

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: August 13, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: CARL B. ALBERT

INTERVIEWER: Dorothy Pierce McSweeney

PLACE: Congressman Albert's office in the Capitol, Washington, D. C.

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M: We had stopped our previous discussion on the legislative program of 1967. I would like to continue with 1968, and then finish up with the political developments of that year in the Johnson Administration.

Among the most controversial and difficult ones that come to mind is the Tax Surcharge which became pigeonholed in the House Ways and Means Committee, and ultimately, when it was brought out and adopted, had pretty large cutbacks in federal spending and personnel. I wonder if you could tell me, with the idea--with all reports Mr. Johnson felt pretty strongly about the necessity of this tax. If you would tell me your role in getting this legislation through the Congress--

A: This the President considered probably the most important bill of that year because of the fact that he was facing a large deficit, and a prospective inflationary reaction to that made it a matter of really major concern. The Secretary of the Treasury then, Joe Fowler, told me that he thought it was going to be the turning point in the history of this country almost if we didn't pass that bill, and that this country was really going to be in trouble in every financial center in the world. It was going to have worldwide repercussions.

So President Johnson--and the leadership supported him strongly, the Democratic leadership in the House--decided that he had to have it almost at any price. Well, those of us who had supported the Johnson programs did not want to see the spending limitations which Congressman Mills was insisting on and which the Republican leadership was insisting on. We wanted to keep the spending limitation lower and make it around four or four and a half billion dollars rather than six, but we couldn't get any support from the Republican side for that kind of proposal. That is the unfair thing about Gerald Ford's criticisms of Democrats as against their actions last year when that bill was up because they got a big quid pro quo. They got what they wanted by way of spending limitations. Our members didn't get anything this time for supporting Nixon. That's one of the reasons why they didn't support Nixon in very large numbers. Our members were very unhappy because they'd had to sit by and see programs in which they were vitally interested go down the drain or be cut back while they were getting a tax bill which the country needed and which they sensed that the country needed.

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Then we had the additional problem last year of having all the more conservative Democrats lining up for the six-billion dollar cut with the Republicans. This made a real tough situation for us and for the President. Finally, we had to give in for the six billion dollars. We did then get a substantial number of Republicans, and we kept a good part of our Democrats, so we had no real problem in passing the bill, although many of them hated, as I say, to see that cut.

M: Did the Congressional leaders and yourself talk with Mr. Johnson about this?

A: Oh, yes, repeatedly. Over and over again. We had meetings that lasted for six months. I mean we were meeting frequently for over a period of at least six months. And the Ways and Means Committee was very slow, you know, in reporting this bill which was worrying the President considerably. He finally gave in to the big spending limitation which he had to do or he wouldn't have gotten the bill.

M: With his astute knowledge of the ways of Congress, did he have any advice as to the strategy or what efforts could be brought to bear?

A: Yes. Well, he knew the members, and he knew what the problem was. It was just a question of simple arithmetic. There was no major job of finding out whether you could use something--some unusual persuasion. It was not that kind of a situation. The only figure was the six-billion dollar spending limitation that had to be agreed to or we wouldn't have gotten the bill. Once agreed to, it was easy to get the bill.

We could count the members, we knew what they would do. They wouldn't take the four and a half billion dollar limitation. We tried that, you know, and failed. We had hoped that they would take that, and we worked hard on trying to get the members to take that. But we couldn't get the leadership of the Ways and Means Committee, and we couldn't get some of the members of the Appropriations Committee to go along with that, you know.

Then there got to be a little bit of a struggle between the Appropriations Committee and the Ways and Means Committee. Finally, the Republicans had the balance of power, and they were insisting on a six-billion dollar cut.

M: This would be with the coalition of the more conservative Democrats?

A: Yes.

M: And there wasn't any way to get the bill out of these various committees to the floor. It wouldn't have done any good. We were defeated on the four and a half billion dollar effort, you know.

