

Book excerpt: 'Patrick J. Lucey - A Lasting Legacy' by Dennis L. Dresang

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The following is an excerpt from chapter 14 of "Patrick J. Lucey - A Lasting Legacy" by Dennis L. Dresang.

Buy the book: <https://shop.wisconsinhistory.org/patrick-j-lucey>

Join WisPolitics.com Tuesday, Sept. 22, for a virtual lunchtime discussion with the author and those who knew the former governor, ambassador and vice presidential candidate. The panel consists of Dresang, daughter and voting rights attorney Laurie Lucey and Lucey advisers Joe Sensenbrenner and Jim Wood.

The program is set to run from noon to 1 p.m., via a webinar. For more information and registration, visit [here](#).

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Chapter 14

Running for Veep

Patrick J. Lucey knew the odds. The chance of discontents denying a sitting president of their own party the opportunity to run for reelection was remote at best. Yet Lucey saw firsthand the near success of Bobby Kennedy in 1968. Could Bobby's brother Ted force Jimmy Carter to withdraw as Lyndon B. Johnson had done? Were enough people within the Democratic Party willing to vote against nominating Carter for a second term?

Lucey also knew it was highly unlikely that third-party candidates, especially when using a new and unfamiliar political label, could successfully compete against Republican and Democratic nominees. In addition to overcoming issues such as

traditional loyalties, name recognition, and financial resources, new parties must master the labyrinth of state requirements for even getting listed on the ballot.

Lucey knew the odds, but he forged ahead, seeming to welcome the challenges and motivated by a commitment to progressive values.

Another Kennedy

When Lucey notified Carter that he was resigning as ambassador, the president suggested he take another assignment. Perhaps in the cabinet? Perhaps as a special ambassador for human rights? It appeared that Carter feared Lucey was about to help Senator Ted Kennedy challenge him for the 1980 Democratic presidential nomination. The fear was well founded. Lucey declined the offers from Carter and said he was joining the Kennedy campaign.

Although the tragic car accident at Chappaquiddick continued to haunt Ted Kennedy, the assassinations of his brothers nurtured an almost nostalgic loyalty to the Kennedys and the dream of Camelot. Kennedy was expected to run for president. Moreover, labor union leadership and liberal activists were disappointed with Carter and saw Kennedy as their best hope for the changes they pursued.

The failure to reach an agreement on health care reform played a major role in fueling opposition to Carter. Kennedy and Carter had been negotiating since 1977 on how to achieve universal health care coverage. They both agreed that a plan should be implemented in phases. Kennedy wanted to pass a law that committed the federal government to achieve certain benchmarks by specific dates, whereas Carter wanted flexibility. He wanted to tie phases to economic conditions rather than dates. Neither budged. On December 9, 1978, at the Democratic Party's midterm convention in Memphis, Carter gave an opening speech arguing for budget stringency as the top priority. This was followed by a panel on health care, chaired by then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. The panelists were Joseph Califano, Carter's secretary of Health, Education and Welfare; Stuart Eizenstat, Carter's chief White House domestic policy advisor; and Kennedy. Kennedy made a passionate argument for his plan that brought delegates to their feet, cheering enthusiastically. Carter and his staff marked this as the beginning of Kennedy's bid for the nomination.

On November 4, 1979, in an awkward interview with Roger Mudd of CBS News, Kennedy said he was indeed seeking the 1980 nomination. Two days later, Lucey

accepted the position of deputy campaign manager. Stephen Smith, Kennedy's brother-in-law, served as campaign manager. At the press conference announcing his appointment, the former ambassador confirmed that Carter had offered him a number of positions. Lucey said he turned them down because of the administration's general failure to accomplish its goals.

Many of Lucey's close associates in the Badger State did not follow him into the Kennedy camp. He met at the home of his former aide, Richard Weening, with about twenty other prominent Democrats to discuss the Kennedy campaign. Lucey's one-time rival David Carley helped raise the five thousand dollars required for Kennedy to qualify for the Wisconsin primary. But leaders such as Anthony Earl, James Wahner, Martin Schreiber, Daniel Wisniewski, Robert Frieber, Thomas Harnisch, and William Gerrard announced support for the Carter-Mondale ticket.

