised, one of many that's been happening over the past few weeks, discussing the accord -- possible accord with the Iranians over nuclear proliferation.

Here it is, all these years later, and we're still talking about relationships with that country.

I wonder -- I know the Carter Library and Center have had many conversations about the Middle East -- in the years ensuing, has the president and those who worked on -- in his Cabinet looked back and say, "We should have done something differently here."

JAY HAKES: Well, on Iran specifically, I think President Carter felt vindicated because the hostages got out alive.

You know, there was a choice between using military force which would have been more popular with the public, as Mrs. Carter's comments suggested, but a high likelihood that a lot of hostages would have been killed, or use punishing economic sanctions and then they eventually all get out alive. We're replaying that same kind of debate today.

Obviously, with Camp David, Camp David was an early step. and I think President Carter would have liked more time to expand to deal with the other issues between the Arabs and Israel, but he didn't have time to do that. So I think that he would have liked more time to work on that issue.

But I think he turned out on Iran -- I think as the hostages have looked back on it over the years, they feel that probably the approach he took was the best one for protecting their safety.

SUSAN SWAIN: David is in Chicago.

You're on the air. Hi, David.

QUESTION: Hi. Good evening.

A general question about the relationship between the Reagans and the Carters. And specifically, I thought I remembered hearing President Carter once state that President and Mrs. Reagan never invited the Carters back either for a state dinner in eight years or that they weren't even invited back for the unveiling of their official White House portraits. Is that true?

JAY HAKES: I don't know. I'd be a little surprised by that because President Reagan came down to the opening of the Carter Library in 1986 and gave a very gracious speech. So at least to that extent, you know, ex-presidents do -- and President Reagan met with President Carter before he sent him off to represent the United States at the Sadat funeral.

So there may not have been a lot of contact, but there certainly was some.

SUSAN SWAIN: You talked earlier about the 1980 campaign, the Carters faced a challenge in the primary from Senator Ted Kennedy.

What were some of the issues in addition to the Iranian hostage crisis that were framing the debate? Mrs. Carter talked about going out to campaigning. What was she facing with the public?

GRACE HALE: Well, one of the main things she was facing was a pretty fractured Democratic Party. There were divisions within the party, a kind of traditional base in the labor movement that the Carters had really never been particularly strong on that front or super connected with the large union movement. The liberal wing of the party, obviously represented by Ted Kennedy, not particularly happy with the Carters.

In some ways, the Carters were the -- they were the candidates that sort of threaded through the middle of all of these factions within the Democratic Party.

And so, the economic decline of the second half of the '70s would be one thing that she would be facing out there on the campaign trail.

It was a really interesting time in our national life. The economy didn't necessarily go down for everybody, but for industrial workers, working class Americans, it was a really, really tough time. And so, that would have been something she would have faced.

SUSAN SWAIN: Where did the Carters go after losing the White House?

JAY HAKES: Well, they moved back to Plains and to sort of plan the rest of their life. They were pretty young to be out of the White House. And eventually, they came up with the idea of the Carter Center (inaudible), still a part of Emory University.

And from there, they were able to launch a whole new career working on some of the same issues, but to continue to have a very big impact both in this country and around the world.

SUSAN SWAIN: Rosalynn Carter, in this interview, talks about her -- their post-White House legacy. It's important to say "their" because they were very much partners in all of this.

JAY HAKES: Yes.

SUSAN SWAIN: Let's listen to how she thinks their years after the White House have been framed and what they'd like to be remembered for.

And remember, as of right now, Jimmy Carter is the longest serving ex-president in history. So there's a lot of years since they left the White House, and they've stayed involved in issues. Let's watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSALYNN CARTER: I hope my legacy continues more than just first lady because Carter Center has been an integral part of our lives I would think. And our motto is "waging peace, fighting disease and building hope."

And I hope that I have contributed something to mental health issues and helped improve a little bit of people -- the lives of people living with mental illnesses.

But I also hope, I mean, I have had great opportunities for so long there.

