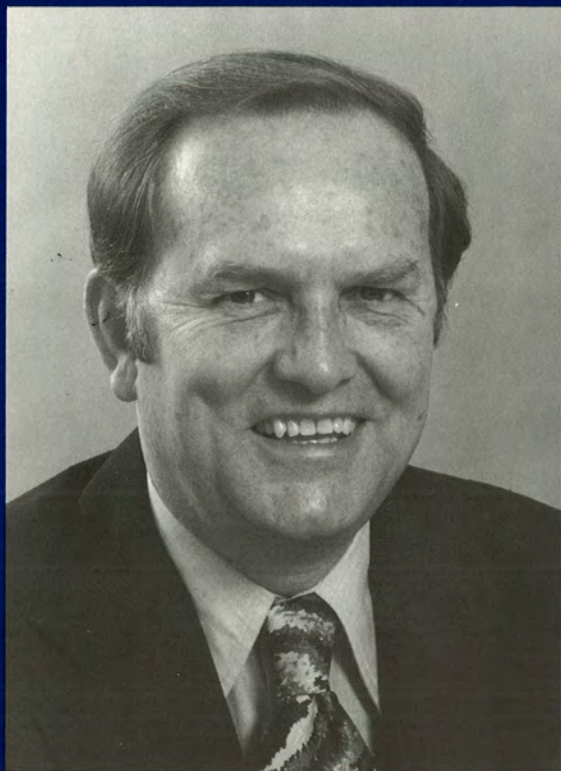


ORAL HISTORY SERIES - NUMBER THREE

# RUSSELL W. PETERSON

GOVERNOR OF DELAWARE, 1969-1973

BY CHRISTOPHER L. PERRY



DELAWARE HERITAGE  
COMMISSION



**RUSSELL W. PETERSON**



**DELAWARE HERITAGE  
COMMISSION**

Oral History Series  
**RUSSELL W. PETERSON**

By Christopher L. Perry

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## About the Oral History Series

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An oral history is different from a biography, although it is a biography of sorts—perhaps closer to an *autobiography*. But it is not that either. It is a combination because it melds interviewer's questions (perhaps the beginning of a biography) with the very personal responses and interpretations of those questions by the interviewed subject.

Reading this oral history will be a new experience. First, you will find that the interviewed person's conversational responses are very little changed. So the flavor of the history is conversational and informal. There are repetitions and interjections which are part of the governor's personality, and they definitely add a spontaneous spark to the history.

Second, what you get in an oral history is the story the interviewee feels is important about his/her life. Questions like what was your greatest mistake? And what are you proudest of? help the reader to know the interviewed person better. You'll get some surprises.

Third, this is not the whole story. The definitive biography of the subject has yet to be written. There are parts of the life which will not be told in this oral history. They will be the province of later historians.

In the case of Governor Peterson, there also exists his own first-person account of his life, entitled *Rebel with a Conscience* and published by the University of Delaware Press in 1999. Included with that volume is a CD-ROM. There also exists a detailed listing



of Peterson Administration accomplishments entitled *A Report of Progress of the Peterson Administration 1969-1973*.

This book is based upon a series of recorded interviews with Governor Peterson conducted by Chris Perry. Each paragraph in the book is coded according to where the material appears in the actual taped interview transcripts. For example, (1M11) means that the quotation is from the September 16, 1998 interview (tape one) and can be found on Page 11 of the transcript, which is available from the Delaware Heritage Commission.

The interviews took place on the following dates:

- 1M September 16, 1998; tape one.
- 2M September 16, 1998; tape two.
- 3M September 23, 1998; tape three.
- 4M September 23, 1998; tape four.
- 5M September 30, 1998; tape five.
- 6M September 30, 1998, tape six.
- 7M October 7, 1998; tape seven.
- 8M October 20, 1998; tape eight.
- 9M November 4, 1998; tape nine.
- 10M November 4, 1998; tape ten.
- 11M November 12, 1998; tape eleven.
- 12M November 12, 1998; tape twelve.
- 13M November 18, 1998; tape thirteen.
- 14M November 18, 1998; tape fourteen.
- 15M December 10, 1998; tape fifteen.
- 16M December 10, 1998; tape sixteen.
- 17M May 25, 1999; tape seventeen.

In the book, the author's comments are in italics; Peterson's comments are in regular type.

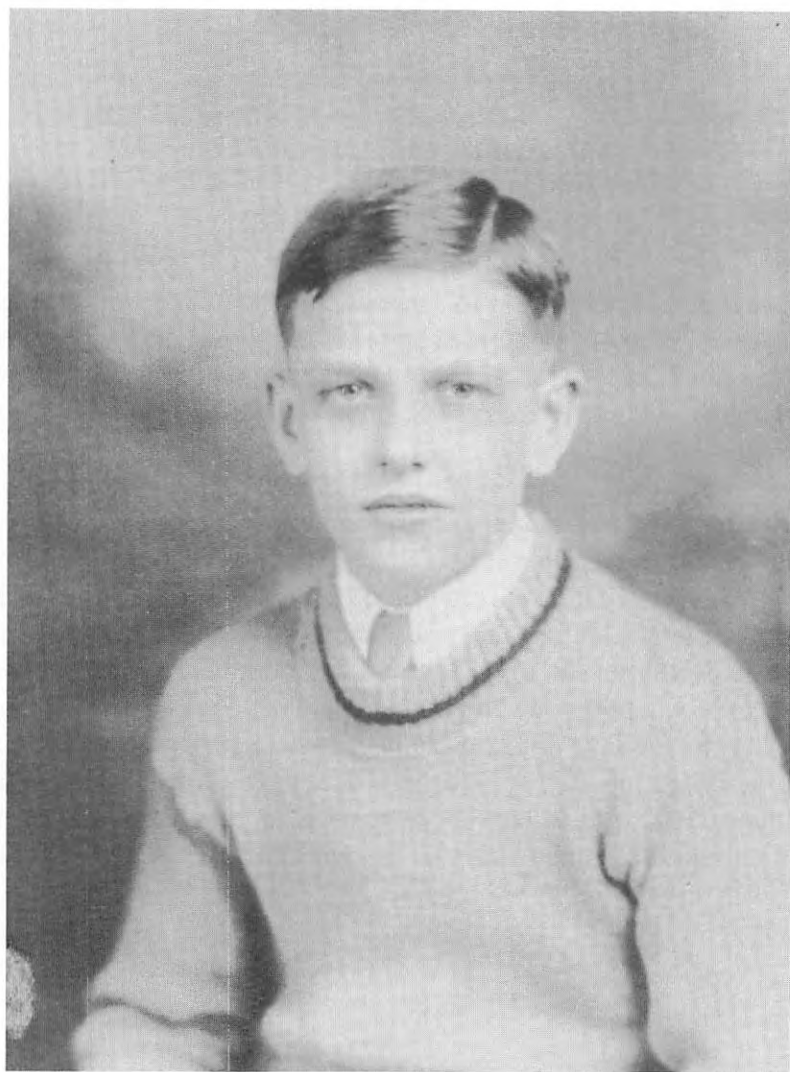
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## About the Author

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Christopher L. Perry came to Delaware in 1944 at the age of six. Except for some out-of-state schooling and a year in Washington, he has lived here ever since. He is a graduate of Princeton University and earned an M.S. in Journalism from Columbia University.

The author's career began as a reporter, columnist and Bureau Chief in The News Journal's Dover Bureau, where he first met Russ Peterson. He later worked for the Republican State Committee of Delaware and was Executive Assistant to Governor Peterson during the first two years of his Administration. He went on to become a political campaign consultant, Editor and Publisher of Delaware Today Magazine, and Assistant to U.S. Secretary of Commerce Elliot L. Richardson. He then joined the DuPont Company, where he spent 15 years as a speechwriter and public affairs executive. Since 1992, he has worked as a free lance writer.



Russ Peterson as a sophomore in high school.

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## Introduction

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The mid-and late-1960s were a time of extreme political swings, nationally and in the First State. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory over Senator Barry Goldwater showed what coattails can do as Democrats assumed almost total dominance over Delaware government. Thus, when Democrat Charles L. Terry, Jr. took office in 1965, you could count the number of Republicans in the General Assembly on two hands.

But the tide turned quickly, and in the 1966 mid-term elections, Delaware Republicans won an unexpectedly strong victory. Those gains were largely cemented in 1968, after which the GOP pretty much controlled Delaware government. And the leader of that Republican Party was newly elected Governor Russell W. Peterson.

Like his predecessor, Russ Peterson ran for public office only twice—both times for governor, a stark contrast with today's career officeholders. He won a narrow victory in 1968 and was defeated for reelection four years later. The period between those two elections marked a progressivism and an activism seldom seen in state government.

Many of the initiatives, and most of the more controversial ones, came from Peterson himself. But as Peterson is the first to admit, few of those initiatives would have found their way into law or practice without a Republican-controlled and reapportioned General Assembly. He also benefited from a reapportioned Republican Party, which increased the clout of New Castle County, along with a well-financed and professional party apparatus. In any event, Peterson's many accomplishments dramatically changed the face of state government.

For a man who often seemed to be tilting at windmills, Peterson was remarkably successful in getting what he wanted. Having had

the privilege of playing Sancho Panza to Peterson's Don Quixote, I have some reflections of my own on the Peterson years. You'll find those in the Author's Afterword. But first, let's hear from one of the most innovative, determined and energetic leaders in recent Delaware history.

Chris Perry



Note: A number of people provided the author with background and suggested questions. Thanks go to Gene Bookhammer, Gene Bunting, Bill Campbell, Fletcher "Sandy" Campbell, Dan Enterline, Mike Harkins, Hal Haskell, Jerry Herlihy, Arva Jackson, Andy Knox and Peter Stone.

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Lillian and Russ on a trip to Portage, Wisconsin.

## SECTION ONE: THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

*This section covers the years before Russ Peterson became governor. It begins with his upbringing in rural Wisconsin and goes on to describe his education and marriage to Lillian. It next focuses on Peterson's career at the DuPont Company and the community activism that led to his candidacy for governor, ending with his successful 1968 campaign. Not surprisingly, Peterson's core character and characteristics were evident very early on. To a great extent, therefore, his past was prologue to his term in office – and to a lifetime of community involvement.*

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### The Early Years

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*Most Delawareans knew Russ Peterson as a Ph.D. chemist, DuPont Company executive, community activist, progressive governor and global environmentalist. Few were aware of his humble origins, the early years that shaped his character. While he wasn't born in a log cabin, his father was.*

#### **Growing Up**

I was born in Portage, Wisconsin back in 1916. My father had come over from Sweden when he was 11 years old. He and his mother and father and six siblings lived in a one-room log cabin in a little village in Sweden. They moved to Nebraska initially, where they worked on a farm. My dad left there when he was a young man and went up to Minnesota, where he was hauling grain into Wisconsin, driving a team of horses, when he met my 17-year-old mother-to-be. They were married the following year and raised four sons. They subsequently moved to a much bigger town of 5,000 – Portage, Wisconsin – where four more sons were born. I was the seventh one in the family. (1M1)



Peterson's mother, Emma Anthony Peterson Peer at age 76.

*Peterson's father was a stern disciplinarian. His mother provided most of the love and caring.*

When I was growing up, my dad was a baker. He would leave home at six every evening and walk two blocks down to the bakery, work all night 'til six the next morning, and do that six days a week. He was quite a disciplinarian. For example, when we played out at a little community yard, and he would walk to work at night, he would just whistle and point towards home, and we would run (home) as fast as we could . . . (1M1)

He used to take his sons down in the basement and beat their rear ends with a razor strap – a piece of leather about 18 inches long, maybe three inches wide – that he used to sharpen his razor. I got that treatment once from him, but I have very little recollection of him other than that. (1M1)

My mother was a very warm, loving individual (who) worked very hard all her life. Neither of them had more than an early elementary school education. In our home, we had only one book, a Bible, which was used for recording birth dates and marriage dates and so on. Our whole life centered around sports; we had no real discussion of any big issue. But in any event, I look back on those years as . . . happy (and) fun-loving. (1M1)

*Peterson learned not only to respect discipline but also to value work and to help his family.*

I learned that I had certain jobs to do around the house, like carry wood in. I'd bring coal up from the basement to the pot-bellied stove, and I'd wash dishes. And whenever I earned any money, I had to give half of that to my mother. For example, when I worked for an older brother who ran a restaurant, peeling potatoes every morning before school and after school, I got 50 cents a week, and I gave 25 cents of that to my mother. And so, early on, I learned that we had specific jobs to do, and that we had to help support the family if we could. (1M1)



Peterson's father, John Anton Peterson.

As a grade school student, and in early high school, I had several paper routes – two of them daily, and three on Sunday. I always figured that having those three paper routes on Sunday was a legitimate way to skip Sunday school. And I also, early on, was involved in recycling. I would go down the alleys (between the houses) and pick up stuff that I knew I could sell to Mr. Samuels, who ran the salvage yard. And the key thing that I always looked for was a used storage battery. And not knowing anything about chemistry or about the environment, I would dump the acid out on the ground, break up the storage battery, and go sell the lead to Mr. Samuels. For my standard of up-bringing, collecting and selling trash was a pretty high-income job. (1M2)

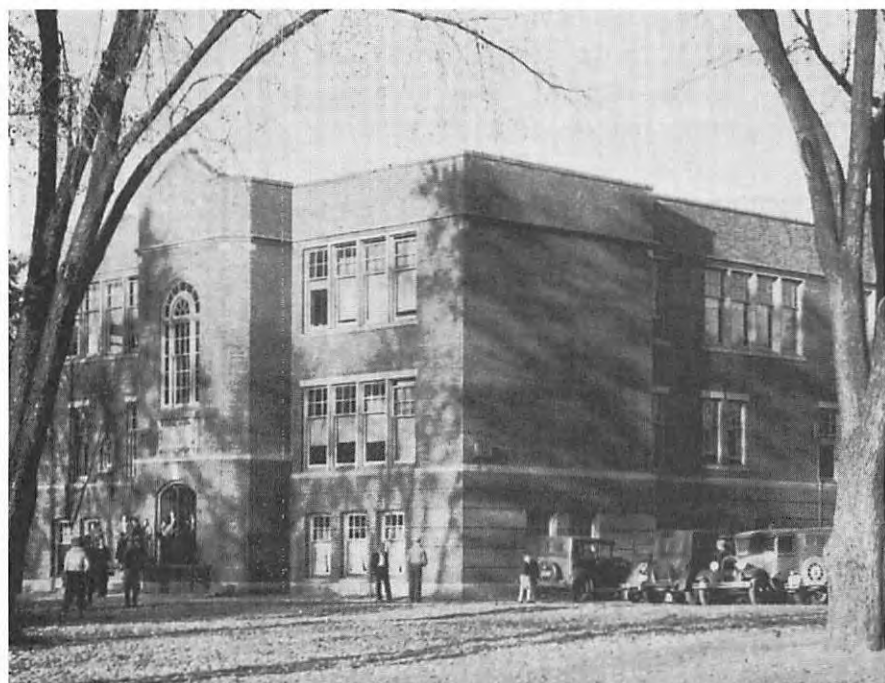
*Was Peterson aware that he was poor?*

Well, I never felt unfortunate being poor because I always had exciting things to do; mainly, in the early years, through sports. As I look back at it now – no doubt about it – I was raised in a poor family. During the Depression, when my dad got cancer, we were on relief, as it was called then, with the county paying for part of our expenses. And I think the most my dad ever made in his life was 37 dollars a week, approximately. . . . (1M2)

I have to admit, now that I reflect on it, that there were two incidents that really bothered me. One was when a neighboring boy's mother invited me to his birthday party, and I took some of my money from collecting trash and went down to Woolworth's and bought a little pen flashlight, which I was excited about. I went over to that birthday party and gave that flashlight to him, and then his mother said that all the boys now were going to go to a movie together, and she hoped we all had our 10 cents to go to the movie. I didn't have 10 cents, so I was the only one that didn't go to the movie. (1M2)

Another time I was in the Boy Scouts, and I only got up to a (Scout) First Class. I left because I was the only one of the Scouts who didn't have a uniform. In later years, I found out that (in)





Portage High School, 1934.

communities where kids didn't have uniforms, somebody would find the money or something to go get them uniforms. But that never happened to me, so I dropped out of scouting. . . . (1M2)

*Peterson participated in many sports, despite a paucity of athletic facilities.*

Early on, I was involved in many sports. In fact, I organized kids in our neighborhood to have a big track meet. We built our own hurdles, pole vaulting standard, and high jumping standard, and we got Mr. Samuels to help us make a shot put out of some of the lead that I had collected. And we got our high school coach to give us an old, battered discus and javelin. I ran the 100-yard dash, the 220, the 440, the mile, and pole vaulted; in fact, I used to pole vault in our back yard. The pole came from a store which sold rugs. They wrapped the rugs around the bamboo pole, (and) we got that bamboo pole. The best I ever did (in pole vaulting) was third place in a meet. (1M3)

*As with many young people, Peterson was not sure what he wanted to do with his life. At the same time, he set his sights high.*

What I wanted to be was somebody who did something important. I certainly wanted to become a baseball hero, like Lou Gehrig. And probably the most exciting experience of my early years was Charles Lindbergh flying across the Atlantic. Boy, I would (have liked) to be like a Charles Lindbergh. Later on, when my high school teacher got me interested in chemistry, then I wanted to become a famous chemist and make some big discovery. But, until that junior year in high school – until that chemistry teacher turned me on to chemistry – I really didn't have any specific objective. (1M3)

### **The First to Attend College**

I was a good student in high school, and I enjoyed what was going on in high school. . . . The first (time) I remember thinking seriously about going to the university was when the chemistry

teacher talked me into wanting to become a chemist. He didn't really talk me into it; he just made the course so exciting that I came to that conclusion. My six older brothers never got through high school; only one of them went to high school (and) he went only for two years. My younger brother and I did graduate from (high school), (and) we both later graduated from the University of Wisconsin. (1M3)

*But college raised serious financial issues. It was the middle of the Depression, with a quarter of the population out of work. Peterson's father was seriously ill with cancer and had taken a cut in pay as a result.*

I remember what a sad day that was for my mother, because we were barely hanging on, and now with the cut in salary, we needed and got some help from the county. But I decided I was going to go (away to college) anyway, and my two parents tried to talk me out of it. I decided to go anyway (because) I didn't want to get in the same position they were in. And if I had an education, I knew I could do better, and that with an education, I could probably help them. And so, I really went away to college feeling kind of guilty, not doing as my parents wanted me to do, and they certainly needed help. (1M4)

After my dad died of cancer, I brought my mother down to Madison where the university is located, and rented a big house, and started up a rooming and boarding house. And I got friends of mine to come and room and board there, and I also encouraged a friend of the family whose wife had died, who was about the same age as my mother, to come down and help. And he did, and a number of years later, they got married. It was the happiest time of their life, they said. My mother loved having young people around. That gave me a little more satisfaction (knowing) that I had helped her (achieve) a much better financial position than she had ever experienced before in her life. Of course, she had to work hard in this job. (1M4)



Lillian Turner at age 18.

*Peterson, of course, had his own financial problems at the university.*

When I first got there, with only 37 dollars to my name, I set out determined to find a job. And after going to every business establishment along the two major streets in Madison, Wisconsin, and failing to get a job, I told my chemistry advisor . . . that I was going to have to quit school. I had absolutely no money (and nothing) to eat. Fortunately, he was dating the woman who ran the employment office on the campus. And he called her while I sat there, and before I left, I had two jobs. One was a busboy in a restaurant, and one was working for the National Youth Administration . . . that Franklin Roosevelt had set up. (That involved) washing laboratory dishes in the basement of the chemistry building for 15 dollars a month. (1M4)

### **Marrying His College Sweetheart**

*For many students coming from a small town, and from a family with little education, the transition to university learning would have been daunting. But not for Peterson.*

I never had any trouble with the academics. I had a good memory, and all my friends were jealous because . . . in only a short time of studying, (I could get) "A"s in my courses when they had to work much harder. I don't mean to brag (about) that; it was just a fact of life . . . . As I think about it now, I don't recall any one thing which I just disliked. I was anxious to learn. The fact I knew so little when I went away to college made me want to learn. (1M5) I was lucky to marry Lillian Turner, a friend from back in high school. (Her) first night there I saw her on the street, and we had a date, and ended up being married. She was so much better read (than I); in fact, I had read almost nothing. She was majoring in the romance languages, and she did a lot to educate me. (1M5)

I remember one night when she said, "Let's go into the Student Union and listen to some music." I thought it was kind of a ridiculous thing to do, but I went along, (and) we went in a little



12-year-old Elin Peterson tried out the Governor's chair even before her father.

room by ourselves and put on some records. And (we) listened first of all to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and I just thought, "That's pretty good!" But up to that time, I thought things like symphony music were just for sissies – not for the people who played sports! (1M5)

*Russ and Lillian were married and had two children while he was still at the university. More kids followed.*

Lillian and I went away from home and got married with a Justice of the Peace, much to the irritation of her mother and dad. We came back and lived in my mother's rooming house at first, but then we got a little apartment. Nine months later, we had our first baby, Glen, a son, and then I began (working toward) my Ph.D. About a week after I got my Ph.D., my second son – Peter – was born. (1M5)

Our first daughter, Kristin, was born in 1946, four years after I got to Wilmington. Our second daughter, Elin, was born 10 years after that, in 1956, . . . in Wilmington. So we had two sons born in Madison, Wisconsin and two daughters born in Wilmington, Delaware. (1M5)

I have 17 grandchildren. One of my sons, Peter, has seven children, and the other son was married twice and he has two children with each wife. And the other two daughters each had three children. (1M6)

*Some people may remember Elin Peterson, who lived at home and attended school when Peterson was Governor.*

Elin was a great treasure during that time, living at home with us, and she was very much interested in what I was doing as governor. I was just recently looking at some pictures, and I saw one from the first day I became governor, and there was Elin sitting in the governor's chair. She sat in it before I did . . . . She worked hard,

helping us during my campaign, and she was very much involved with the Governor's Youth Council. (1M6)

*After the birth of their first child, Lillian came down with what was then called "child bed fever," a streptococcus infection.*

Doctors on two occasions told me she wouldn't live out the night, but as Lillian said, "I fooled them." We took her up to her family's farm near Portage, presumably to die. We called in the family doctor, the hometown doctor. He decided she had an abscess behind her uterus, and he took her to the hospital and lanced it. He did that on several occasions, and that saved her life. I still have that doctor's picture on the mantel here (to honor the) tremendous contribution that he made. It took nine months for Lillian to get past that problem. (1M7)

*After earning his bachelor's degree in chemistry, Peterson determined that he needed more education to do the kind of chemical research that he had dreamed about. Money remained a problem, especially with debts from Lillian's illness. How would he finance the four years necessary to obtain his Ph.D. degree?*

I went to see my five debtors, the three doctors and two hospitals that were involved, and asked them if they would accept my note so I could pay them four years later, after I got my Ph.D. They all said "yes," each volunteering, without my asking (a rate of) zero percent interest. Therefore, I could comfortably – at least as far as my debts were concerned – go on for four more years in graduate school. (1M10)

And when I was a senior in undergraduate school, the professor who had been so good to me said to me that, "If you agree to stay here to get your Ph.D., I will give you a teaching assistantship as a senior." That's what I did, and that's why I stayed at the University of Wisconsin for eight years. Usually, a person moves to another university to get graduate training. (1M10)



## **Peterson's Career Takes Shape**

*And how did Peterson get from the University of Wisconsin to Delaware and the DuPont Company?*

While in graduate school, I became obsessed with the idea of solving the cancer problem. I decided that maybe what I should do is get my Ph.D. in chemistry and then get an M.D., (thinking that this) combination would give me the training necessary to solve the cancer problem. . . . and, after I got my Ph.D., I was going to be a professor at a university. (1M10)

But one day, near the end of my third year in graduate school, I got a letter from the DuPont Company offering me a summer job at their Experimental Station in Wilmington. I had never been beyond Chicago from my home in Wisconsin at that time. A job in Wilmington would pay more in one month than I could earn in three months at the university. Well, I got excused from a teaching assignment in summer school and came to Wilmington to work at the Experimental Station, and found what a wonderful place that was. (There were) so many brilliant scientists there, such fantastic facilities, and I got deeply involved with the problem of finding something to replace silk in parachute lines. (1M10)

This was during the middle of the (Second World) war. The Japanese had cut off our supply of silk, and we had nothing to produce parachutes. I got more done in three months than I had gotten done in three years in graduate school. So I went back to the university, still planning to be a professor but having had this experience of what it was like in probably the top-rated industrial chemical laboratory in the world. (1M11)

(Then) DuPont, (in the person of) Preston Hoff, who was head of Nylon Research, . . . called and urged me to come to work for DuPont. I got three letters after that. Finally, my wife and I decided that maybe we should take that job. We could pay off our

bills sooner and go back to the university later if we still wanted to do that. That is how we came to work for DuPont in Wilmington the next year, and it was the right decision. (1M11)

*While Peterson did not serve in the armed forces, he contributed to the cause in other ways.*

I was enrolled in ROTC at the University of Wisconsin, and I went on to graduate school and graduated from there with a wife and two children, (coming) to work for the DuPont Company on projects directly involved with the war effort. Lillian and I had decided that I would never try to get deferred from the draft. Her father was a naval officer in World War I and had been called back into the service in World War II. Her sister had gone off into WACs (the Women's Army Corps). (2M8)

I felt guilty about not going into the war effort. I wasn't going to volunteer, but I wasn't going to resist the draft either. I got a notice to appear in Philadelphia for examination prior to being drafted. I went up and took that and passed. I was told to report for duty the following Tuesday. I came home and talked to Lillian. We just accepted the fact that I was going to go in the service. She was going to have to figure out how to get by with our two kids. Then . . . the quartermaster corps dealt with the draft board and told them that they needed Peterson to stay at the DuPont Experimental Station working on war projects. So the draft board withdrew my name, and the probability is very high that I did a lot more for the war effort working at the Experimental Station than if I had been drafted. (But) I don't know that. (2M8)

Nevertheless, to this day, I feel a little guilty that I didn't go into the war effort. In fact, a few times I felt that I missed an exciting experience. I don't mean getting mowed down, but being involved in that major enterprise. But I worked, 16 hours a day, six days a week, during that period for the DuPont Company. (2M9)



Son Glen joins father Russ Peterson for a graduation photo on the occasion of Peterson's doctoral degree.

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## Better Things for Better Living

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*The Petersons brought little to Delaware but themselves.*

When I left college to come to Wilmington to work for the DuPont Company, I had a wife and two children, a Ph.D. and not much else. We had only one piece of furniture, a little \$2.98 end table that we had bought. But fortunately, we were able to find a furnished house in Arden for \$25 a month. . . . It was a lively community (and) we got deeply involved . . . . (1M5)

It took us five more years . . . before we could afford to buy a car, and . . . I rode the Arden bus during most of this period into Wilmington, switched to the #10 bus, out to the end of that line, and then walked about half a mile down the hill and up to the Experimental Station. This was during those early years during the war, and I was doing a lot of things that called for working 10, 12, 16 hours a day. Some of this time I'd be doing this at night, but I had never looked at that as any great chore. I now had this good job, and I was elated by that opportunity. (1M5)

*Peterson worked at DuPont for 26 years and found his immersion in Research and Development very rewarding. Among his projects was Dacron polyester fiber.*

I had this great opportunity of taking the Dacron polyester fiber development from the lab bench . . . all the way to the semi-works, to chairing the design of the plant, (then) going down and managing the start-up of the first commercial plant in eastern North Carolina. And to do that, to see something which you have worked on evolve into a concrete plant, is a unique experience. And (another exciting thing about it was that) I helped it become

one of the most profitable ventures that the DuPont Company ever experienced. (1M11)

From there on, I got more and more involved in launching new business ventures. I look back on that experience very positively. I learned a lot about the free enterprise system and, later in life, when I was involved as an environmentalist in many confrontations with business leaders, they would make wise cracks about, "What do you know about business? Have you ever made a payroll?" I could put them down in a hurry by telling them about my experience in launching new business ventures and thus get myself on an equal playing field with them. (1M11)

*At DuPont, Peterson also worked to convince tire companies that they should use nylon tire cord and, later, to convince U.S. automobile firms to put nylon cord in the tires that came with their new cars. He was also involved in getting DuPont into the carpet business with bulk continuous filament nylon and with the development of three non-woven fibers: Tyvek, Typar, and Remy. Corian was another DuPont product in which Peterson was involved.*

### **A Rising Star Fades**

*In these efforts, Peterson often met resistance – and not always from outside the company. For much of his career at DuPont, Peterson was considered a rising star – a trajectory he believes was slowed by his social activism.*

When I went to work for DuPont, I moved up the ranks very rapidly for the first 17 years. In fact, I was told by top management that I headed the "skimmer chart," the chart where they plotted the salary versus the age of promising executives. The salary reflected what the employee had done and governed the person's merit increases. (It also reflected) management's judgment of one's potential for advancing (in the company). And I was actually shown that chart, which showed that I stood ahead of anyone else near my age, which was 41. (1M8)

At that time, I was working in Wilmington and was Chairman of the Social Action Committee of the Unitarian Church. We decided that all hell was gonna break loose in blighted neighborhoods if more wasn't done to find jobs for unemployed young blacks. I decided I had to do something in my own organization. At that time, the Chestnut Run location reported to me, and there were about 2,000 employees. I found out that we had 60 blacks working out there, all laborers, including one with three years college and one with two years college. Nobody had ever been promoted, or was likely to be promoted. (1M8)

I decided I was going to do some little thing. I talked to the people (at Chestnut Run) and we agreed we were going to promote four male black laborers – like one to a truck driver, one to a chemist's helper – and we were going to hire a black woman as a typist. And I reported that to my management. (1M8)

I was then asked by Andy Buchanan, the head of the Textile Fibers Department, to go to dinner with him in the Green Room of the Hotel duPont. That was a great opportunity, . . . and on the way to dinner I told him about what I planned to do at Chestnut Run. After a long dinner, when we were the only ones left in the dining room, (Buchanan) said, "What I asked you out to dinner for was to talk to you about what you brought up on the way over here. We've been about to promote you," he continued, "to put you in charge of all the various technical activities in the Textile Fibers Department, but now we're concerned about your stability." (1M8)

I went home that night, quite upset, and the next day the company psychiatrist, Jerry Gordon, a good friend of mine, . . . (told me) that the two top people at the Textile Fibers Department – Andy Buchanan, the general manager, and Lester Sinness, the assistant general manager – had asked him to check me out for my stability. He said, "I told him you were probably the most stable person in the DuPont Company." (1M8)

I went home that night at five o'clock and my wife asked, "How come you're home so early?" And I sat down, and I told her what had happened, and she said immediately, "Those are the people who need a psychiatrist; not you, Russ. We don't need them; we can get along without them." And we vowed that minute that we were going to work hard to solve social problems. It was much more important to us and to the world, finding a solution to a social problem, than producing a new product for the DuPont Company. (1M8)

I had promotions after that, but I wasn't on that curve to the top of the company that they told me I was on earlier. (2M1)

*Peterson adds a postscript to the story.*

A year after DuPont turned "thumbs-down" on (my plan), President Eisenhower asked the heads of major corporations to come to Washington. And he told them that unless they did something about finding jobs for young blacks in America, there was going to be an explosion in poor neighborhoods around the country. The President of the DuPont Company then, Crawford Greenewalt, came back to Wilmington, called a meeting with his key people, and said he wanted to . . . do something about it. And the first thing they did in (the) Textile Fibers Department was to implement that promotion of those five people that I had talked about. (2M2)

*Some months later, Peterson saw Howard Swank – who had made that decision – at a party.*

I said, "Howard, let me commend you for promoting those young blacks out at Chestnut Run." And he said, "Russ, you were just ahead of the times." And I said, "The hell I was; DuPont was behind the times." (2M2)

*Nonetheless, Peterson expresses great enthusiasm about his years at DuPont.*

I found my overall experience there very enjoyable. In discussing my experience in launching the Dacron enterprise, I remember how hard everybody worked, how the management was fully behind us, putting up large sums of money to make it happen. I don't remember any bickering among the group. We went on to have a major success, and I compare that in later life with many activities in the social arena where there's all kinds of bickering going on – people deliberately trying to tear down others, which is a disease of the political system. And it would be wonderful if we could transfer to the social arena that same kind of togetherness, dedication, (and) hard work that I experienced with the launching of new ventures at the DuPont Company. (1M11)

### **A Rebel at Heart**

*Through such incidents as that at Chestnut Run, Peterson became known as something of a rebel, a label he readily accepts and one that few who know him would dispute.*

I have been a rebel all my life, and I'm proud of it. And I didn't rebel just to throw a monkey wrench into what was going on. I rebelled because I saw a need to pursue what I thought was right, or to try to overcome some injustice that I saw, or to try to get some environmental sanity in the country. (2M2)

Before I had this collision with DuPont over racial discrimination, I was always known as somebody who was a dreamer, and I have to admit that I always *was* a dreamer. I appreciate that, obviously, if somebody wants a dream to come true, they have to dream first. And I was well aware that I had made a whole bunch of dreams come true, in the DuPont Company and elsewhere. And thus I developed more self-assurance that I could make some of these things happen, not alone, but with the help of other people, too. (2M2)

And it is a problem in management, even in research management – questioning ideas that are different from the normal view . . . .





Peterson dedicates the Wilmington Job Bank. Present with him are (left to right), unidentified, Arthur Benson, William Conner and Hal Haskell. (See page 107 for discussion.) *Photo by Lubitsh & Bungarz.*

But when you're supposed to be producing such ideas, making new things happen, (and) management questions that, it's a little bit irritating. That was (even) true in research, where you'd think there'd be none of that. (2M2)

*In fact, Peterson originally titled his own book, "Rebel with a Cause" since he had always considered himself a rebel.*

(But) I found out later that Billy Graham's son had written a book called "Rebel With A Cause," and his rebel with a cause was Jesus Christ so I had to give up that idea. And then I decided maybe "Rebel With a Conscience" would be better. At first I thought, how can I name my own book, "Rebel With a Conscience?" But then so many people I discussed this with said, "Hey, that's a good title." So I adopted it, (and) now I like that title very much. I like to be called a rebel because I think I rebelled for reasons which will stand up under careful scrutiny by most people, today and in the future. (2M2)

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## Community Service

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*As already noted, Peterson began to involve himself in solving community social problems – an activity that helped propel him into the world of politics and government and ultimately led to his becoming a candidate for governor.*

Lillian and I became members of the Unitarian Church, and we were very much involved with some social problems. Lillian got involved at the Governor Bacon Health Center, and she brought two young boys to our house frequently, very handicapped kids. She got involved with Planned Parenthood, really trying to help in low-income neighborhoods to teach people about family planning. I became chairman of the Social Action Committee of the Unitarian Church. And from that vantage point, I became more and more aware of the critical problems in low-income

neighborhoods. Because of my background, I could feel for those people – more, I think, than somebody who had grown up in a wealthy family. (2M3)

That experience is what led me to want to promote these young blacks in my own organization at the DuPont Company. And (after) I had that collision with my management there, . . . I took a two-week vacation . . . (and) spent it all at home studying and thinking about social problems and how we might solve them. I developed what I called "reasoned progression," and it really was a definition of what turned out to be my political creed. (2M3)

*What is "reasoned progression?"*

Well, it's not a very sophisticated idea. It's something I talked about repeatedly when I was describing to people what I wanted to do if I became governor. It involved citizens defining the most important community problems, analyzing (those problems), identifying the best solutions, then organizing and providing the resources to get the job done. That's no different than the way you go about solving problems in the free enterprise system, but it's true that it wasn't very often (followed) in the . . . governmental arena. (17M4)

*Peterson joined the board of the Prisoner's Aid Society, subsequently convincing the Wilmington Kiwanis Club – and later all Delaware Kiwanis Clubs – to take on reform of the state's prison system. That led to the formation of a much broader group, the Three-S Citizens Campaign to Salvage People, Save Dollars and Shrink the Crime Rate. Peterson's interest in correctional reform turned out to be the genesis of his career in public service.*

I was very much concerned about how little we really knew about what was going on with prisoners. So, I went out to the prison every Tuesday night for six months to interview the men who were going to be getting out in a few days, and then we followed them

for two years. We found that three-quarters of them were back in prison. I decided the state was part of the problem . . . (8M29)

(For example), people who couldn't pay a small fine for running a traffic light went to prison, maybe for only 10 days, but then they had a prison record. If you had to fill out an application for a job, invariably you had to answer the question, "Do you have a prison record?" If you said "Yes," that application went in the wastepaper basket. I realized that if I had gone through a traffic light and had been fined \$25, I would have paid it, and that would have been the end of my debt to society, so to speak. But somebody else's whole life was ruined because they didn't have \$25. I started talking out about a debtors' prison. (8M30)

When you went out to that decrepit prison (the old Workhouse at Greenbank near Price's Corner), it was almost like . . . going back to the Middle Ages. None of the guards had uniforms. The prisoners all wore their own clothing, so it was hard to tell a prisoner from a guard. Juveniles were incarcerated along with adults. All the things that we knew were going on there were frightening, and I am sure there were a lot of immoral activities there . . . that we didn't know about. (8M30)

*Peterson began to focus his organizational skills on these problems.*

Kiwanis International had established a program for the year called "Build Responsible Citizenship." I got myself invited by the president of our Wilmington Kiwanis Club to make a speech to the club and said, "Let's take that stand seriously; let's really do something about it. Let's organize to attack this critical state problem." Well, they bought that, and since four of us on the board of the Kiwanis Club were also on the board of the Prisoner's Aid Society, we were able to convince them the thing we ought to work on was the corrections problem. (8M31)

Then I said to them, "We have to get all the Kiwanis Clubs in Delaware involved," so I went up and down the state. There were 17 other Kiwanis Clubs (and) all of them eventually agreed to join in this program, although I have to admit some of them weren't very enthusiastic about doing so. They made me president of a Delaware Kiwanis Committee for correctional reform, something like that. I then said to them, "Look, we are not going to get very far if we label this as a Kiwanis program. We have to get many other organizations involved." (8M31)

Since they had all voted to put up some money to carry out this program, at first they were a little reluctant to give up having the Kiwanis name on this thing. In any event, they finally agreed to my proposal that we call this the Three-S Campaign to Salvage People, Save Dollars and Shrink the Crime Rate. (8M31)

### **The Three-S Citizens Committee**

So, we abolished our Kiwanis Committee and set up a new committee, the Three-S Campaign Committee. I was made president. We then set out on a major effort to educate the people of Delaware about the problems in adult and juvenile corrections. . . . We hired the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (and) paid for that with a grant from the Delaware Citizen's Crime Commission. I was on the board of that, too. John Jessup was the president of it. (8M32)

The Prisoner's Aid Society (was) then chaired by Herb Cobin. We decided we would get to Governor Carvel to ask him to set up a state committee to work toward the same objective. He did, and he appointed Herb Cobin chairman of it. I appointed a technical committee which was headed by Tom Herlihy, also a member of our Kiwanis Club, and a municipal court judge in Wilmington. On that committee we had Herb Cobin, people from all the courts, police forces and corrections groups, and their job was to work with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and help us focus on what we really wanted to get done in Delaware. (8M32)

Having little experience working with the state legislature, I decided we had to get a citizen activist group that could have some clout with members of the legislature because I foresaw that we would probably have difficulty getting one of the so-called "prisoner coddling acts" through the legislature. I appointed two people, a Republican and a Democrat, in each of (Delaware's) then 37 Representative Districts. (8M33)

Their assignment was first of all to get themselves well informed . . . but then to go out and find at least 12 people in each Representative District who (would work) on the subject. Their job was to meet with their State Representatives and State Senators and educate and motivate them to do something about (the problem). That proved to be a real key to making this thing happen. That meant that each State Senator, since there were roughly two Representative Districts for each State Senate District, would have 24 people beating on him or her, mainly *him* because there weren't many *hers* at that time in the legislature. (8M33)

(In addition) nearly every church and synagogue in Delaware was involved, (along with) other service groups besides Kiwanis. It was amazing how many people got involved, and the News-Journal papers strongly supported it. Martin Klaver, the head of the editorial board, was a strong proponent. He was a Quaker, and he really believed in this markedly. We had no trouble in getting great support from the two papers at the time, the *Wilmington Morning News* and the *Evening Journal*. Our combined forces developed pieces of legislation which Governor Carvel got introduced. I better hasten to add that Governor Carvel was a strong supporter of this. Without his involvement we wouldn't have gotten very far. (8M33)

*Strong opposition came from a powerful contingent of Senate Democrats, along with Lieutenant Governor Eugene Lammot, a former mayor of Wilmington. The Senators were Senate President Pro Tem Curt Steen of Dagsboro, Majority Leader Leon Donovan of Harrington, and Joint Finance Committee Chairman Walter*

*(Doc) Hoey of Milford. Lamot assigned the bills to unfriendly committees, like Hoey's Senate Finance Committee.*

(I labeled) Hoey as “public enemy number one” for Delaware corrections. We had a running battle in the newspaper about this. I invited him to lunch, and that became a big public thing; and when we met, he tried to tell me he wasn’t blocking the bill, (that there were) just a few little things he wanted to change in it, but he never could identify what those things were. (8M34)

Finally, we had a massive meeting down at the Unitarian Church in Newark. People came from all over the state. Many of them couldn’t even get into the building, there were so many there. I rallied those troops and said, “Look, this State Senator is trying to block the will of the people, and we have to force those bills out of committee.” It wasn’t long before the Senate voted. It is very unusual to vote to take a bill out of a committee. Then it was clear sailing because we had the votes to pass them. (8M34)

I will never forget that wonderful day in the Gold Ballroom of the duPont Hotel when 500 people came – they had an overflow out into the ante-room there – when Governor Carvel signed these bills into law. I still have hanging on the wall a pen that Governor Carvel gave me, with which he signed that legislation. He gave pens to Herb Cobin and to me. (8M35)

The most exciting thing about this was how you can get a large group of citizens – 6,000 (people) in Delaware – really to work together on a sustained basis over three years to make something like this happen. I put that to work when I was governor, turning it around a little bit. Usually it is citizen armies beating on the governor. This time I went to citizens and got them organized to work with the governor to make things happen. I think it is a good lesson that students ought to study and then replicate it as they go about trying to get things done in their communities. (8M35)

*Peterson's Three-S work led to building the Smyrna prison, which he later dedicated as Governor, along with a major change in focus in Delaware corrections, probation and parole. In addition, more money was made available for manpower in areas such as probation and parole. Peterson's experience with the Three-S Campaign, what he learned from it and what it demonstrated about him to other members of the community, was instrumental in his later decision to run for governor.*

During the Three-S Campaign, and after it, people started to talk to me about running for office – primarily about running for the governorship. At that time, I was still a scientist running major research divisions for the DuPont Company and was certainly in no financial position to take on the low paying governor's job, even if I could win it. I had four kids that wanted to go to college, and so I didn't take that very seriously. (8M37)

As the years went on, I became more and more interested in obtaining the power of something like the governorship as a means of getting some of the things done that I was trying hard to get done as a citizen activist. Furthermore, I got what I thought was a lot of statewide publicity over this Three-S Campaign, and thus got known around the state, and I certainly got to know more about the legislature. (8M37)

*Peterson found his experience with the Three-S Citizens Campaign very helpful in his future career.*

That experience in the Three-S campaign was of tremendous value to me when I ran for governor and when I became governor. I recognized some serious problems in our community. I recognized that there were solutions to those problems, and that a lot of people in the community would share that conviction. You could get those people to work together on a sustained basis to get something done. (2M4)



In fact, if elected officials, from the President on down, would really pick out programs which they thought were . . . important to the nation or the state or the city – they'd have to be programs, of course, which the majority of people believe in – and sell those to the people, and ask the people to work with them in some organized way, they could move on many, many fronts. (2M4)

But that's not the way it normally happens. Normally, there's all this sniping and deliberate attempts to destroy political opponents, almost as though it was some big sporting event rather than something which the future of the world depended upon. (2M4)

### **A Do-Gooder Tackles Urban Problems**

*Another of Peterson's community activities while he was still at DuPont was his participation in the Greater Wilmington Development Council (GWDC), a business-funded organization to stimulate improvements in Wilmington's inner-city.*

Near the end of my work on the Three-S Citizens Campaign, Henry B. du Pont, who was chairman of the Greater Wilmington Development Council, called and asked me to be on the Executive Committee of that organization. . . . The Greater Wilmington Development Council was similar to organizations in other cities which involved the leadership of the (business, education, and religious) community. Primarily, they worked on improving the physical nature of the community – by (building) better highways, better parks, and so on. (2M5)

I took that assignment and, before long, I was encouraging them to also do some work in the social arena. (I) suggested they form a neighborhood improvement program. I spelled out what I thought should be done in three different neighborhoods in Wilmington. They agreed to do that, they voted to put up the money, and we hired a young man from Baltimore, Jim Gilliam (Sr.) to be the staff person. And that was a major decision for a number of reasons. One was that Jim Gilliam, his wife, and his family, became a tremendous asset for our community in many ways. (2M5)



Mother Teresa speaking at the United Nations World Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver.  
She invited Russ Peterson to join her on the dais with the young woman from Kenya  
who chaired the meeting.

