INTERVIEW WITH SENATOR GEORGE AIKEN

INTERVIEWER: Paige E. Mulhollan

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A: I used to go down to the White House about twice a week for the first two months after he [Truman] became President and he was sick. And he couldn't get anything out of the agencies, the Armed Services--the Defense Department---wouldn't tell him a damned thing going on in the war.

M: And you had been a friend of his in the Senate?

A: Yes. And so I finally got somebody to go down there. They got General Carter Clark over there and finally arranged to have him informed on how the war was going from day to day. Harry Truman, the next day after he was sworn in, came up to have lunch with the Congressional Leaders and he hung on to me and the tears ran right down his cheek. He kept saying, "I am not big enough for this job, I'm not big enough for this job." And of course the people believed it too, that he wasn't. But he got over that after he was elected in his own right and proved that he was big enough.

M: During this period that you've just been talking about, the 1940s, when you were in the Senate and Mr. Johnson was in the House of Representatives, did you ever have any occasion to have personal acquaintanceship with him during that period?

A: No, I don't think I can say that I knew Lyndon Johnson until he came to the Senate. That was in January of 1949 as I recall it.

M: Once he was over in the Senate and particularly after he became leader, and particularly after he became Majority Leader which I think was in 1955, how would you say that he operated? Can you describe his method of leadership?

A: Well, when you say "operate," you described him. He was an operator and he really carried out the decisions of the Policy Committee and was very effective, although he irritated a lot of people. He'd actually change votes on the floor of the Senate.

M: This is the so-called famous "Johnson treatment" that you're describing?

A: Yes, pointing the finger at them and saying, "You voted yes--you vote no now." And he was very effective that way, but as I say he also irritated a lot of people particularly those on the Republican side of the aisle. All they had to do any morning was to throw a needle over in his direction and the show would be on right then and there.

M: Did he work through the Republican leadership at all to put together his various majorities? The balance was very close in those days, I believe.

A: Yes, it was close. I don't think there was the cooperation between the leadership that there has been in more recent years. Of course, there's a one-sided arrangement now with the Democrats having almost twice as many members of the Senate, and they have enough so they can afford to split among themselves which they could not do when Lyndon was Majority Leader. They had to have every vote lined up. It was in those years, I recall, that Wayne Morse left the Republican Party and went over first as an Independent and then as a Democrat.

M: Did Mr. Johnson, in cases where the Democratic Party would break--did he have to depend then on Republican votes to pass measures that he felt needed passing?

A: Well, he had to depend on getting virtually every Democratic vote with the few Republicans which he could usually pick up. The Republicans were never as subject to discipline as the Democrats were in those days, and he could nearly always rely on some Republicans splitting off from the main body of the party. And by holding all these Democrats plus what Republicans he could get, he was pretty effective in legislation.

M: The Democratic leadership, some of whom were critics of Mr. Johnson in the 1950's like National Chairman Paul Butler, for example, and others who were generally referred to as liberals, criticized Mr. Johnson by saying that he made government work by surrendering to President Eisenhower. Do you think that's accurate?

A: No, I don't think he surrendered to President Eisenhower. Of course, President Eisenhower in my book was not a politician anyway. He might have known army politics, but not the party politics. While I don't know what Lyndon Johnson's relationships with him were exactly, I would say that there wasn't animosity between them, but how much cooperation I wouldn't be able to say.

M: So far as you know, there was no point in which they got completely at odds?

A: No, I don't recall any.

M: What would you say--and this is a subjective question--what would you say were Lyndon Johnson's chief goals as Senate Leader?

A: Well, to be successful; to be the Leader of the party in the Senate. Whether he had ambitions beyond there or not, I can't say. I think it's reasonable to assume that he did have, because he was an ambitious young man in those days. And with the authority that he had he was in a position to go ahead and work to achieve his ambitions.

M: You are now the number two ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee and so many of Mr. Johnson's difficulties have been in that area that this is obviously an area in which you can lend some considerable insight. Do you remember in the 1950's, before he was President, that Mr. Johnson ever took a very strong position on any specific foreign

policy issue?

A: No, I wouldn't say so. I wouldn't say he was a typical Southern state Senator, but he came awful close to it. Along about that time they got to calling Texas a Western state rather than a Southern one. You can understand that.