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- M: That's true. Did the members of the Congressional liaison from the White House help in--?
- A: We contacted every member--both they and we. We contacted every single member on the Democratic side. We called everyone. But we didn't know for sure who was going to vote with us. We called them all.
- M: Had you been optimistic about the passage of the four and a half billion?
- A: Not very, because I had run into a lot of trouble. Ford was being very insistent. We knew most of the Republicans were going to go with him.
- M: I think another one that comes to mind, and I'd like to have you tell me about passage, was the gun control. Of course, this is after two assassinations that year. The bill was again submitted and finally passed banning mail order and out-of-state purchases, but no registration. I believe this is the first recorded vote in something like thirty years in the House on firearm legislation.
- A: It's the first in my time. I don't know when there was one before. I was opposed to that bill. That's one of the few bills that I voted against that the President was supporting. It caused a lot of complaint in my district since--the fact that ammunition is difficult to buy, and everybody in my district hunts and carries a gun. They're very unhappy with it.
- M: Mr. Albert, that puts you in a rather odd position as the Majority Leader and the Administration's bill.
- A: The Majority Leader doesn't have to support an Administration bill per se. There was nothing in my platform or in the Democratic Party platform that required me to cast such a vote.
- M: Does that take you completely out of doing any organization or figuring of votes on the possible passage of the bill?
- A: I didn't campaign for it. I just told Larry O'Brien and all of them--Barefoot Sanders, that I was not going to vote for the bill and was not going to work for it. I just happened not to believe in that legislation.
- M: Did you discuss this with Mr. Johnson?
- A: Briefly, but not at great length. He became so engrossed in this legislation that he practically pleaded for it. He talked to me about mail order murder and that every gun should be registered. Well, I don't think that would have changed the assassinations. Bobby Kennedy was killed by a registered gun. But I assume that the fact that he probably was under threats all the time--I'm sure he was, as all Presidents are, you

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know--would make him more sensitive to trying to get some control. I imagine we have about three hundred million guns in this country. You'd have to have martial law to get them all registered and search every home. You couldn't possibly get them all registered. In Washington, D.C., the registration law they've put in locally here--I read somewhere that less than twenty percent of the estimated guns in the District of Columbia are registered, and of that less than twenty percent, there was no need in those people registering because they're not the kind who'll use them illegally.

M: There was a lot of talk about the strength of the gun lobby, of course, that has managed to mount pretty good resistance to legislation in this area. What was your assessment of their efforts in this last passage?

A: I didn't pay any attention to the gun lobby. I just had my own opinions on the matter, and that's the way I voted.

M: What about the Housing and Urban Development Act that year? It was--

A: It was a comprehensive act.

M: One of the most far-reaching in a long time.

A: A very fine act. We haven't been able to implement it as quickly as we would like to. That's one of the problems we're having with all the Great Society bills. Financing is becoming difficult because of the war costs and the expenses of the Defense Department are so high.

M: This leads me to another question that I have a little bit further down in regards to our welfare legislation that was put on the books. Do you, reflecting now back on it, think it was truly realistic to pursue these programs in the light of our continued involvement in Viet Nam?

A: I think it was. Of course, when we put most of these programs on the statute books, we had not become as heavily and deeply involved in Viet Nam as we were later. Most of these were put on in the 89th Congress--that is, a big majority of them. Of course, the Housing Act wasn't, but many of them were. But I think it was good to get the basic legislation on the books at a time when we had a President who was capable of getting it done and a majority in Congress that was capable of getting it done. We had just the kind of majority we needed in the 89th Congress to get most of these things done.

M: Do you think the programs were well organized, or was it more the effort to get them down?

A: What do you mean by that?

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- M: There have been some charges that, by getting this legislation passed, a great many hopes were aroused that many of our social problems would be solved. Of course, I think people have also attributed this to disaffection towards the Administration because they were unable to implement.
- A: They were not all implemented, and many of them weren't implemented as much as they should have been. But had we done what the President wanted us to do in these programs, I think they would have fared much better. But I'm glad the laws are basically on the statutes now, because we can go from there when we have the wherewithal to do it.
- M: Was it possible, Mr. Albert, with our Viet Nam involvement to--?
- A: It wasn't possible to do everything that we would have liked to have done. No, it wasn't. Not by last year, because we had a tremendous deficit last year, you'll remember. We would have had a much bigger one if we had not passed the surtax.
- M: I have a notation down here, looking at my notes, had the welfare programs suffered any from the demands of the war on Mr. Johnson as far as their groundwork, their guidelines.
- A: I'm sure that some of them suffered, but I think some of them did a lot of good. I think the OEO has done a lot of good. I think the regional programs, I think the manpower training programs,, the housing programs, certainly up to a point. We have had to curtail activities somewhat, but I think most of these--the education programs certainly have really done an awful lot of good. And these were the main thrusts of the Johnson drive--education, training, trying to prepare people to work and to earn a living. There's nothing new in President Nixon's statement that he wants people to work. That's exactly what the poverty program was set up for--the Appalachia Program, the Ozarka, the regional programs, the manpower training and all the others, were set up for that very purpose.
- M: Mr. Albert, was Mr. Johnson realistic about the cooperation he would receive his last year in office?
- A: I think he was. The President found himself in a very serious situation from the standpoint of managing the overall programs that he had sponsored because from the more liberal members you had grave cries for enormous city programs reaching billions of dollars. He felt that the implementation of his programs within his budget would have given them the kind of start that they needed and that they were realistic. So he had that group after him to expand everything. The Kerner Report and all of those things came out, you know.