I was made chairman of that committee, and I worked many, many nights in low-income neighborhoods, (attending) meetings in church basements and in schools and in homes. And Jim Gilliam and I would go together . . . to these meetings and meet with some of the militant young blacks in the community. (2M5)

And that gave me quite an education. I saw myself in the position of some of those militant young blacks. If I had been a young black at that time, I would probably have been leading that thing . . . because they were striving to do the thing I had done – trying to reach for the American dream, or at least reach for a job, reach for a position where they wouldn't be clobbered by the police at every move. (2M5)

They were discriminated against all the time. And if I had been in that position, I really would have come out fighting, and the difference between some of those boys and Russ Peterson was, they were black and I was white. I became very sympathetic with that, and that experience was of tremendous importance to me when I became governor. In fact, I had on my agenda when I became governor, to do a number of things directly as a result of that experience, and the Three-S Campaign experience. (2M6)

*Once again, it was Peterson the rebel. But it was also Peterson the "do-gooder" – a characterization, often meant as an epithet – that followed him throughout his political career.*

I had always been called a do-gooder. And I got to like that, by the way. I would put people down in a hurry by saying, " Well, that's interesting. You know you can put all the people in the world in three piles – those that do good, those that do bad, and those that do nothing, and I know which pile I want to be in." And they don't know what to say, you know, they just stand there looking at you. But what's wrong with being a do-gooder? (2M6)

I tell in my book about this wonderful experience (I had) with Mother Teresa, probably one of the most effective do-gooders of

all time. And when she first met me, she said that, "I just learned from Lady Jackson of Britain, that you are a do-gooder like we are!" And to this day, I consider that one of the best compliments I ever received. (2M6)

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## The Race for Governor

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*The more active Peterson became in the community, and the higher his profile, the more speculation took place about whether he would run for public office. Such speculation was fueled not only by Peterson's community work but by his work in the Republican Party – starting with an activity called "Recruit for '60" and later including blocking, party reapportionment, and service as State GOP Finance Committee chairman.*

As a result of moving around the state on those assignments, people started to say, "Hey, why don't you run for office?" That was far from my mind at that time. I was still anxious to continue being a scientist. (3M1)

*The issue arose more directly during the 1960 campaign.*

John Rollins, when he was running for governor in 1960, asked me to run as lieutenant governor, and I very promptly said, "No, I can't do that." I still had young kids, and I (couldn't) afford to even consider something like that. At that juncture, however, Hal Haskell went to the DuPont Company management to ask them if Peterson ran for lieutenant governor and got elected, could he continue to work for DuPont and receive his salary? They said "no," and appropriately so. He (Hal) never asked me; nor did I authorize him to do that; nor did I have any intention to run for lieutenant governor. I did suggest to John Rollins that he go ask that guy Bill Roth to run, which Bill did. (3M1)

*Eventually, of course, the speculation proved accurate – leading to Peterson's run for governor in 1968.*

(Later on) there was an article written by Chris Perry, who wrote for the News Journal papers, which said that, "You have to watch this guy Peterson. He's now moving around the state a lot, and don't be surprised if he runs for office some day." (3M1)

The prime event that led to my deciding to run occurred when (State Senator) Reynolds du Pont called one day to ask me to come to his house after work to have a drink with him and Hal Haskell. And that was in 1967. When I got there, they said they wanted me to run for governor. . . . They (said) that I knew how to organize people, that they could make the fact that I hadn't run for office before into an asset and not a handicap, and that they would see to it that the money was raised for my campaign. (3M1)

Well, I went home that night and talked to my wife, Lillian. We had been thinking about how I might be able to get more done on some of the critical problems about which we were concerned – if I did have some authority, such as the authority of a governor – and we decided that night that I would accept the offer to run. We recognized that this was a major financial decision because the governor's salary then was one third of what I was making at the DuPont Company, and certainly the job of governor offered very, very minor security compared to my continuing to work with DuPont. But we decided to do so. (3M1)

*Peterson recounts a onetime visit to Legislative Hall with Al Smith, head of the Republican Party in rural New Castle County. Smith asked if Peterson would like to look in the governor's office, which he did.*

Al said to me, "How would you like to sit in that seat someday?" I laughed, but I have to admit that I walked away from there thinking maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to sit in that chair someday. (3M1)

*Once he had decided to run, Peterson conveyed his decision to his employer, DuPont.*

I got no reaction out of high-level management, but I did discuss (it) with my immediate superior, Dr. Ed Gee. He was very supportive. I told him that during the early phases of my campaign I would want to continue working full time for DuPont, and I would put in plenty of time. He said to me, "You already do twice as much work around here in a day as other people do, so I'm not worried a bit about your working hard for the DuPont Company. So you go ahead and do it, and downstream we can worry about when would be time for you to take a leave of absence or retire from DuPont." (3M2)

### **The Power Brokers' Candidate**

*Peterson undertook his quest for the Republican Party nomination with a big advantage – the support of several very influential party leaders. These included Hal Haskell, Delaware's Republican National Committeeman who ran for Mayor of Wilmington in 1968 and was a power in the city, and Reynolds du Pont, the Senate President Pro Tem and a power in suburban New Castle County. In addition, Peterson won support from John Rollins, a major party donor and past gubernatorial candidate. Haskell and Rollins were able to help Peterson in Kent and Sussex Counties, where he was less well known and had less natural support.*

John was a friend. I worked with him very closely before, but after I had announced for governor, Lillian and I attended a cocktail party at Rollins' home. And during that party, Rollins made it clear that he was going to be supporting Dave Buckson for the nomination for governor. My wife Lillian told Rollins off on the basis that I had worked until two or three in the morning (in 1960) doing a lot of planning and writing speeches and so on for Rollins' campaign. And I had taken on the difficult job of Finance Chairman for the party when the party was in a shambles, at the request and strong urging of John Rollins. (3M2)

And now, she said, "You, John, won't support him," figuring that we would not get the nomination because Rollins . . . had tremendous influence downstate and in Wilmington. Well, we were only home a few minutes when the phone rang and Linda Rollins, John's wife, was on the phone, and she said that she and John wanted to come see us for a cup of coffee the next morning. Lillian welcomed that. They came over and John announced that he was going to support me for the governorship, and he did so very strongly. (3M2)

*Despite the support of Haskell, du Pont, and Rollins, Peterson had competition for the GOP gubernatorial nomination – first from Sussex County's Bob Short, the state insurance commissioner. Short was very popular among conservative Republicans, with many people considering him another John Williams, the longtime nationally known U. S. Senator from Sussex County. Another candidate was Attorney General Dave Buckson from Kent County.*

When I started out to gather support for my nomination, I traveled around the state talking to leading Republicans. I got 19 of them to agree that they would support me, including Bob Short. I invited them all to my home on Montchanin Road for a drink and some hors d' oeuvres. All 19 of them showed up. I then called them together at that meeting and thanked them for agreeing to support me, and asked each one of them in turn to say what he thought about my candidacy. I reckoned that if they did that in front of the other 18, that they would be quite firmly tied into my campaign. I knew from my little experience in the past that in the political world it was a little bit unwise to accept everybody's early judgment of whom they're going to support. (3M3)

I was really amazed at the strong statements, especially from Bob Short. Prior to that, I had told some people in Brandywine Hundred that Bob Short was going to support me, and they called me a liar, because Bob Short was at that very time dealing with them to get their support for his nomination. Two weeks after this



Peterson with his close friend Andy Knox.



meeting at my house, Bob Short announced for the governorship. It didn't go very far. I think the fact that he had made such a pledge in front of 18 other key people just had to have devastating impact on his plans for running for office, and it wasn't very long before he withdrew. (3M3)

Dave Buckson was still in the running for that nomination, and of course I worried right down to the last minute about whether I'd get the nomination. But the way it worked out, I got the nomination easily, with the support of those 19 people, including such people as Hal Haskell and John Rollins and Reynolds du Pont, and Al Smith, and George Anna Theobald, and Polly Buck, and others. (3M3)

*The effort to raise campaign funds began at a meeting organized by Hal Haskell and Reyn du Pont. At this meeting, Peterson gave a presentation on what he would like to accomplish if he became governor. The meeting was at the campaign's informal headquarters, the basement of Andy and Sally Knox's home.*

Hal and Reyn brought three extremely wealthy, potent members of the du Pont family to that affair: Lammot du Pont Copeland, Henry B. du Pont and Irenée du Pont, Jr. Along with Reynolds du Pont and Hal Haskell, (who was also) quite wealthy, we clearly had tremendous financial support in that room, if they went along. I made my talk, they asked a number of questions, and then Reynolds du Pont said, "Hal and I have agreed that each of us will go out and raise \$25,000 for Peterson's campaign. And we want each of you three to do likewise." And instantly they said "yes." And all of them produced, getting their wives and their relatives and so on to send in their checks. (3M3)

I was pleased that, four years later, when I ran for reelection, all of them did the same thing, with the exception of Henry B. du Pont, since he had died. But his wife Emily picked up the assignment and produced just as her husband had done previously. Let me add that many, many people contributed smaller sums to the campaign.

But without the participation of those five, plus John Rollins, who contributed in the same league with those other five, I would have been very, very hard pressed to have the funds to take on an incumbent governor as I did. (3M4)

### **People for Peterson**

*In his campaign, Peterson applied his organizational skills and the lessons he had learned in the Three-S Citizens Campaign. He had become convinced that with the right leadership, large numbers of people could come together to make things happen.*

When I sat down to think about (how to get elected), I said, let's get a large number of people interested in good government – Republicans, Democrats, and declines; independents in other words – to work together. And I wrote down a plan for a group to be called "People for Peterson" and asked my good friends Andy and Sally Knox if they would head that. They agreed to do so. (3M4)

We identified Andy Knox as the head of People for Peterson. And many of my friends signed up (as) husband and wife teams; a lot of people with whom I had worked, almost none with any political experience. But they did know how to organize, and that proved to be a very potent force. (3M4)

Without that, I don't have any question that I wouldn't have come close to winning the election. After all, when we conducted a poll of how many people in Delaware knew of this guy Peterson, we found only 9% did, while 96% knew the incumbent governor (and former state chief justice), Charles Terry. After all, he'd been around in the state, head of nearly every major court, Chief Justice (of the State Supreme Court), so he was very well known. And in the political business, name recognition is considered extremely important. (3M4)

So getting People For Peterson organized was a great way to get a lot of dedicated, hard-working people to volunteer their time and thus help to get my name known. (3M4)

*People for Peterson volunteers included some with significant experience in fields such as advertising. From its Market Street headquarters in Wilmington, the group designed, produced, and distributed literature. It organized coffees and other events all over the state, seeking to build as much recognition and enthusiasm as possible. It was the first major Delaware campaign run largely outside the structure of a political party, the beginning of a trend that continues to this day, and some party regulars didn't like it.*

I tried to get (Republican State Chairman) Clayt Harrison to be one of the 19 people to come to my house, and he wouldn't come. I understand why. After all, here I was a newcomer, and trying to vault over many people that had been trying to get to be governor for years. And the fact I organized People for Peterson was sort of a slap in the face of the normal party (although) I never considered it that way. You can probably attribute that to my naivete in the political business. As People For Peterson gained power, Clayt Harrison and others became more favorably inclined toward my candidacy, although I believe that the night I won the election, Clayt Harrison was kind of down . . . . And we didn't get along very well when I became governor. (3M5)

I understand why they . . . would be upset. They'd already been upset with me from some of the things I had done when I was working for the Republican party – like wiping out the use of what was called “walking around money” during elections, (a practice in which) the party would give Republican leaders in various areas x dollars which they could use to help with the election, but (with) no real accounting of where that money went. That was a major irritant to the regular party structure. Some of those people made comments to other party people who were supporting me, (like) how can we expect to elect a guy like Peterson, who has been out

there in the most do-gooding operation of all, prison reform. (3M5)

*Peterson also had worked hard to reapportion the GOP state convention more in tune with current Republican voting strength.*

The Republican Party convention which made the major decisions about party affairs, such as nominating the statewide candidates for office, (had been) controlled by areas of the state which had a minority of the Republican voters. At that time, the party had four different (subdivisions). The area in New Castle County outside Wilmington called the Second District was really the center of Republicanism in Delaware. The other three entities – the City of Wilmington and Kent and Sussex Counties – were always strongly Democratic. (Yet) each of those four groups had roughly 50 delegates to this state convention, (which) was a major irritant to people outside Wilmington in New Castle County. (17M3)

I thought it was important . . . to get rid of that inequity and led a major effort to that end. I worked all over the state to get support for (the change), and it was difficult to do because you were asking Kent, Sussex and Wilmington delegates to vote themselves out of control of party affairs. But after two-and-a-half years of work, we did get enough support to make the change and gave the second district much more support in the convention than it had previously. (17M3)

*Peterson established a broad, lofty theme for his campaign.*

I tried to sell the people on the idea that I could help them build a Model State, that, if many of us worked together, we could do almost anything. But to do that, we needed the right kind of leader who appreciated that (and) had some skill in motivating people to work on a common cause. And I talked a lot about the need for

our doing what was right to make government more efficient, to root out injustice. But the main theme was working together to produce a model government. (3M6)

*Some Peterson associates, in recalling that campaign, referenced what they called Peterson's "steam boiler speech."*

I think a lot of my friends in particular were amused by my attempt to be an actor when I gave a speech about how the fear that Governor Terry was spreading throughout the community, the fear of young blacks as a justification for his keeping the National Guard on the streets for nine months, . . . was leading people to become more and more upset, and it could eventually lead to the point where an explosion would occur in the community. And I would build up the tempo of my words and the volume of my speech as I developed this, until there was an explosion at the end. And although I usually got a lot of applause from the people present, I knew that many of my colleagues were sort of smiling at my amateurish way (of speaking). (3M6)

### **The National Guard**

*For many voters, the election turned on this very issue: Whether to remove the National Guard from the streets of Wilmington. The two candidates took opposite positions on this emotional and volatile matter.*

The National Guard on the streets was by far the biggest issue in my campaign. (A few days) after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, on April 4th of 1968, . . . young blacks rioted in Wilmington, and the governor (Charles Terry) called out the National Guard and then kept them there for nine months. That issue became the dominant issue in Delaware. And when I came out opposed to what the governor was doing, and pleaded with him to take the Guard off the streets, then he and I became the leaders of the pro-National Guard and anti-keeping the Guard on the streets positions. (3M6)

Before this occurred, the polls which we ran showed that I was actually ahead of Governor Terry, in spite of the fact I had such low name recognition. The ideas that I presented seemed to catch on in those early days, before people were really thinking very seriously about the election. But when the National Guard issue developed, our polls showed that Terry was ahead of me by about 10 percentage points, and I began to criticize Terry for the fear that he was spreading throughout the community . . . and his failure to really solve critical problems, even the problems that led to rioting in the first place – the miserable conditions under which black people were living in our lower income neighborhoods. (3M6)

*The fallout from Peterson's position was dramatic.*

Good friends of mine told me they were going to work against me. They were afraid to have the National Guard taken off the streets. One good Republican leader who had given me my first assignment of blocking for the Republican party said that now she couldn't take her dog for a walk at night because she was so frightened, and she'd be damned if she'd support me for the governorship. (3M6)

It was a very disturbing period. I was so convinced that I was right. I was certainly not going to backtrack from my strong desire to get the Guard off the street, but it was clear that this was a losing proposition for me. It was a potent political factor, (and a) positive factor for Governor Terry. I believe if it hadn't been for television, which I started to use three weeks before the election, I never would have been elected. (3M6)

### **TV to the Rescue**

*Peterson's campaign for governor in 1968, and purchased advertising on Philadelphia TV stations – an expensive proposition since you had to pay for the entire Delaware Valley market in order to reach the relatively small percentage of that market that*

*was Delaware. At that time, Delaware had only the embryonic WHYY and no commercial television station.*

When we found out how much that cost, we realized that we couldn't afford to do that very long, so we decided that we would hold our money for television until three weeks before the election. And we hired a consultant to come in and help us develop advertising materials. We put out a one-minute ad and a five-minute story about Russ Peterson.

*The consultant was Bob Goodman from Baltimore, who had made a national name through his work for Maryland Governor and Vice President Spiro Agnew, among others. Goodman's trademark was the use of "larger than life" images and inspiring background music, which he composed. In any event, television seemed to make a difference.*

Prior to the television programs going on the air, I campaigned all over Delaware – many, many, many hours in shopping centers, walking up to people, saying "I'm Russ Peterson. I'm running for governor, and I hope you'll vote for me." Most (people) were polite, (although) a few said, "Get lost." But it was a major chore; disturbing in fact because I didn't find any big group of people coming over to me in a friendly fashion to greet me. (3M7)

But now that these television ads had started, almost like a miracle, when I went to the shopping center, I was a celebrity. Not just one or two, (but) many people would come around me. "I saw you on television," they would say. "Gee, that was great!" And our own polls showed me coming up rapidly. (3M7)

### **Governor Terry's Heart Attack**

I barely won the election. There were other forces besides the television and the major "Guard on the street" issue. Governor Terry had a heart attack about a month before the election. In fact, that was right at the time when my staff and I had developed a new, hard-hitting program, really hard-hitting on Terry. And

obviously we couldn't run with that (since) the governor had just had a heart attack. So, I remember how down I was. In a way, I was certainly sympathetic with Governor Terry, but I was down because I had had what I thought was a good program, but now it was impossible to use it. For Governor Terry, fortunately, his heart attack was a minor one, and he was back doing some campaigning before the election. (3M7)

I don't know, and nobody would know, the relative significance of all these things, but I believe there were maybe as many people who would be sympathetic with Terry and vote for him as there would be those who were concerned about his health and not vote for him. I know there were many, many people who voted for Terry because of his position on the National Guard. (There were) many, many people downstate who loved him. He was a native son, (had a) great career in the judicial area, and was a very friendly human being. On my side, I think, as I said before, there was interest in a new face in government, and the impact of those television ads, which really played up this new force that Peterson might bring to Delaware government. (3M8)

*Like many candidates, Peterson's view of campaigning varied according to the reception he received.*

I enjoyed it sometimes, and I was very uncomfortable other times. You get up early in the morning and go down to an auto assembly plant, General Motors or (the) Chrysler plant. (And) you stand up to shake hands with people, and almost nobody would even shake your hand. And that's what it was like that first election. On the other hand, (my own troops) were so enthusiastic and excited (that) they would just encourage me more and more and make me feel good. So, I had those cross-currents. But I had to admit those last three weeks before the election, when I became a television celebrity, all things seemed to be "go," and I just barely squeaked through. (3M8)





Russ and Lillian campaigning in 1968. Peterson won a narrow victory over incumbent Charles L. Terry, Jr. in a hard fought contest.  
*Photo courtesy of The News Journal Company. Photographer Godfrey C. Pitts.*

*Given the fact that Peterson trailed in the polls for much of the campaign, he received lots of advice from well-meaning supporters. Some friends urged him to be less idealistic and more political.*

(I remember) one time when a number of us were talking about what I should be doing in my campaign, and what I should say I was going to do when I became governor. I was determined to stick to my guns and talk about what I thought was a just and proper way to operate. I was not very receptive to some suggestions about things I should be doing in the campaign. And John (Rollins) said something like, "Peterson, do you want to be governor, or do you want to have a plaque in the church?" I don't know the exact words, but it was something close to that. (3M8)

### **A Razor-Thin Victory**

*Nonetheless, Peterson won the election – his first attempt at public office – although the margin was razor-thin.*

I don't remember the exact number, but it was less than one percent of the voters. In fact, the night of the election, Lillian and I were in a hotel room in the duPont Hotel, listening to results on radio and television, and my campaign manager, Bill Campbell, called and said, "Russ, we've won! We've won! Come on down to headquarters." "No," I said. "I'm not leaving here until we get more information than we (have) now. You shouldn't be so confident at this stage." And that went on repeatedly. They practically dragged me down to the Republican headquarters for a big celebration. Then when I saw the final results, I saw that I had a good reason for being cautious. (3M9)

*Peterson's success varied widely among Delaware's political subdivisions.*

I did very poorly in Kent County. That was the home of Governor Terry. It was also a very strong Democratic county. It was also the home of Dave Buckson, who was no strong supporter of mine.

And Herman Brown, who really worked very, very hard in parts of this period against me. But in Wilmington, I had well above average support for a Republican candidate. That was mainly because Hal Haskell was running and won the mayorship. (3M9)

I won overwhelmingly in the second district, New Castle County outside Wilmington. That was clearly my stronghold. But the big surprise, and the determining factor in winning the election, was that Sussex County voted for me. And I think there were some incidents in Governor Terry's administration that teed off some of the people down there, so they voted against Governor Terry on that basis. So, when you look at that overall picture, I was very lucky to win. (3M9)

*Thus, Peterson became the first Ph.D. scientist to become a governor, a fact that attracted considerable publicity in the scientific world. He was also the first governor of Swedish descent since colonial days, a factor that received little attention. Four years later, however, U. S. Senators Williams and Boggs asked President Nixon to name Peterson ambassador to Sweden. Nixon agreed to do it, but Peterson took another job instead.*

*As is the Delaware custom, Peterson traveled to Georgetown two days after the election to participate in Return Day – his first exposure to that venerable Delaware tradition in which winners and losers appear together to “bury the hatchet.”*

Usually, the winner and loser ride together in the same vehicle. I went down there, and Governor Terry did not come for that affair. It was a great occasion, enthusiastic. People were there who had supported me, and of course I was elated about having won that election.

### **The Peterson Imprint**

*Peterson started to place his own stamp on the governorship when planning the inaugural festivities – especially the Inaugural Ball.*

I thought it would be desirable to invite everybody in Delaware to come to my Inaugural Balls. In the past, they'd have one at the National Guard Armory in Dover, and a number of people were invited by invitation. I decided we were going to do it differently. We were going to have three balls, one in each county, and this time we'd do it in schools, not in the National Guard Armory. Remember, the first thing I did when I became governor was to take the National Guard off the streets of Wilmington. So, I wasn't going to go to a National Guard Armory and have my inaugural ball. (3M10)

Furthermore, I wanted to encourage African Americans and other minorities to come to those balls, and they were open to everybody. (We held one) at the Delaware Tech and Community College campus in Georgetown, one in Dover at Delaware State College, which at that time, was almost 100 percent black, and the third at the University of Delaware in Newark. We did get large crowds, and many African Americans came to those three events. I wanted to give a signal that a new day had arrived, and we did. Lillian and I started out at the first one in down in Sussex, and then drove up to Dover, and then up to Newark for those three events. (3M11)

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## Transition and Removing the National Guard

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*Peterson approached the transition period between election and inauguration with his usual energy, determined to hit the ground running. First on his list was removing the National Guard, still patrolling the streets of Wilmington.*

After I won the election, I called Governor Terry to talk to him about taking the Guard off the street, which he refused to do. I decided at that very moment that the first thing I was going to do as governor was get that guard off the street. But I wasn't going to

announce it to the public. I was just going to make it happen that (inaugural) day, . . . and thereby hopefully avoid any planned demonstration that night. (3M11)

I went off to the inauguration of President Nixon, a several-day affair in Washington and, while I was down there, I became more concerned about not announcing what I intended to do until I actually did it. (That was) because a group of liberal ministers from the East Coast had planned a major demonstration in Wilmington at 11 a.m. – the very time I was to be inaugurated. And they were going to be demonstrating, among other things, against me, relative to the National Guard on the streets. (3M11)

I had discussed this with the newly elected mayor of Wilmington, Hal Haskell. He was sworn into office before I was, and we agreed that he should approve the request of these people to come to Wilmington and have three parade groups that would assemble in different parts of Wilmington. All three then would march into Rodney Square, where they would have their official demonstration. And the mayor would have extra police on duty, but in civilian clothes, not police clothes. (3M11)

But now that I'm down in Washington, I decided no, I'm going to go up to Wilmington and have a press conference and announce what I'm going to do. I had a car in Washington, and I invited Bill Frank, the reporter for The News Journal, to ride back to Wilmington with me. We stopped at a stoplight in Washington, and a person came around and handed a flyer to us. That flyer was encouraging people to come to Wilmington, and they would pay one's bus fare to come up to Wilmington and demonstrate. I came to Wilmington, had my press conference, and announced it, went back to Washington to see Nixon being sworn in. (3M11)

On the day of my inauguration, it poured. These people came to Wilmington, marched downtown, (with) almost no local people there to see the occasion, and had their little ceremony in Rodney Square. I was sworn in in Dover. Immediately after, standing in a

DON'T CALL US, WE'LL CALL YOU



Peterson's first action as governor was to remove the National Guard from the streets of Wilmington. The Guards' presence was a particularly contentious issue during the 1968 campaign.

*Cartoon by Jack Jurden of The News Journal.*

receiving line over in the National Guard Armory, where we held the actual ceremony, I walked over to the Governor's Office, fired the head of the National Guard, and appointed my Adjutant General Brigadier General Clarence E. Atkinson to take over, and then ordered him to get the National Guard off the street that very night, and signed a piece of paper to that effect. And he did it. The worries about what might happen that night were not fulfilled. Nothing happened. It was just a wonderful celebration on those three different campuses. (3M11)

### **Meeting with Young Black Leaders**

*As Governor-elect, Peterson wasted no time in pursuing the agenda for social progress in Wilmington – especially among minorities – that he had started during his community work with GWDC and other groups.*

After I was elected, I asked my staff to arrange a meeting for me with people in each of the five gangs of young blacks known to exist in Wilmington. And they did that. I said, "Why don't we ask them to bring five people from each of those five organizations to meet with me in the Walnut Street YMCA in Wilmington," which at that time was almost completely a black operation. I did that, and Jerry Sapienza, my press secretary, went with me to that affair. At first it was kind of a rough meeting. Remember now, I'm a newly elected governor, and I'm telling them that I'm anxious to learn about their concerns, and to see what I can do about helping to resolve them. (4M1)

At first they were a little unfriendly, but very shortly they warmed up, and then I said to them, "Why don't you select one of your people to be your leader, and he can contact me." Right away, they said, "No, there you go, you think we're all alike." And I said, "I don't care, I'll have four or I'll meet with all of you. You go ahead and decide what you want to do, and I want to learn from you what are your real concerns." And then I left, and as the weeks went by, I kept pushing my staff people to find out what they were going to do about it, and finally they said, "We don't

want to meet with you until after you're governor. We want to meet with you two days after you're governor at BJ's corner," out in Northeast Wilmington. (4M1)

Now, BJ's Corner . . . was considered a particularly dangerous spot to go (to), and they had told me when I was campaigning for election to stay away from that area. BJ was a young black who was killed in some kind of a disturbance in the city. So now, two days after I'm governor, I go out there in the Governor's limousine, being driven by Lieutenant Bill Denney. I had to park about a block from the entrance to this community hall, and I got out of the car, and he started to get out, and I said, "No, I don't want you to come with me, I want to go alone." And Lieutenant Denney said, "I can't do that. I've just been told by my bosses that my job is to protect you and to be with you." I said, "Damn it, I'm the governor, I'm going there by myself." (4M1)

I walked up there, (and) the door was locked. I rapped on the door, and they opened it. I went in there with about 25 young blacks. Up front, they had a small table with two chairs, and Bill Hallman, who had been selected as their leader, and I sat at that table. They had produced . . . an agenda for the meeting. I sat down and told them I only had two hours, because I had to do a speech later. We went through that agenda, item by item – all reasonable things that they were talking about, things that I had been talking about for years, like getting an open housing bill passed by the legislature. And I left there thinking we had a great, positive experience, as we did. And . . . we implemented a good share of those things in the first six months I was governor. And we were actively working on some of the others. (4M1)

By the way, I deliberately avoided having the press know anything about that first meeting. I didn't want the young blacks to think this was some political gimmick. I wanted them to know that I was sincere and really determined to help get some solution to the problems which were plaguing them. But now, they announced that they were going to have a big meeting, (to) which the



governor was invited, out at BJ's Corner again, to meet with me after the first six months. (4M1)

And I went out there expecting a great homecoming, a great celebration (for) what we had done. On the contrary, they gave me hell again for things we hadn't done yet. Particularly one young woman in the crowd. And Arva Jackson, an African-American woman who was on my staff, rode with me back from that meeting, and I said, "What am I going to do, Arva? Should I try to continue to meet with large numbers of these young blacks . . . ?" (4M1)

A couple of weeks later, (Arva) came to my office and said, "Governor, you remember that woman who gave you a hard time out at the meeting at BJ's Corner?" I said, "I certainly do." And she said, "Well, last night we had a big meeting of black leaders at the Walnut Street Y. And that woman got up and said to them, 'If you black leaders were as much concerned about our problems as Governor Peterson is, we would get somewhere.'" (4M2)

I even get emotional now when I report that story, because it drives home to me a common problem in our society. We all forget to recognize and thank people for what they have done to help us, because we're so anxious to get on to the next chapter in our program to further progress. And that's what she had done. She was really trying to be helpful in a way at that meeting at BJ's Corner when she was irritating me with her unappreciation of what I'd already done. And, to this date, this story has never been reported in Delaware. I wonder sometimes whether I was right in doing this thing on a Q.T. basis or not." (4M2)

## SECTION TWO: THE PETERSON ADMINISTRATION

*This section is really the heart of this oral history, recounting the accomplishments and disappointments of the Peterson Administration. Whether or not one is impressed by Peterson's record, it represents an awesome display of activist political leadership.*

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### Cabinet Government

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*Another major area that occupied Peterson's time during the transition, and through his first two years in office, was the historic transition from a commission to a cabinet form of state government – a change that had been proposed long before but never enacted.*

For 50 years, people had been trying to get a reorganization of the executive branch carried out. They were deeply concerned because (the executive branch) consisted of so many independent commissions – agencies which were autonomous once they were established. And the governor had very little influence over what they did. He appointed the people to those commissions, which had to be pretty well balanced between Republicans and Democrats, and each person served for four years. So it would take a whole term as governor before I even had a chance to appoint all members to those commissions. (4M3)

And as was frequently demonstrated, the commissions could tell the governor to go to hell if they wanted to. . . . These commissioners had no direct commitment to the people. They were appointed. They hired their own executive director. Each commission dealt directly with the legislature, . . . getting funding for their programs. Obviously, because (the governor) appointed

the people, because he had something to do about the budgets, he had some influence, but not what you'd expect a governor would have – not the (kind of authority) the Constitution called for. (4M3)

*Why had previous efforts to replace the commission system come to naught? What forces were resisting this change?*

First, (many legislators) considered that they had more power through the commission form of government than they would have if the governor had supreme authority. And I think that was true, because each of these commissions had to go to the legislature to get its own budget approved. Many of the commissions, probably all of them, were set up when the legislature had a problem. They didn't have anybody (in the executive branch) who they thought could handle it, so they'd set up a new agency. That's why the thing grew to over 140 agencies over the years. They didn't want to lose that particular power. (4M4)

Now, the commissions themselves were autonomous units. People were very proud to be on a commission. Downstate, nearly every big family had some relative or somebody who was on a commission. And the executive directors of those agencies . . . had a little fiefdom of their own. They too liked that setup. And to think that they would be combined with many other groups into a larger department, with just one person in charge who served at the pleasure of the governor; they didn't like that. (4M5)

*Peterson's introduction to the cabinet government issue came in 1960, when Governor Caleb Boggs included this reform in his "New Day for Delaware" Program.*

They had developed a plan to convert the commission form to a small number of cabinet positions, and (Governor Boggs) asked me if I would help them with that program. I agreed to do so. My job was to try to find witnesses who would support this, and I tried to find witnesses among the members of the commissions, the

chairmen of the commissions and the executive directors. That was almost impossible because they didn't want the change, and the hired hands, the executive directors, they were afraid to come out and talk against the commission form because their bosses didn't want it changed. And the outcome of this was that "A New Day For Delaware" was turned down overwhelmingly. (2M7)

Governor Boggs tried to do this in one fell swoop – one bill. I learned from that experience many things which led to a (successful) strategy I used when I became governor. (2M7)

### **A Strategy Based on Past Experience**

*As good a case as there was for switching to a cabinet form of government, Peterson knew how difficult it would be to bring about. He had given the subject a lot of thought and formulated a strategy based on his past experience with the General Assembly. And he came to this position with several major advantages on his side.*

When Governor Boggs tried to make the change, . . . he was running for the U.S. Senate, and the legislature was in Democratic hands. They weren't going to have any part of putting through this program and thus building up Governor Boggs. . . . Then, of course, there's always the force of resistance to change. As some wit said, "There's only one thing more certain than change, and that's resistance to change." (4M5)

I had that advantage of being exposed to some of those problems early on. I also had the great fortune that both the Senate and the House were in Republican hands. And having good working relationships with the President Pro Tem of the Senate and the Speaker of the House and many other key members of the legislature, with whom I had campaigned and worked, we made this a joint venture, (wiping out) most of the previous resistance of the legislature to making this change. (4M5)



In his 1970 Future of the State message to the General Assembly, Governor Peterson proposes that Delaware replace its commission form of government with a Cabinet system. Also in the picture left to right are Lt. Governor Eugene Bookhammer, House Speaker George Hering, III and Senate President Pro Tem Reynolds du Pont. *Photo courtesy of The News Journal Company. Photographer Chuck McGowen.*

Early on, I met with Reynolds du Pont, who almost certainly would be President Pro Tem of the Senate again . . . , and with (George Hering), who it was pretty generally agreed was going to (be) Speaker of the House . . . and with other legislators. I took them into my confidence that (cabinet government) was one of the things I was going to push hard for, and asked them to help. In fact, they were obviously pleased that I had invited them to participate. (4M2)

We planned that they would form a joint committee in the legislature, a joint Senate/House of Representatives Committee on Reorganizing the Executive Branch. And the President Pro Tem would be the head of it, and the Vice-Chairman would be the Speaker of the House. The two people who were likely to get those jobs were sitting with me doing this planning. That proved to be extremely important because this then would get around one of the big problems, (which was) somebody putting the bills into a committee which was unfriendly . . . (and holding) up those bills indefinitely. (4M3)

I also planned early on that there would be a citizen's advisory group that would help bring this about, and this group would in turn hire the University of Delaware to develop the details of how you would carry out the reorganization. All those things actually came to pass when I became governor. (4M3)

So, I was off to a running start in partnership with the legislature. Without that kind of thing, I don't think the job of reorganizing the executive branch would have gotten done. . . . And we made it happen in about 18 months from the time we started 'til we had a celebration and swore in the last members of the governor's cabinet. (4M3)

### **The Reorganization Task Force**

*The process did in fact play out pretty much as Peterson had contemplated.*

I think it was about five months or so after I became governor (that) I actually appointed this task force. I appointed Norm Veasey, (then) a young attorney, to be chairman, and Charles Keil, another attorney, to be vice-chairman. Norm Veasey was a Republican; Charlie Keil was a Democrat. Charlie Keil had been a legislative assistant to Governor Carvel, and he was a great asset. I had the President Pro Tem, and the Speaker on this task force as well. And today, 1998, Norm Veasey is Chief Justice of the Delaware Supreme Court. Charlie Keil went on to become a judge of the Family Court. (4M5)

Also on that committee, we had Jim Cox of the University of Delaware, who really was assigned, and hired, to staff up this operation. Also, Bob Halbrook, another attorney, was made executive director. Later, when we changed the form of government, Bob became Secretary of the Department of Community Affairs and Economic Development. (4M5)

I wanted to get this cabinet form of government established in the first two years (of my administration), because I didn't know what would happen in the (mid-term) election. Maybe we wouldn't have a Republican legislature. . . . (4M6)

So I set these tight time schedules of when we were going to have a preliminary report, when we were going to be ready to move with the first two cabinets, and when we would finish the job. It was a great credit to those people involved that they pulled off this whole thing on that time schedule. And so it was, I believe, August of 1970, that we got the job done. (4M6)

*As with many of his activities, including the Three-S Citizens Campaign and People for Peterson, Peterson also set out to organize broad support for this change. This included those deeply involved with the current system.*

We (launched) a major effort to get people involved, primarily the members of all these commissions and their executive directors. We organized at Buena Vista, the home that the state had just taken over, thanks to Governor Buck granting it to the state in his bequest. And we used that for a series of meetings. In fact, the big library there . . . would be jammed with the chairmen of commissions, and executive directors, talking about what we wanted to do in reorganizing the executive branch. And we would have another meeting where we would deal with just the people who were going to go into the Department of Health and Human Services, for example. We arranged to have some people in those organizations get up and speak strongly in favor of it. (4M6)

We did a lot of selling of those people before we actually decided how we were going to organize. I believe that was very important, and it was in tune with my conviction that the way you get things done is to get a lot of people to work together. And particularly, you want to involve those who have some authority in making it happen. (4M6)

*Buena Vista was used frequently as a central meeting point. Peterson and his family lived in Woodburn, the Governor's mansion purchased and renovated by the State under Governor Terry. When Peterson was in Northern Delaware, he would use the Governor's Wilmington Office or, for task force-type projects, Buena Vista.*

*Another lesson Peterson learned from his "New Day for Delaware" experience was to divide the cabinet legislation into a series of individual bills – a "divide and conquer" approach.*

I decided not to do this all in one omnibus bill because . . . when you're going to take the whole state government, 140-some commissions, and change them into, say, 10 cabinet units, all the people who are opposed to it will gang up against that one piece of legislation. (4M6)



We decided that we would go after the organization of the Department of Health and Human Services first because it was the biggest one – (involving) the most agencies in the old form of government. If we could get by that one, it would be easier for subsequent ones, because, in all probability, those people who fought against the Health and Social Services bill would then go away and not come back to oppose another one. (4M7)

In fact, the only . . . real strong opposition was (to) that Health and Human Services bill. After that, (we moved) onto the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, the second largest one. I think we pulled together 14 different units in that organization. After that, though, there was very, very little opposition. I think in the final analysis, that was another part of the strategy very important to our success. (4M7)

### **Issues to Resolve**

*There were, of course, a variety of generic issues raised during the cabinet debate. An example was the issue of size, raised immediately during debate over the proposed Department of Health and Human Services. Was that department too big?*

It always bothered me that people would be so concerned about an organization being too big for one person to handle, when we were talking about putting all of the organizations under one person – the governor. I didn't see why some (department) couldn't be large, and in turn have (sub) units, each headed by a director so that you could end up with man-sized packages for each person in the organization. (4M7)

One thing I was determined to do in forming the Health and Human Services was to put Corrections in there. (That's) because I wanted to get people worrying about the rehabilitation of offenders. And here were so many people who were first offenders, . . . young people who with some help could be steered away from an ongoing life of crime. People worrying about health and social problems would be much more inclined to administer a

correctional program that would be helpful to the inmates, and helpful to the community by working to reduce crime. (4M7)

I thought that was extremely important. Years later, corrections was taken out of that department. I think that was a serious mistake. That permits people to get back to the "lock them up and throw away the key" philosophy. (4M7)

*One argument in favor of the commission system was that it involved large numbers of Delawareans in running the government. That was widely seen as desirable, so the question of how to retain as much citizen involvement as possible became an issue.*

That was an item about which we spent many hours and had many discussions. There were about 1,400 Delawareans involved in the 140-some agencies in the old commission form of government. We decided that we needed to take care of this important interest of getting citizens involved by establishing advisory committees to each of the new departments, and the sub-units, in the cabinet form of government. (4M8)

We provided for every member of all those (existing) commissions to be on the advisory committees, with the number decreasing as those persons' four-year terms came to an end. They would then go off this advisory committee until it came down to some reasonable number like five or seven members. And that is what happened. (4M8)

. . . naturally, people who are on advisory committees are going to retain less interest in working at it than people who serve on a board with the authority to make decisions by itself. And so the attentiveness of the members of the advisory committees is appreciably less than the members of the old commissions. But I think the heads of these various departments and their division directors still have strong communication with the people. (4M8)

*One very difficult issue was how to adapt the cabinet proposal to Delaware's new merit system for state employees. Peterson, in fact, was the first governor to implement the merit system.*

I was a citizen activist who worked hard to get the legislature to put in a merit system. And it was done during Governor Terry's administration. But the law provided that it would be *implemented* by the next administration. So, when I became governor, our job was to carry it out, and all the people who were then in these jobs were tied into the merit system. Many, many of them were put in just for patronage purposes, and I had to put up with that. There's no doubt about it that the amount of sniping from . . . some people in my administration stemmed from the fact that they were strong partisan Democrats who had been there, and now they had to stay there under the merit system. (4M8)

I believe that the merit system is the right way to go, and somebody had to be around when the transition occurred, and I happened to be there. It had its pluses and its minuses. (4M8)

*Some of the people who served as executive directors of the outgoing commissions were going to become division heads under the cabinet structure. In each cabinet department, there were division directors reporting to a secretary. The secretary clearly was outside the merit system – appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate. But there was an issue as to whether the division heads should be covered by the merit system. Many of them, naturally, wanted such protection.*

This was a major problem. We handled that by agreeing that the secretaries of the departments would appoint and could fire their division directors, but could only do those two things with the approval of the governor. That helped to mollify some of the former executive directors of the old commissions. Obviously, they would have preferred to be tied in through the merit system. But it was essential to giving the governor the authority we were looking for that those key people also be sufficiently responsive to

the governor, and that the governor, through his secretary, have the power to hire and fire. (4M9)

### **Ten Cabinet Departments; Ten Secretaries**

*In total, there were 10 departments plus the Executive Office of the Governor. Peterson listed these departments, and the people he named to head them.*

(There was) the Department of Health and Social Services . . . (under) Dr. Al Ingram. Al had been very active in the medical community, (and was) a highly admired M.D. in the greater Wilmington area. The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control became by far the most comprehensive such unit in the country, . . . and I hired Austin Heller, who came down from New York City to be the head of that agency. The Department of Agriculture was headed by Pat Caulk, a very prominent farmer in lower Delaware and a leader of a number of different agricultural organizations. (5M1)

(For) the Department of Public Safety, I hired Fred Vetter, who was the general in charge of the air base in Dover. This was the organization that had the responsibility for, among other things, the state police. (For) the Department of Highways and Transportation, which of course took over the duties of the former powerful Highway Department, Kirk Mearns, a Wilmington banker, became secretary. . . . For the Department of Finance, I promoted our Budget Director, Joe Cashman, to take on that very difficult job. (5M1)

Bob Halbrook, who had been the Executive Director of the reorganization task force . . . , became the secretary of the Department of Community Affairs and Economic Development. Jim Rosbrow, who had been involved with labor organizations and government in the state before, became secretary of Labor. Gene Bunting of Sussex County became the Secretary of State. He already had that job, being one of the positions that was provided for before the reorganization of the government. But we put under

that Department of State now many functions that were not there previously. And then the last of these ten departments was the Department of Administrative Services, headed by Hugh Martin from Sussex County. Chris Perry, who headed the Executive office of the Governor, also served on the Cabinet. (5M1)

### **Flack for Out-of-State Appointees**

*The Senate, of course, had to confirm these cabinet appointments.*

I didn't have any major opposition to these appointments. Some of (the nominees) were very popular in the community, and they just sailed through without any question. The two people who were from out of state did get a lot of flack and opposition. They got (even) more flack *after* they were nominated and approved by the Senate, and on the job. (That's) a disease that plagues many communities, particularly small communities like Delaware. People think you should give all these jobs to people in your own state, which I think is a mistake because the talent throughout our country that one can choose from in filling these jobs is a lot greater than in our own little state. (5M1)

And so I brought Austin Heller in from New York City to head the new Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control. He was working under then Republican Mayor John Lindsay, . . . administrating their air quality control programs, which received much national publicity because it was one of the first times a big city in our country really cracked down on the pollutants being poured into the air. When I got the letter from Austin Heller and checked his credentials, . . . I called up Mayor Lindsay, and . . . he tried to talk me out of hiring him so I cooled off on that for a short time. (5M1)

Then Mayor Lindsay called back and said Austin Heller was so adamant about coming to Delaware . . . , (that) he decided to go along. So I called up Austin, he came down, we interviewed him, and gave him the job. He did a good job, but he continued to get



Peterson with Brigadier Gen. Fred W. Vetter, Jr. in October 1969. Vetter, who held the top position at Dover Air Force Base, was one of Peterson's more controversial cabinet appointees.