M: I recall Mr. Johnson wanted it that way.

A: I do recall his making a speech on the floor in regard to the underdeveloped nations and saying that if there was only one thing we could give them to serve them well, it would be the right of unlimited debate. Well, of course, he hasn't been permitted entirely to forget that.

M: No, I'm sure he hasn't.

A: Although he may have had a change of heart when he got into the national picture.

M: Do you know anything about a personal relationship that Mr. Johnson may have had with Secretary Dulles? Did he work at all closely with him?

A: No, I don't. Secretary Dulles was in the Senate for awhile. As a Senator I don't think he had very close or too good relationships with anybody. In fact, we didn't know him. After he got to be Secretary of State, he apparently was more on his own ground, and I personally got along with him much better then. But how Lyndon Johnson got along with him I don't know. Of course, Lyndon Johnson is a politician--a born politician--from the ground up. And he just loves to exercise his powers in that field.

M: Now moving over to the time that Mr. Johnson becomes President, and particularly in connection with the Committee on Foreign Relations, how has Mr. Johnson worked with that committee in comparison to the other Presidents under whom you also served on that committee? Has he briefed them in the same ways, for example?

A: Well, yes, I'd say the first two or three years that he was in the White House that he had members of the Foreign Relations Committee down there very frequently briefing them. He also insisted that his Cabinet members as well as the CIA keep us briefed. For the last year and a half, however, that relationship has not gotten any better, and I don't feel that the members of the Foreign Relations Committee get the briefings, or have had it all this year, that they had in the earlier years when he was President. In fact the briefings began to wane, I'd say, soon after the bombing of North Viet Nam began. Many of us advised very strongly against the bombing of North Viet Nam, insisting it would not accomplish the purpose, and we made a few speeches on the floor indicating our thoughts. Of course President Johnson is sensitive. While he didn't show any animosity toward us, we did not get the close and intimate briefings that we had previously when a few of us would be invited to the White House to get the latest developments.

M: Would you say that those briefings in the early years were in the nature of genuine consultation, or were you called down and more or less advised as to what was going to happen--that is, about decisions that were already made?

A: Well, that goes for most any President. The members of the Congress are not briefed--in a sense they're not briefed either down there or up here. I think sometimes when there were small groups--six or eight of us--that it was more or less of a consultation; but if the whole committee went--if there were forty or fifty members of the Congress there--then it was in the nature of telling them what had already been decided.

M: Let's say a crisis comes up--take for example the Tonkin Gulf attack. How many would Mr. Johnson call down in a case like that when there was a specific crisis to deal with?

A: I was called down that day. I suppose there might have been eight or ten members of the Congress and Senate, maybe more, not many more though. And we were advised of that, as I recall it, the very afternoon that the news came through. We were also asked to keep quiet about it, and that night the President released the news to the public.

M: Do you recall that there was significant opposition or significant question to the case that the Administration made at that time that there had been an unprovoked attack in the Gulf of Tonkin?

A: I think that was the general opinion--that there had been an unprovoked attack on one of our ships in the Tonkin Bay; and, that it was decided, or we were informed, that there would be some retaliation. And even though differences arose later as to the accuracy of the early report of the Tonkin Bay attack, I'm sure that at the time the President, as well as the rest of us, believed that report to be strictly accurate. And so far as I know, it may have been, although questions have been raised since as to whether the attack was provoked or not.

M: You mentioned awhile ago the advice that some of you gave him regarding the advisability or inadvisability of bombing North Viet Nam. Did any of this advice take place prior to the time that the regular bombing began in February of 1965, I think?

A: Yes. I happened to be at the White House. I was invited down. I would say that it was the day the Administration decided to carry on the bombing of North Viet Nam. While some of us advised very strongly against it, we said it wouldn't stop the infiltration; it wouldn't bring the war to an earlier end; that the North Vietnamese would react the same as other people, including ourselves, if we started bombing them. Yet the military advisers apparently felt that they could bring the war to an early end by bombing the North Viet Nam area. Of course, it hasn't worked out very well. But nevertheless if the bombing hadn't started, we would still have large forces in South Viet Nam, and he would be subject to much criticism for not having bombed, because those people who said that

bombing would bring the war to a conclusion very soon would now be insisting that if he had bombed, the war would have been over. That was one of the times when he couldn't win.