At the same time that Kennedy was launching his campaign, Iranian student protestors were storming the American embassy in Tehran. They seized fifty-two members of the staff as hostages. As efforts to free the hostages failed, concern grew. The botched April 24, 1980, attempt by Carter's Operation Eagle Claw to rescue American hostages held in Tehran cemented Lucey's negative assessment of the president. The complex and risky effort ended with eight US military crew members dead, five others injured, increased Iranian security placed on the hostages, and international embarrassment. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, with whom Lucey enjoyed a close relationship, had opposed the rescue plan and resigned when Carter went ahead despite warnings. The hostage crisis plagued Carter throughout his bid for reelection.

Kennedy's campaign foundered initially. Carter notched victories in the Iowa caucuses and primaries in New Hampshire, Vermont, Illinois, and several southern states. Kennedy's only win prior to mid-March 1980 was in his home state of Massachusetts. In a shakeup of Kennedy's campaign staff at the beginning of March, Lucey took over responsibilities as chief spokesperson. Ahead of New York's March 25 primary, polls had Kennedy trailing by twenty points. Kennedy drafted a concession speech. He could pocket this, however. Kennedy beat Carter in New York with 59 percent of the vote and also won neighboring Vermont. Although Lucey was not able to put his home state in the winners' column, he did help win critical contests in Pennsylvania, Michigan, New Jersey, and California.

After completion of the primaries on June 3, Carter had 2,123 delegates—more than the 1,677 votes need to win on the first ballot— and Kennedy had 1,151. Kennedy

argued for an open convention in which delegates were free to vote for whomever they wished regardless of pledges or commitments made through the primaries. But some states, including Wisconsin, had laws binding delegates on the first ballot. Lucey acknowledged this but joined in arguing for an open convention. So did Representative Les Aspin, who headed the Wisconsin delegates for Kennedy. David Lasker got support from Dane County Democrats for a resolution asking for an open convention. Senator Gaylord Nelson and Representatives David Obey, Robert Kastenmeier, and Henry Reuss joined in the call. The Wisconsin delegates pledged to Carter, on the other hand, opposed changing the rules.

The roll call of all national convention delegates was 1,030 in favor of an open convention and 1,936 opposed. Kennedy withdrew his candidacy and gave what many regarded as the best and most moving speech of his life. He had criticisms for Ronald Reagan and for Carter, but he emphasized a vision of justice and fairness.

Lucey walked out of the convention hall before the first vote and sent a letter to Ray Majerus, chair of the Wisconsin delegation, resigning as a delegate. His departure was captured on national television and prompted murmuring throughout the political world. Lucey explained that he could not support Carter and Rule N of the Democratic National Party, which states that delegates “will not publicly support or campaign for any candidate for president or vice president other than the nominees of the convention.” A delegation of Wisconsin delegates, most of whom supported Carter, followed Lucey to his hotel room. They pleaded with Lucey to return, and when some—including a few of his close associates—started yelling at him, Lucey firmly announced, “This conversation is over!” and ushered them out of his room.

Lucey’s resignation was not well received by Wisconsin Democrats. He was accused of disloyalty and bad judgment. Some worried his decision would spell victory for Reagan in November. Majerus was particularly vocal. On the other hand, Aspin and Bill Proxmire urged continued respect for Lucey, and Lasker wrote a column defending him. Amidst the controversy, Lucey tried to make it clear that he had resigned as a delegate, not as a Democrat.

Teaming Up with Anderson

The day after Lucey walked out of the convention, John B. Anderson, a Republican member of the House of Representatives representing northern Illinois, invited him to meet. Anderson had competed with Ronald Reagan, Bob Dole, Howard Baker, John Connally, and George H. W. Bush for the Republican presidential nomination.

Lucey and Anderson had not worked together and knew one another only by reputation.