Then he had the conservatives wanting to cut back everything. Between those groups--and that's where the leadership of the Congress was--we were right between the

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same groups. Then of course he had the war costs and the opposition to the war, some of it coming from liberals. With all these problems, there just wasn't enough money around to do everything that had to be done., and there wasn't enough elbow room for him to maneuver among all these conflicting groups.

M: Mr. Albert, talking about the war, did you ever have occasion to discuss our commitment with Mr. Johnson?

A: Oh, yes, many times.

M: Was this more in personal talks, or was it in relation to foreign aid or military appropriations?

A: Both. I've talked to him privately about it. I have talked to him in small informal groups. He has reported time and again to the Democratic leaders and also to joint leadership meetings formally with his Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense and others--the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We were constantly briefed on the war--I was.

M: Did you see a change in his outlook regarding the war during this period from 1965 on--through 1968?

A: I don't think I saw any change. I think he thought--and I still think--that he was right in thinking that we were in Viet Nam due to obligations which we had made, and that our vital interests were affected there. I think he felt that way, I felt that way--I still feel that way. God knows, we don't want any of these wars, but the one way to insure having them is not to be willing to face up to them.

M: Then you didn't see in this period a development of a change of our policy towards the conduct of the Viet Nam---

A: There was no change in policy that I knew anything about. I think he was trying all the time--he'd been trying from the very beginning to get Hanoi to the conference table. He had stopped bombing different times. He had done various things. He had taken many initiatives, both on the battlefield and through informal conferences around the world., through other Iron Country Embassies that could reach Hanoi and Peking. There was a constant effort being made all the time to try to end that war, but President Johnson did not change his position on that war. He insisted that the Democratic platform and the Democratic convention should endorse his stand, and that's what it did. That was after he had withdrawn from the race himself. I do think that he withdrew because he felt that he might do a better job if he took his own political career out of the negotiations. I think that's why he withdrew. I think he would have won the election had he run.

M: Did you have any forewarning of what he might say on March 31st?

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A: Just a matter of hours.

M: Prior to it?

A: Yes.

M: Do you recall what happened?

A: I was called and I forgot who called me, whether it was Barefoot Sanders--I've forgotten who called me. I was called and told that they were delivering me a copy of the President's speech and that he was going to say that he would not be a candidate for reelection. That was a little while before--maybe a couple of hours before, three hours or something like that, before he made the speech.

M: Were you instructed not to talk about it or anything?

A: oh, yes, it was confidential at that stage because if it got out it would, I suppose, have blunted his speech some.

M: I've read some reports that say that he was not even sure right up till delivery of the speech whether he was going to include that statement or not. Do you think that's accurate?

A: I was told some time before, and I can't remember just how long before, that he would say that he was not going to run. Otherwise, what would have been the purpose of his speech!

M: Of course, he sizeably reduced our--put a troop ceiling and limitations on our commitment in Viet Nam.

A: I don't see where that speech would have meant much if he wasn't going to get out. I was very sorry that he got out.

M: Did you talk with him about his decision afterwards?

A: I told him I was sorry that he had decided not to run, but it was obvious that he had made up his mind.

M: Did you see it as irrevocable from that moment on?

A: I didn't think there was any possibility of his changing and, of course, he was obviously throwing his support to Hubert Humphrey who had supported him in both his domestic and foreign policies while he was Vice President.