M: You mentioned the military advisers. How would you estimate the importance of particular advisers? Who was important in advising him in this decision as far as you understand it?

A: Well, that's something that's always a subject of debate. People disagree as to whom the real advisers are. Whether they're military or not. As I recall it, General [Earle] Wheeler and the Chiefs of Staff would always put in an appearance; the Secretary of Defense McNamara, and the Secretary of State of course would be present; but just who he depended on--you know, in the long run his principal adviser was Lyndon Baines Johnson.

M: He made the decisions?

A: He made the decision. I don't think that he ever quite took the advice of anyone at face-value. The trouble is he knew too much about running government to trust his advisers one hundred percent, and in the final analysis he made the decision.But of course he had to get the information from other sources before making that decision. I'm sure that when he decided that we would bomb North Viet Nam he thought he was making the right decision and the war would come to an earlier close.

M: He did give an opportunity for those who disagreed with that to state their position adequately?

A: Oh yes indeed. I disagreed with him, and some of the other people who were present disagreed with him too. And he didn't appear to be resentful even though he didn't always take our advice. When it came to the war, he didn't take my advice very well.

M: At the same time--now this is early 1965 just before we began our larger escalation--had the Administration in your opinion made a case with Congressional leaders for extensive aggression from the North, that is, actual troop participation by North Viet Nam in the South?

A: No. At that time it was estimated there were about, possibly 5,000 North Vietnamese helping their brethren in the South, and it was believed then by those who advocated bombing, that this would stop any further infiltration. Of course, the result was it stepped up to not 5,000 a year, but 5,000 a month soon afterwards, and has increased very much since, even up to 7,500 a month.

M: You would say then that their escalation came after ours?

A: Oh yes, yes indeed. We only had about, as I recall it, 35,000 men in all in South Viet Nam

at the time that Lyndon Johnson took the oath of office.

M: Yes, sir, I think that's about correct.

A: And it was predicted that they would be coming home before long.

M: Several times--

A: Yes.

M: The other moment of greatest crisis perhaps, as far as foreign affairs are concerned--of course it turned out a little better, I expect, than the Viet Nam experience--is the intervention in the Dominican Republic. Were there prior briefings to that decision in which you were also involved?

A: Yes. Some of us were called down to be advised that our troops would be landing in the Dominican Republic that night.

M: This was after the decision was made in this case?

A: Yes. I think the decision really had been made. Even the French, who criticized us for going into the Dominican Republic, it appears, had asked for protection for their embassy people down there. And that was an entirely different situation. There was very little criticism of intervention in the Dominican Republic.

M: There was no opposition from the leaders who were called down?

A: No, I wouldn't say so. I don't recall any opposition at all. Of course that had come up suddenly, although I wouldn't say entirely unexpected. We went in there and did a very good job and got out when we said we would.

M: One of the arguments that has arisen about the Dominican Republic intervention has been the justification that Mr. Johnson gave for it: first, that we were there to protect American lives and later, that we were there to prevent a Communist take-over of that government. At the time you were advised that we were going to intervene, was it fairly clearly understood among the top advisers who were present that there was a danger of Communist take-over of the rebellion--was that a chief consideration at the time?

A: Well, I don't think anybody believed there were any large number of Communists in the Dominican Republic at that time. Of course, Communists will move in anywhere there's trouble. Even if there are only half a dozen of them, they'll move in to accentuate that trouble. I don't think anyone believed that the Dominican Republic was really in danger of a genuine Communist take-over.

Of course, the United States had tremendous investments there. And our investors had cooperated and had excellent cooperation from Trujillo, the former President, and the country was in good shape financially. So far as I know they had no external debt whatsoever. They had under Trujillo a long period of stability there. It did threaten to get out of hand.

And you know, these Communist take-overs are usually take-overs by very, very few Communists and an awful lot of people who are dissatisfied with most everything. And that was what was happening there. But there were probably fewer actual Communists in the Dominican Republic than almost any country in the Western world.

M: So you believe that when Mr. Johnson announced that our primary goal was to save lives and property that this was indeed the chief consideration?