*Courtesy of The News Journal Company.*

flack. I think one of the reasons he got some flak, I think it's fair to say, was that he was Jewish, and some of the people didn't like that either – one of the examples of a disease that continues to permeate our society. (5M2)

The other . . . non-Delawarean, was General Fred Vetter. I had met Fred a number of times. When I became governor, he would invite me down to the air base (and show me) all the exciting things that were going on there. So I admired the man. And when it came time to pick somebody for the Department of Public Safety, his name came to my attention immediately. (5M2)

I called up . . . a former Secretary of the Air Force (for whom) Fred Vetter had worked as his chief assistant. And this key person, whose name I'm having trouble remembering, told me that of all the people with whom he had worked in his whole lifetime, Fred Vetter was the most intelligent and the most competent. So that was all it took to convince me that I wanted Fred Vetter, and he came to work in that job, and I think he did a remarkable job. But he continued to get flack, mainly from the *Delaware State News*. (5M2)

*Not surprisingly, Peterson was unable to attract to state service all of the people whom he considered prime secretarial candidates.*

I have to admit that I tried to entice quite a few others to join my cabinet, but they were not willing to give up a much higher-paying job, or were unwilling to get into the public battle, where they would get criticized in the press for things they did or did not do. I had dreamed of bringing in some people who had high level positions in the state, in the private sector, to these jobs, but had difficulty in finding such people who were willing to take on the assignment. But overall, I was satisfied that I was appointing people who could do that job well, and I think the track record shows, for the most part anyway, that they did do a good job. (5M3)



Peterson signs the bill creating a Department of Public Safety. Looking on are (left to right): Robert Halbrook, Rep. William Frederick, Sen. Everette Hale, unidentified, and State Police Superintendent Col. Jerry Lamb.

*Photo by Al Vietri, Delaware Technical Community College.*



## **Education: a Key Omission**

*One area that was noticeably absent from the list of cabinet departments was education, on which the state spends more money than anything else.*

When we first started talking about having a Department of Education, it became very clear that it was going to be a much more difficult proposition than forming the other departments. And I became more and more concerned about whether it was the right thing to do, listening to people who headed the many school boards around the state, the heads of the University of Delaware, Delaware State College at the time, Delaware Technical & Community College, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ken Madden, and members of the teachers' unions – they all had big questions about doing this. (5M3)

And it wasn't just the fact that they had questions; it was that the arguments were disturbing to me. So I wasn't comfortable enough to just go ahead and say we're going to do this. We probably could have made it happen if we had set out to do it. So I then appointed a large committee with the head of the University of Delaware, Art Trabant; the Chairman of the University of Delaware Board of Trustees, Jim Tunnell; (the heads of) Delaware State College and Delaware Technical and Community College; Ken Madden; people from the teachers' ranks and from the school boards. They had a large committee, and their job was to figure out what we should do about this, and we never brought that to a head during my term as governor. I always thought we could get at that in my second term, which, of course, never materialized. (5M3)

*In 1997, Governor Carper and the General Assembly created a Department of Education, giving the governor direct control over the state's primary and secondary education system. It was a move Peterson supported.*

## A Price to be Paid

*As with many of Peterson's accomplishments, the conversion to a cabinet system carried a stiff political price since the move's opponents felt more intensely about the change than did the general population, which appeared generally to support it.*

There's no doubt about it, I paid a political price . . . . I'm convinced that the reason I was so thoroughly clobbered in my bid for reelection in Sussex County, and why Kent County continued to be strongly against me, was because of this move. Below the canal, where 30 percent of the people in Delaware live, they had members of their communities occupying 70 percent of the (commission) seats. They liked that power, and they had a lot of influence, a disproportionate (influence) really, and when they lost that they blamed me for it. I was pleased to have the honor of being blamed, but it definitely had an impact on people voting against me. (5M4)

There were many other reasons why I lost that election, but I think that was the dominant factor. In my first election bid, I won strongly in rural New Castle County and lost in the City of Wilmington and in Kent County, and I won in Sussex County. In my bid for reelection, there were similar results in New Castle, the City of Wilmington and Kent, but this time Sussex went against me. (5M5)

*The conversion from a commission to a cabinet form of government was cause for pomp and circumstance in Dover.*

. . . we thought it really merited some special attention, and we talked to some historians in the community who were particularly excited about what had been done. We swore in the last of the members of the cabinet, which we did at a ceremony in the House of Representatives in Legislative Hall – we did that by the way in front of a packed house – and then marched from there over to the new Townsend Building, where we were to hold our cabinet meetings. We were led in that procession by the colonial-

costumed fife and drum corps, and I led the procession of the cabinet officers, and other key officials in the state government . . . . (5M5)

And at that time, Bill Frank, one of our Delaware historians and somebody who had been following attempts to create a cabinet form of government for many years, gave a very fine talk marking this historic occasion. It was a big day, and a very satisfying day for all of us who had been involved in making it happen. (5M5)

### **Enjoying the Difference**

*As the only governor who sat in that seat under both the commission and cabinet forms of government, Peterson was in a unique position to compare the results.*

I can tell you, it was one major change. Before we had a cabinet form, when people called the governor's office about some problem, my secretary would tell them that the governor couldn't do anything about it – that it was a matter, for example, for the Highway Department. "They meet on the third Thursday of the month, and here is a member of that board who lives in your area. Maybe you should deal with him." (4M4)

But when the thing was changed, now people knew that the governor really had that authority along with the responsibility. So you would get (people with problems) together with people in your organization who had the responsibility, and you would try and help that person get an answer to his or her question. (4M4)

*Peterson offered a concrete example of the change.*

When I was first governor, I was determined to get some African Americans on the State Police force, and I set out to do that. The Highway Department then also had responsibility for the State Police. And when I went to the head of the State Police and said that I wanted to do this, he informed me that he couldn't find any qualified blacks to (join) the State Police. I told him I just didn't



Differences between the Cabinet and Commission forms of government were among the topics discussed when a collection of Delaware governors dined together at Woodburn in 1995 at a dinner honoring Russ and June Peterson. Pictured are: (front row left) Governor Thomas Carper, Martha Carper, Governor Pete du Pont, Jane Castle and Governor Mike Castle. (Second row) Clarice Wolf, Jeanne Tribbitt, June Peterson, Sherman Tribbitt and Governor Elbert Carvel. (Top row) Governor Dale Wolf and Governor Russ Peterson. On the wall is a portrait of Lillian Peterson.

believe that, and (I went) to the head of the Highway Department. He backed up his head of the State Police. And so I got nowhere. (4M4)

But now, . . . we had a Department of Public Safety, and the secretary of that was Fred Vetter. I went to Fred Vetter and said, "Fred, I want you to have six African Americans in this next class that you're training for the State Police force. If you don't have them there, you're not going to get any money to carry out that training program." Fred went to bat on that, and he had six blacks in that class. They graduated and became the first six blacks in the Delaware State Police. (4M4)

When you meet with people who have been governor since the cabinet form of government, and talk to them about this – as we all did in one dinner party at Governor Carper's house one night – (none of them can) conceive of going back to a commission form of government. So we accomplished what we set out to do, to make the governor's office much more efficient in doing the work that they're supposed to do. (4M4)

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## More Effective Government

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*Conversion to a cabinet system was certainly the best-known and most important of Peterson's efforts to make state government run better, but it was not the only one. His interests included much more than proper organizational structure and efficiency. He was out to reform state government in a variety of ways as part of his overall quest to make Delaware a Model State.*

### **Election Reform: A Do-Gooder's Delight**

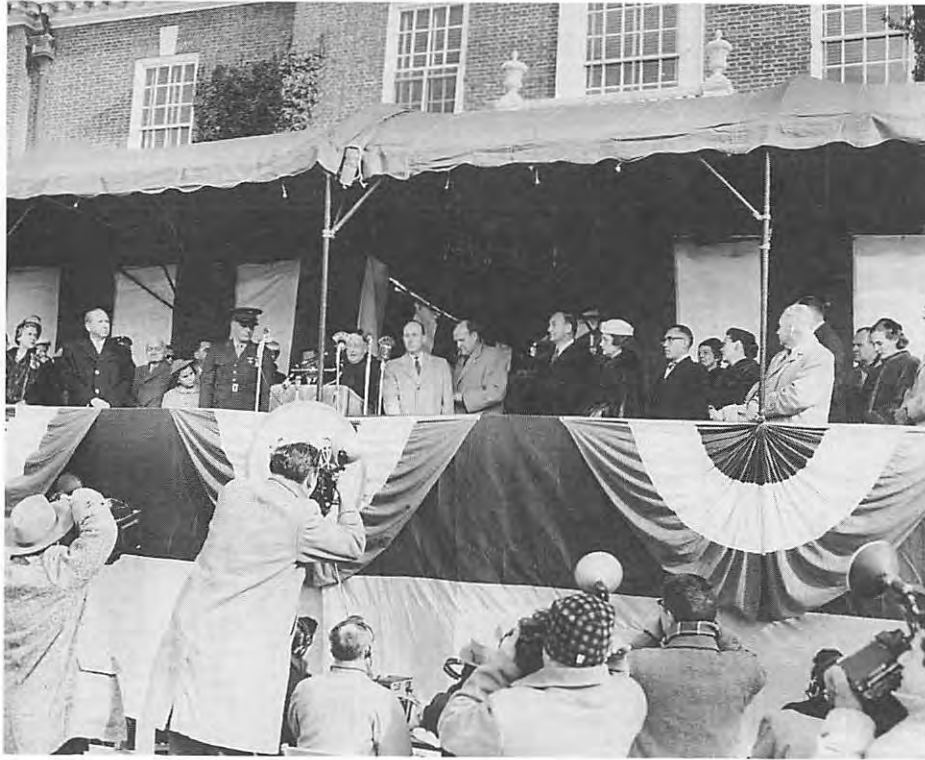
*The election laws are always a tempting target for reform.*

A number of us do-gooders, pushing for reforms in government, had been disturbed about some of our election procedures. Having been involved with Republican party activities and seeing how party conventions worked, I was upset that some people with very substantial political influence and financial influence could have such a disproportionate impact on who got nominated for election. And I also worried about some of the very talented people in our community who were interested in government but didn't have the courage to actually run for office because they figured that the structure of the parties and the state conventions would preclude their ever getting considered. (5M8)

So, working with others who had similar goals, (and) others from the legislature, we came up with an election reform bill. (It was a) very comprehensive bill that did quite a variety of things, such as (establish) bipartisan election commissions in each county and get rid of the "Big Lever." (At that time), you could go into the voting booth and by pulling one Big Lever vote for all the Democratic candidates, or by pulling a different lever, vote for all the Republican candidates. (5M9)

. . . the Big Lever kind of made voters lazy. They really didn't have to study who all these candidates were, running for different offices. They'd just go in and decide whether they were Republican or Democrat and vote. And, of course, the party leaders thought that was a pretty good idea, but in thinking about the good government aspects, it wasn't. (5M9)

(In addition), people could still get nominated for office by the vote of a party convention. . . . We set up this so-called modified primary, modified because if more than two thirds (of the delegates to a party convention) voted for a given candidate, that candidate would become the party's candidate without having a primary. But if a person couldn't get that percentage, there would have to be a primary election. (5M9)



Lt. Governor David Buckson inauguration ceremonies, Legislative Hall, 1957. Left to right: Mrs. & Governor J. Caleb Boggs, Mr. Edgar Boggs, Marilu Boggs, Lt. J.C. Boggs, Jr., Chief Justice Clarence A. Southerland, Lt. Governor David P. Buckson, Lt. Governor John W. Rollins, Senator & Mrs. John J. Williams, Senator & Mrs. J. Allen Frear, Jr. *Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives.*

Anyway, we got that legislation through the General Assembly and one reason we were able to do that was because the Senate and the House of Representatives and the Governor's Office were all occupied by people from the same party. Almost certainly, if we had had two different parties represented in those three branches, there would have been all kinds of political fighting, and we probably never would have gotten this job done. (5M9)

*Peterson was asked whether the kind of disproportionate political influence he bemoaned had not benefited him during his own quest for nomination and election. Certainly Peterson was helped by very powerful political friends and supporters.*

Yes, no doubt about it that that whole system benefited me very much when I got nominated the first time around. But (the reforms also) really did ensure that I didn't get re-elected. I'll put it quite that strongly, but let me just explain what I mean by that. Let's say that the Big Lever had been left in there. When I ran for reelection, President Nixon won overwhelmingly (in) a big landslide. Almost certainly, a few thousand more people in Delaware would have pulled the Republican lever, thus voting for me; (Republicans) who when they had a choice, because they were teed off at things I had done, didn't pull the specific lever for me. (5M9)

Secondly, that call for a modified primary provision led to my principal opponent, Dave Buckson, getting just one more vote than he needed in order to call for a primary election. And that led then to months of real fighting among Republicans. I went ahead and won that primary with something like 66 percent of the vote, but in the meantime, all kinds of people, particularly downstate – Dave Buckson's own territory – were really teed off at me. And some of those (Republicans) who supported Dave Buckson actually worked against me in the regular election. (5M9)

... if we had retained the Big Lever, I think I would have been re-elected. If we hadn't had a primary rule, I might have been re-



elected. Frankly, having both of those things made the situation much different. But, nevertheless, it clearly was the right thing to do. Certainly whether or not I got re-elected was a detail in the long term. (5M9)

*Another election-related reform provided Delaware, the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution, with another national "first": The first state to ratify the constitutional amendment to allow 18-year-olds to vote. An attempt to be first in ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment fell short, but just barely.*

*Besides changes in governmental structure and election laws, Peterson pushed for changes in consumer protection.*

We used to get a lot of calls in the governor's office from people who were hurting because of some bad deal they got in buying a car, or in a mortgage on their house, or some appliance that didn't perform like it was claimed to perform. There was no way to pass that concern on to others, and we (in the Governor's Office) certainly were not equipped to answer such questions and help such people . . . . And so we set up a Division of Consumer Affairs. I think that was a very good decision because the number of things which came to that group was surprising. I appointed Frances West to that job, and she really did a (good) job. (5M10)

### **Code of Ethics**

*In another effort to improve state government, Peterson formed a committee to create a Code of Ethics for members of the executive branch, headed by former Delaware Attorney General Jan Bove.*

One read frequently of problems around the country, and in our state, too, of examples of people in government who didn't behave ethically. And I thought it was fundamental that we . . . avoid, or at least minimize, such practices. I figured that in order to have a good level of performance, one needed to have a code to go by. . . . And I believe it was very worthwhile and effective. (5M7)

I don't remember any special incident that triggered this off. It was just a general conviction by a student of government, yours truly, that this was a problem that got many organizations, many administrations (around the country) in deep difficulty. And thus we ought to be doing our darndest to avoid or minimize such a problem. And by the way, I don't remember any incident we did have in our government that was about a serious breach of ethics. (5M7)

### **Intergovernmental Cooperation**

*There was an unusual level of cooperation during Peterson's term between Peterson and two other key Delaware leaders – Wilmington Mayor Hal Haskell and New Castle County Executive Bill Conner. The three were friends and political allies, moderate Republicans agreeing philosophically on many aspects of government and politics.*

When we three got into positions of authority. . . , we pretty naturally worked together. We would have meeting after meeting. We would sit down with the sole purpose of talking about what we could do to . . . improve the effectiveness of our governments. And one thing I remember especially is how we worked on taxes. (5M8)

All three of us agreed that the most regressive tax was the property tax, which was particularly hard on people who had only modest resources, especially after they retired. We thought it would be much better to replace some of that property tax with something like an income tax, which was collected according to people's ability to pay. (5M8)

At that time, the City of Wilmington and the counties were paying a substantial amount for such things as medical care of indigent people, welfare costs, and the costs of some of the courts. I agreed that the state should take over some of those programs, take over the responsibility for administering them and paying for them. And, of course, they were very agreeable to this. It added a

problem for me however, since this was another reason for having to increase (Delaware's) income tax. It particularly irritated me when I was running for reelection (and) the two downstate county governments took credit for how they were able to reduce the property tax – at the same time they were clobbering me for having increased the income tax. But that's one of the diseases of the political process. (5M8)

*Another example of the three units of government working together was the Wilmington Wage Tax, a highly controversial new tax that was enacted only with the full support of Peterson, Conner, and Haskell. Once more, there was a political price to pay.*

That was something of major importance to the City of Wilmington. They really were in a bind in trying to find the funds to operate the city, and yet all of us, statewide, took great advantage of some of the resources of the city, particularly those in the affluent, so-called Second District, that part of New Castle County outside of Wilmington. We took great advantage of the things the city offered and yet were not . . . paying for them. So, by permitting the City of Wilmington to have a wage tax, that helped to solve that problem. But, of course, most people who lived in the county outside the city and worked in the city were pretty unhappy about that. (5M8)

### **Supporting the Arts**

*Peterson also increased state government involvement in the arts.*

I had personally been a strong supporter of the arts. My good wife Lillian had gotten me involved, and when I worked on the executive committee of the Greater Wilmington Development Council, I tried to get them to support building a center for the performing arts in the Wilmington area. (5M11)

When I became governor, and realizing that we didn't have any Division of the Arts – one had been established previously, but no funding was provided for it. . . , I decided we were going to have a

(real) Division of the Arts, and so I established . . . the Delaware State Arts Council. (5M11)

I appointed Polly Buck to be the head of that. She was very active in the field, and proved to be a good chairperson. She enlisted many talented people around Delaware who had a firm commitment or involvement in the arts. (5M11)

. . . the Delaware Arts Council had to do many things. One thing we did was establish awards for people in that field, the Governor's Gold Medal Award, which we initially gave to a woman in Sussex county who had her own studio there (Mrs. Louise Chambers Corcoran), but we also gave one to Charles Parks, our famous Delaware sculptor. (6M1)

*Also during Peterson's administration was the beginning of what we know today as the Grand Opera House, a facility that sat idle for many years and had served as a movie house before that. Nonetheless, it had a distinguished past and today plays a major role in Northern Delaware's arts and entertainment environment.*

We decided we were going to do something to help get that Grand Opera House resurrected. The Delaware State Arts Council put up some money . . . and worked with the Greater Wilmington Development Council. And out of it came a big concert at the Opera House. We sat on the seats where the upholstery was falling off, and talented artists from Delaware performed. My wife and I arrived in a horse-drawn carriage. I made a little speech on the stage about how important it was for us to get behind this effort. And as we know, the community *did* get behind it, and some years later the Grand Opera house came into being – and it has proved to be a center for performing arts in Delaware. (6M1)

### **Involving Youth in Government**

*Yet another Peterson initiative was a vehicle to involve young people in state government, which turned into the Governor's Youth Council.*

I thought it was very important to get young people excited about government, and knowledgeable about government. I'd found that quite a few young people had been very active in my political campaign, and they had a great time and got excited about it. So I said, "Let's have a Governor's Youth Council." I appointed one. It was a lengthy process, (and) we selected 50 students from high schools and colleges to be members. (6M1)

I remember in meeting with them down in Legislative Hall, I told them how we (would) hire a full-time person to be their advisor and they said, "Oh, you'll get somebody who won't work with us properly." And I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll only appoint somebody if you interview and approve him." And so I did that (appointed Doyle Owen), and they thought he was terrific. (6M1)

That organization thrived. In fact, the students came to me and said, "There are so many of our friends around the state who want to be on the Governor's Youth Council, and you need to have more than 50 members." And so we just took off that ceiling. I think we had 300 and some people signed up by the time I left office. And these young people organized into committees – one for education, for example, (headed by my daughter, Elin). They even went to the State Board of Education and strongly recommended that the way the State Board should grade teachers was by asking the students to grade them. (6M1)

I thought there was some merit in that suggestion. I remember back in my high school years (that) we had an American history teacher who wasn't worth a damn in the view of all us kids. And over the many years since that time, when I've talked to people in my home town, (I've learned that) she's still teaching out there and the current kids have the same view of her that we had. (6M1)

*Perhaps these young Delawareans were ahead of their time. Today many businesses conduct what is known as 360-degree reviews, in*

*which managers' performance is assessed not only by their superiors but also by their peers and subordinates.*

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## **Criminal Justice**

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*As noted earlier, Peterson's experience with corrections reform and the Three-S Citizens Campaign was a major impetus in his later running for Governor. It taught him valuable lessons about organizing citizens and how the General Assembly functioned, and it increased his visibility.*

*In addition, crime and criminal justice were major issues in society at the time he ran for governor. So as Peterson took office, criminal justice issues were clearly front and center on his agenda and that of the general public.*

The main thing I was determined to do was get at the *causes* of crime, because what we had been doing and were still doing in our country is to work on the *symptoms* of crime. You go find the perpetrator of the crime. You lock him up. You take him to court. You then lock him up again, and you provide very little help in rehabilitating that person. To me, that is just working on the symptoms – crimes being committed, people being arrested, people going to court, people going to prison – and what we needed to work on was why people got in trouble in the first place. (8M38)

I said, "I'm going to do what I can as governor to work on these things which are causing crime and, secondly, to change the state system which is contributing to crime. For example, . . . our prisons were debtors' prisons, locking people up for inability to pay a small fine; (and) thus, giving them a prison record, so they now couldn't find a job. It was a tremendous negative impact on that person's life. (8M38)

## **Ending Debtors' Prisons**

*Peterson set about changing the law that allowed these "debtors' prisons." One day, his staff informed him that the bill was headed for defeat in the House of Representatives. Determined to prevent that from happening, Peterson took the unusual – almost unheard of – step of seeking permission to speak on the House floor. Normally, a governor stays away from the legislative arena, appearing only for his annual State of the State and budget messages or some other special occasion.*

They gave me permission (to address them), and I lectured them on the fact they had run for office, nearly every one of them, on the basis that they were going to do something about the crime problem; and when they had a chance to do something, they were going to renege. I was asking them to vote for it. I went back upstairs to my office, and my staff came back in a very short interval, something like a half hour later, to say that the House had passed that bill. That gave me more confidence, (to know) that if you really presented the issue to the legislators, you probably could get their support for some of these controversial issues. (8M39)

## **Cutting the Rate of Violent Crime in Half**

*One of Peterson's initial moves was to establish a goal for reforming the criminal justice system – and a challenging goal at that.*

I set a goal. We were going to cut the rate of violent crime in half by 1980, a little over 10 years from when I made that statement. I realized that was a very difficult thing to accomplish, but I thought if we really worked at it, we could do it. But the prime reason for that was to get the whole community thinking about reducing the crime rate – not just *tabulating* the crime rate, not just *screaming out* because you have high crime, not just saying "Let's get more police so we can arrest them and lock them up," but *doing* something about the very causes of crime. I thought that if the state had an assignment to reduce crime – not just to arrest and lock up people – they would get something done. (8M47)

That's why I changed the Law Enforcement Planning Agency to the Delaware Agency to Reduce Crime. I put in charge of that agency Ned Carpenter, who was a very able and outstanding young lawyer, and (I) put on that agency people from every one of the units involved in apprehending offenders, sentencing (and) dealing with corrections, plus people who were skilled in such things as dealing with drugs and alcohol, etc. (8M48)

That group was excited about their assignment (but) in subsequent administrations it too got changed and went back to the old title. It was embarrassing to have an agency to reduce crime when the crime kept going up and up. To me, that would have been more of an incentive to strengthen an agency to reduce crime rather than to get rid of it. (8M48)

### **Reforming Juvenile Corrections**

*Corrections reform had led to Peterson's involvement in public life. Once in office, Peterson set out to revolutionize the corrections system – juvenile and adult.*

I set out to markedly change the staffs involved in the correctional system. For example, in the case of juvenile delinquents, we had institutions like the Ferris School for Boys, run by people who had no real training in the treatment or rehabilitation of offenders. In fact, . . . the Youth Services Commission, (which) ran Ferris School, was headed by Tex Warrington, who (had been) a professional football player. He had hired nine other members of professional football teams to come to work for him. (8M40)

To illustrate what they did when a juvenile ran away from the Ferris School, they would form a posse of other kids to go out and scour the community looking for that escapee. When they found him, those kids in the posse were allowed to beat up on the one they had captured. (As a result) there were *more* escapes from Ferris School, not *fewer*. What we did was replace all of those ex-football players with people who had some training (in the behavioral sciences). In fact, when I became governor, there were



eight people working in the whole juvenile crime area on rehabilitation and custody who had a college education. We increased that to 80-some during my four years in the office. (8M40)

As a result of the educational programs and recreational programs that they started, we got 300 volunteers who would work with kids who were in trouble with the law, to try to get them to straighten out. The escapes from Ferris School went down to zero. There were zero escapes in my last year as governor from that institution, because the kids now had educational and recreational activities there, which they appreciated. The number of people coming to Ferris School as repeat offenders went down. As I recall, (in 1969) about 57% of the offenders who were coming into Ferris School in a year were repeat offenders. In the last year of my Governorship, only 14% of those kids were repeat offenders. (8M41)

*Peterson was very proud of his accomplishments in juvenile corrections . . . and irritated at what happened later.*

That was a tremendous accomplishment, something in which all of us in that group were extremely proud. The frustrating thing was that my successor in office markedly changed that. He fired some of those key people, and others quit in disgust. At the same time, the whole corrections program was taken out of the Department of Health and Social Services and set up as a separate department. (8M41)

I (had put it there) deliberately (when we created the cabinet system of government), because I wanted people who were skilled in dealing with people with health and social problems to work on crime problems. . . . One of the reasons we were able to build this very effective staff was because people involved in Health and Social Services were also involved with corrections. That was all done away with. (8M42)

That (kind of thing) is not only a problem here in Delaware but . . . around the country. Very successful programs are established – they call them experimental programs – and when it is going along beautifully, somebody comes in and fires the person in charge of it. They cut the money out of it and revert to the old lock-them-up-and-throw-away-the-key philosophy. (8M42)

### **A New State Prison . . . and Work Release**

*Peterson carried his same dedication to rehabilitating prisoners to adult corrections as well. This included planning for the new state prison at Smyrna.*

The building was designed to do something about trying to rehabilitate offenders. We recognized that there was a great range of characters who were arrested and confined. They included very difficult people, very violent offenders. Some . . . had mental problems and had to be controlled by sedatives, etc. But at the other extreme, people were there for some minor, non-violent offense, and they were all put in one big pool. (8M43)

We decided that we had to deal with them differently. So . . . the prison had been designed so you would have one area for maximum, one for medium, and one for minimum security – and another area where people were going out on work release. The prisoners were all told that a new day had arrived. Henceforth, those who were really behaving properly in the institution – really trying to improve themselves, get more education, get ready to move back into the community to live a law-abiding life – they would be moved from the maximum security to medium security, then from medium to minimum, and then put into a work release program. (8M43)

That led to a high percentage of those prisoners seeing a little more hope for their future. We hired more people to make this thing happen. One of the most exciting parts was what we did in the work release area. In the past, when a person left prison, he was given a very small sum of money (and) left at the gate, (with) no

transportation to go anyplace. He had to figure out where he was going to go and how he was going to get there, and one of the most welcome places for them to go was to meet with former offenders whom they had met in prison. (8M44)

*This emphasis on rehabilitation included seeking jobs for released prison inmates.*

We decided that what those people needed was a job, so when they got out of prison they had some source of income and could take care of themselves. We worked with employers in the state, and many of them were very responsive and helpful. . . . When we thought a person was approaching the time when they would be discharged, and hopefully even earlier, we would get them a job on the outside. Obviously, we weren't going to put someone on the outside who was a very violent criminal because we had to be concerned about protecting the community as well. But most of them in that prison were well qualified to (participate in) a program whereby they could find a job when they got out. (8M44)

. . . at the end of my term, one out of six (inmates) was on work release. They would go out and work eight hours at a job, then spend the night and weekends in the prison. They would have to pay room and board to the prison. They paid state taxes, federal taxes and social security taxes, and they saved some money – so when they got out, they had a little kitty to work on. Our plan was they would maintain that job after they got out of prison and many of them did. (8M45)

. . . (our statistical ability) was so limited (that) it was very difficult to make any sweeping conclusion as to whether or not this program was effective. I think almost certainly it would have been effective, but this program also was markedly reduced (by my successor). (8M45)



Peterson talks with Director of Corrections, John Moran, at the new Smyrna Prison.

*Not everyone supported programs such as work release. Some feared that released inmates would commit another crime; others opposed the mere idea of helping criminals.*

If a person out on work release commits a heinous crime, that is obviously bad, but that person is going to be released into the community sometime anyway, at which time he could commit a heinous crime. The place to concentrate is on the number of people out on work release (who) did *not* commit a crime – then or in subsequent years. Why should we condemn all of the people who are put in custody of the state because of the acts of one individual? I know that (view) is normal, and I am sorry to add that politicians fan that flame. They (pretend that they) are great saviors of society by getting tough on crime, and what they are really doing is screwing up a system which could do the most to reduce the crime rate. (8M46)

### **A Prison Riot at Smyrna**

*The new Smyrna prison had not been in operation very long when, on September 2, 1971, the inmates staged a riot. Ever the activist, Peterson quickly sprung into action.*

I was coming back from the Salisbury TV station when I got a call on the car phone that John Moran, the Director of Corrections, wanted me to contact him urgently. Well, you don't carry on such conversations in the car because your conversations are not private. So I hurried up to state police headquarters in Georgetown and called John Moran, (who) reported (that) a prison riot was under way – a very serious matter. The prisoners had rioted in a maximum security unit and had taken three guards hostage and were threatening to kill them. (8M48)

I told him I would be right there. We drove at high speed, violating my rule that we would never drive that car beyond the speed limit . . . . (When we got there), John Moran . . . described in some detail what was going on. Some of the prisoners had taken the keys away from the guards, opened all the cells, and torn up the

place. He was trying to communicate with (the inmates) by telephone. It was hard to find out even what they wanted. They were concerned because . . . several of the prisoners there . . . were kept under sedation because they were so violent. They thought if their drugs wore off, there would be a tremendous problem. (8M49)

(At one point), I had a chance to talk to some of the guards . . . and found out how frightened the guards were about what was going on. Some of them (said they) understood why the inmates got so irritated because they didn't have enough guards to cover the job, so the guards who were on (duty) became so overworked they would do things they shouldn't to antagonize the inmates. (8M49)

I told John . . . that I didn't come up there to tell him what to do; I came up there to back him up . . . . He called all of his guys together . . . and passed out shillelaghs to everybody. He (said) he was going to lead them into the back door of the maximum security. Harry Towers, who was then the head of the facility, would unlock the door and – with gas masks on – then they would shoot tear gas into the room. They would then go in and push the inmates into a cell and close the door, and then try to find the guards and get them out of there. Then they would air out the building. (8M49)

He (asked if there were) any questions so I put up my hand . . . and I asked if anybody had a gun. Two of the men said they did. I said that I didn't think they should take guns in there. John Moran asked them to turn the guns over and a person locked them in the drawer. (8M50)

*While prison staff left to execute the plan, Peterson walked alone into an inner courtyard surrounded by sections devoted to maximum security, medium security, minimum security and work release. An inmate in medium security screamed obscenities at him, the sound reverberating around the entire courtyard.*

A door opened from maximum security and out came this whole bunch of guards who had been in there . . . . I then walked over to meet with those guards, and John Moran told me how the three guards had been found and were safe. They had pushed all the guys in whatever cell they could – three, four, or five to a cell as necessary and locked it up. Now they were airing (out) the place. I said, “Can I go in the prison?” And he said, “It’s full of gas.” I said, “Well, give me a gas mask.” He did, and he went in with me. I saw several guys in a cell coughing and cussing and saw all kinds of damage they had done the facility – water flowing all over where they had pulled a toilet out of the floor. (8M50)

(About a week after the riot, gubernatorial assistant) Jerry Sapienza . . . arranged for (us) to meet with 21 offenders. We took three offenders from each of seven areas of the prison (with) nobody there from prison management. I wanted to learn why did they have a riot, and at first some of the prisoners claimed they had been beaten . . . and their heads were bleeding. I asked . . . to see their heads and couldn’t see any sign of a wound, but they claimed it had healed in the intervening period, (which) might have been true. (8M52)

One prisoner spoke up and said that they always have a riot, or at least some big disturbance, in August . . . because Superior Court goes on vacation for the whole month of August, and (many) people are sent to prison, waiting for the court to process them. (August is also) the most humid month and the most uncomfortable month in the prison. Well, I found that this fellow was absolutely right. That was true. (And) as a result of what he said, Superior Court stopped (shutting down in) August, and we got money from the legislature to hire three more Superior Court judges. (8M52)

*Peterson learned that, with the prison jammed full of inmates and others awaiting trial, the system for moving people in a planned way from maximum to minimum security was violated. That in turn was seen as a breach of faith.*

I think it's extremely important to recognize that when we make a promise to even the least of these thy brethren, we have to keep that promise or have a good explanation for why we are not keeping it. (8M53)

The riot was a blow to me for many reasons. One reason was that I had not responded to the request for funding to get more people out there and provide more facilities. With all my background experience in this field, I should have been more responsive to that. (8M53)

*Prison rioting at that time was not unique to Delaware. In fact, very shortly after the problem at Smyrna there was a major riot at the Attica Prison in New York State. The prisoners wanted to meet with Governor Nelson Rockefeller, who declined.*

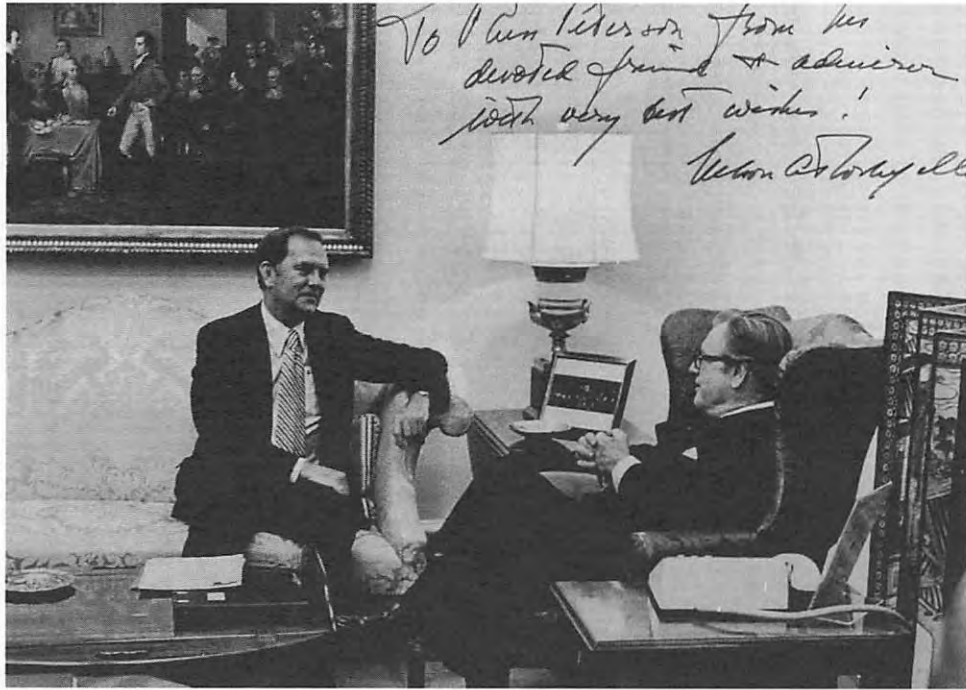
Prisoners are always asking to see the Governor, and in a big state with many prisons that is impractical, and so I don't fault the Governor in not going there. The riot went on for quite some time, and finally the Governor ordered the New York State Police to go in and take that prison back . . . . The State Police charged that prison and they killed many of the inmates and many of the hostages. It was one of the worst prison riots in our country's history. (8M54)

### **Fixed Versus Indeterminate Sentences**

*One topic of frequent debate between so-called "hard-liners" and "do-gooders" is whether prison sentences should be fixed – based upon the crime involved – or more flexible and indeterminate.*

Later on, when I lived on the Rockefeller estate, one night at dinner with Nelson Rockefeller and others I said to the Governor of New York, "Governor, how about telling us something about





Peterson shown with Vice-President Nelson A. Rockefeller in 1976, for whom he had worked after completing his term as Governor.

the Attica riot.” All he said was, “I wish I had gone to the prison,” and that was the end of the conversation . . . . (8M54)

I thought it important that judges have some freedom to decide on the kind of sentence they were going to mete out (because) the nature of the crime, the nature of the individuals involved vary so markedly. If a first offender who has a record of being a reliable citizen commits a crime, it would seem reasonable for a judge to give him a lesser sentence than someone who had committed the same crime and had a bad record. Many people, in fact the majority of legislators at that time, didn’t agree with that. They thought the judge ought to be tied down to give a tough sentence and lock them up. (8M55)

That problem is still with us today all over America. We need to do our best to get the best judges we can and then let them – aided by their staffs – determine what is the best sentence for the community and for the individual who is sitting there before them. (8M55)

### **Magistrate Court Reform**

*No discussion of the criminal justice system would be complete without mention of the magistrate or Justice of the Peace courts.*

The Justice of the Peace system was really a disgraceful system. So many incompetents sitting on those benches and so much partisan politics involved. Governor Terry did that very important thing of stopping the bad practice of magistrates, Justices of the Peace, being able to keep a portion of the fines that they forced people to pay. I can’t think of anything more inappropriate than that. In other words, magistrates sort of getting a cut on the fines they imposed. (8M56)

When I became Governor, there were still many things wrong with the Magistrate system that needed to be done. At the time we had 50-some magistrates in Delaware, and every one of them, except one, was . . . a Democrat, and the other one was what we call a



Peterson signs legislation creating a Statewide Family Court. Surrounding him are (left to right): Richard Wier, Murray Schwartz, Rep. Marion (Buzzy) Seibell, Sen. Margaret Manning, Rep. George Hering III, Mrs. Henry E.I. (Muffin) du Pont and Hiram Warder.