And to go to Africa or one of those countries -- we have programs in- we have programs in 77 countries. And we go to Africa two or three times a year. And to go to those villages, and now things are coming to fruition we've been working on all these years, like we've almost eradicated guinea worm. I mean, to go to a village where there's no longer guinea worm, it is a celebration.

I mean, one of the good things about the Carter Center is we don't give money to the government. We send people in to teach, to help people in that country how to do something. And we work with the people in the villages, with -- and the health department does too, and we work with them. And they do the work.

I mean, just to go to a village and explain to them about guinea worm, if you can get the chief to approve -- that's what you have to do. But if they see that, or hear about it from another country, they're so happy you're there.

But just to see -- to go back, when it's gone from a village or almost gone, and the hope gives to them, that most of the time, it's the first thing they have ever seen that was successful. And it's just so wonderful, just to see the hope on their faces that something good is happening.

I didn't mean to get emotional.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: Will you comment some more about their approach to their post-presidency, their post-White House years?

JAY HAKES: Well, these are pretty epic stories when you look at them closely, because when the Carters started working on guinea worm in the 1980s, there were 3.5 million cases around the globe.

And this is a very debilitating disease. The worm grows within the body and people can't go to school or work in the fields. And the last official number I saw was 542 cases, and I think it's actually a little but lower than that. It's just now in four countries, I think, Mali, Chad, Ethiopia and Sudan.

So this is a remarkable achievement. It's going to be the second disease after smallpox to be eliminated from the face of the Earth.

She didn't mention election monitoring, but they've now monitored elections, I believe in 37 countries. And many of those countries more than once. And, countries like Indonesia, Liberia, they've helped sort of nurture them as they've gone through several election cycles.

And then, Liberia is a perfect example. They've not only moved to democracy, where they elected the first woman president in an African country.

But they had no mental health care. So the Carter Center organized a program where they train mental health nurses. And now, with the cadre of nurses that they've developed over several cycles of that, most of the country is now covered with basic professional help.

So it -- when you start -- I'm just scratching the surface, but when you start to see all of these different things going on around the world, because they can open that door as ex-president and ex-first lady -- and it's still going on. It hasn't stopped. They -- you know, President Carter was in Nepal last week for their elections there.

SUSAN SWAIN: And he is now 89 years old?

JAY HAKES: Correct.

SUSAN SWAIN: And the first lady is 86, I believe.

Well, Lauren (ph) is in Elizabethtown, North Carolina.

Hi, Lauren (ph). You are on.

QUESTION: Hello. Good evening.

I was wanting to know the relationship that Ms. Carter had with the late Betty Ford.

JAY HAKES: Well, they became very good friends, and they worked on the ERA together as we've mentioned. And they communicated a lot, worked on projects together. And, as I mentioned earlier, Mrs. Carter gave a very nice eulogy at Betty Ford's funeral.

So they -- the Ford family and the Carter family became very good friends.

And, of course, Betty Ford, because of her candor, had sort of taken a step forward for first ladies as well, and I think that made it a little easier for later first ladies to speak out and say what they actually thought.

SUSAN SWAIN: And the Carters have concentrated on humanitarian issues and globally. But I'm wondering about the relationship with the Democratic Party. After leaving the White House after a trouncing in the 1980 election, how welcomed were they by the national party and what was their role?

GRACE HALE: Well, you know, immediately after that kind of defeat, that's not -- those aren't the people you're going to send out on the campaign trail or raising money. So the Democratic Party wasn't super embracing of the Carters after that defeat, but it seems that it came around in time.

I mean, the whole Democratic Party ended up across the '80s, going in a more moderate direction, and really pulling back from some of its -- you know, moving away from its more liberal wing, and that's represented in the presidency of Bill Clinton.

And so, in some ways, again, the Carters were just a little bit maybe ahead of their time. The Democratic Party seems to have ended up coming around to a lot of the issues that maybe some Democrats weren't thrilled with him about at the time.

SUSAN SWAIN: Ashantics on Twitter asked, "Does Rosalynn Carter feel that her husband received the credit he deserved for his accomplishments as president?"

JAY HAKES: No.

(LAUGHTER)

SUSAN SWAIN: Does any first lady ever, I might add?