A: Yes. There could have been a rebellion or revolution going on there with faction against faction, and there could have been a lot of bloodshed. That could have spread to other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America. And so that's why, as I recall it, there was no objection to the operations which were carried on in the Dominican Republic from members of the Senate, at least.

M: I realize the word "dove" is far too simple, but I don't know what else to use to refer to people who have generally opposed the President's policy; have the doves dominated the Foreign Relations Committee in the last two or three years in your opinion?

A: I'd say the words "dove" and "hawk" are badly misused.

M: I agree with you.

A: And you can be a dove in one place and a hawk in another. Many of the doves, for instance, who were the doves as far as Viet Nam was concerned, were not very dovish when the fighting broke out in the Middle East.

M: That's right. Would you say that the people who have opposed Mr. Johnson's Viet Nam policy have dominated the Foreign Relations Committee for the last three years?

A: I think that the majority of the committee felt that the expansion of the war in Southeast Asia was a mistake. I think they still do; but the result was that we got a bear by the tail. The decision was made and we had to make the best of it. I expect we're going to be there for a long, long time--at least in South Viet Nam.

Of course, there are two distinct wars going on. One in North Viet Nam--a bombing war which was, at least at the start, conducted from Honolulu. And the other one under General Westmoreland in South Viet Nam was a rather different type of war--it was a guerilla-type warfare. And although I felt it was a mistake to start bombing in

North Viet Nam, I did recognize that we had a responsibility in South Viet Nam; because when the French were driven out of the North, we had taken our ships and moved about 800,000 of the North Vietnamese, who were in danger of being imprisoned or executed or having something terrible happen to them down into the South. And having gotten them down there, we really had some responsibility for their welfare. So I make a distinction between the two wars.

M: Would you say that the public disagreement that certain members of the Committee on Foreign Relations have expressed with the President has been effective in any way?

A: Oh, it has been effective in demoralizing domestic affairs in some ways. I think it has resulted in probably an increase of crime in the streets in the United States. It has resulted in dissatisfaction among the advocates of domestic programs who feel that the money is all going into the war and that they are being cut short in their own programs. There has been an indirect effect, which perhaps is as costly in the long run as the direct effect of war.

M: Particularly in regard to the hearings of 1966, do you think this is an effective activity for the Foreign Relations Committee to conduct?

A: I only attended one or two of those hearings. While I think that the public enjoyed those hearings as they went out over television, as far as restoring stability to the world went, I don't think they were too effective.

M: Have the opponents of Mr. Johnson's Viet Nam policy in Congress, both House and Senate, been organized? There has been a reference to meetings held by the so-called doves; has this been a regular practice--sort of institutionalized?

A: No. No. Not in the Senate. I would say there has been no organization. That's one of the demoralizing effects of it, even throughout the country. I don't say there is no organization but in the Congress, at least, there has not been an effective organization.

M: Has the coolness between Senator Fulbright and President Johnson, in your opinion, hindered the activity of the Foreign Relations Committee?

A: It has probably resulted in the Executive Branch not being quite so frank with us as they might otherwise have been, such as not letting Cabinet members come before us to testify when they felt that perhaps the objective was to embarrass the Executive Branch.

M: Have members of the committee, Fulbright and others who have expressed great opposition on many occasions, been punished in any way--politically punished by the Administration?

A: I don't know. I'm not on the inside of the Democratic Party so I couldn't say. Senator

Fulbright, even though he couldn't persuade the Senate to do things his way very frequently, did build up a great following throughout the country, particularly through the schools and the colleges.

M: To put it another way perhaps, did the Administration exercise--as a matter of fact, I believe you may have even complained publicly about this at one time--great pressure on committee members to try to build up a majority for its position on such things as added appropriations and things of this nature?

A: No, not on me at least. They have on some of the members, but I wouldn't say there has been any great pressure exerted on me, because they know perfectly well that pressure is not too effective on me.

M: Again, you're not on the inside of the Democratic Party and don't have the pressure on you then?

A: They have advised me of their position on various matters which have been coming before the committee and before the Senate, but I wouldn't say that they have laid down the law to me and said "We want you to do this or else."