*Photo by Al Vietri, Delaware Technical & Community College.*

decline, an independent. It was traditional that when a new governor came in from (the other) party, they would switch all those magistrates over time as the magistrates' terms ran out . . . . (8M56)

It was a great political spoil that the politicians enjoyed. In fact, having friends of yours in the magistrate offices could become quite convenient in getting a son off from a drunken driving charge, for example, or getting other things done by a magistrate that were not really conducive to equal justice under the law. So I set out from the beginning to change that. (8M57)

*And when Peterson said balance, he meant balance – equal representation for Republicans and Democrats, with some independents thrown in for good measure. Again, the predictable happened.*

This got me in hot water with the Republican party leaders because I was taking away one of the most important spoils from having won the election. But that was only one of the problems. Another was that the people in those jobs were in many cases very incompetent. We learned by requiring all of the magistrates to take certain tests that three of them had IQs in the 80s. That paralleled pretty well with the records in their courts. A number of people would complain about ridiculous decisions, outrageous decisions by those particular magistrates. (8M57)

I set out to get rid of them. I didn't want to wait until their terms ran out. I discussed this with the Chief Justice of the state, Justice Daniel L. Wolcott, and he helped to put pressure on these people. We managed over a couple of years to get those three people to resign. We got a lot of flack about this from some quarters, but from the standpoint of what was right, we were absolutely on solid ground in what we did. (8M58)



Peterson being sworn in as Governor by Chief Justice Daniel L. Wolcott, January 21, 1969.  
Looking on is outgoing Governor Charles L. Terry, Jr.  
*Photo courtesy of Delaware Public Archives.*

Then we established a new magistrate system (and) established a Court Administrator. The first Court Administrator was Mort Kimmel, a lawyer. We set out to markedly upgrade that system by requiring the magistrates to take various training courses, not once but repeatedly over the years. We required that they meet certain educational qualifications and set up a system whereby those who applied for the magistrate job would be tested, and it would be determined who was the most qualified. . . . Lo and behold, we now got quite a different group of people applying. Lawyers were now applying for those jobs, and they wouldn't have been caught dead previously taking one of those assignments. There is no question about it, this markedly upgraded the quality of magistrates in Delaware. (8M58)

### **Reforming the Family Court**

*And then there was the real "people's court" – the Family Court.*

We had three different Family Courts in the state, one in each county, and they were markedly different in their facilities and other things. Many people in the state were very unhappy with what the Family Court was doing. Family Court was way understaffed. We set out to make a major change there. Some people, like Senator Margaret Manning, had been pushing hard for a statewide Family Court. She was a great ally in the State Senate. We got the statewide Family Court system established and provided for a much improved facility for Family Court operation. It was in a big building in Wilmington that used to be the Delmarva Power & Light Company headquarters. (8M59)

One of the things that pleased me during that period was (that) I was able to appoint the first woman to the bench in Delaware – Roxanna Arsht – as a Family Court judge. Every time she sees me to this day, she calls me her governor. (8M60)

Bill Gordon was the person I appointed to be the Chief Judge. I see him frequently today. He considers that one of the most important things he has done in this life, to assume the leadership

and help build a much more effective Family Court. He strengthened the court by increasing the number of judges . . . and oriented that court more towards the rehabilitation of delinquents. I think it has to go down as a very significant progressive step in the evolution of the court system in Delaware. (8M60)

### **The Whipping Post**

*Finally, there was elimination of the whipping post. That's right. Until Peterson's Administration, Delaware had a whipping post.*

That's one of the things of which I am most proud. I could hardly believe that Delaware still had the ability to sentence people to whipping . . . until the early 1970s. Delaware even had a law that there be a whipping post in each county. What was most disturbing was that they also had a law which made it illegal to take a picture of the whipping post. It was supposed to be a deterrent to crime, and yet they didn't want people to see it because I think they were ashamed to have it seen. (8M62)

. . . the last time (the whipping post) was used was 1952. After that, quite a few times the lower courts sentenced people to whipping, but higher courts would throw the case out . . . . When I became governor, one of the first things I did was order them to take down the whipping posts. They took them down and put them in a storage room. I got a lot of flack from that, the governor breaking the law. I said, "I'm not breaking the law. The law says there has to be a whipping post in each county, and there is — come, I'll show you where we are storing them." Nobody took me up on that, however. (8M63)

Then we had this great opportunity when we changed the whole Criminal Code for Delaware. That was a very important project. Attorney General Laird Stabler had a lot to do with making that happen. He was very much involved in the legislature at that time and later became Attorney General. It was a great day when he

## PILGRIMS PROGRESS



When Delaware adopted a revised Criminal Code, it spelled the end of the State's whipping post.

*Cartoon by Jack Jurden of The News Journal Company.*



and I, Bill Frank, and just a few others appeared down at Buena Vista, and I signed the (revised) Criminal Code into law. (8M63)

It wiped out the whipping post, I hope forever, although there are still people around the community who speak out about bringing the whipping post back, how it will keep people from big cities around us from coming to Delaware to commit crimes. There is absolutely no data to support that contention. It think it is gone permanently from Delaware. (8M64)

*The whipping post finally disappeared with the adoption of a new state Criminal Code.*

### **The Nation Pays Attention**

*With his deep involvement in criminal justice, Peterson became something of a national figure in this area. For starters, he chaired the National Governor's Association Committee on Public Safety and Criminal Justice. He immediately set about duplicating the approach he took in Delaware.*

I became chairman of that for two years. I convinced the whole Governor's Conference that they should adopt a goal of cutting the rate of violent crime in half in ten years, . . . and they voted unanimously for that goal. Now that is a long way from doing something about it, just passing a resolution. But at least they considered that a logical goal – that if we really put the resources into this problem, we could have that kind of impact. Of course, we never had that kind of impact in Delaware or in the nation. We didn't put the resources into it. (8M65)

It's a standard problem of crime. We know what we can do to have an impact, and we don't do any more than run a few experimental programs. When they succeed, we don't replicate them on the big scale necessary to reduce the crime rate in America in any significant way. (8M65)

*Anyway, at one point U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell invited Peterson to lunch. He said that President Nixon considered crime by far the biggest domestic problem, and that they wanted to make an in-depth study of the criminal justice system and to develop criminal justice standards and goals.*

They wanted me to chair . . . a National Commission on Criminal Justice, Standards and Goals. I asked him if that meant we were free to go ahead and recommend anything which we thought would do something. Certainly, he said, our objective is to reduce crime, and you come up with a recommendation of what should be done. I took that job. They had a tremendous committee . . . . We worked very hard . . . and came up with a report which had a lot of what would undoubtedly be called liberal programs. All of these people coming from conservative Western states and so on voted that we make this presentation to the Attorney General. (8M67)

By this time, Elliot Richardson had become Attorney General, and he and I had become good friends . . . . I'm out of office – this is 1973 – and we just finished our report on the National Commission on Criminal Justice and Goals, and I go to see Elliot Richardson. Previous to my meeting with him, he had read my report, and he said to me, “Why did you have to have so many of these controversial recommendations in there? It is loaded with (too much) dynamite to carry this thing out.” (I replied that) I wasn't asked to make something which was politically safe; I was asked to come up with recommendations that would reduce the crime rate. (8M67)

In any event, our recommendations didn't go very far in influencing governments to act, but it did do this: Every one of the 50 states . . . carried on an extensive study of the criminal justice standards and goals, as we had recommended. (8M67)

*The report was vintage Peterson – bold and sweeping, with no holds barred.*

. . . our final report was called a National Strategy to Reduce Crime. Among other things, we called for the decriminalizing of certain things that were in the Criminal Code, such as vagrancy, sexual acts between adults in private (and) the use of marijuana. We argued that the use of tobacco was legal, and yet it was a drug that was known to cause hundreds of thousands of deaths each year. We thought arresting young kids for using marijuana, locking them up, was unjust. (8M69)

That was obviously the most controversial of our recommendations. Another was to outlaw the manufacture and sale of handguns in the United States. This is something we ought to do. It's clear that the number of fatalities from the use of handguns in the United States is outrageously high, way beyond that of other countries. (8M70)

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## Equal Rights for All

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*Although Peterson's most frequently cited accomplishments are the cabinet form of government and Coastal Zoning Act, and to a lesser extent criminal justice, he accomplished many things in a wide variety of areas. Among the more important examples was his aggressive posture on equal rights for minorities and women. As always, Peterson pushed hard for change.*

### **Open Housing Legislation**

The one (piece of civil rights legislation) I remember most vividly is the passage of Open Housing Legislation – something which a number of us had tried to get done in previous administrations, unsuccessfully. I set out to make that happen when I became governor and, of course, that provided the opportunity for minority groups to be able to live in any part of the state and made it illegal to deliberately exclude minorities from a given area. Obviously,

they were excluded on many grounds – many times just financially . . . , but there are cases where just their race was the reason for their not being allowed to live in an area. (9M2)

Well, we got that bill passed and, I remember how strongly two senators worked for that bill: Louise Conner, a great, great Senator, and Senator Herman Holloway (Sr.), the first African-American State Senator. Herman was from the Democratic Party and Louise from the Republican Party, but we worked together closely. (9M2)

*Once again, Peterson was out in front on a controversial issue, and some people were not shy about airing their disagreement – even at the Governor's Prayer Breakfast, held at a school cafeteria in the Kent County town of Camden-Wyoming.*

I decided that would be a good place to sign this bill into law. (The legislation) was certainly a good example of brotherhood, and so in the middle of this Governor's Prayer Breakfast, I got up and signed the bill into law. And as I remember, Louise Conner and Herman Holloway stood beside me there as I did that. (Later), as Lillian and I walked out of the building, right ahead of us were three men, and one of them said loudly, "Imagine that son of a bitch, signing an open housing bill at a prayer breakfast!" Well, I reached up and tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Can you think of a better place to express brotherhood?" He was startled to see me there and hurried off without making any comment. (9M3)

I'm sure that (my action) did upset some people, particularly some of the bigoted people in the state, but I thought it was an important move to demonstrate that a new day had arrived and that we were going to pay attention to these racial problems. (9M3)

### **Affirmative Action**

*Peterson also strengthened the Delaware Human Relations Commission, enlarging and raising the caliber of its staff, opening offices in all three counties, and directing it to monitor state*



State Senator Herman Holloway, Sr., and wife Esther chatting with Russ Peterson.  
*Courtesy Delaware Public Archives.*

*government for adherence to civil rights. And he promoted Affirmative Action.*

We pushed the idea that minorities needed to be given special consideration in such things as employment because they had been denied them in the past, although we didn't believe in setting up quotas . . . . This concern for Affirmative Action permeated my whole administration, and I know it had an impact on helping Blacks get jobs. When I was governor, there were relatively few Hispanics in our community, and in the intervening years they have come in large numbers so the same concern would have to apply to them – to all minority groups, for that matter. (9M3)

Getting jobs for Blacks was a special interest of mine because I learned earlier in working with the Greater Wilmington Development Council how critical that was – that you can't expect people to live within all of our laws if they are denied the very means of obtaining a livelihood legally. (9M4)

It's absolutely sure that there was major job discrimination in Delaware against African Americans, and we set up a number of things like a state Job Bank. We pulled together all the employment programs in our new Department of Labor when they were scattered all over umpteen different organizations prior to that. And it facilitated minority groups coming to centralized areas to get help in finding a job and getting training for a job. (9M4)

*Given that Peterson became governor following the Wilmington riots and subsequent long-term patrol of city streets by the National Guard, race relations were an especially sensitive matter during his term.*

There's no doubt about it that keeping the Guard in the streets for over nine months added to a racial bitterness in our community and drove a wedge between whites and Blacks. I already had my deep concern about the inequality facing African Americans well before I

became governor, but this major problem of having the Guard on the streets patrolling African American neighborhoods night after night after night for over nine months made me more and more concerned about it and made me more determined to do something about correcting the problem. (9M4)

And when I met with young Black leaders after I was elected, and before I became governor, they were so bitter about what had happened that at first it was hard to talk to them because they wanted to tell me off rather than listen. But later, when they saw that I was serious about this, they cooperated. (9M4)

*As noted in the chapter on cabinet government, Peterson set out to desegregate the State Police, which he was able to do once that body reported to him through a Department of Public Safety.*

(That) irritated a lot of bigoted people, but it was major evidence of progress in the minority community and also with the many people in the white community who were strongly supportive of civil rights. (9M5)

### **More Political Fallout**

*Each such action Peterson took – the Open Housing law, desegregating the State Police, Affirmative Action programs – infuriated some members of the white community. One State Senator, Dean Steele, referred to Peterson as a “nigger lover.”*

There’s no doubt about it, a number of people were really teed off at me and never going to vote for me again. I heard that from a few, but (most) people are not going to tell you to your face. People working in my campaigns said they heard it quite frequently. But . . . Dean Steele called me a “nigger lover” . . . right to my face. I thanked him for that and said, “Dean, I love all people, including African Americans, and I appreciate your recognizing that. But I don’t like you using that insulting term.” Dean was notorious for such outrageous language. He was a quaint individual. I admired him in some ways, but I was very,

very much opposed to the way he treated people and the foul language he used. (9M5)

### **Women's Rights**

*Peterson also worked to advance the rights of women.*

I knew that women were very unhappy with the fact that they were ignored when people were making appointments for various boards and commissions, and that they were dissatisfied with the lack of opportunity in employment areas and so on. And so I decided what we needed was a Council for Women, which could face up to some of these concerns and help to get the state to focus on them. (9M5)

I appointed a group and (made) Nancy Sawin, who was the head of Sanford School, the chairperson. They really went to work and, no doubt about it, had a major influence in getting some advances for women in the community. By advances I mean more job opportunities, more promotional opportunities, more appointments to important positions. (9M6)

And I think the record will show that a major change occurred in my administration. In hindsight, it should have been more, but at the time I thought it was a tremendous change. I'm pleased to go to meetings today and have people who are involved commend me for establishing that council. And so in the historical perspective, I find that was a more important move than I appreciated at the time when I made it. (9M6)

### **Governor's Wilmington Office**

*Peterson also took a greater interest in Wilmington than many of his predecessors, enlarging and greatly activating a branch Governor's office first established by Governor Terry. More recently, of course, the Governor's Wilmington Office has been a major operation; for some governors, it's been their primary working location when the legislature is not in session.*





Peterson campaigns along Market Street in Wilmington, where he greatly enlarged the Governor's presence upstate.

(I expanded the Wilmington office) for at least two reasons. One, I had learned when I was campaigning how unhappy the people of Wilmington were with the lack of attention they obtained from the Governor's Office. Although there was an office in Wilmington, it was a very minor one and, as far as people were concerned, they didn't even know that it existed. And I also had recognized that there were many critical problems there that deserved the close attention of the governor. I'd been working on such problems with the people in the area for years, and so I decided it was very important they would have a significant office in Wilmington. (9M2)

So we did that, and I assigned Arva Jackson to be in charge. Arva was a young African American – tremendously qualified, very well respected in the community – whom I later made a member of my Cabinet in charge of our work on Urban Affairs. We (also) had many volunteers working out of that office. You'd go down there (and) there'd be large numbers of people. They'd even come there to demonstrate on occasions. and I would meet with them when they were demonstrating. So it was clearly a good contact with the community. And over the four years we moved to another location, with much more space. (9M2)

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## Health and Social Services

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*Less attention has been paid to Peterson's record in health and social services than in government reorganization, criminal justice and the environment. But Peterson is also proud of his Administration's record in such areas as welfare reform, health care, substance abuse, and housing. The accomplishments may not have been as dramatic – perhaps reflecting the difficulty of the inherent problems – but once again the Peterson approach at problem-solving was readily apparent.*

## **Welfare Reform**

(Fortunately) people are putting many more resources into (welfare reform today) than we had available in Delaware at that time. (Still) we did a whole series of things. For example, we took off the welfare rolls nearly all of the single people who were employable because too many people were just goofing off and getting on welfare rolls, and . . . we went to bat to get those people a job. (9M6)

Secondly, (we had a program called) the “Something for Something Program,” which was to help people who were in Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and this meant a lot of mothers (who) were living alone. The theory behind this was (that) if you could just convince a person that help from the State (requires) giving something in return, you’ll find that, my gosh, that’s what they all wanted to do. Well, maybe not *all*, but (many) really wanted to do that. (9M6)

And so when you would say to a woman, “Look, we can get you this job, and we want you to take it, and we will help take care of your children through a day-care center that we now have in one of our social service centers,” it was amazing how many people would respond. (9M6)

*There was also a push to get fathers to make the support payments they were supposed to make. For example, the law was changed so that an employer could attach a father’s wages to help support his children.*

Our objective wasn’t as much to get (people) off welfare as to get them in a position where they could take care of themselves. And *then* they would get off welfare. And to me, this was of tremendous importance. . . . You can’t just say, “We’re going to stop making payments and then you must go find a job,” because that’s not going to work. And that’s what’s being found today in 1998 around the country when they try to . . . get people off welfare. (In) places where they cut them off welfare without

providing them jobs, it's not very long before they're in desperate condition. And it causes more problems that it solves. . . . (9M7)

*Perhaps surprisingly, Peterson does not connect his interest in welfare reform to his own parents' difficulties during his early years.*

The main reason I emphasized (welfare reform was) what I had learned . . . working with the Greater Wilmington Development Council (and its) neighborhood improvement program, and when working on reforming the prison system and seeing so many people going to prison because of (the) absolutely intolerable conditions under which they had to live. And that drove home to me how fundamental it was to try to help the people who were in difficulty – financially or educationally or because of some violation of the law. (9M8)

And then I would go back and reflect on my earlier experiences and realize there are a lot of other people out there who didn't have the good fortune I had. I remember in my hometown . . . when I talked to my senior class as president of the senior class in the middle of that Depression and almost none of (them) was going away to college. (There were) many who *wanted* to go but didn't have the wherewithal to do so – and didn't go ahead and take the risk that I did in going off to school. (9M8)

I just recently went down to visit the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial in Washington. What a moving experience that is. F.D.R. was a person who understood the problems we're talking about and led his tremendous program during the big Depression. One of them, by the way, was the NYA, National Youth Administration. (When) I got to the university, I got one of those jobs making \$15 a month washing laboratory dishes in the basement of the chemistry building. Franklin D. Roosevelt made that happen (and many others things also). (9M8)

As . . . I think about these problems historically, I think what we were doing in Delaware was right on the beam, right on target, and our biggest problem was finding the resources to do it on a large enough scale to have the impact that we would have liked to have had and that was certainly needed. (9M8)

### **State Service Centers**

*A frequent stumbling block to solving social problems is that less affluent people have difficulty getting to where the services are. One solution is to help them get around. Another is to bring the services closer to them.*

We established the DART program, (the Delaware Agency for Regional Transit) . . . to help people get around. Elderly people, for example, could ride for almost nothing on the buses. . . . Also, I had emblazoned on my mind as a result of (my GWDC experience) . . . how fundamental it was to have a place where people in low-income neighborhoods could go to get the many services which the community provided. (9M9)

State-wide, we had this large number of (disconnected) agencies, each having its own little locations where they could be of help for jobs or mental health or clinics and so on. And I decided we had to build these service centers (nearer to their clients), and we did. We provided a number of them, and we had several others under construction when I left the Governor's Office. (9M9)

I went out to (the) northeast Wilmington neighborhood center a few years ago and was pleased . . . that they had decided to give me an award for what I had done when I was governor many years before. (It was encouraging) to see all the activities around those centers, where . . . you bring the State services to the neighborhoods where the people live so that they know that (these services) exist and then, knowing that, take advantage of them. For example, . . . people desperately wanting a job could go to a neighborhood center and get counseling and some help. It helped them identify what jobs were available. (9M9)

So yes, those neighborhood centers are extremely important. (Incidentally) I was pleased when I married my current wife, June Jenkins, to find out how deeply she had been involved in neighborhood centers and (that she) had worked (at one). In fact, she was involved with hiring a guy named Jim Sills (now Wilmington's mayor) to work there. (9M9)

### **Health Care**

*Peterson also faced many issues involving health care. One was a shortage of doctors, especially in more rural areas.*

The two lower counties had great difficulty in obtaining MDs, and it was a serious problem. We considered seriously whether we should have a medical school at the University of Delaware, but in talking to President Arthur Trabant and others about that, it became obvious that we couldn't justify that very well – particularly when there were major medical schools in Philadelphia and Baltimore. (9M10)

And so, out of that came the decision that we should work with the Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia. They cooperated with us very well and arranged the DIMER program which, initially, called for the Jefferson Medical School taking 20 Delawareans a year into their (program) and . . . for the Wilmington Medical Center, as we called it then, to accept interns and resident doctors from Jefferson for further training. And we worked with the University of Delaware to provide some pre-med courses to train Delaware students to go to medical school and (we) markedly supported the expansion of nursing at the University of Delaware. (9M10)

All these things were tied in to (making) our state more of a player (in educating) MDs and nurses. And it has worked beautifully over the years. Many Delaware residents became MDs because of that program, and downstate (Delaware received) more medical help. (9M10)



Russ proposes to June Jenkins in Wilmington Brandywine Creek State Park on May 11, 1995.

We did the same thing about *mental* health, establishing the Jefferson Medical School – Marka T. du Pont Institute of Mental Health, I think we called it, (although) I don't know what happened to that over the years. But it was an attempt to get us more involved here with the mental health problem. We did a lot in that connection by providing . . . for people suffering from mental health problems. Also, we provided services in our neighborhood service centers so people could go there and get help on mental health problems. And we worked with our Delaware State Hospital to markedly reduce the number of people who were held there with mental health problems when they didn't need to be there . . . . They could get back into the community. . . . (9M10)

### **DAPI**

*Prior to his gubernatorial service, Peterson had worked with a program called DAPI, the Delaware Adolescent Program Inc. As governor, he sought more state assistance.*

We significantly increased (this program). . . . Young high school girls who became pregnant were brought to this organization, and they would be permitted to continue to get their high school education, and there'd be a day care center taking care of their baby. There would be health care programs for the baby and the mother. It was a very, very successful program, and (it) was extended throughout the state. Actually, we played a role in getting that established on a national basis. In fact, the woman who used to run the program here in Delaware (Mrs. Theophilus Nix) became head of the program nationally. I don't know what the status of that is today, but we in Delaware played a key role in making it happen. (9M10)

I went a number of times to a DAPI service center and was amazed at how many young people were there and how happy they seemed to be. It found people who were interested in helping them with their problems and were committed to getting them back on track with their high school education. It was exciting, indeed, to see that. (9M10)



## **Substance Abuse**

*Peterson was governor when illegal drugs were becoming a serious societal problem.*

It was a very disturbing thing in the community. That (was) one of the early periods when the use of drugs started to skyrocket and many young people who were otherwise law abiding citizens were getting hooked – and, as a result, getting involved in illegal activities, many times trying to get money so they could buy drugs. It was a very serious problem. (8M61)

We responded to that in a number of ways. One (was) to get better control over the people who were bringing drugs into Delaware and selling them. We set up a special Governor's Crime Reduction Task Force. As I recall, it had about 55 policemen – involving people from the State Police, Wilmington police, New Castle County police, and other local police forces. They worked together to zero in on these drug offenses. As a result, there was a major increase in indictments by the Grand Jury and (in) incarceration . . . . (8M61)

At the same time, we set out to focus on the rehabilitation of such offenders. We weren't only concerned about drugs like marijuana and heroin, etc. but also about the drug alcohol, because there was a tremendous problem with drunkenness leading people to get into crime. (8M62)

We had a practice of locking people up for drunkenness, and this was something I had become deeply concerned about early on when I was working on prison reform, before I became governor. We set out to do something about it. I think it was the first time in the country that anybody had a state-operated alcoholic detoxification and treatment center. And with that available, police finding some drunk, could take him to that center instead of to prison or to a jail. And it was very, very effective. (9M11)

In fact, we went from zero drug treatment facilities at the time I became Governor to 43 at the end of my term. (8M62)

Like most of these major problems, we didn't have adequate resources to take care of this huge problem, but we made a big dent in the problems, and today we still have these – at least I see these signs around here, "Alcohol Detoxification Center." It was helpful in keeping people from getting a prison record just because they had this disease of alcoholism. (9M11)

One of the things being used at that time (that) you don't hear very much about anymore was methadone. It was a treatment . . . that would take away (an addict's) craving for other drugs. It was a frustrating thing to work on because as we increased the efforts to cope with it, the number of people using drugs continued to increase. Of course, in the intervening years, that problem continued to grow throughout the country. (8M62)

### **Housing**

*Peterson also worked to increase the supply of housing for needy groups of Delawareans.*

. . . as I remember, the main thing we did was to provide a large, revolving fund so that existing institutions could borrow money from the state – with zero percent or one or two percent interest – to build a senior citizen building. And a number of those were built around the state. In fact, we played a role in supporting Luther Towers, which became the first of many such towers that were built, led by people who were very active in my campaign, good supporters of mine. Paul Bente was the leader of . . . the first one built in Wilmington, and then Marilyn Forney followed over the years with a whole series of others around the state. I think our program played a key role in getting that program established. (9M11)

*Less successful was a proposed demonstration housing project in suburban New Castle County. In fact, it was among the most spectacular failures of the Peterson Administration.*

There were very few opportunities for low-income people, particularly low-income African Americans, to get housing outside of low-income neighborhoods in Wilmington, for example. And . . . HUD, the (Federal) Housing and Urban Development Department, had established this Operation Breakthrough program to facilitate building mixed-income housing. I decided we should compete for some of those funds. (9M11)

*Delaware's application was successful, but local opposition halted the project.*

We decided that the place to do this would be on property that the state already owned, near Ferris School in a suburb of New Castle County. So we planned our Operation Breakthrough building there. It was, I thought, an exciting kind of thing with a wide range of housing, different kinds of housing . . . . (But when citizens heard about the project), many neighborhoods just exploded. They were dead set against it. In fact, people who lived right around Ferris School (in) some of those neighborhoods (became) my permanent opponents. They voted strongly against me in my bid for reelection. (9M11)

*Opposition to the project soon surfaced in the General Assembly, where legislation was introduced to halt it. The Administration became concerned that the controversy would negatively affect other potential items on which legislative support was required.*

(There was) such a tremendous outpouring of opposition to this that we decided to drop the project and didn't pursue it. In hindsight, I don't know whether we were right or not. I now notice that on that very land where we had planned to build this housing (there has been) a major expansion of Ferris School. A lot of good facilities (are) there for helping to treat juvenile delinquency . . . .

So I'm pleased to see that land being used for a good, constructive purpose. (9M12)

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## Education

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*Peterson listed education as among his five priorities. It was also a priority for legislators, and together they dramatically increased state spending in this area. Peterson was especially interested in early education and vocational education. And among his biggest confrontations was a run-in with the University of Delaware's Board of Trustees.*

I had the deep commitment (to education) for a long time and recognized how fundamental that was to helping people obtain a decent quality of life – to obtain the right employment, satisfaction in life, the ability to enjoy the historical record and the wonders of the natural world, and so on. And I recognized that education was important way back in the early years of life – how parents (interacted) with their young kids even before they started school. So that was a key priority when I became Governor, . . . to improve our educational system in Delaware. (9M12)

### **Big Budget Increases**

And actually, we increased the total funding for education in Delaware all the way from kindergarten to graduate school at the University of Delaware by 63 percent. In four years, that's a tremendous change. There were (also) quite a few specific things that I would like to emphasize. (9M12)

For example, I was deeply concerned about school districts in lower income neighborhoods which didn't receive any more funds from the state for education than the affluent ones. Those school districts were completely dependent upon property taxes, the worst



Russ pins March of Dimes button on a young Delawarean as Mary Joy Breton watches.

kind of tax I can imagine. And so they ended up with a lot fewer resources to further education. (9M12)

And by the way, the state legislature was at least as determined as I was to strengthen our education system. That's one reason we were able to put so much money into the educational system. (9M12)

*Included in this spending were funds to implement the state's equalization law, which attempted to compensate for the disparity in wealth among school districts, and the Educational Advancement Act, which consolidated school districts.*

### **Kindergarten and Day Care**

*Peterson also worked with the General Assembly to expand the state's kindergarten program, providing for its inclusion in every elementary school throughout the state. Recognizing the importance of early education, he also introduced day care.*

We had the first State-supported day care centers. And that is an important educational thing because so many people with jobs . . . have no real way to take care of their kids. And (by) providing these State day care centers, at least for the working hours of their parents, these kids had a learning experience. Over the years before this, I had learned, through my concern about crime, that you can tell almost from the cradle whether kids are going to become juvenile delinquents or not when you look at the environment in which they are raised and the kind of educational programs they are provided. And so I've always believed how fundamental it was very early in life to start educating, training young people for a decent life. (10M1)

### **Delaware State College**

*Delaware's educational system, of course, includes not only education at the elementary and secondary levels but also at the college and university level.*

One other place where we had a big educational problem was Delaware State College. At that time, it was essentially a 100 percent Black student body and was really way under-funded. So we set out to change that and, in the first two years, we more than doubled the total budget of the Delaware State College – and also put into our budget major funding for new buildings . . . . It was a big step forward for that institution, and many white students started to go there and later on, as we know, it became the Delaware State University. (10M1)

### **Delaware Technical & Community College**

*The “new kid” on the “higher education block” at the time was Delaware Technical & Community College, started by Governor Terry with a campus in Georgetown. Peterson was an enthusiastic supporter of the idea, which he built upon during his tenure.*

Governor Terry had made a very important move to establish the first Delaware Technical and Community College, and we just grabbed ahold of that and significantly expanded it. We added three more Delaware Technical & Community College Institutions so now we have them in both Kent and Sussex, in the City of Wilmington, and in rural New Castle County. (There was a) major, major change in funding. (We) also markedly increased support for vocational education in the high schools. It appeared to me, and must have appeared to Governor Terry too, and to many, many other people, that we had to provide a means for people who are not going to go onto college, who don’t have a desire to go onto college, to get some training beyond high school. (10M1)

I remember so well John Gardner, who had been the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the Kennedy and Johnson administration, saying – I’ll try to paraphrase what he said – that if we focus on pushing more and more people to get doctorates of philosophy and don’t do anything about training plumbers, then neither our theories nor our pipes will hold water. (10M2)

## **The (Vocational) Education Governor**

*Although a Ph.D. chemist himself, Peterson was very interested in and strongly supportive of vocational education.*

I had a great experience working to further vocational education. In fact, I can immodestly point out here that I received a special award from the American Vocational Association for what we did in Delaware in this area. I got all wrapped up in these youth organizations like VICA, the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America, and DECA, the Distributive Educational Clubs of America, and the Future Farmers and so on. We provided funding to help these organizations. (10M2)

And I remember Martha Bachman, who just recently passed away. We gave her a special honor when I was governor for what she had done in leading vocational education. She was a person who really pushed me into getting more and more involved in this field . . . . (10M2)

One of my fond memories is of going off to a national convention of DECA, the Distributive Educational Clubs of America, when (Delaware's) Linda Ford, a student, was the president of it. I was the first and only governor that ever went to such a national meeting. They had 5,000 kids there. . . . and when they introduced me at this meeting as the first governor to ever come to that, my gosh, I got a blare of trumpets and pounding of drums and a real demonstration. (10M2)

Another time (that) I went to a high school vocational education meeting, I was invited there by the teacher in charge for sort of a final ceremony for the program where these kids had been rebuilding an automobile. And when I came there, they turned on that automobile for the first time and those kids just cheered, and it drove home to me how that training could be so significant, so important to people – like my getting a Ph.D. was to me back at the University of Wisconsin. (10M2)





Educators surround Peterson at a bill signing. Among them are Dr. George Kirk (second from left), Sen. Louise Conner (fourth from left), William Keene (fifth from left), Charles Harris (sixth from left), Rep. Clarice Heckert (fifth from right), and Dr. Kenneth Madden (far right).

*Photo by Lubitsh & Bungarz.*

Undoubtedly such programs have a way of reducing juvenile delinquency, reducing the crime rate in the community, helping people build a happy, healthy family. And so I'm very, very pleased with that, and I respect very much Governor Terry for getting that Delaware Technical Campus and Community College started here in our home state. (10M2)

### **Outside the Cabinet System**

*As noted previously, education was the one major area that remained outside the new cabinet form of government. Since there was no Secretary of Education, Peterson worked with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and others.*

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, . . . Ken Madden, and I worked together very closely. In fact, he came to our cabinet meetings. Bob McBride was the Chairman of the State Board of Education. I had appointed him to that job, and he was really a dedicated person and worked very, very closely (with us). He had great rapport with the various school districts around the state. (I also worked with) Art Trabant, who had just become head of the University of Delaware when I became governor, and Dr. Luna Mishoe, who headed the Delaware State College. I was close to all of them. (10M3)

### **University of Delaware**

I hasten to add that I (also) had a great experience working at the University of Delaware. I already mentioned what we did to extend their pre-med training and nursing school training, but we markedly increased their budget during this period, too. I worked very closely with (University of Delaware) Vice President George WorriLOW, former dean of agriculture, in developing and expanding the College of Marine Studies – and particularly in acquiring the land and getting the funding and so on for the Lewes Campus. (10M3)

That was the kind of institution we thought would be good to put along our coastal zone, and of course, time has shown that to be

true. We have this wonderful Ocean Day there every year which shows us what they have been doing to help us learn more about our marine world and to train people for careers in that field. (10M3)

*Peterson had a better relationship with the University of Delaware administrators than with its Board of Trustees, a prestigious and powerful group of Delawareans.*

I had a real head-on collision with the Board of Trustees of the University of Delaware soon after I became governor. I had learned when I was campaigning for governor . . . from many students and members of the University faculty that they were kind of teed off at the Board of Trustees. They said that the Board of Trustees thought the University was their own private little preserve and it was dominated by members of the duPont family and . . . by very wealthy people and did not represent the community. Well, I shared that concern and, when I became governor and became a member of the Board of Trustees as a result of being governor, I decided to bring up that problem. (10M3)

So I asked for a meeting with the Board of Trustees just a few weeks after I was governor. And we met down at the University in President Trabant's home. Jim Tunnell was then chairman of the Board. And when I told them that I thought it was time for a change in the membership of the Board, that there were just too many people there by the name of duPont or who were associated with the DuPont Company and (there was) no African American on the Board, no young person on the Board, no people of modest income on the Board, only one woman on the Board, that we had to make some change. (10M3)

Well, all hell broke loose. I really got told off by some members of the duPont family who were there, and two of them who had married into the duPont family primarily were the ones who told

me off. "How dare you say this," (they said) "after all our family's done for this institution?" (10M3)

Well, the next day some of my supporters called me and said, "You're in deep trouble. I understand the Board of Trustees will never support you again for any election." I called up my friend Henry duPont, who was on that Board of Trustees. He had been there the day before. I told him I wanted to come and see him. "Oh no, I'll come to see you," he said. "You're the governor, I should come to see you." "No, I'm coming to Wilmington anyway," I said. "I'll come to see you." (10M4)

So I went up there and met with him in his office. He had been chairman of the Greater Wilmington Development Council and I (had) worked for him. He had practically taken me under his wing. He would get me excused from my work (at DuPont) to fly with him out to California to a meeting of the Board of North American Aviation where he was a fellow who saved that company, which was one of the principal companies in developing the Apollo space craft and so on. We got to be really very close. (10M4)

So I went to see him . . . . He told me that he agreed with me, but I didn't have to be so brutal in the way that I did it. I said that I figured that (I should follow that old adage) about the way to get attention from the donkey is to hit him over the head with a two-by-four. "Well," he replied, "you certainly got our attention." (10M4)

*It must have been a jarring moment for the new governor, even one who was used to rocking boats.*

Anyway, after this meeting with the Board of Trustees, we were supposed to go to a nice reception on the sun porch of the President's House that had a long table loaded with delicious hors d' oeuvres, but nearly everybody on the Board just filed out of there and didn't even go to the reception. The only two members

of the Board who went were former Governor Elbert Carvel and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Dan Herrmann. (10M4)

And they stayed only a short time and left so then the only people left were the president, his assistant, and me. What a huge table; I can still see that great big bowl full of delicious shrimp. I ate a few things and left. They had planned this nice reception for the new governor, and I blew it by what I did. And so, to this day, Art Trabant tells me that the Trustees were so angry they could have chewed nails. One of those members has been given credit by two people – by Trabant and by Governor Carvel, separately in recent conversations (with) me – for beating me in the election. They said, “That person alone beat you.” (And) that Trustee, by the way, was Bob Carpenter. (10M4)

*R.R.M. (Bob) Carpenter, Jr. was a longtime University trustee and athletic benefactor. The Bob Carpenter Center is named in his honor.*

*Despite the fury, there were changes at the University of Delaware during Peterson’s term.*

For example, the governor had the responsibility to appoint eight members of the Board and the Board of Trustees themselves appointed all the others. Well, shortly after this incident occurred in the president’s home, Henry F. duPont, the founder of Winterthur who had been on that Board of Trustees for almost 60 years, died. He was a life-long Trustee, and I replaced him with Arva Jackson, this young African American – a graduate of the University of Delaware and a terrific person. (10M5)

Well, I thought that was pretty symbolic. And then shortly after that, we made Luna Mishoe, the president of Delaware State College, a member of the Board of Trustees. And shortly thereafter, (when) I had the opportunity, I appointed two other young people to the Board, both of whom had been strong supporters of mine. (10M5)

## **Listening to the Students**

One of the key issues that had irked the students is that they had been trying for years to get permission for one of their student representatives to go to a Board of Trustees meeting and tell the Board what their interests and concerns were. But the Board would, at every meeting, bring up a resolution to do it and vote it down overwhelmingly. Well, I knew that around the country students were raising hell on campuses. They were irritated about so many things. And there were many irritated there at the University of Delaware, too. I said, "We have to do something about this." (10M5)

Well, (at) the first Board meeting I went to, this resolution came up. It was voted down immediately, and I was very surprised at how – just overwhelmingly, just boom, let's get rid of that stuff. So now we have these new people on the Board. I talked to them and we agreed we're going to change the situation. So one of them made the motion at the next meeting (to grant the student's request to come in to the meeting), I seconded the motion, and it passed. (10M5)

And that very day when we left the building where the meeting was held to go off for lunch, we walked down a pathway, (where) there were students up in trees, on buildings – hundreds of them. They had planned that day to have a major demonstration – I didn't know about this – against the Board of Trustees. Well, when they got the message that we had acted on it favorably, . . . they all stood there. They didn't boo us or anything as we marched down to lunch. So, I like to feel that we did some things there that turned around the University. (10M5)

I know that many, many faculty people were very pleased with what we did . . . When I ran for reelection, I won overwhelmingly in the Newark area. That indicates to me that I was held in good graces by the University community. (10M6)

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## Conservation, Growth, and Planning

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*Every Governor is concerned with enhancing the state's economic growth, and creating jobs. Such growth can come from any of Delaware's business sectors, among which one of the most important is agriculture.*

### **Conserving Delaware Farmland**

I spent a lot of time with prominent farmers in Delaware. And when Pat Caulk became Secretary of Agriculture – when we reorganized the government – we were very, very close. In fact, . . . I got . . . a lot of help from Pat Caulk in dealing with the agricultural community. (11M1)

One thing we spent a lot of time on was setting up things to promote the sale of agricultural products, especially poultry. I remember with great fondness a major event we had at The Governor's House, Woodburn, where we were promoting poultry. We had a big chicken barbecue, and many, many people came . . . (11M1)

*Unlike other economic sectors, there is a conservation aspect to the agriculture business. Peterson was very much interested in that.*

I was (also) very much involved in promoting the idea that the state should set up a mechanism whereby the agricultural community could set aside in perpetuity their farmland – so it would not go into commercial, industrial development. And (that) was a problem because some of the best farm land in the country, really, was being put into commercial development, and we had to put an end to that and save this great resource. (11M1)



Peterson stopped the U.S. Military from bulldozing dunes in Cape Henlopen State Park. Here he tours the Cape Henlopen dunes with Lt. Colonel Richard Lundquist, Commander of the 75<sup>th</sup> Engr. Btn. April 28, 1970.

*Photo courtesy of The News Journal Company. Photographer Alan B. Poland.*



Now one of our problems was that we didn't have any money . . . to make any major, immediate investment in buying up the development rights to the agricultural community. In other words, if the state could purchase development rights, the land could be used for agriculture forever, and be protected from being sold to some commercial development, and many of the major farmers in the state were very much behind that. (11M1)

One thing (farmers) did agree to do was to voluntarily hold their land in agriculture in anticipation that the state would be able to buy the development rights some time downstream. And that, over the years, has proved to be a very important thing. Right now, in 1998, . . . the development rights to a substantial number of acres have been acquired by the state, and many more acres are in this voluntary program where the farmers have agreed (through), I guess, a tax incentive to . . . to hold their land in agriculture, with the potential . . . to sell the development rights to the state at some time in the future. So by putting a significant number of dollars a year into buying the development rights, you can over a long term protect a substantial portion of our valuable agricultural land from development. (11M1)

### **Economic Development**

*Peterson's efforts to protect Delaware's Coastal Zone – discussed later in this book – were criticized for stifling job creation in the state. That made him particularly interested in promoting economic growth.*

In view of the major program getting under way to save the Delaware coast, . . . I made a special effort to demonstrate that we could attract jobs, (could) attract other businesses that would provide jobs, (and that would) have even a bigger impact on employment than . . . bringing in refineries. (In fact), highly mechanized units just don't really provide very many jobs. (11M2)

And we did that. As I recall, there were about 15 industries that we brought in. Two of them I remember very well. One was the Scott Paper Company's plant in Dover. In fact, the management of Scott gave a report to the community that one of the reasons they came to Delaware was because of the attractiveness of our coastal zone – as a way of providing a good quality of life for their employees. (11M2)

. . . I use that particular example to illustrate the point that a plant such as that could provide many more jobs than a refinery. That one plant provided as many jobs as three refineries . . . . The other key one was the Vlasic Food Plant in Millsboro. As you know, Vlasic Foods are a major enterprise. It was good to get them there. They (provided) substantial stimulation. (11M2)

But, in addition to bringing in 15 new industries, we spent a lot of time on helping *existing* industries expand, which led to a substantial increase in employment. (11M2)

*In fact, a good bit of Peterson's time on economic development took place in Kent and Sussex Counties.*

I remember . . . spending a lot of time working with (people from Sussex County), taking the Georgetown Airport and making it into a much more effective airport. In fact, what we envisioned was that if we could provide more air transportation, not only for passengers but for products too from there – and since Sussex County was a little more isolated from the major transportation systems – that that would be a way to stimulate business. (Another idea was) to build alongside that airport an industrial park, which was done. Now we put substantial money into that over the years. That has helped significantly in Sussex County. (11M2)

*A few miles down the road from the airport was the original Delaware Technical & Community College campus, which has long been a central meeting place for Sussex Countians.*

Delaware Tech, which Governor Terry started and which I expanded, has proved to be a very effective instrument, not only for teaching young people . . . and old people – giving them the skills so they can have jobs – but also as a means of encouraging new business. Because if you can say, “Look, we will set up programs in our Delaware Technical & Community College to train people specifically for the kind of work that you are going to bring here to Delaware,” (the idea becomes more attractive). (11M2)

### **Minority Business Enterprise**

*Peterson was extremely interested in finding ways to help minority groups participate in the state's economic growth, a subject that was also a priority for President Nixon.*

We did establish a state Office of Minority Business Enterprise, and it was effective . . . , not only helping some minority entrepreneurs expand their business, but to get some other people into the business world. And I am pleased to note that that office is still operating because in my current job on the board of the Riverfront Development Corporation, . . . that office is helping to get contracts for minority business along the Riverfront. And it's being very effective. (11M3)

### **An Advocate of Planning**

*Perhaps as a result of his business background, Peterson was enamored with the state planning function.*

I think that planning is extremely important, and we have been negligent many times in the past in doing little, if any planning. Earlier, when I worked for the Greater Wilmington Development Council on the Executive Committee, we were involved in pushing the planning function. (We) played a role in getting the planning office set up in the City of Wilmington and New Castle County and at the state level – along with our own GWDC planning office.

