

“Free and Open and Easy Access”

Interview Date: August 23, 1977

Participant: John O. Marsh Jr.

Participant Title: Counselor to the President

SCENE SETTER: President Ford had a long career in the House of Representatives prior to becoming president in August 1974. He learned to collaborate and made himself available to a wide range of people during his career in Congress, which informed his leadership style as president.

John O. Marsh Jr.: Jim Lynn mentioned earlier the fact that Ford had served in the Congress for 25 years, and that had impacted on the manner in which he approached federal-type decisions. In a congressional office, there is a very minimum of formal staffing, and a member of Congress assumes that if a constituent or any individual with whom he has a reason to deal—that if they get in touch with his press secretary, his legislative assistant, his summer intern, regardless of who it is, or his driver, or if they happen to say something to one of his children—that that is of equal importance as if it came through his administrative assistant or came through the Speaker of the House. It all comes in to the congressman, who ultimately makes a decision because a congressional officer is one personality—there’s one, Don—and there’s a free and easy access to that one particular personality. That sort of congressional approach to dealing with issues was a part of his personality and I think carried over in the manner in which he first began his operation in the White House: the free and open and easy access of everybody being an equal from the standpoint of having an opportunity to gain his time and his attention. It was discussed; I think Bob Hartmann talked about that point.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: The Ford White House, First Session, April 23, 1977, Gerald Ford Oral History Symposium, Miller Center, University of Virginia.

URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/ford-white-house-restoring-executive-office>