M: You were a member of the highly publicized Mansfield tour in late 1965, which resulted in the Mansfield report of early 1966. Do you still subscribe to the general conclusions that were reached in that report?

A: Yes, I think it was a very accurate report. Of course, the report that was printed was available to the public; however, there was a report made to the President which was perhaps more open, more factual, plainer talk than the one which was made public. But that was a good report.

M: Was the private report also more pessimistic than the public report?

A: I shouldn't say, but I think it was in plainer language--let's put it that way. And it was made very plain to the President that we really had a bear by the tail--that's an expression they use up where I come from--you couldn't hang on and couldn't let go. The war was open-ended and there was no end in sight as things were going then.

M: All of the presidential candidates now, for example, are talking about two things: one, letting the South Vietnamese share more of the burden, and also letting our allies share more of the burden. That report, as I recall, indicated that neither one of these was very likely. Do you still believe that they are not very likely?

A: No. They're not. Of course the South Vietnamese government, as of today, is a minority government any way you look at it; it couldn't last except by our support. So I think the report we made was pretty accurate.

You know, Senator Mansfield had made a trip over there two years previously and had given a very factual report to the President.

M: I have to admit I've been one of your great admirers since you were quoted as making a suggestion for Viet Nam in 1966 in which you are alleged to have said that the best solution was to "call it victory and get out." Did you make that suggestion; if indeed you did make it--did you make it as a serious suggestion?

A: Yes, although it wasn't taken seriously.

M: Did anybody take it seriously?

A: It was taken seriously a year later. It didn't sink in. But at that time our military forces--well you might say they were in a pretty good position over there. The President was just leaving for a conference at Manila, I believe, and I hesitated about making that recommendation. I had thought of making it for some time. But when he left for the meeting at Manila with the allied countries over there, the SEATO nations, I thought it was about time to make that suggestion. I think it would have worked; there would have been some grumbling on the part of North Viet Nam and possibly Communist China that we really hadn't won the war, but the world as a whole would have accepted it. I'm sure the President wouldn't have been subjected to any great criticism from the rest of the world had he done that and withdrawn from North Viet Nam at the time, because North Viet Nam was being severely punished by our bombing. No one can tell me that they liked that; they too would have liked an excuse to quit.

M: What about the American public? Do you think he would have suffered extreme criticism at home for taking that action?

A: Oh by some, of course. There's always an element that thinks we can lick the world; that we could even do it before breakfast some morning with one hand tied behind us. Of course, they are hardly up to date I would say. So whatever he did would be subject to criticism.

M: You were quoted then about a year later as saying that this Administration could not achieve an honorable peace in Viet Nam. Why?

A: Because I think by that time that the war had become personalized; that the leaders of the North Vietnamese government had acquired such animosity for President Johnson that I predicted they'd never sit down at a table and sign any agreement with him. I still don't think they would. I held that the war would simply have to phase out, informally almost, and I might say that Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge also held that position while he was in Viet Nam. And the last time I saw him he still had that belief. I don't think that North Viet Nam will ever sign any contract, agreement or arrangement with Lyndon

Johnson's Administration; it has got just too personal; it has got to be a matter of face-saving.

Naturally, Hanoi wants it to look as if the arrangement was in its favor, and knowing our President as I do, I'm sure that he wouldn't agree to anything that left him in a bad light.

M: Then you think the reason why his Administration is unable to make an honorable settlement is because of the relationships that have developed between it and North Viet Nam and not because of domestic political commitments?

A: I think that the relationship [that] has developed with North Viet Nam is the major factor why Hanoi will not sign or reach any agreement with us. Why, Hanoi would prefer to deal with almost anyone else in the White House than with President Johnson, whom Hanoi appears to hold almost wholly responsible for the difficulties. They forget that he inherited the situation over there, even though it was a small inheritance at the time.

M: What has been, this is sort of subjective-- you know, in regard to entertainers that are always asking "What is the real Johnny Carson like?" On Viet Nam, has there been a "real" Lyndon Johnson; has he had a consistent personal position toward the general problems there?

A: Lyndon Johnson, in my opinion, has been terribly concerned about his place in history. He wants to go down in history as a great President, a good President. He has got a lot of things in his favor, too, which are overlooked frequently today. I think that the policy has been his own, at least for three years.