And we got those planners to work together so they could be thinking about plans for Delaware. (11M3)

When I became governor, the planning office was already established. (It had been) established under Governor Terry, and I strongly got behind that. We expanded it. Dave Keifer was the State Planner. Dave Hugg was his assistant, and it so happens that Dave Hugg today, in 1998, is the State Planner. (11M3)

I didn't call my messages State of the State (messages); I called them the Future of the State messages. Because we really ought to be talking about where we're going and how we expect to get there. And, of course, that meant we had to be planning what we're going to do. One of our early meetings with the planning groups was to tell them that I thought we ought to be concerned about the future of our coastal zone and that we had these two opportunities. One was for a multi-billion dollar industrial development, and another one was to keep it as it is – an unspoiled place as a way to attract people interested in recreation. I favored the latter, and I was going to work toward the state making a . . . choice between those two alternatives. (11M3)

So yes, planning is super important. (11M4)

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## Coastal Zone Act

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*Peterson is probably best known for Delaware's landmark Coastal Zone Act of 1971, which he considers his greatest accomplishment as Governor. It won him worldwide acclaim from environmentalists and others and strongly influenced his post-gubernatorial career.*

*The story began many years earlier, when Peterson's environmental interests began to take form – first in the vicinity of*

*Wisconsin's Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, near Portage; and later in Delaware.*

### **Birdwatcher and Environmentalist**

My nine-year-old son, Peter, (was) interested in birds and liked going out in the morning before the sun came up to see what birds sang first and so on. And that led to my wife, Lillian, suggesting, when we were down in Florida, that I take my two boys on a birding trip sponsored by the Audubon Society. So I signed up for that, (and) three of us – Peter and his elder brother Glen and I – went with the naturalist (who was) leading this trip. He gave each of us a pair of binoculars for the day, and we went into the Everglades. (It was) a fantastic experience, and we saw 60 species of birds I never knew existed. (11M4)

And right there on the spot I signed up as a member of the Audubon Society. . . . That was 1952, and over all those years since I've been a member – and later became president of Audubon. But that birding experience led to our whole family becoming birders. We would go on birding trips together. Weekends, we'd go down the Delmarva Peninsula, go into many different locations to see how many different kinds of birds we could see. And I got involved with a group of scientists (who were) with the DuPont Company. We would leave a number of times during the year before sun-up, on Saturday morning, work down the Peninsula into Maryland; spend the night down there in a motel and come back all day Sunday. (11M4)

*As time went by, Peterson observed this environment changing. At the same time, plans began to surface for industrial development.*

So I . . . got to know that Delaware coastal zone very, very well. And I admired the fantastic plusses that it provided . . . and saw many, many people enjoying it. But I also began to notice how things were changing. We'd come back one year and find that it was markedly different than the previous year. Woods had been



Left to right: Pete, Lillian, Glen and Russ Petersn on a birding trip to Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge.

mowed down which used to be a very popular place for us to go to see birds or a wetland had been filled in and so on. And I began to worry – my gosh, if this keeps on the way it's going, there will not be anything left. (11M4)

Of course, at the same time I was reading a book by Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*) about the threat from pesticides and so on that were killing off bird life and other life. And . . . I gradually became more and more knowledgeable and more concerned about (the) environment in general but very specifically concerned about Delaware's coastal zone. And so, when I became governor, I was anxious to do something about that. I had (also) learned about the plans – some of the plans; it wasn't until years later (that) I learned in depth about what was planned there – (by) a number of major oil companies to build refineries. (11M4)

### **Developers Beckon**

Shell Oil Company . . . was about to break ground and (was) drilling water wells to get the water they would need during the construction project to build on the 5,000 acres that they had acquired down near the Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge. They had had a major battle in our state . . . years earlier when they tried to get that land rezoned so they could build there. And the so-called Levy Court, the then government of New Castle County, had approved that. (11M5)

But the people in (one) organization under Ted Harvey, a group he called Delawareans for Orderly Development, organized a major citizen's objection to that. They took this thing to court – all the way up to the Delaware Supreme Court, but they lost. And Shell then had the official sanction of the State of Delaware to go ahead and build that plant. (11M5)

*This happened in the early 1960s, before Peterson became Governor. By the time he was in office, there was growing industrial interest in Delaware's coastal zone.*

Governors almost universally go all out to try to entice industry to come to the state and build plants, and I knew that there would be strong support for Delaware to take advantage of this opportunity.... (It was) a huge opportunity because it wasn't just one, it was *many* plants and major transportation companies. And at that time there was a big interest in getting . . . super ports to take these huge oil transports (to locations) where they could unload them and bring the oil to shore. And since Delaware Bay was the deepest bay on the Atlantic Coast, it was very inviting for that kind of effort. (11M5)

So, anyway, I told the State (that) this was an important thing we had to study and do something about. I established a task force to look into it. I (also) talked to a friend of mine, Baird Brittingham, about what he could do to help because I needed the money to pay for the task force, and I had to identify somebody to lead it. It so happened that Baird was in charge of – he probably owned it – the Oceanic Foundation, which, among other things, built a big SeaWorld-like effort in Hawaii. And so Baird became very much interested in this study, and he suggested that I might put Jim Wakelin in as chairman. (11M5)

*It happened that Wakelin and Peterson were friends, dating back to a time when Peterson chaired the Board of the Textile Research Institute, where Wakelin was director of research. Earlier, Wakelin had headed research and development for the navy. At the time he headed the Oceanic Foundation.*

Jim came to chair that task force; we paid him \$1 a year for that job. And . . . he brought along with him Amor Lane, who became the executive director of that task force. And also, Brittingham raised a hundred thousand dollars to cover the cost of running the task force. (11M6)



### **Step One: A Moratorium**

Now about the same time, I declared a moratorium in which I said, "There will be no more industrial development in the coastal zone until we finish this study and decide what we're going to do." I found out later I didn't have authority (to declare the moratorium). But I did have the authority of the Governor's Office, (namely) that if the people support what you want to do, it gives you all the authority. Members of my staff, when I first did this, I'm sure thought I was nuts. In fact, I think one lady said, "You're nuts, Governor, to think that you can do this, prevent that (development from happening)." Anyway, we did it. (11M6)

It was never challenged, . . . (and it) put on the back burner all of those plans for commercial development of the coastal zone while we carried out this study. I worked very closely with that committee, and then the following January when I made my Future of the State message, that's when I said to the legislature and to the people of Delaware that the task force would be coming in with this report shortly . . . and it's going to recommend that we save the Delaware coast, . . . and I'm going to go to bat toward that very end, and we're going to draft some legislation which would prohibit any more heavy industry in the coastal zone. (11M6)

(And) that's when all hell broke lose. (11M7)

*Peterson believes that up until then, the promoters of coastal development failed to take his expressions of concern seriously – one reason being his business background at DuPont.*

The fact that I had come from DuPont, and had been deeply involved in the launching of new business ventures and had an article written in the *Harvard Business Review* and so on, gave me the image of being a strong pro-business man. (So) why would I be bucking this enterprise? But now, when I said we're going to



Peterson hangs onto the 45 lb. white marlin that won him honors at the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Governors' White Marlin Tournament. With him is Governor William Cahill of New Jersey.

*Photo courtesy of The News Journal Company.*

*Photographer Bill Frank.*

go ahead and get legislation, then oh my gosh, they really got, as you might expect, deeply upset. At the same time, those people in Delaware who love our coast and wanted to save it – and environmental groups – were happy and were cheering me on. (11M7)

### **Trumping His Own Task Force Recommendation**

*The task force report described the coastal zone as a great asset and outlined the events that could threaten the coastal zone if it were not protected. It recommended the establishment of a coastal zone running the length of the state. It also recommended a process to appraise applications within that zone as a means to control development. But Peterson wanted to go even further.*

They didn't recommend specifically prohibiting things. That was my idea, and I pushed that . . . because I concluded that unless you actually prohibited – by statute – any more heavy industry, that it was going to come in. Industry (had) demonstrated, all over the world, in fact, that they could almost invariably win when they would come (in) with an interesting industrial development and start dealing with the commissions and so on that would make the decision. (11M7)

A commission's no way to . . . protect an interest like the coastal zone. Commissions are made up by people; they're not elected by anyone. If the governor doesn't like what they're doing, he can change the commission. And invariably an industrial unit can sell them on the merits of its own case. . . . Having (been) deeply involved in changing our own commission form of government, (and) realizing how autonomous (commissions) can become and how protected, in a way, they are from the pressure of the public, I knew the shortcomings of a commission. (11M7)

I said, "If we prohibit (development) by statute, then it would take three entities, all elected state-wide – the State House of Representatives, the State Senate, and the Governor – (to change it). And so, if the people of Delaware really want to protect it, it's

going to be awfully hard for some group to get all three of those entities to go along with it. (11M7)

*So, Peterson extended the recommendation of his task force, putting more teeth into it. Wakelin had left the task force chairmanship before it completed its work, accepting a presidential appointment to head research and development at the U.S. Department of Commerce – the Secretary of which later opposed the Coastal Zone Act. He was succeeded as task force chairman by Robert Cairns, a former research vice president at Hercules.*

*Peterson proceeded to develop the legislation necessary to prohibit industrial development in Delaware's coastal zone. He put his legal counsel, Sandy Campbell, in charge of drafting the legislation, with assistance from the head of State Planning, Dave Keiffer, who had served on the task force. The assignment was to define the coastal zone, prohibit any more heavy industry in that zone, and create a mechanism to give permits for other (allowed) kinds of development. It was not an easy job.*

They spent many hours with me going over their drafts . . . . From the very beginning, we recognized that what we were trying to do could well run into a major problem because of the Commerce Clause of the (U.S.) Constitution. What we were doing conceivably could have been considered as in conflict with that clause, saying that (the coastal zoning act) interfered with interstate commerce. (11M8)

*In fact, Campbell did an excellent job, and the act has held up well over the years. Its chief sponsor was Andy Knox, then a State Representative and later a longtime, popular State Senator. About 20 people agreed to cosponsor it.*

I decided I was going to ask Andy Knox to sponsor (the bill). Now (the legislative leaders thought I should choose someone more experienced). I didn't take their advice. I went ahead with Andy

Knox, and he did a good job. And (he) became an important environmental leader in our state, I think, as a result of this experience. (11M8)

### **A Traitor to Business . . . and to DuPont**

*The reaction to this legislation was swift and strong.*

(Again), all hell broke loose really. One of the most significant things that happened was the executive committee of the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce unanimously voted to oppose this. And I got a letter from the chairman of that executive committee and chairman of Delaware State Chamber of Commerce outlining what I was doing as being harmful to the state – that I was projecting a major anti-business image, that I was going to hurt employment in Delaware, and on and on. (11M9)

I made a special effort to respond to that letter in great detail, and I stayed up several nights in a row (until) two, three in the morning drafting this letter. I was drafting it not only in response to the Chamber of Commerce, but I wanted this to be a manuscript which would be used by the people of Delaware, by the news media, and so on. (11M9)

And when the letter came out, it got very wide circulation. In fact, as I recall, the News Journal papers, one of them, ran it in its entirety starting on the front page of the paper. Years later, an employee of the DuPont Company sent me a copy of that letter which had been sent by the Chamber of Commerce to the DuPont Company. And this copy that I received had gone to the external affairs department. (11M9)

And written on the margin of that letter were remarks of five different people, all key people in DuPont external affairs, including one person who later became General Counsel of the DuPont Company. And (these people wrote) very strong, positive things about the letter. One fellow said (it was) the best letter he had ever read and how (my letter) had laid out something which

the DuPont Company ought to get behind. And the first person said that we should get right to the Chamber of Commerce and not be a party to this opposition. (11M10)

Within the business community, there was a big difference of opinion. And within the DuPont Company, I know as a certainty that a large number of their key people strongly supported what I was doing. In fact, . . . among my major financial supporters were Henry B. duPont, Lammot duPont Copeland, Irene duPont, and Reynolds duPont. (11M10)

*Speculating on why DuPont did not support the Coastal Zone Act, Peterson noted that DuPont sold tetraethyl lead to oil companies and that petroleum was a basic raw material for many chemical processes. He also attributed DuPont's position to an "old boys club."*

(I learned) more and more over the years that people who work together in a major enterprise, like in the business world, sort of stick together. And when you're head of a major company, you're usually deeply involved with The Business Roundtable, a hundred (of the) biggest companies in the country. And you meet there with the heads of oil companies and . . . automobile companies . . . and chemical companies. That whole group undoubtedly would have been outraged by what I was trying to do in Delaware. So the head of DuPont . . . would come away (from there) saying, "Boy, I'd better do something about it." They're saying, "Why can't you control that guy Peterson? He used to work for you." Of course, as I said, this is speculation on my part. (11M10)

*On occasion, Peterson was called a traitor to his former employer – Delaware's major corporate citizen.*

Well, I was told on a few occasions that I was being a traitor to the DuPont Company and a traitor to the business world from which I had come . . . . I never found any particularly hereditary



Peterson poses with his staff before leaving office in 1973. Left to right are Jim Moore, Jerry Sapienza, Mary Joy Breton, G. Daniel Enterline, Jr., Evelyn Kneisley, Dee Lafferty, and Fletcher (Sandy) Campbell.

obligation to the DuPont Company or to the business world, although I had great respect for them. I had a fantastic experience with the DuPont Company and really appreciated what was going on in the free enterprise system. (But) I was very upset by some of the practices of the time – many of which over the years have been corrected, in part because of rebels like Peterson. (11M11)

### **The U.S. Government Weighs In**

*Opposition to the proposed legislation included the United States government, as represented by the Commerce Department and its Secretary, Maurice Stans, who was very close to President Nixon.*

. . . one day Stans asked me to come to Washington. I went down there and met with him in his big office. He had 25 people there, all of whom, he said, had been working on this project for 10 years to make Delaware a big center of maritime commerce. He had his people tell me all the things they had done and so on. He had more people in that room by far – several times as many people in that one room – as I had on my whole staff in the Governor’s office. And in the middle of this conversation, he got up and looked me straight in the eye and told me that I was being disloyal to my country. That was, obviously, irritating. (12M8)

I stood up and looked straight back at him and said, “Hell no. I’m particularly being loyal to future generations.” Well, he asked me if I wouldn’t, at least, consider allowing what amounted to a super port in the bay, and I said I would think about it. I called the next morning and said, “No, that violates what we want to do.” But there was an example where a powerful person in our country was leaning on me in a very aggressive, to say it kindly, way. (12M8)

*Peterson discovered that he was threatening some very large developmental plans, under which huge tankers would deliver oil to major ports on the Delaware Bay. He also found that there were plans to build thousand-acre islands in the bay “which would be made by dredging up the sand from the best fishing grounds in*



*the bay" to store coal and iron ore. Rail and highway systems would connect these facilities to the rest of the nation.*

This plan had been under way before Nixon became president, of course, within the Department of Commerce, but (Nixon's) department was strongly behind it. And as I said earlier, . . . (what governor) in his right mind would be opposed to a multi-billion dollar industrial (enterprise) being planted in his state? (11M11)

### **Unions Join the Fray**

Another major opponent were the construction workers – because they saw in the building of all these plants a huge number of jobs. They really raised hell with me. They demonstrated down at the Governor's House; they (would) come down there with hard hats and boo me on my way to work. (11M11)

I'll always remember the interesting incident when one day, after I left for work and (the demonstrators) were out there, and my wife Lillian and . . . the woman who worked there took doughnuts and coffee out to these men . . . . And all of them took the coffee and doughnuts, and shortly thereafter they left. And they didn't come back again. I don't know how much the coffee and doughnuts had to do with it, but I'm sure it jarred them a little bit. (11M11)

. . . by the way, one of those electrical workers (unions) had a big sixtieth anniversary celebration. Well, now I'm running for reelection. They held it in Wilmington, and they invited me to come. I went there as the Governor to honor them on their sixtieth anniversary. Out on the floor, right in front of the podium, was an empty table for ten people. When they called on me to make greetings, first I got booed by the crowd and then (after I) made my comments and sat down, I got booed again. And then they announced to the blare of trumpets . . . (that) my opponent in the election, Sherman Tribbitt, was arriving. And he and his party came marching in and sat at that empty table. It was one of those uncomfortable situations that you get into in this political business. (11M12)

*Tribbitt entered the hall to a rousing, standing ovation.*

This, obviously, was all orchestrated. And I was up there in black tie because I was en route to . . . the Wilmington Country Club for an annual meeting of the medical doctors of the state, who strongly supported me. So . . . I go off to another affair where (the treatment was) nice, warm, positive. So that's one of the forces at work in the political arena. You have some people who are teed off at you and others who are strongly supporting you. (11M12)

### **Some Union Support**

*It's not unusual, of course, for unions to support the Democratic candidate. Perhaps more unusual was that two unions actually supported Peterson.*

I had become interested in Walter Reuther, who was head of the UAW (United Auto Workers) . . . . He was very liberal and a positive and aggressive guy, and I said, "Boy, we've got to find some union to oppose these construction workers." So I called up the UAW office (and) was surprised to learn (that) they even had somebody who was named their Conservation Director. (11M12)

So I met with them and found out they were gung-ho and supported the Coastal Zone Act and they became strong supporters. When I was running for election the first time, I had to go out to the Chrysler plant (and) the General Motors plant outside of Wilmington early in the morning and . . . try to shake hands with people coming to work. And most of them wouldn't shake my hand. A few of them even made insulting comments. They were definitely against me as an organization. (11M12)

When I went back a second time to run for reelection, everybody shook my hand. In fact, the leaders of the Union would be out there encouraging their troops to go shake hands with the Governor. So it shows . . . how it's dangerous to go labeling

anything in any way, to say that all business is on one side or all labor is on one side. (11M12)

Another labor union (that supported me for reelection) was the State (Employees) Union. And, in fact the head of that Union, (Tim Hyatt), he and I became good friends. (11M13)

*There was strong support for the Coastal Zone Act, of course, from environmental groups and many citizens. Key supporters included Ted Harvey and his Delawareans for Orderly Development and Grace (Bubbles) Pierce, who later became a major environmental leader in Delaware and elsewhere. Members of the Governor's Youth Council, which Peterson had formed, were also active supporters.*

*To what extent was it a partisan debate?*

Well, my antenna around the state indicated it was not a partisan issue because there were many people from both parties on both sides. In fact, I got some criticism from Republican leaders because I had so many Democrats working for me and Democrats who wanted to save the coastal zone appreciated what I was doing. (11M13)

But when it came to the legislature, it certainly was partisan. In the House of Representatives, for example, we Republicans had the majority – we had the majority in both Houses – but Sherman Tribbitt was the leader in the House of the Democrats, and they fought very, very hard to block the bill. They worked closely with the many lobbyists who were there from the business community. Practically every law firm in Delaware was hired by some oil company to help fight this bill . . . . The people on our side . . . were all volunteers. (11M13)

## **The Contrary Argument**

*Of course, there was an argument on the other side of the issue. Those opposed to Peterson's approach countered with one of their own.*

The argument was that what you really should be doing is permitting each of the applications for development to be settled on its (own) merits. And (that we) should have something like a commission which would rule on whether or not an application really was acceptable. That is fundamentally wrong. That's the very thing I was fighting against because I knew that would not work. I knew that . . . would (facilitate) what they were trying to make happen. (11M14)

*You knew that they would come up with appealing proposals that would get approved?*

That's right. (They would) talk about how many jobs they're going to provide, how many tax dollars they're going to provide. And the politicians (would) say to that, "Boy, I want to support that. It's going to help get me elected." They all get behind it, and they can sell it to the people. And the people can say, "Well, what's one plant?" But one plant becomes a second plant and a third plant and fourth plant, and before long you've got a coastal zone that looks like the . . . Chester waterfront. (11M14)

So this was an argument they'd use repeatedly when all they were doing was trying to support what industry wanted – the thing they knew they could control. And I was determined that we were going to have an outright prohibition because then it would require the statewide vote from three different entities all to agree. (11M14)

*For his part, Peterson needed a rejoinder to those who were calling him anti-business and accusing him of costing the state jobs.*

My rejoinder was that by going down the route of protecting the coastal zone, we would provide for more job opportunities than by converting that (coastal zone) into a heavily industrialized area – and (that) we could attract businesses that would provide more jobs. Refineries, for example, are highly automated. They have a relatively small number of people working there. I previously pointed out that one plant in Dover, the Scott Paper Company plant, . . . came in, according to its management, for a number of reasons. (11M15)

One was that they were attracted by our waterfront. Our coastal zone was there to help the quality of living for their employees, and the management as well. And that one plant . . . did hire as many people as there would be in three refineries. So I think over time we were proved to be absolutely right. The recreation (and) tourism business in Delaware has prospered in a major way. And businesses have come in here, in part . . . because of the attractiveness of our unspoiled coastal zone. (11M15)

So, we always said, “Well, yeah, we agree with you. It’s important to have jobs in Delaware. Our approach will give *more* jobs not *fewer* jobs.” And that whole argument has been played (out) at great length throughout the whole environmental movement – where businesses keep saying, “You’re going to cost us jobs” when the facts are invariably (that) the implementation of environmental regulations has led to more jobs, not fewer jobs. (11M15)

### **The General Assembly Acts**

*The Governor’s coastal zone legislation was introduced in the spring of 1971 as House Bill 300.*

The Bill came up in the House of Representatives first, and there was this major effort on the part of the opposition to amend the bill to get rid of that outright prohibition, . . . to do what they kept contending was a better way. And, rather than our turning down a

better approach, what we (really) did was stop an effort to kill it, to completely nullify what we were trying to do. (12M1)

Now . . . there were 39 members of the House, so we needed 20 of them to get the bill passed. And when the bill came up for consideration on the floor of the House, there were a number of amendments which we all agreed to (that) were passed. One, for example, made it clear to the cities and the counties that we weren't going to be usurping their zoning authority. The state was going to be responsible for zoning only in the coastal zone and, in that case, only for industrial establishments. And then the counties and cities relaxed and went along. (12M1)

*The vote was a squeaker, as Peterson explains..*

But the real battle came over this effort to amend the bill to take out the outright prohibition. And it was nip and tuck, and the place was jammed – the Legislative Hall was jammed with lobbyists. And every time the House recessed, lobbyists would descend upon the members of the House. And a lot of them were pretty powerful lawyers in the community who were there being paid to kill the bill. And amending the (bill the) way they wanted to would have been killing the bill. (12M1)

Well, when the bill came up for a vote, Sherman Tribbitt was on the floor leading the opposition to it, and I was up in the balcony late at night – 11:00, 11:45, something like that, watching the polling. And fortunately, . . . the amendment was defeated 20 to 19. So just by the skin of our teeth we got through with that one. (12M1)

Once that amendment was beaten, people who had voted in favor of the amendment got over to support the Coastal Zone Act. They wanted to be on the side of good government. And so the record will show that substantially (more Representatives) than just a bare majority voted for the Coastal Zone Act. (12M1)



Signing the Coastal Zone Act. Left to right are Mary Joy Breton,  
Gwynne P. Smith, Andy Knox, Russ Peterson and  
Lt. Governor Eugene Bookhammer.

*Photo courtesy of the Delaware State News.*

*The drama continued as the action moved across Legislative Hall to the State Senate chamber.*

And then we moved to the Senate. This turned out to be an even thinner kind of margin. I shouldn't put it quite that way; this was even a closer shave. There were 19 senators, and the Republicans had 13 of them, and (there were) only 6 Democrats. But three Republicans from the very beginning were dead set against this bill, and they stayed that way all the way through. Those three Republicans were Andy Foltz, Don Isaacs and Bill Hart. Those three plus the six Democrats gave the opponents nine votes. We had the bare majority of one at 10 to 9. (12M2)

And . . . we were very worried about some of those 10 because they were being lobbied unmercifully. Well, the day it was going to come up for a vote, at dinner time, we thought we had our 10 votes. People broke for dinner, and after that an aide came running into my office saying, "Governor, Governor, they've turned it around." (The reference was to two Republican Senators, Dave Elliott and Tony Ciccione.) And so I arranged for those two to come up to my office and got the President Pro Tem of the Senate, Reyn du Pont, Majority Leader Frank Grier, and the Lt. Governor, Gene Bookhammer, to join me. (12M2)

For a long time we talked to those two, explaining how important it was to them and their children and how important it was that we stick together with our leadership of the party. Finally, they agreed to go along. Then the leadership went down immediately and called the Senate into session and brought up this critical amendment for a vote. And it lost 10 to 9. After that happened, (we) got overwhelming support for the passage of this good government bill. (12M2)

And so we barely won that battle, and I think . . . history has shown it was a great victory for the people of Delaware. Without strong citizen support, we wouldn't have had a chance of overcoming the tremendous special interest lobbying effort. So



you have to say this was a community victory for saving the coastal zone. (12M2)

### **Eternal Vigilance: Act I**

*But it wasn't a permanent victory as the underlying issue contained in the amendments continued to arise in future years, after Peterson was Governor.*

I made a habit of talking about the need for eternal vigilance. I was saying you never win these battles permanently. You can *lose* them permanently but you can't *win* them permanently. You always have to be there ready to fight them again. And boy, that really proved to be the case with the Coastal Zone Act. (12M2)

. . . in 1974, a year after I was out of the Governor's office, a major organized effort was made to scuttle the Coastal Zone Act. And to illustrate how organized it was, the recently retired CEO of the DuPont Company, and the then Chairman of the Finance Committee of the DuPont Company, was Brel McCoy. He led off by talking at the Rotary Club early in January, 1974, (pointing) out that the Coastal Zone Act was very harmful to business. (He said it was) giving the state an anti-business image, (was) going to hurt employment, and so on and so on. And it was time we did something about it. Irv Shapiro then, who had become the CEO, said, "Yes, it was time [for] DuPont to speak out on this issue." (12M2)

And that same week the construction workers sent out a pamphlet to every home in Delaware denouncing the Coastal Zone Act. The Shell Oil Company announced that very week that they would be pleased to come back and build that plant if they could get rid of the Coastal Zone Act. A committee of 100 business-oriented groups strongly came out for changing the Act. Again the U.S. Department of Commerce waded in with comments about the importance of changing that bill. (12M3)

*This was a time when the United States was worried about an adequate supply of energy, a fact that also influenced the debate and made it less theoretical and more urgent. Peterson was in Washington, working as head of President Nixon's Council on Environmental Quality. The President had launched a major energy independence project, and Treasury Secretary Bill Simon asked Peterson to help get rid of Delaware's Coastal Zone Act. Peterson, of course, declined.*

He said, "I guess I'll have to see the current governor then." I don't know if he ever did go to see Sherman Tribbitt or not, but he said that so I figured he had . . . been convinced by big business forces to help do what he could on this issue. (12M3)

But Sherman Tribbitt is now Governor and he's also (saying) that he thought maybe it would be better to have a different approach. And his Secretary of Labor denounced (the Act) as being very harmful to employment in Delaware. Then at the same time, bills were introduced in each House in the legislature, with a majority of the members of each House signed onto the bills (as sponsors) when they came in – bills which would wipe out the prohibition (provision). (12M3)

*In effect, there were enough sponsors to repeal the Act all by themselves.*

Well, I got a call from Bubbles Pierce. I was down working in Washington. She said, "You have to come back up here and help us. We have this major effort to destroy the coastal zone." So I did, I came back up to Delaware. I met with the editorial board of the newspaper; we got a lot of stuff in the paper. I wrote a letter and had a copy put on the desk of every State Senator and every House of Representatives member the next morning. And we rallied the environmentalist groups who started calling and beating on the legislators. One by one those members of the legislature took their names off the bill, and the bill just died in committee – never even came up for a vote. (12M3)

But it showed the tremendous forces at work. . . . (And) I'm sure that the DuPont Company would never have undertaken that, wouldn't have got out in front like that, to be a lightning rod for this whole effort, if they hadn't been convinced that they were going to get rid of that Act. And so, when they took that strong position and lost, they were really irritated about characters like Peterson – and particularly, a former employee. (12M3)

### **Eternal Vigilance: Act II**

*But that wasn't the end of the efforts to repeal the prohibition.*

Then, when the next new governor was there, Pete du Pont, another attempt was made. Now Pete had been a supporter of the Act when he was in the legislature when the Act was passed. (And) later, when he was a U.S. Representative, he spoke up in favor of the Coastal Zone Act. But about the time when he was considering running for Governor of Delaware, and probably when he was considering running for the Presidency of the United States, he became buddy-buddy with oil interests, and they wrote him up in their magazines about what a good friend he was of the oil industry.  
(12M4)

And when (du Pont) became Governor, he showed sympathy toward some change in this Act. Again, a bill was introduced – the same one that had been introduced four years earlier which would wipe out that prohibition, a (key) feature of the Coastal Zone Act. And again they had a majority of members of both houses signed on the legislation. I remember (that) Senator Cordrey, who was a leader in the legislature, said that the passage of the Act was a certainty. (12M4)

Well, it wasn't a certainty. We organized again. And this time when I came to Delaware, I even had the opportunity to speak to the whole House of Representatives in session. I remember that the gallery was loaded, the halls were loaded with people. I described

what this bill really meant and how vital it was to the state to protect the coastal zone. (There was) great applause. The Speaker had to lecture the people up in the gallery for making so much noise during this official proceeding. But in any event, again the environmental groups responded in a major way, and they were able to stimulate many other people other than members of the environmental groups who . . . believed in saving the Coastal Zone Act to come out and fight for it. And they did. And so it was killed again. (12M4)

### **Eternal Vigilance: Act III**

*The Coastal Zone Act, it appears, had more lives than a cat.*

But that wasn't the last (attempt to change it) either. There was another attempt during Governor Castle's term. I don't think Governor Castle ever was sympathetic at all with any attempt to kill the Coastal Zone Act. Mike Castle had been a strong supporter and helper in the State Senate when this bill was first passed. He had spoken out very much for the Coastal Zone Act repeatedly in subsequent years. (12M4)

But there was an attempt by his Secretary of State, Mike Harkins, and the Secretary of Transportation, Kermit Justice, to change the charter for the Delaware River and Bay Authority. (The change) would permit the Delaware River and Bay Authority to be involved in various developments, including industrial developments in the Delaware Bay area and adjoining areas. I thought that was a good idea except that their bill would have given that Act precedence over the Coastal Zone Act – so that the Delaware River and Bay Authority would have been exempt from the provisions of the Coastal Zone Act. They could have gone ahead and developed harbors and industry along the river. (12M4)

*The bill was introduced in June, only days before the end of the legislative session.*

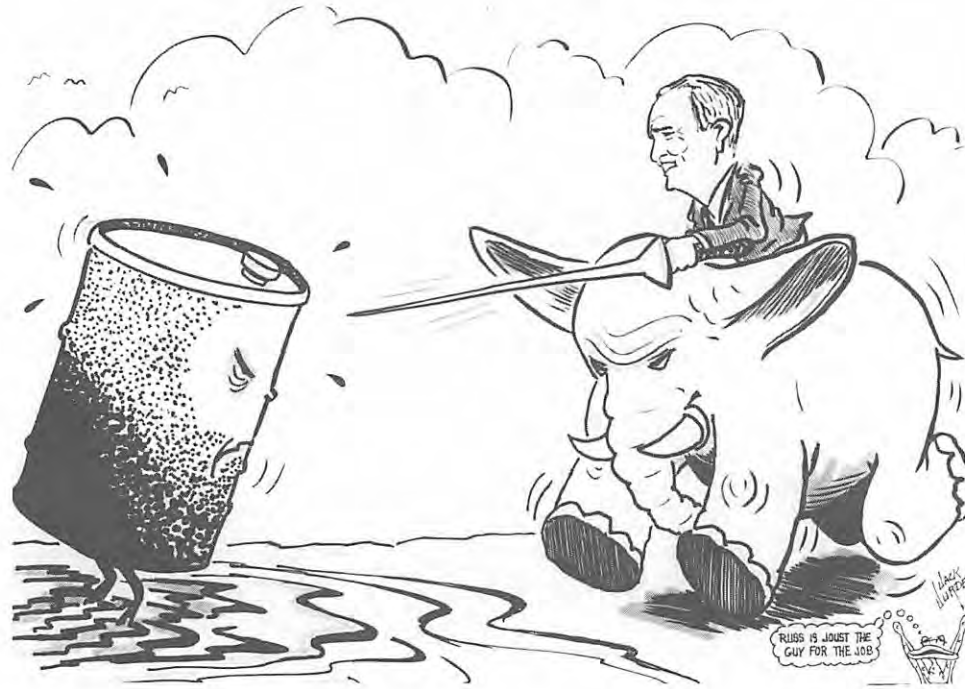
This time my wife called me – I was up in New York – to come down to Wilmington. I did. I met with the editorial people of The News Journal. They played this up the next day. We did the same thing (as before) – got letters on the desks of all the Senators and members of the House. (We) told them what happened and that bill just died. (12M5)

#### **Eternal Vigilance: Act IV**

Four years later, that same bill was introduced, and I prepared a letter to Governor Castle, convinced that he wouldn't go along with that if he really knew what it was. I actually delivered it to his office in Wilmington when I couldn't see him. But then, at the request of environmental groups, I went out and participated in a press conference denouncing this bill the way it was, saying it ought to be changed. Then I got a call from the governor, Mike Castle. He said he wasn't interested in hurting the Coastal Zone Act, and I believed him. He sent Mike Harkins to come see me. (12M5)

He came to my home in Wilmington, met there with my wife, Lillian, and me. And he said, "Governor, I'm probably the only person, the only friend you have left in Delaware." Lillian said to him, "So that's why you came to see him?" Mike was so angry, he almost got up and walked out, but we sat there talking, and I said, "All you have to do, Mike, to get my support and get the support of environmental groups is one simple little amendment. All that would say would be that this organization will be subject to the same coastal zone regulation as any other organization. (12M5)

The Governor agreed. I drafted that (amendment), it was put on that bill, and it passed and the bill was passed. And I said, and I still say, "Why, if those people didn't intend to get around the (Coastal Zone Act), wouldn't they have made that little simple amendment in the first place four years earlier or when this bill came up?" (12M5)



By the time he left office in 1973, Peterson was an internationally known environmentalist.  
*Cartoon by Jack Jurden, The News Journal.*

*That was the last legislative effort to amend the Coastal Zone Act – at least as of this writing. But there was another effort outside the General Assembly, initiated by Bill Gaither, former Dean of the College of Marine Studies at the University of Delaware. Gaither had been a strong supporter of the Coastal Zone Act, served on the Peterson task force, and supported Peterson for Governor.*

(Gaither) had left the University and was working up in Philadelphia, and he put on a campaign (based on) the idea that Delaware should really develop its coastal zone – make a major place for refineries, steel mills, major ports for shipping coal and bringing in iron ore, building major trestles out to the islands that should be built in the bay, and running a new railroad line up the state and so on. Unbelievable. And he and I had a debate at a League of Women Voters affair in Delaware discussing this thing. Well, his idea didn't go any place, but it really was a jolt. (12M5)

### **Finally, a Court Challenge**

*Inevitably, there was also a court challenge, one that quickly became very complex. And again, Peterson was deeply involved – protecting his landmark legislation. Among the forces he rallied were his friends in the national environmental community.*

When they couldn't get this done in the legislature, they tried it in the courts. The issue was Norfolk Southern, a major transportation company, which wanted to use huge coal colliers to haul coal from the United States overseas. Most of that coal was now being loaded on ships in Norfolk, Virginia, but the harbor wasn't deep enough there to use the huge colliers. (They wanted) to come to the Delaware Bay where they could have huge colliers. Coal would come in on barges and be . . . transferred on our bay over to these big ships, which then take off for overseas. They applied for a permit initially to do that and the Secretary of DNREC – then Jack Wilson – gave them a permit. And he was supported by (Delaware's) Attorney General, (Charlie) Oberly. (12M6)

The citizen groups then took a case before the Coastal Zone Industrial Control Board, which had been established by the Coastal Zone Act. They appealed it to that group, and that Board turned it down. It was another example of the strength of that Act. . . . So now, Norfolk Southern sues the state of Delaware, and who are the two key people whom they're . . . going to be suing? Wilson out of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and Oberly, the Attorney General of the State. (12M6)

*In effect, therefore, the defendants were being sued as the representatives of a cause they had supported.*

So there we were in a bind. The assistant Attorney General who was assigned to this, Regina Mullen, told me how little resources she had, and (how) her boss, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of DNREC, who would be called upon to provide most of the information they needed, had been in favor of this thing. (12M6)

I got deeply concerned about this and called a meeting . . . . There were a lot of people there, including former U.S. Senator Caleb Boggs, who was strongly in support of what we were doing, Regina Mullen, (and) many environmental leaders. (Also attending were) the head of the Natural Resources Defense Council, located in New York City, John Adams, a good friend of mine. And some legislators. (12M6)

I made the point that here was Regina Mullen with very few resources facing up to a huge international corporation, with powerful lawyers and a lot of law firms on their side of the issue. And we had to do something about it. (We got) the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) – a potent organization made up of scientists and lawyers who won all kinds of cases in the environmental area, good friends with whom I've worked for years – and the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club . . . to agree to support this, and then the NRDC got a law firm in New York to



agree to work for nothing in support of it. So . . . we backed up Regina Mullen with a potent force. (12M6)

In fact, I agreed to help raise money for NRDC to get involved with this thing. I wrote a letter that went out to all their members, and John Adams wrote a letter too, pointing out how critical this was – not only to Delaware but to our whole country. And they got, by far, the biggest return of money from their members that they ever got to help cover the cost to carry out this legal case. (12M6)

Well, the case went to the U.S. District Court and we won. Then it went to a U.S. Court of Appeals, and we won. And then Norfolk Southern gave up and didn't take it to the U.S. Supreme Court. So now our Act had held up under very close scrutiny because again they were contesting the very thing we had worried about early on, while the bill was being drafted, that somebody would, some day, contest this as violating the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution. And it held up under those considerations. (12M6)

Governor Castle strongly supported what was being done here. I guess the terminology is that he became a friend of the court on our side for this issue. He was very critical of the U.S. Government . . . for supporting this court action. (12M6)

### **At Long Last . . . Regulations**

*But even then, the story was not over. There was still the matter of adopting regulations to administer the Act, passed way back in 1971. Regulations developed during the Castle Administration had been thrown out by the court, based upon a failure to comply with provisions requiring adequate public notice.*

Here we are on November 12, 1998, and on November 21, a public hearing will be held by the Coastal Zone Industrial Control Board on regulations which are now being developed for administering the Coastal Zone Act – and no doubt, the public will be overwhelmingly behind this. I say this because of three workshops

which have already been held around the state. . . . it's my prediction that very promptly thereafter, the Control Board will vote to make these regulations the law of the state. (12M7)

(We owe) thanks to Governor Carper, who a few years ago established . . . an advisory committee on coastal zone regulations, and brought in an outside group from Boston to help with conflict resolution – a technique which I strongly believe in. It worked in this case. He appointed key people from the industries involved, industries which were grandfathered in the coastal zone. They were in business in the coastal zone when the Act was passed and, of course, (were) permitted to continue. (12M7)

*Peterson believes that some businesses fought the regulations because they preferred to deal with DNREC on the merits of their individual situations – a position somewhat analogous to the original battle over a blanket prohibition versus a case-by-case determination. In any event, the Act existed for 27 years before the called-for regulations were enacted in 1998.*

### **And the Future?**

*So how tranquil is Peterson today about the permanence of Delaware's Coastal Zone Act? After all, Russ Peterson won't always be around to protect it.*

I'm quite optimistic about the Coastal Zone Act's being protected now, but it's well to remember that we need eternal vigilance in things like this. It could be turned around if, for example, we had a governor in office and a legislature that were sympathetic with some business goal of developing parts of the coastal zone. I think, however, that the citizenry of Delaware is very environmentally conscious today. There are many people around the state who would go to bat to fight for the Coastal Zone Act, but as I said, it doesn't mean we should conclude it couldn't happen. (13M2)



Peterson examines a horseshoe crab on a research vessel in Delaware Bay.  
*Photo courtesy of Delaware Public Archives.*

Another important factor is that many of the acres along the Coastal Zone, which were the prime candidates for development have in the intervening years been acquired by such groups as Delaware Wildlands and the State of Delaware. Delaware Wildlands deserves some major credit for not only fighting to help get the Coastal Zone Act passed but also for what they've done over the years in acquiring land. They have obtained money to a major extent from members of the du Pont family to buy up that land and set it aside in perpetuity. And many times when they acquire the land, they subsequently resell it to the State of Delaware, as a part of one of the state parks or wildlife refuges. (13M2)

The Nature Conservancy is another group that, in more recent years, has been acquiring land and setting it aside. The movement to get agricultural land protected, through the process of the state's acquiring the development rights to the land, is also a movement which is helping to safeguard the coastal zone. (13M3)

### **Intertwined Identities**

*Certainly, Peterson's close association with the Coastal Zone Act was a defining element in his life, one that followed him during later career moves. Sometimes it helped, other times it didn't. An example of the latter was when Peterson was awaiting appointment as Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality.*

(One day) a friend called and said, "You're in deep trouble at the White House. You'd better have some of your friends call the President." So I asked Nelson Rockefeller to call General (Alexander) Haig, who had just taken over as Chief of Staff for Nixon, Nixon having fired (Bob) Halderman and (John) Erlichman. This was right in the heart of the Watergate problem. Nelson called him and came back to me immediately and said that Haig said that a group of oil company executives had, in person, gone to see the President to talk him out of appointing you. (Rockefeller said) Haig's going to call you. (12M9)

Haig called me and asked me to come to the White House. I went down there. He said, "Do you realize that the President thinks all environmentalists are kooks?" I said, "Yes, I know that. I learned that from Elliot Richardson and Bill Ruckelshaus and Russ Train." "Well then, why do you want the job?" "Because this is one of the most important things in the world, and I want to change the President's mind." He said, "I'll talk to the old man about it when I go out on the boat with him tonight." That was a time when Nixon was going out in the Sequoia – the presidential yacht. The next day Haig called me and said, "You've got the job." (12M9)

*But not really. There was still the matter of Senate confirmation.*

Well, I didn't really have the job because I had to be confirmed by the Senate committee, which was chaired by Senator Scoop Jackson. Democrats were in control. I went around to see the Senators – most of them, prior to my hearing – to talk to them. I talked to the two top-ranking Republicans, a Senator from Wyoming and from Arizona, Senator Hansen and Senator Fannin. They each told me, in separate interviews, that they were going to have to give me a hard time because their oil company friends had come to them and told them they should block my nomination. But each said, "Don't worry. I'm going to vote for you in the final analysis because we governors have to stick together." (12M10)

Well, I went up to the Hill for the hearings, and when I arrived that day, only the Republicans were there. I remember there were 19 members on that committee – 10 Democrats and nine Republicans. Approximately so. Only Republicans were there, and they did give me a hard time. One senator held up a copy of the Wilmington newspaper. The banner headline was, "Governor says, 'To Hell with Shell'" – a comment I had made in the heat of a town meeting and a News Journalist had picked that up and played it up. It became a slogan which was used around the state. (12M10)

*Buttons reading "To Hell with Shell" quickly appeared on the lapels of environmentalists.*

People thought that was my campaign slogan. That was never my campaign slogan, but it was used by a lot of people. Still, occasionally, people come and hand me one of those pins they found in their collection and bring it to the former Governor as a gift. I (have collected) quite a few of them. But in any event, I told the Senator I thought that (this statement) was appropriate . . . or I wouldn't have said that. I probably should have been more diplomatic. (12M10)

But anyway, (the Senators) asked me such things as, "Wouldn't it be improper for you to have this job when you have a pension from the DuPont Company, and the pension plan permits the DuPont Company to fire you if you do something not in their interest?" "No, that's no problem for me," I said, "because when I ran for Governor, I asked the DuPont Company to give me a letter saying (that) I was exempt from that provision, and they did so. I have it in my safe deposit box; if you want a copy of that, I'll send it down to you." "No, never mind," they said. (12M10)

But it proceeded that way – many, many questions. In the middle of this anti-approach by the Republicans, in came Senator Jackson to take over chairing the meeting. And he said, "I understand Governor, (that) your Republican colleagues are giving you a hard time. I thought you needed a good Democrat to come here and support you." Shortly, the Democrats arrived, and they did (support me). We had two more days of hearings – (it was) very unusual (to have) three days of hearings for this level of a job – and it ended up with Democrats supporting me vigorously and Republicans making a show, really, for their oil company friends, to be against it. But when the vote came, they voted unanimously to give me that job. (12M10)

Now I have the job, and I go over to the White House. I was officed within a few yards of the White House, off of Lafayette Square, and I had a pass to get into the White House whenever I wanted to. So I went over there to have lunch. I met George Bush, who was then the Chairman of the National Republican Party, and

I said, "I'm Russ Peterson, former governor of Delaware, and I head the CEQ." He said, "I know, I know." I said, "I'd like to talk to you about the environment." He said, "I'm too busy." And he walked away. (12M10)

And then a couple of weeks later, I had a similar contact, only he was even more unfriendly. I went back to my office. When I was telling my staff about this, they said, "Well, don't you know? He was the one who took the oil company executives to see President Nixon about not appointing you to this job." (12M11)

*The association with coastal zoning, and its implications for the petroleum industry, would stick for many years.*

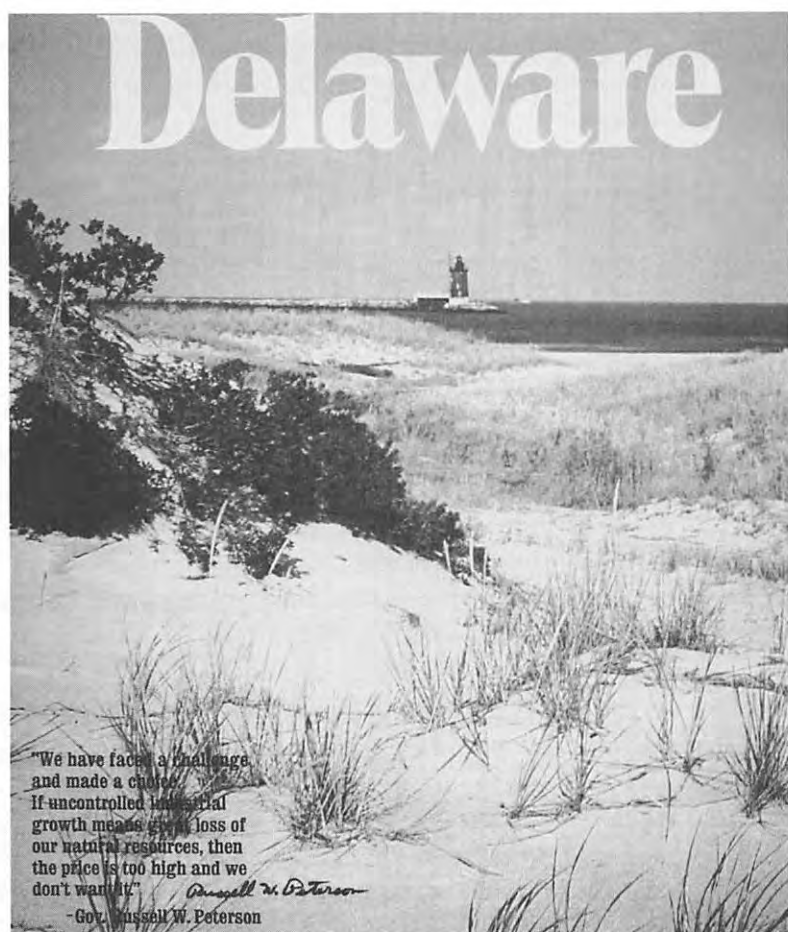
Well, it went on, even years later when I'd be talking at a university. This happened twice to me, once in Texas and once in Oklahoma, talking at a university, to a large group of students and faculty. There would be people in the audience who, in the question and answer period, would give me a hard time about this. In fact, in one of those places, I think it was in Oklahoma, I even got booed . . . . (12M11)

But, no doubt about it, this thing persisted. My anti-business image persisted here in Wilmington very markedly. In fact, in my CD-ROM which I produced (to accompany my book), I have a little section in there which talks about how business pilloried Peterson in Delaware for quite a few years. (But) here in 1998, that is no longer apparent – to me anyway. (12M11)

### **Peterson's Greatest Accomplishment**

*Peterson considers the Coastal Zoning Act his greatest accomplishment as governor.*

That was of great significance, not just in helping to safeguard an important quality of life in Delaware, safeguard it for future generations, but it was of tremendous importance nationally, even



"We have faced a challenge  
and made a choice.  
If uncontrolled industrial  
growth means great loss of  
our natural resources, then  
the price is too high and we  
don't want it."