JAY HAKES: No, you know, it's -- you know, I think if you look at what President Carter did, take Panama Canal Treaty, for instance, that was something that was not at all popular at the time, but has opened up the whole range of positive developments in Latin America.

And Mrs. Carter would often caution him, you know, be careful politically a little bit here, because you do want to get a second term. But they didn't want to wait for the second term, so they sort of moved ahead and knocked off of a pretty long list of accomplishments.

But they did so as -- and again, I think Grace mentioned this earlier, when you're doing this with high interest rates, you know, we talk in Iran about the hostages, but the other thing that happened with Iran was the cut off in oil supplies from the Middle East, which then raises oil prices, which raises inflation, which raises interest rates.

So Iran was this double whammy. Not only did we have the hostages in captivity but we had this inflationary economy which no incumbent president wants to have in their election year.

GRACE HALE: And, really, the severest down turn in the economy since the depression of -- in recent history, so in the time after World War II.

JAY HAKES: Until 2008.

GRACE HALE: Yes. Yes, I meant before -- before recent times.

SUSAN SWAIN: David Welch (ph) on Facebook wants to know, "Where the Carter children now and what are they doing? Did any pursue politics?"

JAY HAKES: Well, Jack, the oldest son, did run for the U.S. Senate as the Democratic nominee in Nevada a couple cycles ago and he lives in Nevada. And his son, who is the oldest Carter grandchild, Jason, is running for governor in the state of Georgia. He's currently a state senator.

Chip lives in the Atlanta area. Jeff and Amy both live in the Atlanta area, so three of them are sort of close to home and Jack's out in Nevada.

SUSAN SWAIN: And could you also comment about the grandson who made news during the last presidential campaign by unearthing the Romney video, changed the direction of that campaign.

JAY HAKES: This is a child who was in the inaugural parade but he was in his mother's womb. He is Chip's son. And he is a master of the Internet and uncovered the candidate Romney's speech about the -- what, the 47 percent, was it? So he sort of got in -- in the news as a member of the Carter family.

SUSAN SWAIN: Do we know his grandparents reaction to what happened in that campaign as a result of it?

JAY HAKES: I think they were pleased.

SUSAN SWAIN: We have one more video -- about 6 minutes left in our program and this is Plains and the Carters' life there after the White House. Let's watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

THEUS (ph): After the White House, Mrs. Carter took great interest in downtown Plains. One of her projects was to help restore and refurbish the Plains Inn and Antique Mall. Each room in the inn is dedicated to a decade in President and Mrs. Carter's life from 1920 to 1980.

Another one of Mrs. Carter's additions to downtown Plains is the Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Garden, established April 2013. Mrs. Carter established her garden to bring awareness to preserving butterflies, their habitats, and for her love of nature.

This is the Maranatha Baptist Church. This is where President Carter and Mrs. Carter attend pretty much every Sunday they're in town. This is where President Carter still teaches Sunday school, and Ms. Rosalynn is a deacon here at the church.

I think Plains -- Plains is home, you know. I mean, everybody has some place they call home, and for the Carters, Plains, Georgia is home. They could have -- they could have traveled anywhere after the White House and pretty much settled anywhere, but they wanted to come home.

And I think that speaks volumes of the way they think about Plains. They love it here.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: The person who is our interpreter there is the National Park Service. Could you talk about the preservation of Plains by the federal government through the National Park Service and what one would find if they visit there?

THEUS (ph): Yes. The National Park Service runs the historic site, and it's got several parts to it. There's the Carter boyhood home which is kind of a working farm now. It's a fairly large farm, and you can walk through the house there and have interpretation.

Then his old high school or their old high school has become kind of a museum, and you can walk through there. Their home they live in now is being deeded to the National Park Service.

So it's well worth a trip to south Georgia. You can go through Warm Springs and learn about FDR. When you get there, you can attend Sunday school, stay in the Plains Inn and visit the historic site.

You're off the beaten path. It's -- Plains is not terribly close to an interstate. But for people who are presidential and history junkies, it's a trip well worth making.

SUSAN SWAIN: And the Carters, I understand, have chosen Plains rather than the Carter Center for their final burial place.