M: Can a President in today's world really control events or, as I believe one of your New England philosophers once said, do events get in the saddle and ride us?

A: Well, not after the decision was made some three years ago to expand the war. Then it is something out of hand even for the one who made the decision.

M: One thing leads to another?

A: One thing leads to another, and you do get the matter of protecting our boys overseas, fighting the monolithic Communist enemy, which in my book is not as monolithic as it is noncooperative at present. Things like that.

M: Shifting to a little bit different topic but in the realm of foreign affairs, has Mr. Johnson had what you would call a consistent position regarding foreign aid?

A: I think so. Foreign aid, of course, has I believe deteriorated as the need for it has lessened. So many countries that we helped when they were in desperate condition are

not in the need of foreign aid that they were five, ten, or fifteen years ago. But his position, in recent years anyway, has been rather consistent. However foreign aid, we might as well admit it, has developed largely into a subsidy for American contractors and industry, and our foreign aid has helped maintain a strong economy with high wages and large incomes here at home.

M: Why then has it become so unpopular in Congress?

A: Because of the shortage of money; because of the rise in interest rates; because of the fact that we haven't shown satisfactory progress in the war in Asia; because other countries which we have aided have gone into the world market and taken some of our business away; because foreign aid has resulted in hundreds of thousands of jobs, particularly low-wage jobs, leaving this country for other parts of the world. You can't say it's any one thing but all of them put together has made the foreign aid more unpopular, and of course the final straw was the 10% increase in the tax bill.

M: You, I believe, have joined Senator Fulbright recently in advocating an end to the so-called "one package" approach to foreign aid. I think you had wanted to divide it into economic and military segments.

A: Yes.

M: Has the Administration had any strong view on that?

A: Well, the United States today, of course, is the greatest supplier of arms in the world. We have more of our military strength outside our own country than all the rest of the world combined, I think. As Trotsky said before he was assassinated in Mexico in 1938, the United States would become the greatest military nation the world ever knew but before doing so would inherit the British Empire. Now, we didn't inherit the British Empire; we just inherited most of her responsibilities. They used to say the sun never sets on the British Empire, but you can say today the sun never sets on American military forces. We are scattered over the world, and the military costs of government--of course defense we call it, although that encompasses a lot of other things too, economic assistance too--has become rather predominant through the world.

Now, our committee has been insisting on cutting down the grants for arms to foreign countries, some of them to fight each other; but, we're adding that cost to our Defense Department. The Defense Department has been really taking over an awful lot of things in this country as well as in the world, including a large part of our educational system.

M: Then your attempt to divide this aid to economic on the one hand and military on the other is really an attempt in the long run to focus attention on the military portion so as to decrease it?

A: I think so. We have attempted to get away from arming different countries to fight each other.

M: Which has in the past happened?

A: Yes, we've done quite a business in that field.

M: Let's shift topics here, more or less completely. You are the ranking Republican on the Agriculture and Forestry Committees, something which is very dear to you, I expect, because of your background and your previous record as a noted author on fruit production, I believe. How about Lyndon Johnson's agriculture program?

A: Well, Lyndon Johnson and I don't have many differences of opinion as far as rural America is concerned and the maintenance of our agriculture. I have found him to be excellent in the efforts which we have been making to develop rural America; to get people out of the crowded cities where they don't belong anyway and where it's a national liability; to get more decentralization of people, of industry, of social activities. I've had a wonderful experience with President Johnson in that field.

M: Do you think he has paid what you would consider adequate attention to the rural problem with all the urban difficulties--

A: Yes, yes. You know, I think he's really rural at heart. And one of his weaknesses when he became President was trying to act like a city fellow.

M: You are also a rather well-known public power advocate. You supported Hell's Canyon back in the 1950's and the Lincoln-Dickey project in more recent times. What about Lyndon Johnson's position in regard to this issue?

A: Well, I don't recall that he has got involved in these matters, recently at least. In the early days, I believe that he was a supporter of rural electrification.

M: When he was a Congressman, yes sir.