*Russell W. Peterson*

-Gov. Russell W. Peterson

This poster was popular among supporters of Peterson's  
Coastal Zone Act.



internationally. This was so well shown by the response of people all over America and around the world, and that is true even today. This was a major benchmark at the dawn of the environmental movement. For a community to stand up to one of the most powerful assemblies of business organizations in concert with the U.S. Department of Commerce, to block a potentially multi-billion dollar series of developments along the Delaware coast was a rare thing indeed. (5M3)

It gave a signal to many people that, look, you can stand up and stop these things if you have the right argument. People will support it, (as) we did. In this case, we said, "We have too much to lose by going down this road." And it led to a fantastic conflict. (5M4)

But the people of Delaware supported it. Obviously, it wouldn't have gotten done if the people of Delaware didn't support it. They've been fighting to protect it even since. So I believe that (the Coastal Zone Act) has to be rated as more significant in the big scheme of things, although I must say that the change in the form of government in Delaware (to a cabinet system) was of very great importance to Delaware itself. (5M4)

*At the time of the coastal zone debate, Peterson's supporters created a poster that can still be found in some Delaware homes. The background is a scene from the Delaware seashore, with dunes and a lighthouse in the background. Superimposed on this picture is language that for Peterson and many others sums up the matter, language Peterson used in his January 1971 Future of the State message.*

*The statement says that, "We have faced a challenge and made a choice. If uncontrolled industrial growth means great loss of our natural resources, then the price is too high, and we don't want it."*

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## Other Environmental Achievements

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*Peterson was governor at one of the most important times in the American environmental movement in that a lot of major national legislation was enacted during that period. That this burst of landmark environmental legislation happened under President Nixon may surprise some people. In Delaware, coastal zoning was the most dramatic and contentious of the environmental issues during Peterson's term, but it was far from the only one.*

Well, it's true that that was a period of major advance in the environmental movement. In fact, we refer to that as the cutting edge of the environmental movement. And we in Delaware were really there, on a number of fronts . . . . It's true that President Nixon signed more major environmental legislation than any other president, although he personally was not an environmentalist. But I think he and his staff sensed that this was very important in the country and that they were going to get with that trend. (13M4)

I went down to Washington (while I was governor) and testified in at least two different hearings relative to some of that legislation. It was through that process I got to know such people as Scoop Jackson – Senator Jackson from the State of Washington – who was one of the leaders in pushing for the National Environmental Policy Act. And over in the House of Representatives, (there was) John Dingel (of Michigan), who was also considered a father of the National Environmental Policy Act. Those contacts paid off in later years when I was working in Washington. (13M4)

### **Taking Litter Seriously**

*One issue Peterson attacked with gusto was litter – along roadsides and especially on Delaware beaches.*

It was common practice to throw stuff out of the window of the car as you're driving along. People coming back from the beach on a

Sunday would bring bags of waste which they collected in the place they were renting . . . and throw it out the window along the road. You'd drive out some of the country roads, and there would be dumps, many dumps along the road. (13M4)

So, I decided we had to do something about that. (We) put on a pretty strong campaign toward that end and had some limited success. One of the incidents which I'll never forget occurred down at so-called Whiskey Beach, near North Shores in Rehoboth. Lillian and I had bought a house out there. We used to go down to Whisky Beach to bathe, to walk along the shore, where . . . several thousand young people would assemble, a good share of them from Washington, D.C. – having a great time, drinking beer and throwing their beer cans all over the place. (There was) trash all around. (13M4)

So Lillian and I went down there in our swimming suits. I'd go over to some of these young people sitting on the sand and ask them, "How many of you know of Earth Day?" A few of them put up their hands, and I'd say, "How can you really be interested in Earth Day and then tolerate all of this mess around?" I said, "My wife and I are going to pick up some of this trash and put it in these, almost empty drums around there. How about helping us?" So they would do it, and in very short order, we had the drums overflowing. (13M4)

Then I went to work to provide more drums, painted them all green and with "Every Day is Earth Day." We had a device which was run up and down the beach during the week, picking up four to six inches of sand, and sorting out the debris and then returning the sand to the beach. But they wouldn't run that thing on weekends when so many people (were) on the sand, so I directed them to run it on weekends, (to) make people get up out of the way, so they (would) get the message, so we (could) really clean this place up. (13M4)

Well, it wasn't very long (before) I'd go down there and young

people would come running over to me, "Governor! How's the beach look today?" It was absolutely clean. It just drove home to me, how if each person does a little bit, the sum of their efforts is fantastic. And Lillian and my daughter Elin and I also joined some groups going out on weekends to pick up trash along the road. (13M5)

### **Zero Tolerance**

*Peterson adopted what in the 1990s might be called a "zero tolerance" policy toward litterbugs.*

We found, for example, (that) people had dumped all kinds of stuff – their mail, with all the addresses – and I'd give that to the police to try to crack down on those people, only to find out that (the police) couldn't enforce the law because you had to see a person in the act of throwing away the trash. (13M5)

Another Sunday, when my driver was off for the day and I was down in Rehoboth, I drove the governor's limousine with my daughter Elin and a friend of hers downtown to get the Sunday paper. The car ahead of me threw out a bag of trash. I hurried up and picked up that trash, got back in the car, and drove and caught up to the car at a stop sign, pulled up beside them, and got out. There were four people in there from Maryland, and I said, "I'm the Governor of Delaware. You don't do that!" and I threw the trash back in their car. Then I drove around front so they could see the "number one" license plate. (13M5)

I don't know what they did, they probably threw it out in the next block, I don't know. But, then we also put drums along the highway, coming up from Rehoboth to Wilmington. "Every day is Earth Day" drums again, but guess what happened? We just created small dumps along that road, because now people even brought mattresses and everything else, and dumped them out there, along the road. (13M5)

So, it drove home to me what a major job we were going to have.

Over the years, with the national program to adopt a highway, now you drive down these roads, and it's remarkable how free of debris they are. But again, it's a result of involving many, many people, and teaching them about good housekeeping. (13M5)

### **Waste Recovery**

*Not surprisingly, Peterson's background as a scientist influenced his approach to many issues – even waste.*

Well, I was a chemist, . . . and when I came to the governor's office, I became concerned about what we were doing with our waste. I recognized that waste really was a raw material. Within it were many, many things which were valuable. If we would recover them, we could sell them. In fact, I had 15 little bottles on the table in the governor's office of things which could be extracted from waste and sold. I can't remember where they came from, but somebody reacted to my interest in this, and supplied me with those samples. (13M5)

So I set out to do something about this, and I got the legislature to pass a law that provided a million dollars to be used in developing a pilot plant for extracting saleable products from our waste, and we put out for bids the development of the pilot plant. Hercules won the bid, and they set out to build such a plant. Unfortunately, before they got far along with that, they had to change the management and (the new management) lost its interest in this development. (13M5)

But the state kept that thing going – very slowly at first – and did end up with that plant's being built, to the point where we were producing and selling aluminum (and) various iron products; the flammable materials were burned to produce the heat to boil water to make steam to drive a turbine to create electricity; and a lot of the organic material went into large vessels where it was converted to a soil conditioner. And there was only one other place in the country that followed us and that was a place down in Florida, and a few years ago they were still running. (13M5)

*There were problems with the facility, Peterson recounts, and it was eventually abandoned. He considers Delaware to be behind many other states in terms of solid waste disposal – and especially in recycling. His priorities are one, not to produce waste in the first place, and two, to make what is produced easy to recycle.*

. . . we ought to design automobiles . . . and require the automobile company to take back their used cars when they end their career. And if they had to take them back and dispose of the materials, you can bet they would design them so that would facilitate the recycling. I tried to get the law passed in Washington that would make that happen. Germany has been passing some laws which really require manufacturers of products to take back their products after the end of the life cycle of the product. (13M6)

### **Clean Air**

*Peterson also spoke about clean air issues during his gubernatorial tenure.*

That refinery down at Delaware City was a major problem. Getty Oil Company owned it when I was governor; it's passed through a few hands since that time. But they bought a cheap petroleum. It was heavily loaded with sulfur, . . . and they would process that to get gasoline and (other products) from the petroleum. The residue on the bottom of their distillation columns was loaded with sulfur. They would sell that residue to Delmarva Power & Light Company, who owned the power plant directly adjacent to the Getty refinery. Delmarva would burn that (residue), and tremendous quantities of sulfur dioxide would then go up the stacks into the air . . . along with many particulates. (13M7)

In fact, at the time I was governor, when we were flying in a small plane or a helicopter, as I did on a number of occasions, you'd see this dark plume come up out of that stack. You could see it going on for 25, 30 miles – and not like the white plumes you see out of many stacks, which is water vapor and (which) goes up a short

distance and disappears in front of your view. This black plume . . . just went on, until it settled out someplace downstream. (13M7)

*Working with the regional EPA office in Philadelphia, the State of Delaware decided to make this an example of how the Clean Air Act can work and brought suit.*

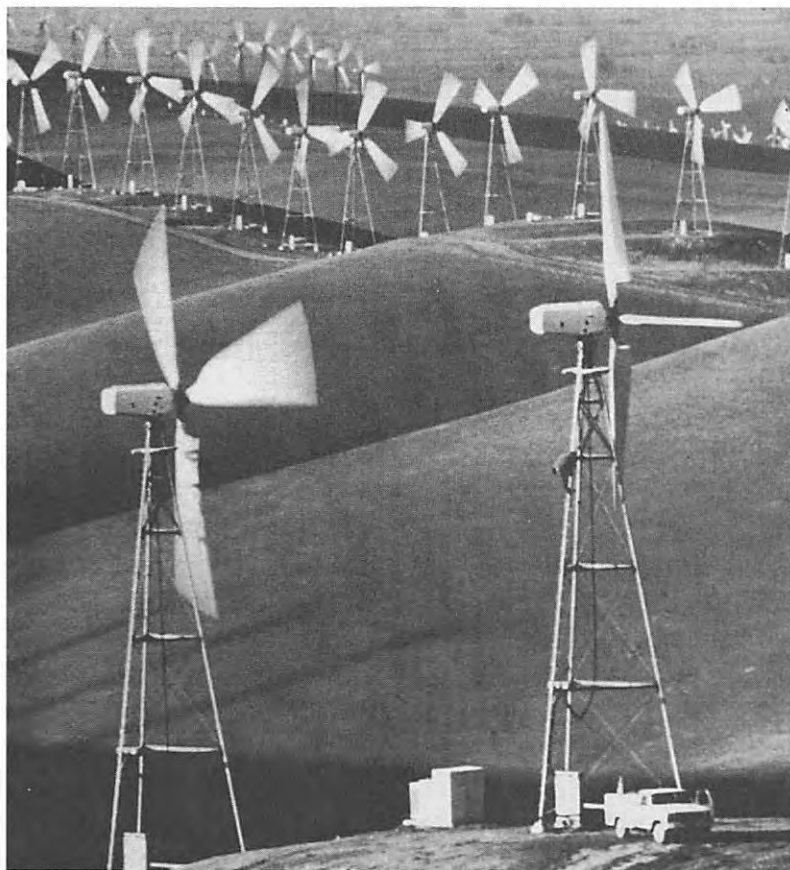
We took that case all the way to the United States Supreme Court and won the first such battle under the Federal Clean Air Act, (forcing) Delmarva Power & Light Company to reduce the emissions of the sulfur dioxide and particulates. And over the years, we continued the battle with that location. Texaco has been very much involved with that in recent years, has been sued a number of times thanks to environmental groups, particularly the Delaware Audubon Society – the principal watchdog. With the help of the Natural Resources Defense Council, which is located in New York City, we've been able to get Federal courts to fine Texaco. (13M7)

## **Clean Water**

*There was also action on the clean water front.*

We set out to make all streams in Delaware clean by 1980, and at the time there was a major amount of Federal money available to help with such objectives, a direct result of the passage of the Clean Water Act by the Congress and the subsequent appropriation of funds to facilitate the efforts. At one time, we had 18 projects under construction in Delaware to build new sewage treatment plants (and) upgrade existing ones . . . . We put a lot of Delaware money into this to match the Federal funds. I think the federal government paid about 75% of it, so you can see the big incentive we had to come up with our share here at home. (13M7)

Over the years, the Federal government cut way back in their program, and the momentum we had established was not maintained, but continual work has been done . . . . Even today,



Peterson is a long-time supporter of clean and renewable energy sources such as wind power.



we need additional work. (13M7)

Cleaning up our rivers was a prime target, and I'm still involved with that, even now. In fact, I just signed up (Bill Cohen) to work with me on this job I have chairing the strategic planning committee for the Riverfront Development Corporation, to develop an overall assessment of the environmental quality along the Wilmington Riverfront. That means going upstream on the Christina River and the Brandywine River too, because many of the pollutants in that river and along the riverfront are coming downstream – runoff from farmlands, for example. So I'm still involved in trying to clean up our Delaware rivers. (13M8)

### **Saying “No” to Inland Dredging**

*Peterson also became involved in some sticky issues regarding dredging inland bays in Sussex County.*

When I became governor, Delaware had ordered two new dredges for dredging creeks . . . in Sussex County, to do such things as pump sand from the bottom of the bays and build additional land like they had done down in Maryland. Maryland markedly increased the size of its barrier reef, you might call it, so they could have many more acres for construction. Many people down in Sussex, particularly, wanted to do the same thing. When I became governor, we had already received one of the dredges. (13M8)

I cancelled the order for the second one and also made a rule that our dredge was not going to be used for dredging creeks or for creating more land in those inland bays. But we would use it for such things as replenishment of sand on the beaches as a result of Northeasters or hurricanes wiping out much of the shore, which has happened so frequently over the years. (13M8)

This led, obviously, to quite a confrontation with a number of people who wanted to use those dredges, which would help them with their own land, increase the value of it. Well, Bill Murray, who had owned Murray Feeds, subsequently sold it to a major

corporation. (He) got quite a few million dollars for it. He invested some of that money in buying up land in Sussex, (including) some land along a creek that dumped into the Indian River Bay. He wanted the state to dredge his creek because in so doing, people who bought land up that creek could then have boats that would go down into the Indian River Inlet – and in the Atlantic Ocean if they wanted to – sharply increasing the value of that land. (13M8)

Well, the state biologist, whom I had asked to look into it, advised me that those creeks and others there were major nursing grounds for shellfish and finfish, and they should not be dredged. Of course, having a healthy population of shellfish and finfish was fundamentally important to the recreation of many, many people, and also to commercial interests off the coast who were doing a lot of commercial fishing. We had to protect those nursery grounds, so I told him we couldn't (dredge). It made him very unhappy. And when I was running for reelection, I was told that I was in deep trouble down in Sussex County, which I knew. (13M8)

*Some Sussex County Republicans, who were trying to help the Governor mend his political fences, arranged for Peterson to go out on Bill Murray's boat.*

Three other people (on the boat) were Lieutenant Governor Gene Bookhammer, and our Secretary of State, Gene Bunting, and a Senator from Sussex, Tom Hickman. Those three and I went down in the governor's limousine and got on Bill Murray's boat and went out with him into Indian River Bay. And after a while, after having a drink and some hors d' oeuvres, I found myself up in the bow of the boat alone with Bill Murray. (13M9)

He said to me, "Governor, I got 400 votes for you in the last election." And I said, "I know you got a lot of votes for me, Bill. I appreciate that very much." But then he shook his finger at me and said, "If you don't get that creek dredged down here, you're going to have those 400 against you, and maybe 400 more." And I

told Bill what the biologists said, which he already knew, and that I had no intention of dredging that creek. (13M9)

But he kept his word. Boy, he really worked against me in that election in 1972. That is an example of the kind of forces at work in the political arena. And also the power of the governor's office on many issues which don't get enough attention in the community but are very important, particularly when you consider the cumulative impact of a number of such items. Certainly, I was repeatedly accused by my fellow Republicans of being a lousy politician, because I didn't play politics. Well, playing politics meant doing favors for people, giving them special treatment, and I had been convinced long before I ever came to the governor's office that that was bad practice, and I was not going to be party to it. (13M9)

### **Saving Burton's Island**

*Another seaside controversy in which Peterson became involved was over Burton's Island and other nearby areas.*

That was a choice piece of real estate, and adjacent to Burton's Island was another piece of property where there were 300 and some shacks, primarily shacks that out-of-staters owned. They sort of were squatters that would come in and put those things there. (There was) no sewage treatment; it was just an absolute mess down there. And (it was) right beside our fantastic Delaware Seashore State Park. (13M9)

I decided we were going to protect this and make it an additional part of this great asset we already had there. And so we forced all of those houses out of there; every one of those buildings was torn down. And obviously I got a hell of a lot of flack for that one. Most of the people that owned them came from Pennsylvania, but they had a lot of sympathetic supporters in Delaware. (13M9)

I had gone down (to Burton's Island) in my bird watching efforts, and thought what a treasure this is. Then I heard that people were

planning to build a huge hotel, a resort, on that island, and put a major marina there and so on. I figured that was unnecessary, that . . . a modest marina (which) the state might operate was a good idea, but the kind of project proposed would make a great change in the character of that area. So I set out to acquire it. The Federal government had funds available toward purchasing such properties. They would work with states, the Federal government putting up part and the state the other part. (13M9)

As I remember, the total cost was something approaching two million dollars. The Federal government put up a million, and we put up the remainder. I can just see right now the little ceremony we had down there when that check was handed to me from the Federal government. My wife and I went down to Burton's Island just last year, and I'm kind of pleased to see it there. It's a great place to go looking for wildlife. I don't know what the state plans for that in the long run, whether they plan to provide any facilities out there to expedite people visiting it or not. But at least it is an asset of great importance . . . (13M9)

### **Wetlands: Unfinished Business**

*There was also the issue of wetlands, which was ultimately resolved by Peterson's successor, Governor Tribbitt.*

When I worked on the Coastal Zone Act, we recognized that that act did not protect the coastal zone from all different kinds of assaults, such as from the filling in of wetlands – wetlands being a major asset. Not only do they attract and support life, numbers of wildlife – serving as a nursing ground for shellfish and finfish – they absorb a lot of pollutants that come downstream. They take and extract (the pollutants) from the water. They also help in case of storm runoff (so) you get less flooding. (13M10)

They're an important asset, and I appointed Bill du Pont, who was nationally involved with Ducks Unlimited, to head up this committee to develop a piece of legislation to protect those salt water wetlands. And many key people (served) on that committee,

(and) they developed a piece of legislation in great detail. This wasn't available for us to act on until near the end of my term. (13M10)

We weren't able to do so but, fortunately, Governor Tribbitt in his term got that bill passed, the identical bill that we had developed through Bill du Pont's committee. That has done a lot toward protecting those (wetlands). We really need another law dealing with freshwater wetlands. (13M10)

So much has happened down there in Sussex – a tremendous explosion in population, all kinds of development – and when you go down there now, it's quite a different environment than was true 20 years ago, 30 years ago, (especially) 40 years ago when I used to go down there birdwatching. Over the decades, the development there is such that many of the wonderful natural areas are now loaded with homes and trailers and roads and shopping malls. (13M10)

### **Awards and Recognition**

*As a result of his environmental work, especially protecting Delaware's coastal zone, Peterson received a number of prestigious awards and honors.*

Well, I got two major awards in 1971, the very year that we passed the Coastal Zone Act. And I say *I* got it; but really, *we*, the people of Delaware, got it. Being governor, I got the specific credit for it. The first was an award from the World Wildlife Fund, a major international organization, and it was given to me at a black tie affair in the main ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. The president of that organization at that time was Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and, when he presented the gold medal of the World Wildlife Fund to me, he said this was the first time in history that any community had ever won a battle like this, against some major corporation that was trying to carry out a development in their area. (13M1)

It was an exciting evening of which one of the special benefits was, I was introduced to Charles Lindbergh, who was there – my boyhood hero. Then, shortly thereafter, I received the Conservationist of the Year Award from the National Wildlife Federation at a big affair in Mexico City. And, on this occasion, Lillian and I were invited to dinner by the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. (13M1)

At that dinner I again had a chance to meet Charles Lindbergh. This time I talked to him for quite a while. His main message to me was that I should work on world environmental problems. He said, “We have plenty of people here in the United States working on environmental problems, but there are very few doing it on a world basis.” Well, that’s what I eventually did. I don’t mean to imply that he necessarily had a major influence on my going in that way, but he certainly reinforced any interests I had in going in that direction. (13M1)

*Peterson is fond of recounting an incident that occurred while he and Lillian were in Mexico City for the award dinner.*

When we were down in Mexico City and Lillian and I received the invitation to go to the Ambassador’s home, we were told to be in the lobby of the hotel at 7:00 (o’clock) and a limousine would pick us up. We went down there, and nothing happened. Finally we took a cab out to the house. As we arrived, a limousine was starting to pull out of the major enclosure around the Ambassador’s home, and then (a man) got out of the back of the limousine and came over to me. (13M1)

It was Roger Tory Peterson, the famous ornithologist. He reported to me that he had made a mistake; that he too had been told to meet a group at the hotel at 7:00 p.m., and when that limousine came up



Peterson has received many honors and awards over the years for his environmental activism.

*Cartoon by Jack Jurden of The News Journal Company.*

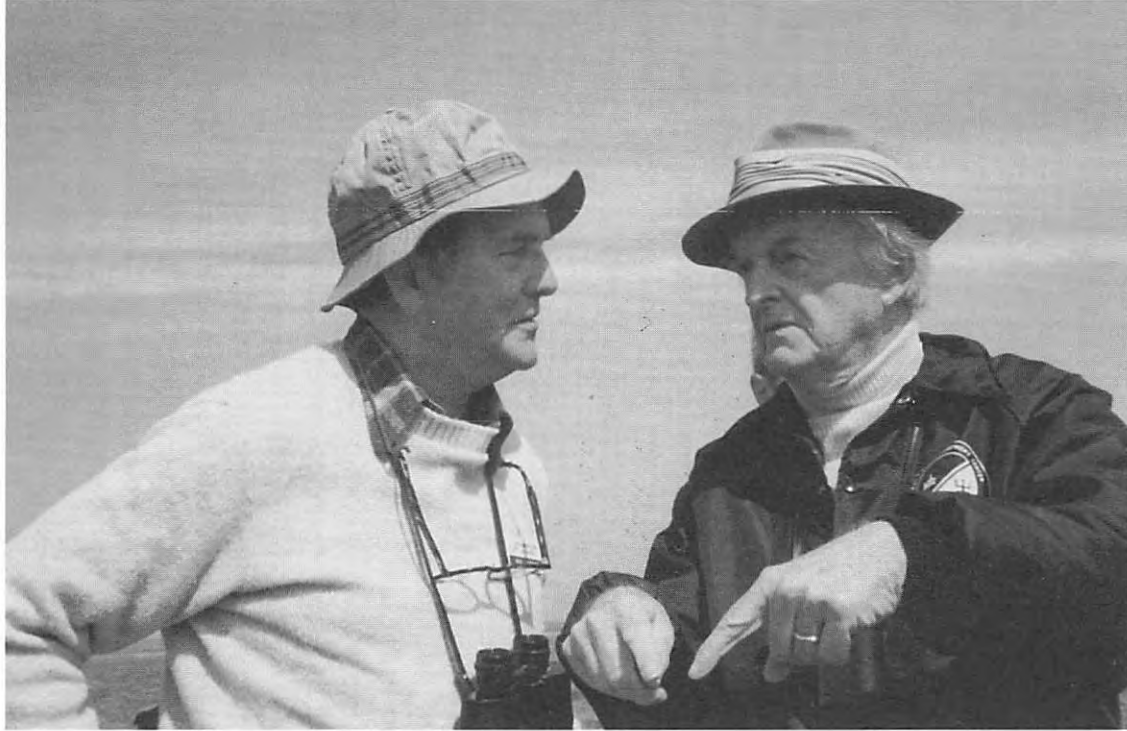
and . . . they asked for Governor Peterson, he jumped in. And when he came out to the Ambassador's house, and was greeted at the door by the Ambassador and his wife as Governor Peterson, he didn't think anything of it, because he had been governor of an ornithological society. After he was in the reception for a while and many other people called him Governor, he got a little worried about what was going on, and found out he was at the wrong place. So he had to leave then, to go to the place where he was supposed to go. (13M1)

We had fun over the years kidding about that particular experience. Down in Florida, in later years, I got a call one day . . . asking if I would talk to an environmental group in Naples. And I agreed to do that. But when I got there, for this meeting, it was pretty clear that they were expecting Roger Tory Peterson, not me. But I went ahead with this thing, gave my talk, and neither the hosts nor I ever admitted that the wrong character was there, but I'm sure the audience was well aware of that fact. So I sort of got even with Roger Tory Peterson on this occasion. (13M2)

*Other environmental recognition followed.*

I received many awards over the years, mainly for the overall effort I put into the environmental movement. But invariably, in giving me the award, they would mention the passage of the Coastal Zone Act in Delaware. For example, I received the top award of the National Audubon Society, of the Wilderness Society, received 14 honorary doctorates from universities and colleges, and they always would refer to the Coastal Zone Act. I also was elected to the Golden Ark of the government of the Netherlands (and received awards from) the Collier Conservancy in Florida, the Alabama Conservancy, a group out in the state of Washington (and one in) California. There were many, many awards and invariably, they would refer back to what I had done in Delaware. (13M2)





Two famous Petersons: Russ chats with ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson.

I emphasized, when I received such awards, that I had just happened to be the leader, and many, many people deserved credit for what we had made happen here. (13M2)

### **Birding in Delaware**

*Peterson is a strong advocate of Delaware's outdoor opportunities, especially birding.*

We have a great opportunity here – with our national wildlife refuges, our many state parks, our total coastal zone, and many interesting forests – to observe not only a wide variety of birds but a wide variety of other wildlife and plant life. On one day, I saw 157 species of birds, starting in Ocean City, Maryland, at 3:00 a.m. in the morning (and) ending up at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge at midnight. And there aren't many places around the country where you can go a few miles away from home and be exposed to that tremendous variety of bird life. (17M5)

Right here in my home just outside Wilmington, where I'm now living in 1999, one Saturday morning I saw 35 species of birds in about four hours without even going outside of my house, (just) looking out the windows. We have a pretty darned good place here, and it's vital that we maintain it. We have a special asset here that is recognized by birders all over the world, (namely) that many shorebirds spend their winter way down in the southern part of South America and go to nest up in northern Canada and Alaska – stopping off along the Wilmington shore to fatten up on horseshoe crab eggs. The birds will more than double their weight in a two-to-three-week period, (getting) the fuel they need to fly the last 2-3,000 miles to their nesting area. And we now have a major program here to protect those horseshoe crabs so that that food source will persist for the migrating birds. (17M5)

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## State Finances

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*At 11 a.m. on June 28, 1971, Peterson signed the Coastal Zone Act into law – the signature achievement of a very productive term. But in a curious turn of fate, that date also marked the darkest hour of the Peterson Administration.*

*Just three hours after signing the Coastal Zone Act, Peterson addressed a special joint session of the Delaware General Assembly. He informed the legislators that the expected budget surplus for the fiscal year ending just three days later would in fact be a deficit. To make matters worse, State law prevented the governor from signing a budget for the next fiscal year that was not balanced. The House and Senate, with the governor's agreement, had just passed such a budget for the upcoming fiscal year, but that budget now was out of balance and the governor couldn't sign it.*

*The problem had to do with a shortfall in the collection of Delaware's franchise tax.*

### **Franchise Tax Shortfall**

The franchise tax is collected from the corporations who are incorporated in Delaware (and it is) a major source of income for the state. For a variety of reasons, many companies have found it desirable to be incorporated in Delaware. The courts and others over the years have done a good job of administering our laws. We benefit in a major way from that. (14M1)

Now, the problem . . . came about this way. I had worked with the legislature in the normal process of establishing our budget for the next year and, in order to do that, we had to have an estimate of what the income would be. I had previously appointed the first Governor's Economic Advisory Council, which would take the estimate out of the hands of the elected officials, and . . . have it

come from a bipartisan group. I appointed 19 people, pretty evenly divided among Democrats and Republicans. (14M1)

They had done a great job of estimating the income for the previous year – hit it right on the nose. This year they had increased the estimate of what would be coming from the franchise taxes because we had made some changes in the legislation which would make it more favorable for companies to incorporate here. (14M1)

So with that new forecast, the State Senate and the House of Representatives and I had worked out the budget. They both had passed it, and I had planned to sign that budget bill on June 28th, 1971. Then, on Sunday morning, June 26, my Secretary of Finance, Joe Cashman, woke me up to tell me that we were in deep trouble because we weren't going to have the money coming in from the franchise tax that the Governor's Economic Advisory Council had projected. (14M1)

*Peterson had questioned the franchise tax estimate on several occasions, always being told that the estimate was sound.*

I had been worried about that earlier because I had kept a tally in my desk, the drawer of my desk, of the monthly income from various sorts of taxes, including the income from franchise tax. I noticed (throughout the year that) the income in 1971 wasn't any higher than it had been the previous year. I had grave questions about that. (14M1)

One of the problems was (that) the franchise tax wasn't due until June 1st of the fiscal year – way near the end of the year – so it was a little more difficult to be sure you knew what was going to come in. I asked the Economic Advisory Committee to make another study, and they did. They appointed a five-person subcommittee, and about May 15th I got a letter from them saying that I should relax, that that forecast was all right. (14M1)

I had been beating on my Secretary of State who administers that franchise tax, and the Secretary of Finance, about being sure we knew what we were doing. They both assured me that we were on solid ground with our forecast. . . . so this Sunday morning when I got that bad news, it was a tremendous blow, (especially since) the law says that the governor cannot sign a budget bill unless the revenue projected is adequate to cover the cost. (14M2)

If they'd had that information earlier, there would have been time for the Senate and the House and me to make some adjustments. But the fiscal year ended June 30th, and without a budget, legally we wouldn't have any (budget) authority . . . after that day. And so on Monday I scurried around, trying to round up a plan for what we could do, and asked the state legislature, both houses, to meet in joint session to hear a message from me on June 28th. (14M2)

**"I was dead wrong."**

*It was a monumental day in which Peterson stood up before the people of Delaware and said that "the problem stemmed directly from my error. I was dead wrong."*

That morning at 11, I signed the Coastal Zone Act. It should have been a great, happy occasion. It was a happy occasion, but it was obviously less exciting when I knew what was coming up in regard to the financial planning for the state. And at 2, I went to the joint session and told them that I had made a mistake. I had said that we wouldn't require any more taxes. I was so confident we knew what the income was going to be that we wouldn't need them, and now it looked like in order to adjust for this problem we were going to have to either raise taxes, reduce expenses, or do some of both. (14M2)

I recited a proposal I had for how we might do that, pointing out that we were going to have to act before the end of the fiscal year in order to get this job done and provide for the state's continuing to operate . . . . (14M2)

*There's been much second-guessing over the years about Peterson's strategy. Some felt he had made a mistake in the way he had handled the problem.*

Well, I took the blame for this because we had just recently converted from the commission to the cabinet form (of government) to give the governor the authority necessary to run the state as really was called for in the constitution . . . . And I figured that I now should get up and take the blame for what my Administration had done inaccurately. (14M2)

Now, all hell broke loose. In fact, going back and looking at a scrapbook that my staff had kept for me when I was governor, on June 29th I find no clippings whatever from the local papers about signing the Coastal Zone Act, which was the most important thing I did in my administration in my view. But (the paper) was loaded with stories about this financial problem. (14M2)

*In any event, the state solved the problem quickly. The General Assembly worked around the June 30 deadline by passing a resolution allowing the government to operate at the current rate of expenditure while devising a plan to bring the new budget into balance.*

Within the next 30 days, we had modified the budget, and we had raised some additional taxes to straighten out this problem – a sharp contrast, of course, to what has happened on the Federal level over the years. They have put in budgets for tens of billions of dollars out of balance, and they never seem to quite get around, until recent years, to having a balanced budget. (14M2)

### **A Political Lightning Bolt**

*The franchise tax shortfall struck a severe blow to Peterson's political fortunes. For those who were neutral, or whose support was soft, it was enough to turn them against him. For his political enemies and detractors – some open, others hidden – it was the*

*chance they had been seeking. For prior to that time, Peterson's reelection appeared likely.*

*Peterson himself has spent a great time of time second-guessing his handling of the so-called "financial crisis."*

When I stop and reflect on what happened then, and what I might have done otherwise, I recall that I really didn't have any financial crisis in Delaware as it was labeled by people. We had a \$5.2 million deficit, which turned out to be exactly what it was when the end of the year came . . . and (it was a) thing which we took care of within 30 days by changing the budget. At the end of my term, we had a surplus in the budget. (15M7)

So this wasn't any great financial crisis, but I made it into one, really, by going before the joint session of the legislature, . . . (telling) them I made a mistake. (15M7)

And it was probably about as naive a political position as you could ask for, because that immediately gave my opponents something to hang onto. That brought Dave Buckson in immediately as an opponent of mine for the election, and the many forces in the state that were teed off at the things I had done now had something that they could grab a hold of to paint me as ineffectual financially. (15M7)

*One group that was unhappy with Peterson was the mainstream business community.*

Let's take the Coastal Zone Act, (which was a) great victory for those of us who believed in protecting the coastal zone. (At the same time), it was a major defeat for business because they had taken this on as a big project and the State Chamber of Commerce unanimously opposed this. They fought us with legal talent brought in to support them, with the U.S. Department of Commerce and so on involved. They lost that battle. They didn't

like that, obviously. And now they had a financial thing they could (use to discredit me). (15M7)

Take the programs to increase the income tax. If you wanted, you could feel unhappy about that. It's something else they could grab ahold of. And there were many Republicans, in particular, that didn't like my many programs to help African Americans and to help prisoners. They called it prisoner coddling. They didn't [confront me] on those issues directly, but now they had an issue they could take me on. (15M8)

*After some more second-guessing, Peterson is eager to drop the subject.*

(It) might have been an appropriate thing – not just politically . . . but also from a standpoint of good management – if I had fired my Secretary of Finance that Sunday morning and let him share more prominently in the problem that we had. But that's water over the dam and (it's) the first time I've thought about these problems in a long time. I'll be glad to stop thinking about them and get onto something else. (15M8)

*Peterson's opponents made the most of the issue.*

The Democrats used this issue throughout the next year and a half, in fighting to elect Sherman Tribbitt. Sherman Tribbitt had been saying before this event that the State was going to have a financial problem, a shortfall. I thought then, and I still think, that that was primarily a normal kind of a political attack that goes on. I don't think he had the basis for that, because he had access to the same information I had coming from the Economic Advisory Council. (14M2)

But nevertheless, he was right, and he made a lot of to-do very effectively over the next 18 months in his campaign for the governorship. That was by far the single biggest issue that people hammered on during that campaign. And it was the main issue



that Dave Buckson used in taking me to a primary. (14M3)

Without that primary, I don't think there was much question that I would have won the election. I think I made a mistake in going on the defensive and trying to explain to conservative Republicans that rather than being accused of having poor financial management, we really had one of the best examples of financial management in the history of Delaware, in my judgment. But the conservative Republicans were teed off at me for a number of things, and trying to explain the situation in this financial area wasn't going to change their minds anyway. (14M3)

*That so-called fiscal crisis marked a sea change in Peterson's popularity and to some degree in his effectiveness. The string of accomplishments continued, but things were not the same.*

(There was) a major change, immediately. First of all, a number of the Republicans in the legislature were a lot less cooperative, (and) a number of them immediately went to work with Dave Buckson – Bill Hart, for example, who really wanted to run for Lieutenant Governor under Dave Buckson, and Andy Foltz from down in Kent County, and so on. (14M3)

But in the community, I noticed it most spectacularly at the time of the Blue-Gold football game, which is the annual football game of high school stars from the northern and the southern part of the state played in the University of Delaware stadium for the benefit of disabled youth in our state. And traditionally the governor sits on one side of the field for the first half, and then moves over at halftime to the other side of the field. (14M3)

In 1971, my young 15-year old daughter Elin was with me, and the announcer announced that Governor Peterson and his daughter Elin would now move across the field to the other side of the stadium. A loud boo came up – a sustained boo reverberated across the stadium. Tears ran down my daughter Elin's face. I took her hand and smiled at her, and she smiled back and we walked across

the field. It was pretty clear that a new day had arrived. (14M3)

### **Governor's Economic Advisory Council**

*Peterson got the idea for his Governor's Economic Advisory Council from Governor Reagan. He created it with Executive Order No. 16, dated October 2, 1969.*

After I had been elected governor but before I took office, I went to a meeting of Republican governors out in California. Out there I talked to a number of the governors about how they (decided on their state's) revenue. . . . I realized that if the governor could just go ahead and estimate the revenue, that it wasn't very difficult to get a budget which would be in balance. Governor Reagan said to me that, "We in California have a requirement. We have this bipartisan group that makes an estimate of our annual revenue, and that's what the governor has to live by." (14M3)

So I came back and decided to do the same thing, and so by an Executive Order I created the (Governor's Economic Advisory Council). And, as I remember, it had 19 people on it, almost evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. (There were) a lot of key people from business, from the University of Delaware, and, for fiscal year 1970, their forecast was right on the button. And in 1971, as I mentioned earlier, they had increased the forecast for franchise tax income. And their estimate was wrong. And that was what led to our difficulty. (14M4)

But it's obviously an appropriate way to operate. Such a group is almost certainly going to be better equipped than the governor's immediate office to make an accurate estimate of what the revenue will be. (14M4)

### **What Tax Refunds?**

*A bad revenue estimate was not the only financial issue that haunted Peterson in his reelection campaign. There was also an issue concerning the delivery of tax refunds – an issue that arose*

*after Peterson had taken the difficult step of changing when the refunds were paid.*

When I became governor, the state was in a very difficult financial position, as Governor Terry had pointed out. He said in his campaign for reelection that whoever is governor next is going to have to increase taxes, because we have a financial problem. In fact, a committee that had been set up to study (Delaware's) financial state also made that strong point. But in the Terry administration, one thing they had done which had helped the financial situation was to delay payment of the refunds that taxpayers get from having overpaid taxes for the previous year. (14M4)