Lucey remembered watching Anderson and Reagan debate and was impressed with the performance and the liberal positions of the Illinois representative. Anderson had been a prominent conservative in Congress but supported civil rights and the Equal Rights Amendment and opposed Carter's proposal to reinstate the military draft. Anderson, however, was unable to do better than second place in primaries. After Reagan beat him in Illinois—the home state of both men—Anderson dropped out of the contest for the Republican nomination and announced that he would run for the White House as an independent. He launched the National Unity Party and began the complicated and expensive task of getting on the ballot of each state and the District of Columbia.

Anderson had Lucey on his initial shortlist of preferred running mates. As names dropped off, the choice came down to Lucey and Edward Brooke, a Republican and former US Senator from Massachusetts. A prominent and respected African American, Brooke had endorsed Anderson in the primary contests, but Anderson calculated that Lucey might bring more supporters because of his ties to the Democratic Party and, especially, to the Kennedys. Aspin, who served with Anderson in Congress and worked with Lucey in Wisconsin, urged Anderson to consider Lucey for the vice-presidential slot. Aspin thought that the disaffected Democrats and Republicans concerned about Reagan might be a winning combination, and Lucey had a reputation that made him credible as a potential president if needed.

Before talking with Anderson, Lucey met with Donald Peterson, his erstwhile rival for the Wisconsin Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1970. Peterson had signed on as the Wisconsin cochair for Anderson and encouraged Lucey to partner with the representative from Illinois. Accompanied by his son David, Lucey met with Anderson for forty-five minutes. They discussed issues and also the possibility of Lucey serving as campaign manager. Lucey said he was not interested in that. Anderson then raised the possibility of Lucey running with him as candidate for vice president. Both men agreed to think about this.

Speculation that Lucey would be Anderson's running mate continued for almost two weeks. Part of the delay in making an announcement was because Anderson wanted to be sure that Jean Lucey was supportive. She had undergone a seven-hour gallbladder operation in early 1980 and seemed to be looking forward to some quiet

time. Anderson asked his wife, Keke, to meet with Pat and Jean at their vacation home in Door County, Wisconsin. The two women, who proudly shared their Greek heritage and strong wills, immediately established a bond. Three days later, on August 26, Anderson and Lucey held a news conference in Washington, DC, and formally announced they would be running together.

Appearing on the national public television show *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report*, Lucey explained, "I'd rather be working for a candidate about whom it is said he can't win, rather than a candidate about whom it is said he shouldn't win."

Lucey reached out to get people with whom he had worked when he was governor to support the Anderson-Lucey ticket. The reaction was mixed. For example, he was on the phone with longtime supporter and former staff member Keith Clifford for almost an hour trying to get him on board. Clifford respectfully declined, explaining that he learned perhaps too well the lesson Lucey taught about the importance of party loyalty.

Nonetheless, shortly after the phone call, Clifford made sure that Lucey was invited to a gathering organized by Aspin to meet with Walter Mondale. After the two friends who were somewhat awkwardly competing with one another to be vice president talked, someone disparaged Lucey for abandoning the party. Clifford responded, "Pat Lucey has done more for the Democratic Party of Wisconsin than everyone in this room combined. He deserves our respect whether we support him or not." That brought loud applause and quelled further anti-Lucey talk.

Lucey also placed a call to David Lasker, who had remained close to Lucey since 1965, when he helped him in his first campaign for governor. Lucey asked, "Are you willing to jump off a cliff without a parachute with me?" Lasker readily accepted the invitation and staffed the vice-presidential candidate.

Platform

Anderson's staff was nearing completion of a platform when Lucey agreed to be the vice-presidential candidate. He reviewed the draft before accepting the nomination and then helped complete the 317-page document. Anderson had a reputation of being fiscally conservative and socially liberal, and the National Unity campaign platform reflected those positions. The major policy disagreement between Anderson and Lucey was over health care: Lucey wanted comprehensive federal health insurance, whereas Anderson favored continued reliance on private plans.

They agreed to disagree-publicly.

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