A: Yes, as Congressman he was a supporter of rural electrification. He certainly has been a very strong supporter of a bill which I introduced in 1965 to give assistance for rural water and sewage systems, which I think has been a wonderful thing for the country. He is helping to develop the rural areas, the farming areas; he has also been wonderfully cooperative in the field of dairying. I can think of at least three or four times when the dairy industry of this country was threatened with disaster, he has stepped in to save it.

M: How would a President step in to save the dairy industry?

A: Well, because in the circumvention of the intent of import rules and regulations. It was two years ago we were getting foreign dairy products dumped on this country by the--well, the equivalent of--billions of pounds of milk and cheese and ice cream mix and so on and so forth. And the Tariff Commission had made a study--the Tariff Commission was not too friendly to the American agriculturists. The President overrode them, put a stop to excessive imports. Again in the summer of 1968 the same thing was happening in regard to canned milk. Many of our, in fact most of our evaporated and condensed milk plants would have had to close in this country--that would have been a real disaster. He stepped in again and declared an emergency and put a stop to the shiploads of imports which were being dumped on our market at about 25% below our costs. He has never failed, when the dairy industry has been in danger, to take action which has really saved it. After all it's still the biggest all-round industry we have.

That goes also for the soil and water programs and particularly for the rural water. I remember in 1965 the Budget Bureau was adamant against any grants or loans for rural water systems. They held right up to the last end that we couldn't do it; although the Senate had passed the legislation unanimously, it looked as if the Budget Bureau had it stopped in the House and Lyndon Johnson stepped in one night, laid the law down, and said they'd been going one way long enough, now they'd better turn and go the other way. And the next morning the Budget Bureau reversed its position and the program went through. It has been a wonderful program for rural America and also for urban America too, because the more prosperous the rural area is, the more employment there is, the more profits there are, the more business is done in the urban areas as well.

M: There was quite a bit of publicity a year or so ago, I believe, when Mr. Johnson failed for several months to reappoint a man, whom I believe you sponsored in part, Mr. [Charles] Ross on the Federal Power Commission. Why did he do that?

A: Because he didn't know him. Charlie Ross is public power-minded; let's put it that way; you can't get around it. And I had recommended to the President that he be reappointed, because it's so easy for members of a federal commission to get over-sympathetic to the people they're supposed to regulate. It's hard not to. But Charlie was standing up pretty well and was representing the public and the rural electric people's viewpoints on that commission. And of course the corporate utilities didn't want him reappointed. They put all the pressure they could, I'm sure, on the Administration not to reappoint him, and I believe that he was not reappointed when his term expired, along April or May. But in late fall that year the President invited him to come down to Texas along with other Federal people and while Charlie was down there, the President got acquainted with him, and he told me afterwards that he liked Charlie and reappointed him.

M: So it was mainly a lack of knowledge rather than any issue?

A: It was mainly due to the fact that the utility industry was dead set against Charlie Ross' reappointment, and they were exerting all the pressure they possibly could to keep him

from being reappointed. But the President finally came through and reappointed him and of course Commissioner Ross, desiring to get into other work after, I think, six years on the commission, or maybe seven years, resigned to take effect in September 1968.

M: Let's have just a few final questions here on politics if you don't mind Senator. You've been very kind to give me this much time.

When Mr. Johnson became President suddenly after the assassination, did you have any early personal conversations with him?

A: I can't recall the first conversation I had with him. I recall going with Senator Mansfield and two or three other members of the Congress out to Andrews Air Force Field to meet the new President, who came in on the plane which also carried the body of President Kennedy and his family. I don't recall just when the first discussion with him came after that. I'm sure it was not too long.

M: How did he go about getting the great mass of legislation passed in 1964 and 1965? Did he have some magic with Congress?

A: Well, I think he was a new President, he had a great majority in the Congress, and party loyalty was stronger then than it is today, much stronger even four years ago. And further than that, the President was rather insistent, rather persuasive, he hadn't built up the animosities which have come on faster in the last year or so. And just pure insistence, I think, put a lot of that legislation through.

M: Do you think that President Kennedy could have passed the same programs had he lived?

A: I doubt it. President Kennedy was <u>not</u> the forceful type; he was persuasive; he was liked; he was amiable. But he was not the driver. Lyndon Johnson is an operator; he's a driver. Sometimes I think that he's probably a better operator than he is a planner; nevertheless, the plans are there and if he approves them, he goes to work to put them through.