JAY HAKES: That's correct. You know, there's only two presidents I'm aware of in the sort of the post-World War II who've gone back to their own hometown. The Trumans went back to Independence and the Carters went back to Plains, and they will be buried on the family compound there.

SUSAN SWAIN: Keith (ph) is in Greenup, Illinois.

Hi, Keith (ph). You're on.

QUESTION: Hello. My question was, if I'm remembering correctly, I've seen news coverage of when the Carters have kind of intertwingled with the Clintons with this Habitat of Humanity, and I'm just curious, do they currently do anything with the Obamas?

SUSAN SWAIN: Do the Carters do anything with the Obamas?

JAY HAKES: Well, you know, I think, sure, they have some interaction. We had a picture there earlier of them together at the White House.

But President Carter sort of marches to his own drumbeat, And, you know, he has views that are very strong about the Middle East and other things.

But, you know, the ex-presidents do hang out. There's a book called "The President's Club" that came out a year or two ago which gives you a lot of behind-the-scenes look at how the presidents interact. And there's a lot of different facets to it. Sometimes, people were together, sometimes they don't.

SUSAN SWAIN: So as we close out here, Regina Crumkey wants to know, "Do Rosalynn and Jimmy still travel and take on new causes?"

JAY HAKES: Well, they have this basic set of causes on which they travel extensively. And they're -- I mean, they're going to like the poorest countries of the world. You know, the Chads and the Malis, you know, make India and other countries look very wealthy.

So they still do travel a lot. But they focus on the causes they have to produce the result that they're trying to achieve. So mental health, election monitoring, peace negotiations, river blindness, these are sets of things they've been working on for a long time and they're achieving a lot of success.

SUSAN SWAIN: As we close out here, Gary Robinson (ph) wants to know, "What is the public's perception of the Carter's time as -- the Carters', as time has passed since their presidency and will it improve more over time?"

As a historian, can you anticipate the future?

GRACE HALE: Not in our greatest strength as historians, to anticipate the future, but I will say that it's been a very successful post-presidency. In many ways, they've reinvented that job, and it doesn't seem like it's going to stop here in their later years.

SUSAN SWAIN: But as a historian, looking back on their -- on their time in the White House...

GRACE HALE: Oh, OK.

SUSAN SWAIN: ... has public perception of that changed in the ensuing decades?

GRACE HALE: You know, I think perhaps the jury's still out. I mean, it's not seen as the most successful presidency of the post-war era. But, at the same time, trying to change some of the directions of events, promote some of the issues that he was promoting like energy conservation, energy independence, the spread of democracy in various parts of the world, those are important issues still today.

SUSAN SWAIN: And what about her legacy as first lady?

JAY HAKES: She generally has ranked in the top five or the top 10, depending on which poll you use. Eleanor Roosevelt is always at the top and then below that there's some fluctuation.

I think in his case, he's not rated as highly as she is by a lot of the traditional polls. On the other hand, he was rated as one of the top three presidents in history on the environment, and there's a -- there's a libertarian book out that ranks him in the top 10, which is interesting, coming from that source.

So I think the jury is still out. You know, papers are still being declassified, people are still getting the broader perspective. And hopefully, people will keep having these kinds of discussions.

SUSAN SWAIN: How much of her papers did she preserve for the public?

JAY HAKES: Well, she's got a lot. She took very extensive notes and diaries, and there's a lot of private comments in there. And in general, those are -- still haven't been available to historians.

So she is a great documenter. She is a good historian herself. Her memoirs of the White House years is something that I always recommend to people. It's -- you can still get copies.

SUSAN SWAIN: In fact, I have one here. It's "First Lady from Plains," and it is one of five books that Mrs. Carter has authored or co-authored in her years since the White House.

That's it for our time.

And I want to say thank you to our partners at the White House Historical Association for their continuing help in producing the series. And we'll also have a list of many of the others who made this particular installment possible.

And thanks to our two guests, Jay Hakes and Grace Hale, for their information and your conversation with our audience tonight. Thanks for your time.

JAY HAKES: Great. Thanks.

GRACE HALE: Thanks for having me.

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