As you know, we pay our taxes in April, and if you pay the refunds after June 30th, then that money comes out of the next fiscal year's funds. That (involves) a number of millions of dollars, and thus is important in whether you balance the budget or not. Well, when I became governor, refunds were being paid in the fiscal year after the fiscal year in which they really should have been paid. Now to correct that means you're going to have to pay refunds twice in one fiscal year, and I set out to correct that situation. (14M4)

*Peterson bit the bullet. The State set out to pay the previous year's refunds and the current year's refunds in the same year. But a problem arose.*

. . . I had been assured we had already completed doing that . . . and I had announced publicly that we had done that, only to find out (in 1972 that) a lot of people claimed they hadn't got their refund yet. And much to my irritation, I found that was true. I dug into this and said, now I want to be absolutely sure that all these checks are paid, are sent out. And when they were all ready, I took a big mailbag full of those checks over my shoulder and went down to the post office and mailed them. There was a big picture in The News Journal, or The Morning News, whichever one it was

at the time, showing me delivering those checks to the post office. (14M4)

But lo and behold, there were still a few people who didn't receive their checks. I was about ready to climb the wall, because I was absolutely sure (that all the refunds had been paid). Of course, we proceeded to send checks to those people who said they hadn't received them. But then, a year or so later, when I was working down in Washington, (I saw a) story in the Wilmington papers that a bunch of checks had been uncovered in a drawer in a state office, checks made out to people as the refunds for the overpayments they had made. Somebody was obviously trying to get me in trouble. And I never learned any more detail than that about those uncanceled checks. (14M4)

### **Cut Spending, Raise Taxes**

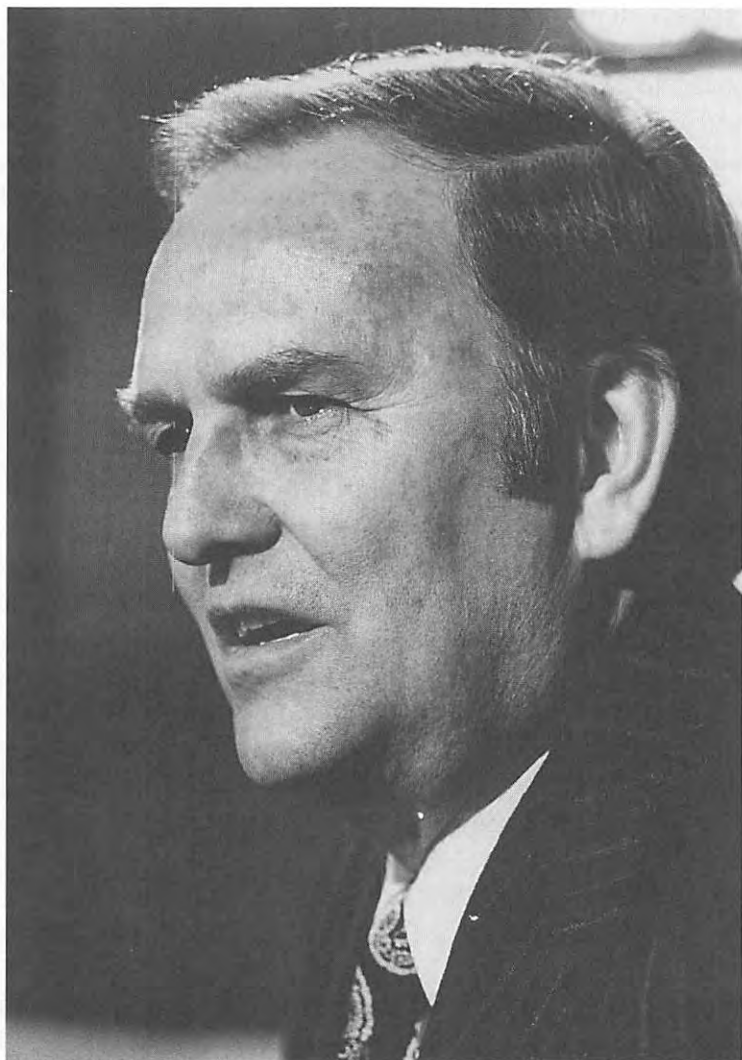
*As already noted, Peterson entered office with the knowledge that Delaware had financial problems that needed addressing. He addressed the problem by reducing spending and raising taxes.*

I came in with my eyes wide open that we had a big problem to cope with and set out to do what we could about it. One of the first things we did was to face up to the out-of-date business management in the state, (the) tremendous waste of money that was going on . . . . Remember now, they had the 142 commissions that were run in the state, at a time when each organization hired its own staff and administered its programs. (15M1)

### **Governor's Economy Committee**

*Thus, Peterson established a Governor's Economy Committee.*

Early on as governor, I went to a meeting of the national governors. Reports were made on the activities of Warren King and Associates, a consulting firm that had been working with one or two or three other states, especially Ohio, to study their government and recommend things they could do to operate it more efficiently and economically. I was very much impressed



Early in his term, Peterson appointed the Governor's Economy Committee to identify ways that State government could run more efficiently and effectively.

with what they were doing and thought we should bring Warren King to Delaware to help us carry out a similar study. (5M6)

Warren King agreed to work with us (and) came to a meeting in the Buena Vista conference center, to which I'd invited the heads of the major corporations in Delaware, the heads of banks and the university, and so on. (I) talked to them about what we might do in Delaware, and how much it would cost to hire Warren King. . . . Then I said to all of these private leaders, "I would like for you to get behind this project, to put up the money to hire Warren King, and then make key people in your organization available for two to three months." (They would) take on an assignment in one of our areas, and study it in depth and make recommendations on what we should do to improve. (5M6)

They bought that . . . and assigned 52 people who worked on average about 10 weeks. They weren't just cast-offs from their company. They were key people; they had major responsibilities. These organizations relieved them of their current jobs to come and work as volunteers, and it was fantastic what they did. (5M6)

Out of that (study) came over 500 recommendations of what we could do. They were particularly critical of the commission form of government, showing the many inefficiencies that were involved. Of those 500 and some recommendations, we carried out during my term well over 300, about two-thirds . . . , and implemented a substantial number of others partially. We were working on 50-some more before the end of my term. Our financial people calculated that this effort was saving the state about \$11 million a year. For example, each of these 140-some agencies had their own staffs, their own cleaning operations, their own purchasing activities. (5M6)

We did in a major way what they recommended, and results at the end of my term indicated that we had saved the state over (11) million dollars a year. Now that's a hell of a lot of money when

you recognize the state's total budget was only 300 and some million dollars. (15M2)

And to illustrate the kind of things that were done, let's take automobiles, for example. These mini-commissions had approved employees' having state automobiles. They drove them for their own family pleasure, even (taking) family trips using State cars. They also approved other employees, who used their own cars, turning in an expense account. (15M2)

Well, we really cracked down. We got rid of all those cars, nearly all of them, and helped set up a motor pool. If a person wanted a State car, they had to sign out for it and bring it back at the end of that particular trip. The number of dollars spent for paying for mileage for driving . . . was knocked down from \$527,000 to only \$27,000. (It was) a remarkable change. Now, this caused a lot of irritation throughout the state government because they had (lost their) free transportation . . . . (15M2)

Another (problem) was in mailing. All these organizations were sending their communications back and forth through the mail. Again, we saved over half a million dollars by setting up what we called the Pony Express, where a State operated system (moved) packages of mail from one building to another. (Another area was) data processing. Each of these organizations had their own equipment; many had early computers – they didn't know how to use them, but they had them. We pulled them all together in a centralized data-processing system, which also saved a lot of money. (15M2)

*The Governor's Economy Committee study also reinforced Peterson's belief that the commission system of government was inherently inefficient.*

(In) each of the years before we established the cabinet form of government, the expenditures by the state increased appreciably

each year. And then, the one year we had the records (from operating fully under the cabinet system), we had a decrease for that one year in how much was expended. We really needed a much longer period to (assess) something like that, but that's all the data we had available. (15M2)

(So) not only was . . . the cabinet form of government a major contribution in providing services for the state and making people accountable for what was going on and so on, but it also was a major economic advance. (15M2)

### **Up Goes the Income Tax**

*But more efficient government was not enough. Peterson still had to raise taxes.*

I need to point out that while we made an increase in taxes, that was essential. I pushed to increase income taxes because I believed then, and I believe today, that that's the best way to get funding from the people – get it in proportion to their ability to pay. In the process, we took over the State government's responsibility for some functions previously covered by the counties and the City of Wilmington – such things as medical care for the indigent, some welfare costs, some court costs. (All of these had been) paid by the property tax, the most regressive tax we have. (15M3)

(It's) a particularly serious problem for retired people, who have their home and not much other income, and their taxes are related to the value of their home. That's unfair. But of course, when the State takes over that responsibility and lets the counties and the City lower their property taxes, the State's got a big problem, which puts more pressure on raising the income tax. (15M3)

*The other option was another broad-based tax, like a sales tax. A sales tax was one explosive issue that Peterson avoided, at the same time maintaining Delaware's competitive shopping advantage versus nearby Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. There were those in the business community – especially*



*big business – who argued that a sales tax would give Delaware a better balanced tax structure. Some also argued that Delaware's gross receipts tax was in effect a hidden sales tax.*

Well, I fought (a sales tax) from day one because, again, I thought that was a less desirable way to tax than the income tax. Now I know that many, many people – many conservative people, particularly – are very unhappy with the income tax. They didn't want to pay in proportion to their ability to pay. (15M3)

*During the 1970s, Delaware's income tax rate soared, and subsequent governors and legislators have been bringing it back down ever since.*

We increased it to the high rate of 18 percent, and then in the Tribbitt Administration, they increased it to 19.8 per cent which, admittedly, was high. The revenue study commission clearly demonstrated that the total taxes paid by taxpayers in Delaware were lower than that of the surrounding states. But it's certainly true that our income tax was high. (15M3)

In subsequent administrations, they markedly reduced the income tax. That's been due to a major extent to a lot of income we get from out-of-state people – like a fantastic growth in our franchise tax and this major, positive change carried out in the du Pont administration to entice banks to come to Delaware. For years, Delaware's income just kept growing. Every time the Economic Advisory Council upped the income (estimate), I wished (my Administration) could have had 5.2 million dollars out of that gravy train. (15M3)

### **Gross Receipts Tax**

*Among Peterson's controversial tax actions early in his tenure was adoption of a gross receipts tax, referred to by some Delawareans as a "hidden sales tax." It was one of the steps he took to address the economic problems he inherited.*

Recently, I'm talking about 1998 now, (someone said to me), "Governor, that damn gross receipts tax is the worst thing you ever did. I'll never forgive you for that." This was an outcome of many, many hours of meeting with the leaders of the legislature, with financial advisors, and with people on my own staff – to decide how we should get the increase in taxes that we needed. We agreed that to get some income by taxing the gross receipts of businesses made sense. I still think it does. People say that's a hidden sales tax. Yes, I guess every tax was a hidden sales tax because when a business has to pay a business income tax, they have to increase their sales or the price of their products in order to make a profit. But the people who complain about the gross-receipts sales tax should be thankful we don't have a sales tax. (15M5)

### **Capital Spending**

*In addition to operating budgets, there was also capital spending – and resulting debt.*

When the state wanted to build a new school or a new building, or pour more money into highways, it was called a Capital Account. They would borrow money and obviously have to pay interest on the bonds, and the interest they had to pay annually plus those payments that were made to reduce the principal – which we all called debt service – became quite substantial because of the extent to which people had been pushing for capital for projects. That debt service amounted to 23 percent of the total revenue of the state when I became governor. (15M4)

I set out to reduce that by two procedures. One was not to have as high a capital budget each year, as we would have liked to have had. And secondly to make sure we paid off some of the principal according to a plan. And the last year I was governor we had the (debt service) down to 17 percent. Now that's a substantial change, from 23 percent of your total revenue to 17 percent. (15M4)

## **Pension Funding**

*Peterson also undertook to put the state pension system on a more financially sound basis.*

The other example of how improperly Delaware government was operating was that we had, obviously, many people on pension – people who had retired over the years past. And there was almost no money in a trust fund to cover that. In fact, there was less than \$2 million, and over my four years here we increased that trust fund up to \$28 million. Now that's a lot of money which you've got to take out of our revenue to build up the trust fund, but it's an example of, should I say, economic responsibility. (15M2)

## **The Big Spender**

*Over the years, some of Peterson's critics have labeled him a big spender – a man of big ideas, big new programs and big spending to pay for it all.*

I think it's fair to say I had great ideas, and I was willing to invest major amounts in programs I thought were important. I had that reputation in the DuPont Company. But I'll stand on the record; it really paid off, what we did. And you can't do big things with pennies; you've got to do it with a significant amount of funds. And that goes for a governor or the head of a corporation or whoever you are, (even the) president of a university. But I think that the record will show that when I went to bat to invest in a major way, that I had a good program in which to invest. They didn't always work out successfully, but I think I had a pretty good batting average in what did work. So I don't worry about people saying that I thought in big terms and was willing to invest in a major way. No, I say that's a thing I'm proud of. (15M5)

In regard to this concern about my being a big spender, I think that it would be worth while to point out that the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce conducted a study of the growth of the state budget during the terms of the two previous governors – Governor Carvel's second term and Governor Terry's term – and

my term. And they did it in order to compare them on an equal basis, assuming no growth in population; assuming (that we) take into account the difference in inflation that was occurring at that time. And when they did so, they found that in the Carvel and Terry Administrations, the budget went up approximately 6 percent a year (while) in my term it went up 4 percent a year. (15M6)

One of the reasons that our growth was lower was because we did have a significant number of dollars available to spend because of that major economy drive that we had. (That) reduced expenditures . . . by (11) million dollars, which really meant we were able to use that money to put into different programs. As I pointed out earlier, a good share of that money went into education. (15M6)

### **The Bottom Line**

*Peterson entered office with a deficit. What was the State's financial condition when he left?*

I just noticed last night – in reading some of this background information for our meeting today – that we ended out my term in the black and had those many things I described a few minutes ago giving us a more solid financial situation. I know that Governor Tribbitt had a major problem because he went into a recession, and that was true all around the country. There was this major energy crisis where the Middle East oil suppliers had quadrupled the price of oil. That affects practically everything in the economy. (15M5)

There was tremendous inflation going on, which then comes back and, of course, hurts state commerce and city commerce and private businesses. So he had to operate during a time when we had those major national problems. What a contrast to what's going on right now with a very healthy economy. Even the Federal government (is) having a surplus. I think there's no doubt about it that we markedly improved the financial structure, the

financial health of the state, but (we) didn't make it immune to financial crisis. (15M5)

Let me add here that things we did in the legislature to strengthen our corporation law (and) franchise taxes . . . over the years contributed to a significant increase in franchise income. Unfortunately, during my term none of that showed up . . . . But once you had made the changes you had to go out and promote it and advertise and tell people, "Come on, incorporate here in Delaware. Here are the advantages for doing so." (15M6)

### **The Farmer's Bank**

*A major action during the Tribbitt Administration – anticipated during the Peterson Administration – was the sale of the Farmer's Bank.*

When we had this (economy) study by the business people, they questioned the merit of having a state-owned bank. I worried about that to a great extent. . . . (and) when Joe Cashman resigned, I said, "I'm going to get a banker to come in here to be Secretary of Finance." (I) managed to entice Bill Bradford (a vice president at Wilmington Trust) to come. (I) asked him to look into the Farmers' Bank. He came back and said, "This is something we've just got to get out of." And he said, "I'll have to find buyers." And he did have some people strongly interested in buying the Farmers' Bank. Then we had our financial problems, and we didn't . . . pursue that. I considered making that a high priority if I were re-elected – to go ahead and get the state out of that banking business. (15M6)

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### **Peterson's Bid for Reelection**

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*Besides major political events such as the franchise tax shortfall, Peterson had to deal with the ongoing political factors that influence any governor's success. Peterson, who was at the very*



Lillian, Russ and Elin Peterson together during the Governor's campaign for reelection.

*Photo courtesy of The News Journal Company.*

*Photographer Ron Dubick.*

*least a non-traditional politician, viewed the world differently than most occupants of that office. Did politics interfere with what he was trying to accomplish? Or did he enjoy gubernatorial politics?*

### **Peterson as Politician**

Well, it was frustrating, and I enjoyed it, both. I think it's important when people have had experiences like I've had . . . to talk about what happened (and) to emphasize that being involved in the political arena is extremely important. Certainly in our democracy, it's important that people do what they can to make our system work effectively. As people have pointed out, (there are) many, many things wrong with the democratic processes, but we haven't found anything that comes close to being as good as it is. (15M9)

I respected the job I had as governor and enjoyed it. But there's no doubt about it (that) very frustrating things go on, and one of them is (what they) call "playing politics," which used to irk me long before I became governor – when I saw people in the political world who were doing things to help people who shouldn't be helped in order to get their support when election time came around. I was determined I wasn't going to play politics, as that's called. (15M9)

In fact, I got told off many times by Republicans (saying) "Peterson, you're a lousy politician. If you don't start playing politics, you're never going to get reelected." And I would say, "Look, I didn't come down here to play politics or to get reelected. I came in to solve problems. And when you want me to put some incompetent person in a job, I'll be damned if I'm going to do that. Because we're here to solve problems, and I want to get the most competent people we can. And I want the best advice I can get of who is competent and who isn't competent." (15M9)

We even did such things as force three members of the magistrate system, who had IQs in the 80s to resign – imagine those people making decisions about whether our kids are going to go to jail and

so on. We forced some others out on the basis of their incompetence, which was never heard of before, but with the help of the Chief Justice, Justice Wolcott, we made that happen. But the political team didn't appreciate that. (15M9)

One thing that complicated my role was that a merit system had just been established in Governor Terry's term, (but) it wasn't implemented until I became governor. Which meant that all those people who had been appointed to jobs as political favors in many cases, very politically partisan people, were locked into other jobs. (15M9)

*Thus, Peterson had less ability than previous governors to fire incumbent state employees and replace them with his own selections. This added to his reputation of being a lousy politician. For his part, however, Peterson challenges that characterization.*

From my view (of) what is a politician, or who is a politician, I think I was a hell of a *good* politician. The prime objective should be getting things done. How could we possibly have got the cabinet form of government done (by playing politics)? Many people had tried to do that in the past and didn't get it done. You had to get many, many people to work together and to agree on it. We did that. What about the Coastal Zone Act, with tremendous opposition to what we were trying to do? We had to get many, many people to work together. We had to get the majority, obviously, of the Legislature to agree. We made that happen. (15M9)

There are many other things we've been talking about – about finances and changes in the financial structure of the state. That took a lot of us working together, not just one person. And to do things for African Americans – all the prejudice against them, the racial discrimination and so on. You don't make changes in those areas unless you've got a lot of support for that. That means you have to be a politician – somebody who can get others to work together to make these things happen. So, if you use that as a



definition of a politician, somebody who gets into the political arena to make things happen, then I was a damn good politician, I can say, immodestly at this juncture. (15M10)

I don't mean to say, (to) give you the impression that I think I was the only one who's done this. Many, many people in the political world . . . are there to get the job done. But the overwhelming force is to get reelected. It's the big disease of the process, in my view. It would be better if people got thrown out every four years or every two years and (we) got new people – because we have communities loaded with competent people, and . . . you don't have to be around for 20, 30, 40 years (to do a good job). (15M10)

**Surprise: An Advocate of Term Limits**

*Does that make Peterson a supporter of term limits, generally considered a conservative solution?*

Absolutely. I'm a very strong supporter of term limits. I learned, when I worked down in Washington, that it was standard practice for both the Republican leadership and the Democratic leadership to call together the newly elected members of Congress and tell them something like this: "If you think you came down here to solve problems, you're mistaken. You came down here to get reelected." Now with that approach, these political leaders can get people working on getting reelected and thereby increasing the political leader's power if they get more of their group into Washington. (15M10)

That statement makes me see red, almost, when I see them actually doing that. And then when I worked for the Congress as head of the Office of Technology Assessment, and got into many congressmen's and senators' offices, and saw what went on there, most of their activities dealt with communicating with constituents back home – to try to keep them as supporters to get reelected. It's a disease of the process. The news media adds to this by playing up the contest for reelection. In fact, the news media frequently analyzes every decision made by an elected official like

the president, or a governor or senator, (in terms of) what it means to the upcoming election, not what it means to the people or what it means to future generations. (15M10)

The political contest in getting more power for your party by getting reelected is bad, it's a disease. We need to de-emphasize that and ask politicians, "By the way, what have you done for the people?" (15M10)

*In conjunction with several other senior party leaders, Peterson deposed Republican State Chairman Clayton S. Harrison, Jr. – an effective traditional politician with roots in the City of Wilmington and ties downstate. In retrospect, was this a good thing to have done?*

I think it was a good thing to do from the standpoint of making what we wanted to (happen) more effectively. And that's tied into this very thing that we just got through discussing – that there are certain aspects of the political process really that interfere with your doing a good job, of solving problems for people. Clayt Harrison was the typical old politician and, from that standpoint, he did a good job. He was a little bit teed off with some of us who didn't give that emphasis to political leadership. From the standpoint of my getting reelected, no doubt (deposing him) hurt me. (15M11)

*Peterson's reluctance to "play politics" was a factor in his unsuccessful bid for reelection. But it is not something he wishes he did differently.*

I was just congenitally opposed to putting people into jobs who aren't as well qualified as some alternates we might have had. Or doing favors for people so that I would get reelected. Absolutely no. I would much rather lose the election than go down that road. (15M11)

## **A Divisive Primary**

*One very important factor in Peterson's 1972 loss was his divisive primary with Dave Buckson.*

Dave and I really were on opposite sides of most issues when I was active in politics in Delaware. Dave was a long-time politician when I first came into the business. He had been lieutenant governor (and) served as governor for 18 days. He had run as the Republican nominee for governor in 1964 and was beaten by Charles Terry, and he had ambitions to run again in 1968. So naturally, when I came along as an upstart, he wasn't very happy. (17M4)

(The primary in 1972) was very hard fought and bitter in many ways, and when you have a fight within your own party, it almost always is bitter. As the incumbent governor, it hurts in a way when many of the members of your own party don't want you and want to have an alternate, and when the people supporting the alternate candidate distort what you've been doing as a leader of that party. It really was the Republicans who defeated me for reelection. The Buckson campaign was the biggest (obstacle) we fought. There was a tremendous amount of publicity about deficiencies in the Peterson administration and, after I overwhelmingly won the primary election, many of those same people kept working against me. (15M11)

Dave Buckson said publicly that he was supporting me, but I never saw any evidence of that other than his stating it. I know that his followers down in Kent County, (his) close buddies, strongly worked against me in that reelection. Herman Brown was a leader in Kent County who also wanted to become governor. He declared that he was going to run for governor some day. He worked very hard against me. So I think that if we hadn't had that primary, no question about it, I would have won that reelection. (15M11)

## Self-Inflicted Wounds

*In one very direct and ironic sense, Peterson brought the primary on himself. For as noted earlier in this book, Peterson supported two key election law reforms that came back to haunt him. The first was a law creating the primary system.*

I was a prime person pushing to establish the primary approach, figuring that a political convention was the way, really, of railroading a political party leader into the job. I figured a talented opponent ought to have the opportunity to challenge him. And if he could get one-third of the delegates to a party convention (to support him), then he ought to (have the right to take the matter to a primary election). And that's what Dave Buckson did (to me). (And he got that right to a primary) by one vote – one (delegate) vote to spare. (15M12)

*Likewise, Peterson supported elimination of the Big Lever, which made it easier for voters to vote a straight party ticket.*

When I ran for reelection, President Nixon won overwhelmingly and, if we had had that Big Lever, I think some people would have pulled that Big Lever, and Cale Boggs and I (would have won). But I still think, in the overall view, that those were desirable things to do – get rid of the Big Lever and further the primary election. (15M12)

*Through the 1960s, Delaware statewide political campaigns were run largely from party headquarters – with the Republican State Committee purchasing media and allocating it among the candidates. The Peterson campaign of 1968, with its People for Peterson organization, began to loosen that tie between statewide candidate and state party organization. In 1972, the advent of primary elections and elimination of the Big Lever significantly accelerated the trend.*

*1972 was also the year in which Cale Boggs, among the state's all-time most beloved politicians, lost his U. S. Senate seat to a*



Five Republican heavyweights pose near Caesar Rodney's statue at the nation's Capitol in Statutory Hall in 1971. Left to right are Hal Haskell, Pete du Pont, Cale Boggs, Bill Roth and Russ Peterson.

*young Democrat named Joe Biden, who attracted large numbers of volunteers not previously involved in the party organization. In addition, Peterson's strong supporter, Hal Haskell, lost his bid for reelection as Mayor of Wilmington. Peterson does not think these other GOP losses affected his race.*

I think they were really independent battles. As I pointed out at length here, the various things I had done as governor had antagonized many Republicans and some Democrats too, but primarily my own party worked against me. And so people voted against me for what I had done rather than for my opponent, I think. In regards to Hal Haskell, (the fact that) he won as Mayor of Wilmington (in 1968) was a very unusual thing . . . because the city was so overwhelmingly Democratic. He did a good job, . . . but it would have been a miracle for him to win again in a heavily Democratic city. (15M12)

Cale (Boggs) was so popular in Delaware and had won so many elections before that. In his case, here was a young, very attractive opponent in Joe Biden. I think Joe sold himself to the people of Delaware. (He was a) very articulate, likeable person. Cale had been around a long time, and here was a big choice between the young competent person and an older person with a long track record. So I think each of those battles had different forces at work. (15M12)

### **In Hindsight, the Wrong Strategy**

*Peterson admits that he had alienated many voters. At the same time, he says that some non-Delawareans expressed surprise to him over the years that he failed to win reelection, given his record of accomplishment. In hindsight, he would have adopted a very different reelection strategy.*

This question about how could you have lost the election when the record was so strong in your favor, that was expressed by people in Washington who looked into my career up here. In fact, there were two people who had worked closely in John Kennedy's

campaign, one person who wrote speeches for him and traveled all over America when John Kennedy was campaigning. He was the person who said, "Boy, I wish I could have been running your campaign." (15M13)

Well, as I reflect on that, I think too that I could have won the election if I really had directed my campaign to those people who believed in what I was doing. And that meant toward a lot of Democrats and African Americans as well as moderate Republicans. What I did in that campaign (instead) was try to go out and explain to Republicans that my financial problem wasn't a serious problem, a very complicated thing to explain. Most of those people who were Republicans who were teed off at me didn't care whether that was a serious problem or not because they were already angry with me about my liberal views. (15M13)

One thing that hurt me personally was the fact that African Americans voted overwhelmingly against me. In my campaign, I didn't really go out to appeal to them for votes. My record was such that I certainly could have convinced them to get behind me. And so, if I were running that election today, I would come out and talk about the Coastal Zone Act, about what we've done to improve the government, and what we've done to help the disadvantaged, to do something to improve racial relations, do something to help the offenders and so on. (15M13)

And I would have presented my liberal philosophy with vision and conviction, and I think I would have had a hell of a lot more Democrats (than) did vote for me as it was. Maybe I would have given ammunition so that moderate Republicans could have supported me. I didn't do that and, although, as I've pointed out before, I didn't like losing the election at all; in the long term, in hindsight, I think it helped me in my overall career in getting involved in exciting and rewarding jobs. (15M13)

*Peterson is not one to mince words in describing his political philosophy. While few politicians today accept the label, he*



People for Peterson attracted large numbers of volunteer supporters to Peterson's two campaigns.



*proudly calls himself a liberal. And many years later, he took the formal step to become a Democrat.*

### **The 1972 Campaign**

*In any event, the mood of the 1972 reelection campaign, as Peterson recalls it, was quite different from that of 1968.*

We didn't have the enthusiasm in the second campaign that we had in the first campaign. There was a sort of gloom over the second campaign – with this competition within the party, . . . the long preparation for the primary, and the actual primary itself. And while the People for Peterson (organization) worked hard – and a lot of people worked in it – it was not the enthusiastic organization we had the first time I ran. (16M1)

*In discussing his 1968 campaign, Peterson noted that few people paid much attention to him until he was on television. It was different in 1972.*

In 1972, there were . . . people around who were outraged by things I had done as governor and who would really tell me off on the campaign trail. That was not true four years earlier, (when) I didn't have a record (as governor). But let me hasten to add (that a) large number of people were (also) excited and enthusiastic about what I had done. One thing for sure: In 1972, practically everybody in the state knew who I was – in contrast to 1968 when, according to our polls, only 9 percent of the people knew who I was when I started running. (17M3)

*Perhaps surprisingly, most of Peterson's major financial contributors stuck by him in 1972.*

They absolutely did. In fact, . . . it's dangerous to go labeling things like "business did this and Republicans did this" and so on because there's such a tremendous variation in each of these groups of people. And as I pointed out earlier, I had these very

wealthy Republicans, many (of them) members of the du Pont family, who made big contributions to my campaigns or went out and raised (large) financial amounts. And all of those people did exactly the same thing for my reelection (as they did in 1968), and so to say that business leaders were opposed in the second election and not in the first is just wrong. (16M1)

Many, many DuPont Company (employees) worked hard for me and gave money for (the campaign), in spite of the fact that the DuPont Company was officially strongly opposed to what I had done in the Coastal Zone Act. (And) John Rollins, who had been a strong supporter of mine, (was) still a strong supporter in the second campaign. I had enough money in both campaigns, obviously enough to win in the first campaign, and I think I had enough to win in the second if I'd run that campaign in the way I just discussed. (16M1)

*Many candidates, especially those as positive as Peterson, often convince themselves that they will win, no matter what the polls may say. Peterson was more realistic.*

No, I expected to lose. Our own polls . . . showed that I was in trouble. (And) I could tell from my own campaigning that I was in trouble. When you have key people like the Lieutenant Governor of Delaware, Gene Bookhammer, who had that job because I made it happen, when he would go down to a TV station in Salisbury – a TV station which was the main station for people in southern Delaware – and tell the people that it didn't make any difference which of the candidates – Sherman Tribbitt or Russ Peterson – got elected, (that) he could work with either of us, that wasn't very helpful. (16M2)

### **Lieutenant Governor Bookhammer**

*In Delaware, governors and lieutenant governors are elected separately. Even when a gubernatorial candidate chooses a running mate, whom the convention ratifies, their two fortunes are not necessarily intertwined, and their relationships can be rocky.*

Gene Bookhammer and I became good friends. He was a warm, likeable person who had been involved in the political arena long before I came in. When I was running for governor, I got to know him much better, and some of my good friends in New Castle County, like Hal Haskell, had been good friends of Bookhammer's. He had helped to get us together quite frequently. After we were elected, Gene helped persuade other members of the legislature to go along with our programs. He was well liked among legislators, particularly among those from down state. (17M3)

(Bookhammer's position in the 1972 campaign) obviously threw a little cold water on our relationship, but that's water over the dam now, and I believe today (that we) have a good feeling towards each other. (17M3)

*Peterson's political problems were especially acute in lower Delaware.*

In the first election, I won in Sussex and I got clobbered in Kent County. In the second election, I got clobbered in both counties. And again, I've got to be careful to emphasize – in the Rehoboth area, I won, both times. Within the rest of Sussex County, the second time I lost. And I never did make much headway in Kent County, the first one or the second one. (16M2)

I was told when I first became governor, told by a Kent County friend that, "You'd better start playing more politics down here in Kent County. This is quite a different world than you're used to living in." And they said that Charles Terry used to go have breakfast with so many of his buddies down there and go out and play golf with them and go out duck hunting and, "You don't do any of that stuff." I said, "Well, it isn't likely that I am (going to do that) either because I am so dedicated to putting my time into trying to get some of these problems solved I don't have any time left to do that." (16M2)

I recognized from day one that I wasn't the person who was going to spend a lot of time on these activities, trying to cater to my friends at the golf course or at cocktail parties or at breakfast. And I said, "I know I'm in trouble." And in fact, when friends would come to me and say, "Hey, how about doing this specific thing for a person to help you get reelected?" I'd say, "Oh no, I'm not going to do that just because it might help me to get reelected." (16M2)

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## The First Lady

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*Like other Delaware First Ladies, Lillian Peterson played a key role in the Administration.*

She was a very close partner for many, many years. We had a lot of difficult things we went through – health problems, financial problems in starting out from scratch with nothing. (It was a) wonderful relationship as husband and wife partners. Couldn't ask for any better. And Lillian was deeply concerned about disadvantaged people and, well before I became governor, she was involved with helping kids down at Governor Bacon Center, bringing kids home and so on. She was a strong supporter of libraries. (She) always believed in getting kids to read, and adults to read too, (which) was extremely important to the health of a community. (16M6)

And she continued to push those things when she was the First Lady. She also took on a job of trying to get some more historical (material) into The Governor's House in Dover. We came in, and there were almost no books there. She set out to collect books about Delaware and get them into the house. She was a voracious reader all her life – read many, many times what I have read – and she was anxious to encourage other people to do that too. When it came to political campaigning, I was amazed at what she did. She



Lillian (left) was Russ's partner for 57 years until her death in 1994.

*Photo courtesy of The News Journal Company.*

*Photographer Otto Dekom.*

had never done any of that speaking out in public until I ran for governor and became governor. (16M6)

*Peterson speaks proudly about Lillian's prowess on the campaign trail.*

During my campaign for reelection, I know on some days she went to six coffees. Now that's quite a job. . . . Some of my friends said, "You ought to send her. She does a lot better job than you do explaining this problem." (16M7)

. . . she took these things very seriously, too. She was hurt when I lost the bid for reelection, not only because she was a key member of our team and so on but she felt for me. She really thought that I had done a good job. She loved her husband, who was being beaten on by people and lost the election, and so that bothered her for awhile. But immediately, she was involved with me in our next activities. She had a positive outlook all her life, too. And, of course, that makes it easier to take on difficult tasks, when your closest partner shares it with you and also thinks positively about it. (16M7)

*Lillian died in 1994, after 57 years of marriage.*

(When she died) I became quite depressed. I never had experienced that before in my life. But fortunately, I met a woman, June Jenkins, on one of the rare occasions I went to church. . . . she came over to me and told me she was sorry about Lillian dying. I then found out that she had lost her husband just about four months before Lillian died and found out from friends that we had much in common. I finally asked her to go out for dinner with me. And this, over the months, led to our falling in love, and becoming married. And that solved our problems. She was very depressed too about losing her husband. But we've been married now for three years, (and) we have a fantastic relationship. (1M9)

I must say that one has to be very lucky to have, in one lifetime, found two wonderful people to be one's wife. She shares my concern about the world, she's very deeply committed to the environment. She was one of the founders of the Delaware Nature Society. She worked in low-income neighborhoods for years. She had gone to the same Unitarian Church I had, and she worked in my two political campaigns although I never met her until that day she came up to me in the church . . . (1M9)

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## Reflections

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*This chapter captures Peterson's reflections on a variety of topics, starting with the General Assembly and the importance of Republican control.*

### **Relations with the General Assembly**

. . . we never would have accomplished what we did if we didn't have the Governor's Office and the Senate and House – all three of those in Republican hands. It's just one of the diseases of the system that, whether Republicans or Democrats are in the Governor's Office, (and) if the others, (the) Senate or the House, are in the opposite party, there are going to be people that deliberately try to defeat the Governor. It goes on in Washington, it goes on wherever you are. And so to have all three of those legs of the stool, so to speak, in one party is very important to making things happen. (16M2)

Fortunately, there are times when some of the issues are so strong and overwhelming, (and) people are so strongly behind (an objective) that . . . all three of those groups (can get together), in spite of the fact that (they are controlled by different parties and would) like to be tearing each other down. One of the evils of politics is that so many people compete on the basis of destroying

the opponent, and that's gotten to be worse and worse. (It was) especially horrendous in 1998 in our country. And that's one reason for having these opportunities for replacing people in office – through term limits, for example. (16M2)

*Peterson's memories of his dealings with the General Assembly are fairly positive, at least for most of his term.*

I found, at least during the first three years, (that) it was particularly enjoyable (although) we had many disagreements. I'd invite people to come over and have lunch in The Governor's House, and we had many meetings up at Buena Vista, too. I found it rewarding and exciting and certainly helpful. But when we got down to the challenge for reelection, and (there was) the split within my own Republican ranks, then it became quite a different situation. People who I thought were very close friends of mine turned out not to be close friends of mine. (16M3)

But as a student of the overall democratic process in our country I think that each person in the business would have to say the same thing – that there are times when you have real warm working relationships with your colleagues and there are other times when you don't. Now let me hasten to add that I had a very warm relationship with the majority of Republicans in the legislature all the way through my four years. (16M3)

And as I related in detail in a discussion about the Coastal Zone Act, where we just barely (got) that bill through by one vote in each House (and there was) tremendous community-wide opposition to it from powerful forces, and . . . Democratic members of the legislature (were) strongly fighting me, we still made it happen because of a big, major commitment by Republican leadership, (and) the majority of the Republican team were with us. So, it's important to add that footnote . . . (16M3)

I don't want to go through the total list of the members of the legislature, all of whom at some time or other were helpful. The



majority obviously *had* to be helpful (for) all of the projects we talked about (to become law). But I would like to mention some of the leaders like Reynolds duPont, who was (Senate) president pro tem, and Frank Grier, who was majority leader of the Senate. They were particularly dedicated and involved, and they would work incessantly and tenaciously to get many of these things through the legislature. (17M6)

Also, Mike Castle – who later became governor and is now our congressman – was a state senator when I was governor. He was a very valuable asset. Over in the house, the two speakers who were there when I was (governor) were very committed and deeply involved – George Hering and Bill Frederick. One of the Democrats with whom I worked frequently was the only African American in the Senate, Herman Holloway. I found him very cooperative. (17M6)

### **A Constitutional Disappointment**

*One disappointment that Peterson recalls involved an unsuccessful attempt to amend the state Constitution.*

. . . at one time (we) made a list of 50-some things that we wanted to get done down there. We got all of them done except one. And that one was to get the Constitution changed. Before I became governor, a Constitutional Revision Commission had been established, headed by former Governor Carvel. And as a citizen activist, I followed that and was very supportive of what they wanted to accomplish. Then (I had) the opportunity, when I became governor, of making that happen. And we Republicans got that thing passed through the legislature. (16M3)

But the Constitution required that, in order for a revision to occur, it had to be approved by . . . two consecutive sessions. (And there) had to be an election between the two votes so the people of Delaware would be informed that (whomever they vote) for in this election, those people can go in there and change the Constitution. And the law also required that the Secretary of State had to notify

the people . . . in statewide publications a certain number of days ahead that the election would be electing people who would be voting on a Constitutional revision. (16M3)

Well, our Secretary of State didn't do that on schedule, and the net result was that, although we had the overwhelming support to vote the second time, . . . it was thrown out because of that technicality. That was a big disappointment. (And) that Constitutional revision never occurred in the intervening decades since then. So we missed that opportunity, and I know that Governor Carvel was very disappointed about that because he had chaired that important revision commission. (16M4)

And of course, if you ask if there's anything else I was disappointed about, I was disappointed about not getting reelected. (16M4)

### **Stick-to-it-iveness**

*The author recalled a case in which the State Senate rejected one or two of Peterson's nominations. Rather than accepting defeat, as others might have done, Peterson fought back. He resubmitted the names that very afternoon and got them confirmed the same day. It's an example of his tenacity or what some might call stubbornness. He prefers the label "stick-to-it-iveness."*

Well, I have been credited with having that characteristic ever since I was a kid. And as I look back on what I've done over the years, if I hadn't had that stick-to-it-iveness, (or) perseverance, I wouldn't have gotten much done. There are just so many obstacles for getting (things) done and so many things that don't get accomplished well the first time. As I talk to students today, I've emphasized that (it is important) to think big and (encouraged them) to dream about making their dreams come true. And in trying to make them come true, you have to persevere, you have to stick to it – don't just give up because somebody tells you they don't like it or they object to it. (16M4)

And I've been told I was stubborn repeatedly because of that, but I think it's an important trait. I would like to promote that in everybody. Obviously, there comes a time when you can't go on forever doing this; you have to give in eventually and come back and fight another day. And as I've said many times, I think it's better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. In fact, a good share of the fun comes in the trying. And if you do eventually fail, you're going to go back and try something else. (16M4)

*In fact, Peterson sometimes went beyond tenacity, or even stubbornness, and took positions that many people considered unreasonable. Some called him a zealot. He seemed to find merit in that approach – part of the process of achieving success.*

That's absolutely true. And my research background has a lot to do with my attitude here because in research you're always working with unknowns. And you come up with what we call theories or your idea of what might be true. And then you have to run a bunch of experiments and you find out, most of the time, it's not true. And you don't go cry about it; you just know that's a fact of life so now you try another theory. (16M5)

Well, that same kind of thing happens in the political arena (and the) social arena. Sometimes, when you know you've done your homework and you've worked very hard at something and come up with a good idea, it gives you more confidence to push it, in spite of the fact that most people don't think, initially, much of it. Just keep trying again, and you find that these people now have bought it and you also find sometimes that you're wrong. And you ought to be smart enough to recognize that and quit and go try something else at that time. (16M5)

But if you really are convinced that you're right, don't give up, don't give up. Just keep trying to make it happen. And the story that you just told (about the Senate confirmation) kind of makes me smile . . . . (16M5)

*Peterson then recalled another situation, previously noted in the section on criminal justice.*

I remember another case when I got the message from the House of Representatives (that they were) going to vote overwhelmingly against the anti-debtors prison bill that we put in, and I almost demanded that I be given permission to go down on the floor. And that wasn't very wise politically, because the House of Representatives and the Senate don't particularly appreciate a Governor coming down into their domain and speaking out. But they also respect that office (and they gave me permission to speak). I told them they were being negligent, they weren't doing what they said they were doing in their political campaigns and doing something about the crime problem. I (went) back up to my office, and they voted it through. (16M5)

So yes, absolutely, you have to try and try again. (16M5)

### **The Anti-Pol**

*Peterson also reiterated his antipathy to political deals.*

I also remember one senator coming to my office one time and wanting to promise me a vote on an issue if I would promise his son a job. I told him to get the hell out of my office, actually went to the door and gently pushed him out the door, 'cause I was damned if I was going to be a party to that. (16M5)

You know, that reputation for my behaving that way got around and the net result was I rarely got such demands – although I heard that many other governors had received many such requests. And by the way, in regard to the funding which we talked about before, the fundraising, in spite of the large amounts of money that some wealthy people raised for my campaign, not once – not once – did any one of them ever come to me and say, “Governor, I want you to do this for me.” I was really pleased and proud to find that out. I had many other people come to me and threaten me if I didn't get

them a license for their alcoholic beverage institution, what they were going to do to me in the election, and so on. (16M5)

### **Republican Turned Democrat**

*Peterson began as a Democrat, became a Republican, then switched back to the Democratic Party.*