M: Some analysts of Mr. Johnson have divided his career and said that he had a conservative stage primarily when he was in the Senate and a liberal stage. Do you think that's an accurate division?

A: Oh, I think that he's a conservative at heart but a liberal politically. When I say he's a conservative at heart, I mean that he has great faith in private enterprise, in large industries, in basic industries; but when I say he's a liberal politically, he is enough of a practical politician to know that you can't get elected President of the United States on a straight conservative platform anymore. He's both. Nobody is wholly conservative or wholly liberal.

M: So you believe his career is more consistent than can be divided by some lines?

A: That's right.

M: Why did he lose his consensus that he seemed to have in 1964 and 1965?

A: Let's put the main cause on the Asian war. The public had been led to believe that it was just a foray in a foreign country to restore order and then we'd get out. It didn't turn out to be that way, and as the war went on people found other excuses for opposing him. But in their hearts it was the situation in Southeast Asia that prompted people to look for excuses or reasons, if you want to call it that, for disliking him more.

M: Why do you think he decided not to run again?

A: Well, anyone who has had an attack which could have been fatal worries about it thereafter. Every time they get a toe ache, they think maybe it's coming back on them again. And further than that, I don't think that the President felt that he wanted to go into a knock-down drag-out battle for the election. And the dissension within his own party had made it appear that he might be defeated if he ran again, and Lyndon Johnson never liked to be defeated.

M: You said once earlier that you thought he was very concerned about his image in history. I wonder, as a kind of conclusion here, if you might make your assessment as to how you think history will treat him. You have served now under what--four presidents?

A: Beginning with Roosevelt. Five Presidents. It's difficult to tell. Possibly a lot will depend on the development of Southeast Asia over the next ten - twenty - fifty years. If it turns out that that country, that area, becomes a great potent power of the world, he may get credit for it. I don't think you can forecast how history will treat anyone. I can say that I think he's very, very much concerned about it.

Before the election in 1964, I went to British Columbia with him. In fact, most of my trips out of this country have been at the request of the Executive Branch rather than the legislative. I went out there with the President and on the way back, I told him I was not going to vote for him. I had promised I would vote for the Republican candidate. But if he was elected, I wanted him to be the best president that we ever had and I'd do all I could to help him to be a good president. I think that he has realized I have done all I could. It has been uphill at times to defend some of his acts, and I can't defend all of them, of course. But I make it a point to give him credit everywhere I can; credit for believing that he thought he was going to bring the war in Asia to a quick conclusion; and certainly you can give him credit for his devotion to rural America and the efforts and cooperation he has given us to keep American agriculture strong; develop rural areas and get away from the situation which prevails in some of our larger cities.

M: There is always a danger in this kind of project on which I am working that, because of my

lack of knowledge, I might miss something with which you are very familiar and is highly important. Is there anything that you would like to add for the record here for scholars thirty or forty or fifty years from now?

A: No. I can't see that far ahead. I don't know what advice would be applicable thirty or forty or fifty years from now; in fact in these days when technology is running on ahead of us, when distance is becoming shortened and government is becoming larger, we just can't see too far ahead. And I think we have to operate on a day-to-day or year-to-year basis and hope that everything will come out all right.

They talk about the young people of today being worse than they used to be. They're not any worse than they used to be; they just have more things to be worse with--that's all. I have great faith in the young people of today. And I would give them more responsibility; that's why I joined Senator Mansfield in proposing a constitutional amendment to let them vote at eighteen. Because at eighteen, now, they are really better equipped than I was at twenty-one.

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By George D. Aiken

to the

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BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: U. S. Senator
b. Dummerston, Vt., Aug. 20, 1892. grad. Brattleboro (Vt.) High School, 1909. With small fruit farm, 1912; started comml. cultivation of wildflowers, 1926. School Dir., Putney, Vt., 1920-37; elected Gov., 1937-41; elected to U. S. Senate, 1940, to fill vacancy for term ending Jan. 3, 1945; relected, 1944--. Author: Pioneering with Wildflowers, 1933; Pioneering with Fruits and Berries, 1936; Speaking From Vermont, 1938. Died October 19, 1994.