I started out voting in 1940, and I voted for Roosevelt. In 1944, I again voted for Roosevelt. (But while) I was living in Arden, Al Smith, who was very much involved in the Republican Party, and Clarice Heckert, the wife of my boss, Windy Heckert, who was also active in the Republican Party, asked me to do some blocking for the party in Arden, which I did. I became increasingly interested in what the Republicans were doing, and in fact, I voted for (Tom) Dewey on the Republican ticket in 1948 – in spite of the fact that Dewey was defeated by Harry Truman, a person I now admire very much. (17M2)

I became increasingly involved with the Republican Party and was very proud of that, working on a number of assignments (and later) becoming a chairman of the Finance Committee – and, of course, then becoming governor of the state. I was very proud of that. I think we had a good organization and a lot of good people involved in the key operations of the party. (17M2)

But over the years, as I got more and more involved on the national and international scene and got to know much more about what was going on in Washington, I became increasingly concerned about a number of Republicans in the Congress – along with some Democrats too – who were extreme right-wingers. (They) were very much opposed to the things I was working on, like protecting the environment, furthering family planning, strengthening the United Nations (and) extending further foreign aid. (17M2)

I didn't worry very much about them at the time because they were in a minority position. But when the Republicans took control of

the Congress in the 1994 election, those same people now became chairmen of committees – the very committees dealing with issues about which I had been involved. In 1996, those same people had a tremendous impact on what happened at the Republican convention, which led to a platform which was outrageous from my standpoint. (17M2)

I decided it was a time for me to change. I was then 80 years old, and I figured I wasn't going to live long enough to do what I had hoped to do in earlier years, (which) was to move the Republican Party back to the center. The Republican Party kept going farther and farther to the right, and (since) I knew that the Democratic leaders really shared my conviction about these four issues, I decided to help them. And so in October of '96, just before the election, I officially became a Democrat. (17M2)

### **The Media**

*Peterson is generally philosophical when recalling the media coverage of his term as governor.*

I had wonderful relations with the News Journal papers when I was governor. We then had the *Wilmington Morning News* and the *Evening Journal*, both of which strongly supported me well before I became governor. We were always on the same wave length when I was working on such things as trying to reform the correctional system of Delaware, when I was working with the Greater Wilmington Development Council. And throughout my term as governor, they were supportive of most of the things that we were doing. They strongly supported my election in the first place and supported me in my bid for reelection in 1972. (17M4)

The *Delaware State News*, on the other hand, was more oriented towards the people of Kent and Sussex counties. They catered to them, and they had a reputation of not being very happy with Republicans, or with the people who came from upstate, or who came from the DuPont Company. And so they weren't very supportive of me when I was running for governor or during the

time I was governor. I could almost count on the *Delaware State News*, editorially at least, to look unfavorably at initiatives which I launched in the governor's office. (17M4)

One thing they did support, especially after the fact, was the Delaware Coastal Zone Act. In the intervening years, the *Delaware State News* in retrospect has said some good things about that guy Peterson. I wish I could have had a few of those back then – 1969 to 1973. (17M4)

### **Peterson's Staff**

*Peterson asked for the opportunity to speak about his staff.*

A governor is highly dependent upon a good staff, and when a governor is full of energy like I was at that time . . . , the staff has to be very active and hard working. I had a terrific staff that really produced results, and I am deeply indebted to them – as is the State of Delaware. (17M1)

When I started, Chris Perry was my chief of staff – officially “executive assistant to the governor.” He did a tremendous thing in organizing and meeting our objectives. I doubt there ever was a two-year period in any state's history where as much got done as (it) did in those two years of 1969 and 1970 when Chris was running the staff. I was very disappointed when he decided to leave at the end of those first two years. I always figured that if he had stuck with it another two years, we would have had an even better record in that period. (17M1)

Jerry Sapienza was my press secretary a year before I became governor. He worked in the governor's office first as press secretary and later as the executive assistant. He (was) a tremendous asset, worked very, very hard. He was a good writer. He helped me with so many things, (and) went with me on many occasions. It was a sad day when, as a very young man, Jerry died from stomach cancer. (17M1)

*Sid Shaw served as executive assistant between Perry and Sapienza. When Sapienza became executive assistant James Moore became press secretary.*

Arva Jackson was a young woman who functioned as (my) special assistant for human affairs. She was another important asset who helped us work very effectively with the City of Wilmington on urban affairs problems. Dan Enterline, who was an administrative assistant, had the key job of handling a lot of political factors and worrying with me about how to fill the many jobs that had to be filled in the governor's office. He was an important asset. (17M1)

Dee Lafferty, a young woman who came in as an intern, then became an assistant to the governor, (also) made many things happen. Among her contributions was putting together a record of all the things we had (done) in the four years of my governorship. Mary Joy Breton . . . worked for me for most of those four years and then (became) my secretary in . . . other organizations later on. She was extremely important (in having) an efficient office that handled a tremendous amount of work. And Evelyn Kneisley, who functioned as a scheduling assistant, also kept us lined up for the many assignments which we had to carry out around the state. She was a pleasant and very effective member of the team. (17M1)

Of course, we had legal counsel – first Peter Stone, then Jerry Herlily, and then Sandy Campbell – and all of them did a good job. Sandy Campbell wrote the Coastal Zone Act, which held up through repeated challenges in the courts, showing that he had done a good job in putting that together. Then I had state policemen who drove me around and provided security. Initially, the head of that (unit) was Bill Denney, a lieutenant in the state police, and subsequently Dan Simpson took over. Bill later became the second ranking member in the state police (while) Dan Simpson became the superintendent of the state police. (17M1)

Among the other people who worked for me in the governor's office was Tom Evans. I had appointed him head of the Economic



Development Office. Tom was very interested also in environmental matters. I put him on the task force that studied the Coastal Zone. He left to become head of the National Republican Party, a job I helped him get. Later in life, he became a congressman and established quite a record as a strong environmentalist. He played an important role in such important (matters) as getting over 100 million acres of Alaskan land set aside in national parks and refuges. He also (played) a key role in getting the law passed which protected barrier islands from undesirable development. I like to take credit for having helped turn him on to this environmental area. (17M1)

### **Being Governor**

*Like other Delaware governors, Peterson greatly enjoyed the job.*

I enjoyed it very much, except during that primary battle. I liked working with people. It's a fantastic opportunity to get to know your state. You get invited to nearly every organization's holiday. I was Unitarian but, on two occasions, I had dinner with a Catholic bishop at his home. I've been in the reform and conservative and orthodox synagogues. I've been down dancing the polka in Polish districts on many occasions, in spite of the fact they voted overwhelmingly against me. (16M6)

I would give sermons in churches which were predominantly, if not overwhelmingly, African American . . . . I had great positive relationships with unions, labor unions – the UAW for example, (a) particularly warm relationship. And (I had) relationships with some other unions, too. (16M6)

It's an education which otherwise, I don't know how you could get. And you wouldn't be invited to all those places if you were just John Q. Citizen – even though you're interested in them you wouldn't have that opportunity. I have to admit it was a little frightening almost, at first, when you became governor, to walk into a meeting and everybody stood up. I was just down to the Delaware Day annual celebration at Buena Vista, a black tie dinner

which is held every year – maybe 70-80 people there. (They are) mostly people now involved in state government, a few of us old-timers included. (16M6)

And when Governor Carper was introduced, we all stood up, and when he finished a very moving talk he gave, we all stood up again. And I still get goose pimples when I'm participating in the audience, participating in that. So (there were) those many wonderful forces at work, and it makes you ever more proud in your state when you participate in these things. I've been talking here today about some of the negatives, and I don't want that to mislead anybody into thinking that I didn't overwhelmingly appreciate that job and also respect our State of Delaware. I am very, very proud to have been a former governor and (to be) a current citizen of Delaware (16M6)

### **Documenting the Administration's Record**

*Fortunately, Peterson did not leave office without recording his Administration's accomplishments.*

When I lost the bid for reelection, my whole staff and I were down. We thought we had done a good job, we knew we had worked very, very hard, and thus (we) were upset that we hadn't won the people's support. But I called my group together and said, "Let's take advantage of these last 11 weeks to do all we can to further the programs which we had started and to leave them in good shape so that our successors can continue to keep them going. And also, let's make a report of what progress we've made during the last four years." (9M1)

And out of that came a document which should be of great interest to historians who are interested in writing or thinking about what we did in this term. It's a report that's called, "A Report of Progress of the Peterson Administration, 1969-1973." And I know there is a copy of that in the Delaware Historical Society Library, and I'm almost certain that there would be one or more copies in the Archives. I used to have a large number of those that I've

given away over the years to reporters and other people who came around to ask about a specific item. I think it's worthwhile also for those people who are on my team to go back occasionally and look at that. I think it will help to charge their batteries. (9M1)

## **Second Term Thoughts**

*What does Peterson think he might have accomplished in a second term as governor?*

Well, I think the second term might have been different in this respect – that we just had a short interval to try to get many programs started. We just had a short interval of about half my term for dealing with the cabinet form of government, to get that new instrument tuned and well focused. And a lot of programs which we started were stopped (in the next administration). And that was my biggest disappointment, not having the opportunity to really demonstrate that some of these things that we started were very important and could have made a bigger impact on our state. (16M7)

I have been talking for years, (starting) back when I ran for governor the first time, about making Delaware a Model State. We're a small state but we have, essentially, all the same problems of a big state. And if we really did this right, we could demonstrate how problems could be solved, and then (the solutions) could be replicated on a national scale. (16M8)

Well, to carry out many of these programs (required) more money than we had in Delaware. So I convinced Elliot Richardson that the Federal Government could run experiments in Delaware. They could put up money to carry out a program in Delaware, and if it failed, they hadn't lost very much. If it succeeded, then they could move with conviction to replicate it around the country. He believed that. (But) before we could (do) that I lost my bid for reelection and Elliot Richardson got moved to different places in (government). In fact, he moved out of the government when the big Saturday Night Massacre came, when he resigned rather than

try to fire Archibald Cox as President Nixon ordered him to do. (16M8)

I think that if I had been reelected, I certainly would have tried to get Elliot's successor in Washington to go along with this. I thought from a developer's standpoint – I was a research and development guy – (that) the message, the idea that we had to sell was a pretty darn good one. And that most people that have the key responsibility for HEW would have gone along with it. (16M8)

The same thing was true in the crime reduction area. We had a lot of good things started in Delaware, most of (which) came to a halt after I got out of office. And I had a great relationship with the Justice Department in Washington because they had signed me up to head the National Commission on Criminal Justice Standards, and Goals. We could have got Federal support to (further crime reduction) in Delaware. (16M8)

So those are the things (that constitute) my big disappointment. (16M8)

*Peterson's disappointment time was short-lived.*

But it only lasted a short interval because the day that Sherman Tribbitt was sworn in, I left that ceremony, drove up to New York, (and) went to work for Nelson Rockefeller. The next morning I was working in an office in Rockefeller Center on exciting projects for the National Commission (on Critical Choices for America). So I didn't have much time to worry about what I would have done if I had won the reelection. (16M8)

## **An Epitaph**

*Asked to write his epitaph as governor, Peterson offers this simple statement:*

“He tried to do what was right. He believed in sticking to some principles he strongly believed in. He succeeded in some cases and failed in others.” (16M8)



### SECTION THREE: AN ACTIVE FORMER GOVERNOR

*Rather than being the capstone of his career, Peterson's term as governor was the springboard to a series of exciting new experiences on the national and even international stage. He approached each of these new opportunities with his usual energy and determination.*

*When Peterson left the DuPont Company to run for Governor, he made it clear to the community that he would not return there – believing that any other decision would create a potential or perceived conflict. Of course, he and DuPont had been at loggerheads over the coastal zone, and such a return would have been unlikely in any event.*

*For two decades after leaving the Governor's Office, Peterson held a succession of jobs in the public and not-for-profit sectors – all of them located outside Delaware and all of them focused on large-scale, global problems. But the question comes to mind, did he consider remaining in Delaware? And again seeking elective office?*

Nobody in Delaware offered me a job. At the time, I wasn't looking for a job in Delaware because I had all these alternatives. In fact, the alternatives . . . started coming to me almost immediately after I lost my bid for reelection. (6M3)

I thought about running, maybe running again. But I never ever got to the point where I took it seriously. I used to get letters from people in Delaware who encouraged me to run for governor again, encouraged me to run for the U.S. Senate. Oh, I had several groups in the country who wanted me to run for the Presidency. In fact, there was a group of men in Marin County out in California, very wealthy individuals, who were very serious about it. (6M3)

(That happened) in the mid-1970s, when I was working in environmental quality, and I got known nationally. Later, I was talking all over the country and people got to know about what I had done on the Coastal Zone Act in Delaware. . . . There were some people in Washington who also talked to me about that. I never thought there was much potential in going down that road, but the people out in Marin County . . . pursued that for several years. They considered the philosophy that I was preaching around the country would be a very attractive alternative to that which the Republican leadership was preaching. These people were moderate Republicans, like I was, and so they were more likely to be interested in a character like me than somebody like Goldwater or Reagan. (6M3)

*Throughout his post-gubernatorial career, and since, Peterson has maintained Delaware as his legal residence.*

I always felt deeply obligated and committed to Delaware. I'd had these wonderful experiences here, first with my 26 years with the DuPont Company and then as governor. My wife Lillian and I decided we were going to maintain our ties to Delaware so we always maintained a residence here, and for all the years when we lived in Washington and in New York City, we paid Delaware income tax. That really was a penalty to us, (but) we felt good about (it) because we felt that it showed our commitment to the place to which we were indebted and which we loved. So I think I can say (that) I've been a Delaware resident ever since I moved here from college back in 1942. (17M4)

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### **A Series of New Big Jobs**

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*Upon leaving the Governor's post, Peterson had a number of opportunities from which to choose, including the top job at the Federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The Republican Governors voted unanimously to ask President Nixon*

*to name Peterson head of the Environmental Protection Agency, but the current head decided to stay on. There was also talk about several Cabinet jobs, and Delaware's two U.S. Senators (Williams and Boggs) asked President Nixon to appoint Peterson Ambassador to Sweden, which the President said he would do. Peterson was about ready to accept the Presidency of the University of Connecticut when Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York called.*

### **Commission for Critical Choices**

I went up to New York, and (Rockefeller) told me how he was going to establish this big commission – which subsequently we called the Commission on Critical Choices for America – and he said, “Well, you head it.” Well, I knew I wasn’t going to head it. He was going to be the Chairman and I was going to be the Vice-Chairman of it. He called me Chairman of the Executive Committee, when we didn’t have an executive committee. (6M2)

Anyway, I had become quite determined that I was going to get deeply involved in the environmental movement on a national scene. And I thought of the several opportunities I had, the one most likely to lead to that goal would be working with Nelson Rockefeller – studying all of the big issues, global issues. He pointed out to me this was a study like Henry Kissinger had done with him some years earlier, and he said to me, “Look what happened to Kissinger.” (6M2)

*Peterson began work for Rockefeller the day after leaving office. He and Lillian lived on the Rockefeller Estate at Pocantico Hills, with a car and driver to shuttle him back and forth to his office at New York City's Rockefeller Center.*

Nelson Rockefeller and his wife Happy were very, very good to Lillian and me. We spent many, many meals with them. I would travel with Nelson a lot, go over to Albany with him, and had a very talented group of people working with me, one of whom was Nancy McGinness, who subsequently became Henry Kissinger's



wife. We would hold meetings at Pocantico Hills on weekends, with people from all over America – leading Americans. I would call them up and say, “Nelson Rockefeller wants to have a meeting next Saturday at Pocantico Hills on this subject and would like to have you come.” And almost invariably, they’d come, from California and all over, at their own expense . . . . (6M4)

And we talked about critical issues of the world, and we organized a whole bunch of committees on different issues. And many nights Lillian and I would stay over at the Rockefellers after dinner and sometimes ’till 2 or 3 in the morning – just the four of us there talking, sometimes about Nelson running for the presidency, which he was still considering very seriously. So it was an exciting time, and I got to admire Nelson Rockefeller very much. In my view, he was probably the most qualified person in the country to become President. And he became a victim of the all-out attack by the western conservative Republicans (who tried) to picture him as a wild liberal, and he was far from that. (6M4)

### **Council on Environmental Quality**

*It wasn’t long before Peterson learned of another interesting job opportunity, this one focused totally on the environment. Russell Train, the first Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, was leaving that job. Peterson got Rockefeller to help him land the position. He eventually got the job but, as noted in an earlier chapter of this book, he had to counter opposition from the oil industry to be nominated and confirmed by the Senate.*

*In this position, Peterson reported to President Nixon, who remained in office only a few months after Peterson arrived, and then President Ford.*



Peterson served under President Gerald Ford after Richard Nixon left office.

My assignment was to further the National Environmental Policy Act, spelled out by that statute. (The idea) was to further governmental programs which would permit human beings to live in harmony with the environment – more specifically, to do such things as advance the environmental impact statement process. This was spelled out in the National Environmental Policy Act, which required that all branches of the executive would have to prepare such a statement before they could undertake any new action. (7M1)

The impact statement would have to describe what effects their project would have on the environment and also describe alternative ways they might carry out the project which might have less impact on the environment. Now (meeting this requirement) was pretty time-consuming . . . (and) the (Cabinet) departments, who were busy on many projects, didn't like taking on something new like this, which they didn't really believe in anyway. They weren't going to carry it out. They threw up all kinds of obstacles and publicly belittled it, so it was a difficult job to get them to do it. (7M1)

*Peterson, of course, was determined that the departments would comply fully with this new statutory requirement. He was not interested in lip service.*

I spent many, many hours with members of the Cabinet individually, trying to convince them how important this job was. Initially, they would turn out impact statements that were very voluminous, prepared by their lawyers to cover every conceivable item that their project might impact on and, in one case, the Department of the Interior produced a 54-pound impact statement and they gave that a lot of publicity. I went to see (Cabinet) Secretary Tom Kleppe, Secretary of the Interior. He had three of his lawyers come in each carrying a number of big documents that they piled on a scale on a desk and sure enough, they weighed 54 pounds. (7M2)

I said to the Secretary, if my people came to me with (a statement like this one), I would tell them to get the hell out of here and go back and write up what they were supposed to do under the act, which was to consider what their actions were going to do to the environment and how they were going to carry them out in a way that would have less of an impact. They tried to explain what they were doing, but it wasn't very effective on me. (7M2)

In any event, Kleppe made them redo that impact statement. (7M3)

*Peterson enjoyed the job at CEQ.*

Fortunately, during that period, the majority of Congress strongly supported environmental issues. I had a terrific staff, people who were on the average about half my age. They and I were deeply committed to protect the environment. They knew how to operate on the Washington scene. They knew many staff people up on the Hill in the Senate and the House, and they knew staff people in the executive branch, and together we were able to plan a strategy which led us to get our message across and get people to change some of the things they were doing. (7M4)

We had good impact in doing the job we were called to do. I was particularly pleased that when I resigned, during the very end of President Ford's term, he thanked me for the job I had done in CEQ . . . in spite of considerable opposition from people . . . in his own administration. (7M5)

### **New Directions**

*Robert McNamara, then head of the World Bank, recruited Peterson to head New Directions, a new lobbying group patterned after Common Cause.*

I found this opportunity very exciting, dealing with global issues that I was interested in. Common Cause had been organized to work on domestic issues and had been very successful. We were

going to work on global issues such as the threat of nuclear war, escalating population in the world, tremendous poverty around the world, and the measurable impact on the environment globally. The key people in that team were Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist; Norman Cousins, who was a famous publisher and author; Father Ted Hesburgh, the President of Notre Dame and Jim Grant, who later became head of the United Nations Children's Fund, UNCF. (7M6)

*In terms of resources, this position was a long way from Rockefeller Center or the Federal Government.*

I asked to meet with each of these people separately and it was a very stimulating experience. They all were so excited about it, talking about the very things I believed so strongly in, and I agreed to take that job, even though they had \$25,000 worth of debts and only \$5,000 in the bank. They had just rented an office with no typewriters or telephones and I took on that assignment. (7M6)

(It was a) really risky thing for me to do, because I was now 59 years of age, and I didn't have much security. I had a modest pension from my 26 years with the DuPont Company and no pension from my four years as governor, nor from my year with Nelson Rockefeller. I had only been in the Federal government three years, and thus did not qualify for any pension there. This new organization didn't have any money, and they certainly didn't have any pension or health plan. But, anyway, I took on that job. (7M6)

*Peterson spent most of his time in this job raising money and building membership in what turned out to be a disappointing effort. At the same time, however, there were some notable policy successes. Peterson left after about 15 months, when he was recruited by the U.S. Congress, and in the early '80s the organization was closed down.*

We had a very important impact in getting our Senate to ratify the Panama Canal Treaty, one of our accomplishments. In fact, we got a nice compliment from President Carter, and a note from a number of senators that said the Senate would not have ratified that Panama Canal Treaty if it hadn't been for the lobbying we were doing. (7M8)

We (also) lobbied hard getting the world to go down the soft energy path – that is, to use energy more efficiently and use more solar energy. That became a principal program of the Carter Administration. We also worked hard to try to get our country to stop producing plutonium. We already had a huge stockpile of that nuclear weapon material. We were unsuccessful in that, but subsequently, the government finally stopped making more of that material. (7M9)

The reason New Directions didn't succeed in my view, was that there were too few people in America who really had the concern about global issues that would lead them to invest \$25 a year in membership in an organization such as ours. The second thing was that at the time we were created, President Carter came into office, and his agenda was the same as ours, and he was strongly articulating it. So you can see why people in the country wouldn't be moved to join an organization to carry out something which the President was already pushing. (7M9)

### **Office of Technology Assessment**

*While Peterson was at New Directions, Senator Ted Kennedy called and asked him to meet with him and Senator Clifford Case. They offered Peterson the job as head of Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), an organization that advised Congress on the long-term impact of technological applications on environmental, economic, political, and social affairs. Besides the potential to have a greater impact on events, the job carried a regular salary and benefits, including participation in a Federal pension plan. (7M10)*

This was a great relief to Lillian, who handled all the financial situations in our family. At New Directions, we were struggling every month to meet the payroll, and I had put myself last in line to get paid so we never knew at the end of the month whether we were going to get paid or not. I was getting tired of running all over the country fund raising. I didn't have to raise any money for the Office of Technology Assessment. So I seriously considered taking that job. (7M10)

*Before taking the job, Peterson was contacted by and met with leaders at the prestigious National Academy of Sciences. They encouraged him to take the OTA job, but only if he was given the authority to hire and fire and to essentially depoliticize the organization. All but two Senators agreed, one of the objectors being Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska.*

We met in a little room right in the middle of the Capital building. He was very unhappy with me. He asked me, "Who do you think you are? You are working for us, we are not working for you. If you get that thing passed, I'm going to cut your budget in half." He was one of the principals on the Senate Appropriations Committee. I told him I would rather have half the budget and a creditable organization than a (bigger) budget with no one paying any attention to what we were doing. He accused me of questioning his integrity. (7M12)

Then I went to see Senator (Ernest) Hollings from South Carolina. He and I had been quite friendly, . . . but this day he was very unhappy with me. He undoubtedly had checked with Stevens because he used almost the same words, that he would cut my budget in half. He was also a principal on the Appropriations Committee. I told him the same thing, (that) I would rather have half the budget and a creditable organization. When I left his office and I put out my hand to shake hands, he said, "No, I don't want to give you the wrong idea." (7M12)

*When Kennedy and Case asked Peterson to back off, he refused, threatening to speak out publicly on the matter. Ultimately, Peterson got his way. The vote was 11-1, with only Hollings voting no.*

. . . overnight we had converted OTA from a highly politicized group into one which now had gained a lot of creditability. (7M14)

(OTA) became a very effective organization under Jack Gibbons, who succeeded me in that job. Jack later was appointed by President Clinton as his science advisor. But then the right wing group in the U.S. Congress abolished OTA. It was a pretty sad day. (7M14)

### **National Audubon Society**

*At about this point, Peterson became the object of a long and serious courtship by the National Audubon Society.*

During the time I was at OTA, after I had been there only three months, I got a call from Tom Keesee, who was Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Audubon Society and also chairman of a search committee for a new president for Audubon. He offered me the job as President of the National (Audubon) Society – the job which I dreamed of. In fact, way back when I was with CEQ and thinking of what I was going to do at the end of the Ford administration, I thought, boy, I would like to be President of the Audubon Society. (7M15)

*Audubon was a major organization and a potent force in the environmental movement. It owned and operated over 70 sanctuaries and had chapters in every state. Peterson had spoken at their convention, had received their top award, and, of course, had been a bird-watcher, or birder, for many years.*





Being President of the National Audubon Society was an ideal use of Peterson's many talents. Peterson is shown here with a Golden Eagle.

*Audubon came back to Peterson several times, and he eventually agreed to talk with them. They offered him everything he wanted, including an attractive pension provision.*

So I went home and talked this over with my good wife Lillian, and we decided to take on that job. I thought this would be an asset for OTA. This would relieve them of the friction I had caused some members of the board by my taking them on when I came there – although it was true that members of the board tried awfully hard to talk me out of taking the (Audubon) job. I at that time had strong support from the leaders of the OTA board, and nine of the 12 members of the board were strongly in support of me . . . . But, nevertheless, I took the Audubon job, which was a right decision, certainly, for me and I think for OTA and I like to think for Audubon. (7M16)

*Peterson found the job at Audubon – his last regular, full-time position – as enjoyable and satisfying as he had anticipated.*

I was President of Audubon for about six-and-a-half years, a great (and) exciting time. We did much to provide leadership for the environmental movement nationally – organizing groups, getting together with other heads of national organizations to produce a potent lobbying force to further the environmental movement. During a good share of the time I was at Audubon, Ronald Reagan was the President, and he was a strong anti-environmentalist, doing all kinds of things to destroy the institutions and legislation which had been established in the previous administrations. We took him on in a major way. Fortunately, the Congress was controlled by a majority of members who were pro-environment, and thus they were able to block many things the Reagan Administration tried to do. (7M17)

We markedly increased Audubon's membership to about 550,000 people. That means 550,000 homes were getting the Audubon magazine. When I came in, we had a major financial problem. I managed to change that. During my (six) years there, we increased

the revenue by 19 percent per year and established a broad-based program, which I had been asked to do by the board, that involved such big global issues as working toward the stabilization of the world population – growth in population being one of the principal factors in the growing deterioration of the environment. (7M17)

*Peterson recounts other accomplishments as well, including the addition of new chapters and sanctuaries, development of a grass roots capability to influence members of Congress, and lobbying in all 50 states. Each month Peterson wrote an editorial in the Society's magazine. Not surprisingly, he was an activist president.*

*With the aid of Ted Turner, Peterson got Audubon into television in a big way, reaching many millions with its World of Audubon. He organized Audubon Adventures, which helped turn on as many as 660,000 8-to-12-year olds per year to the wonders of nature.*

. . . among other things, I was instrumental in establishing a group called the Group of Ten, involving the leaders of the 10 largest environmental groups in the country, and (I) also became involved internationally. I became President of the International Council for Bird Preservation, which was located in Cambridge, England. We worked all over the world on saving birds and bird habitats. I became Vice President for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, now called the World Conservation Union. That had 50-some nations as members along with several hundred primarily environment groups around the world. (7M19)

In those jobs, I really got to know many environmental leaders globally and thus work with them and try to get things done through the United Nations – and I also got deeply involved with the United Nations projects through that assignment. One other thing we did was to set up a major national leadership conference, which led to the establishment, at my suggestion, of the Global Tomorrow Coalition, for which I was the chair for the first six years. It not only involved many environmental groups but also

population groups, and also a number of businesses. It eventually included the DuPont Company. (7M19)

This group did a lot to get communities around our country to hold workshops and conferences, involving a broad cross-section of the community talking about the critical global issues, to get them to look to the long-range future about what we could do to help to insure that our children and grandchildren would have a decent quality of life. And also to turn around the trends which were leading to more and more devastation of the environment. (7M19)

### **The Better World Society**

When I announced I was retiring from Audubon, Ted Turner called and said he wanted to form a new organization to be called the Better World Society. (We would) use television to reach the people of the world about our issues, which were to protect the global environment, stabilize the world's population, reduce world poverty, and reduce the threat of nuclear war. (17M5)

*Turner wanted Peterson to head the new group. He declined but did agree to help Turner organize it. Thus, Turner became chairman and Peterson became vice chairman and president.*

We had members of our international board from many countries around the world. (They included) Jimmy Carter, the former heads of state of Nigeria and Costa Rica, the current prime minister of Norway, some top people from the Soviet Union and China and Japan, France, Britain, Canada, Africa – a wonderful group of leaders all committed to these issues. And Ted Turner put up most of the money for this, over a million dollars a year of his own funds. We became very good friends, recognize each other as world citizens, and today still maintain our friendship. My wife Lillian and I were invited down to Ted Turner and Jane Fonda's wedding reception, and my new wife June and I have been to Ted Turner's house in Montana, where he has over 100,000 acres on which there are almost 6,000 head of buffalo. (17M6)

That's been another major fallout from my activities. I've learned so many times now – at the DuPont Company and in the governorship, working in Washington, working for Audubon, working with international groups – that one of the big satisfactions (in life) is the wonderful, competent, (and) dedicated people you meet whom you can call friends. (17M6)

### **A Professor – at Last**

*Peterson did take one other paying job after leaving Audubon. In the fall of 1985 he taught at Dartmouth College.*

They wanted me to stay there for a while as a professor. I agreed to come for one semester, and I taught a course which I created called "Prospects for the Global Environment." (It was) a really rewarding experience. I had always wanted to be a professor, and now I had that chance. Dartmouth was an exciting place. The students there at the time were raising hell with their administration, about the university investing funds in companies that were operating in South Africa as part of (the students') campaign to try to change the government in South Africa. The president of the college was having a feud with the Board of Trustees. (7M21)

Anyway, I had a good time teaching up there and had a large class of bright young people; in fact, five people in that course actually changed their career plans because of that course. (7M21)

During this time, in talking around the country, I was invited by Carleton College (in Minnesota) to be a visiting professor there. I arranged to go there the following fall. That was a great school, a small school, but boy what a nice environment. When I walked around the campus there as a new professor, the students would greet me, "Good morning, Professor Peterson."



Peterson's career has brought him in contact with many well-known people. Here he is shown with newsman Walter Cronkite on Cronkite's boat in Martha's Vineyard.

It really made you feel at home. It was the same way with the faculty. I had the same kind of great experience there (as I had at Dartmouth). Then, in 1989, I went to my alma mater – the University of Wisconsin-Madison – for a summer teaching job, teaching the same course. (7M22)

It was fun to be back there on that campus where I spent eight years before. They encouraged me to stay on, but I decided at that time I was going to be a complete volunteer. So from that time on, I never had a paying job, but I have been deeply involved working long hours on many projects. (7M22)

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### Developing Wilmington's Riverfront

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*Most recently, Peterson's volunteer work has included Wilmington's riverfront development. On Memorial Day in 1992, he was at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, where the Memorial Day parade ends at Delaware Avenue and Broom Street in Wilmington. A conversation with State Senator Bob Marshall about an environmental issue on the Christina River led Peterson to suggest that Marshall contact Governor Castle, asking him to establish a task force on the future of the Brandywine and Christina Rivers. Eventually, Peterson and Art Trabant, who had recently retired as president of the University of Delaware, agreed to co-chair a task force.*

We had a helluva good group. We signed up (architects) Jim Nelson and Joe Carbonnell (and through them representatives of 15 Delaware architectural firms to carry out) on a pro bono basis a major study of what we might do around the riverfront, to develop what we call a vision for the riverfront. They did that. They worked many months, many, many hours, not charging the state anything. (7M25)

(In 1994), we held a big meeting in the Delaware Theatre Company with 300 people present. I had arranged ahead of time to have Governor Carper come, along with Mayor Sills, County Executive (Tom) Gordon, our two United States Senators – Joe Biden couldn't come but he asked Mike McCabe to represent him – and our Congressman, Mike Castle. They all came. I had pre-sold them on the fact that they would support what we were trying to do. (7M25)

I chaired the meeting. Jim Nelson made a great speech, projecting slides showing them what we planned to do, what we thought the state should do. Then I presented our report to the Governor. He got up and said he thought this was great, and he would definitely get behind it. Then I called up the Mayor, the County Executive and the others. Each of these people said he would get behind the program. (7M26)

The main thing we asked the Governor to do was appoint an implementation committee . . . to make this thing happen. He did, (and) he made Pete Morrow of the DuPont Company and me co-chairmen. We set up committees with a lot of talent, . . . and recommended (that) the legislature establish a Riverfront Development Corporation that would be the official body that would be empowered to make things happen. The legislature passed that legislation and appropriated \$10,000,000 to get the thing started. I became a member of that board and Pete Morrow became chairman of that board. On the board was the Governor, the Mayor, the County Executive and leadership from the legislature and a few of us outsiders. (7M26)

We then set out to implement the programs and out of it has come such things as the (First USA) Riverfront Arts Center and the new riverfront park down by the railroad station, the river walk that is being built, and a whole line of other projects. Now I am very much involved. (7M26)

*Peterson is clearly excited and proud at what is happening.*





Russ Peterson's grandchildren, 1993.

1<sup>st</sup> row: Nora, Rosanna, Matt, Andrew. 2<sup>nd</sup> row: Erica, Sara Davia, Maja, Karin, Kjellyn, Emma, Erin.

3<sup>rd</sup> row: Caleb, Eric, Samuel, Joshua, Nathan, Jessen.

Now thousands of people are going to the riverfront. A few years ago, many people didn't know we *had* a riverfront, and those who did were afraid to go near it. Now, we are having exciting celebrations down there, and people are excited about what is going to happen. . . . I hope I live long enough to come down and walk the whole length of that river walk and see all the exciting things that are going on. (7M27)

*One major riverfront component that has not yet been implemented is the dredging of a harbor. It's an extremely expensive component of the original riverfront vision, and many Delawareans do not expect to see it happen. Peterson is not among them.*

Yes, I definitely expect to see that; that was the jewel of the vision that we had for the waterfront. In fact, we've had very active meetings. Right now, engineers are working on it. This will provide what we call the Inner Harbor for Wilmington, and I think it could lead to Delaware's harbor being as exciting as the Inner Harbor in Baltimore, and our riverfront as attractive as that well known river walk in San Antonio. But this is a big project, and it calls for dredging out a substantial number of acres, and moving that fill to another site, and creating 23 acres of a very good building site along the riverfront. We think this can be done with a real positive change for the environment. (13M12)

Because of the magnitude of this job, it's going to cost \$30-some million, we currently estimate. Our target is going to be to get the congressional delegation to get some money from the Federal government to go along with City and State funds to make it happen. (13M12)

*Peterson considers this dredging project benign, as opposed to the proposals to dredge in Sussex County's inland bays, proposals that he opposed and halted as Governor.*

I just recently walked with a number of people over much of this

area where the inner harbor would be dredged, and I think that everybody would agree it would be a great environmental asset to make this conversion. In fact, our total riverfront project is going to be a big plus for the environment. One part of it provides for creating a 285-acre wildlife refuge right at the border of the City of Wilmington. Work is going to be done there to re-establish some of the drainage channels that were there years ago, and were filled in when they built I-95 through the area. That's going to be a big improvement to that area. (13M12)

### **What the Future Holds**

*None of this sounds as though Peterson has any plans to retire from community activism.*

Throughout this period, my life got fairly hectic (and) I would be talking about (how I'd) better get out of some of these jobs and really retire. But the excitement of being involved is so important, (the) job satisfaction is so substantial that is hard for me to even imagine that I would ever really retire unless I got Alzheimer's disease or something like that. But I know the day is going to come – I'm 82 now – that I may not be able to remain involved. I don't think, in good health, I would willingly say I'm now retired and I'm just going to read and go look at birds and travel. I just have it built in me that I have to be involved. I have had so much job satisfaction over the years, met so many wonderful people and seen things happen that the bug to keep doing that, I think, will persist as long as I'm able to do something. As long as I don't get thrown out by other people. (7M28)

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## Author's Afterword

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Borrowing his own phrase, one might say that Russ Peterson took office on January 21, 1969, and for the next four years, “all hell broke loose.”

Throughout Peterson's life, in fact, there is a pattern that goes something like this. Using language that will be familiar to the readers of this book:

- Peterson discovers a problem and “sets out to solve it.”
- “All hell breaks loose.”
- Many are “dead set against” his solution.
- Peterson solves the problem anyway.
- A group of people are “teed off at him” for doing so.

### **The Unreasonable Man**

George Bernard Shaw has written that, “The reasonable man adapts himself to the world, but the unreasonable man tries to adapt the world to him – therefore, all progress depends upon the unreasonable man.” Peterson is that “unreasonable man,” often unwilling to make the compromises that progress may require.

His opponents on coastal zoning had what many considered a more reasonable position, i.e. let each application be considered on its individual merits. Peterson understood, however, that anything short of a total prohibition would inevitably thwart his goal, which was to stop coastal industrial development in its tracks. Otherwise, applicants would come along with a good story, and “reasonable” people would acquiesce. And almost certainly, he was right about that.

Many of Peterson's reforms – even the transition to a cabinet government – would eventually have occurred, I believe. But the Coastal Zone Act, as enacted, would never have happened without him. Perhaps that's why he considers it his greatest achievement.

Throughout his various careers, no cause has ever been too big for Peterson to tackle. At the same time, no cause has ever been too small. An example is his campaign against litter, where his zero tolerance policy is reminiscent of today's New York Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani. How many governors, driving the state limousine on their state trooper's day off, would rescue a bag of litter and toss it back into the offending car?

### **Never Give Up**

What makes Peterson tick? Above all, there is the determination, his absolute and unyielding approach to problem-solving. He likes to call it "stick-to-it-iveness;" his detractors call it fanaticism and offer other, less genteel descriptions.

Combined with his determination is his overriding belief in change and progress. All other governors deliver an annual State of the State speech; Peterson delivered a *Future* of the State Speech. That difference reflects more than nomenclature. He wanted Delawareans to start thinking differently, to expand their horizons and take on problems or challenges that most others ignore. Thus, he also renamed the Law Enforcement Planning Agency – a name suitable to everyone else in the country – the Agency to Reduce Crime, then set a goal of cutting the rate of violent crime in half by a date certain.

Don't do that, some pleaded with him at the time, arguing that the goal was unreachable. But such advice was seldom heeded.

To Peterson, precedents were there to be broken. Thus, when the House was about to defeat his crime measure, he insisted upon an appearance on the House floor. When the Senate rejected his nominees, he sent them back again the same afternoon and got them approved. Don't try to thwart me, he seemed to be saying.

But such in-your-face steamrolling – combined with what some critics considered a sanctimonious attitude – was taking its toll,

building resentment among legislators and others who turned on him when the “financial crisis” gave them an excuse. Thus, some would say that Peterson suffered politically not only from the reforms he espoused and the changes he made but how he approached the task.

Given vast differences in philosophy and style, I always wondered how Peterson and John Rollins have maintained a 40-plus year friendship. How could two such strong and different men be so close for so long?

“We often disagreed,” Rollins told me, “but we were never disagreeable. He was a man of his word. I might not always like what he did, but he always did what he said he would do.”

### **Why did he lose?**

During the interviews that provided the content for this book, Peterson repeatedly linked his controversial actions to his failure to win reelection. There was the abolition of the commission form of government, and the many prominent Delawareans who lost prestigious roles as a result. There was the fiscal shortfall of June 1971. There was the reaction from those who objected to Peterson’s civil rights initiatives. There were the political enemies and the politicians who failed to receive the bounty they expected from a Republican administration. There was the primary contest with Dave Buckson, enabled by a reform Peterson himself had espoused. There were the many traditionalists, who felt that he was doing too much too fast. Not exactly a formula for victory in tradition-bound Delaware.

One could also throw in the fact that he took on the DuPont Company, the University of Delaware Board of Trustees, and just about every political leader in Kent and Sussex Counties.

A Washington staffer associated with President Jack Kennedy could not understand how Peterson lost, considering his record of accomplishment. The other side of that coin is to wonder how,

given his many controversies, the race was as competitive as it was.

### **Working inside the system**

Most hell-raisers work outside the system. Peterson raised hell from *within* the system, one reason so many things got done in a brief period of time. A partial list of accomplishments by Peterson and two General Assemblies would include:

Protecting Delaware's coastal zone,  
Totally reorganizing State government,  
Fundamentally reforming the adult and juvenile corrections systems,  
Beginning to reform welfare,  
Dramatically expanding reform of the magistrate system,  
Reforming the Family Court,  
Enabling the first state primary elections,  
Enacting open housing legislation,  
Advancing the state's physical and mental health systems,  
Building a system to prevent and treat substance abuse,  
Raising education spending more than six-fold,  
Significantly expanding Delaware Technical & Community College,  
Implementing a government-wide economy study,  
Forming the Delaware Arts Council, Delaware Youth Council and the Council for Women, and  
Ending debtors' prisons and the whipping post.  
Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

### **In his own words**

In the CD-ROM that accompanies his biography, *Rebel with a Conscience*, Peterson describes his life this way:

"All my life, when I worked to solve problems in industry and government and the non-profit field, I have been a rebel. I've rebelled against leaders, institutions and programs that I thought were unfair to others, or non-productive, or harmful to the

environment. My strong beliefs led me to directly confront presidents, captains of industry, and powerful politicians when I thought their actions were wrong. I offered and pushed alternative approaches with some successes and some failures. Along the way, it's been exciting and rewarding, providing great job satisfaction. I believe this story will encourage others to pursue similar paths to their self-fulfillment and the benefit of others."

What Peterson does *not* say is that rebels pay a heavy price for their rebellion. Few of us are willing to accept the slings and arrows that accompany this role. Few of us, especially elected officials, will take on the corporate power structure, the Federal government, labor, and others in pursuit of our beliefs. Few of us are self-proclaimed dreamers, rebels, do-gooders, and big spenders. Few of us devote our lives to a Better World Society or a Global Tomorrow Coalition.

### **Praise for the Pariah**

For many years, Russ Peterson has paid such a price in Delaware. Many have regarded him as a zealot and treated him as a pariah. That's why an event in Dover on January 21, 1999 meant so much to him.

On that date, Governor Carper invited Governor Peterson and his wife, June, to attend the Governor's State of the State Address. With Peterson seated in the balcony of Legislative Hall, Governor Carper described the completion of a 27-year effort to adopt regulations to accompany the Coastal Zone Act. Then, Governor Carper asked Peterson to stand and enjoy a sustained standing ovation by the legislators, judges, cabinet officials, and others who were present.

"I really want to thank you," Governor Carper said, with Peterson still standing, "for reminding us as a people to remain vigilant in meeting our responsibilities to protect our environment and to make sure we do that, not just for ourselves but for future generations of Delawareans."



Then Carper proposed naming the urban wildlife refuge along the banks of Christina River in Peterson's honor.

I spoke with Peterson about it later. Even more satisfying than having the refuge named in his honor, he said, was the reception he received from the audience that day. After all the years when he and Lillian had felt *persona non grata* in Delaware, he said, it was rewarding indeed to receive such public recognition. He only wished that Lillian could have been there to experience it also.

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