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- M: Of course he was the head of the Democratic party and was heading towards being the nominee at the upcoming convention. What would you say was the impact on Congress and the Democratic leaders around the country?
- A: I think most everyone felt that it would make for a difficult campaign--not that Humphrey wasn't a good candidate, but you can only have one chief at a time., and President Johnson hadn't run his whole show. He still had another term in which he'd be considered the logical candidate for the party nomination.
- M: Do you recall some of the occasions of discussing Viet Nam with Mr. Johnson--his frame of mind?
- A: Well,, he would try to drive home the point every time he talked about it that we had made commitments that had gotten us there; that we had tried everything we could to get Hanoi to stop fighting the South Vietnamese. He thought that we should keep our commitments that if we didn't and were caught bluffing that we would pay for the consequences in the future.
- M: Of course, the March 31st speech did, as I said, limit our troop level in Viet Nam.
- A: Well, yes, it limited our troop commitments in Viet Nam, but the troop commitment was enough to do what we had to do.
- M: Of course, there were also reports that General Westmoreland was requesting more troops.
- A: Of course, I think the frustrating thing about the war was that the reports from the Pentagon that the war would be over quickly, you know, were not confirmed--
- M: Mr. Albert, continuing on just one last thing on Viet Nam, did Mr. Johnson ever talk about the advice he received from the military?
- A: Oh, yes.
- M: I'm not hedging on this, but particularly among the Armed Services committees. In the House Armed Service Committee several times accusations came up of military muzzling.
- A: I think he consulted his military advisers all the time. I don't think there's any question about that. I don't know whether they were muzzled or not. He was the Commander-in-Chief. No military man ever told me that he was told either by the Secretary of Defense or by the President not to tell the truth or not to tell the whole truth.
- M: How did you assess Mr. Johnson's reliance on military advice. Again, I'm thinking of

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course at the end he rejected escalating our troop level in Viet Nam.

A: I think he relied on military advice for the policy, the military tactics and strategy, but he had his own responsibility when it came to the extent of the American commitment and the nature of the American commitment. That was his job, not the military's.

M: I'd like to continue on and ask you about 1968 Democratic convention. Of course, Mr. Johnson's decision on March 31 threw the election year sort of topsy-turvy and removed the main candidate. You were named permanent chairman of the convention, and I would gather that that convention certainly must have contained just about every possible element in previous conventions. I'm thinking in terms of--

A: I suppose it was one of the most violent conventions--I don't say that in the sense of referring to the violence that took place outside., but I mean tempers and feelings were about as high as they could get because the convention was so divided on the issue of the war. Candidates who had supported the anti-Humphrey candidates--I mean, delegates who had--were generally very violently against the war. They had a substantial minority, although they didn't have a majority of the delegates at the convention. Their presence made it difficult sometimes to run the convention and get things done on schedule. The chairman of a convention has got to--when he's told by the President or somebody that we've got to get the Vice President on television at a certain hour, or if he doesn't hold the line and there are some who are trying to prevent the Vice President from getting on, he'd just be run over. The convention would be taken away from him. You wouldn't be able to meet your schedule. The convention would adopt a schedule, and somebody else turn around and a strong minority could probably filibuster it out of existence, and you'd lose all your prime time to those who wanted to disrupt the majority process.

M: Mr. Albert, Mr. Johnson would have been the titular head of the party even if he wasn't politically now involved. Did this therefore make his people and the convention under his direction?

A: I would say he was in control of the convention up to the time Humphrey was nominated.

M: Could you elaborate on that? What do you mean by that--by control?

A: He had his way with the platform. He had his way with the agenda. He selected the temporary and permanent officers of the convention, and everything was run by the National Committee through him.

M: Did you discuss details of running the convention with him?

A: Briefly. We knew it would be very tough.

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M: Did this come in the form of meetings during that summer?

A: I talked to him two or three times just privately.

M: Did you talk to him out at the convention?

A: No. I talked to him by telephone.

M: Was there a telephone on the platform connected with Mr. Johnson?

A: I talked to him from a trailer that I had behind the platform. I had a trailer office out there. That's where I talked to him. I talked to him at least twice. Once he said to me that he wanted all the candidates--all of them--to know that they weren't going to put any weak Vietnamese plank in there in that platform. If they did--I'm not going to tell you what he said.

M: Did he direct you to tell the candidates?

A: No, he didn't direct me. I think he probably told them, too, but he told me that we're not going to have one of those.

M: What were your other conversations with him about? Do you recall?

A: Just reporting on how it was coming along. He called me once, and I think I called him once. Those were actually the only conversations I actually had with him.

M: To inquire as to how your voice was holding out, Mr. Albert?

A: Yes. I had a virus, you know, during the convention. I was about to lose my voice there for a time, and it made it all the more frustrating and difficult to get things done. But I made up my mind that I was going to get it over on time if it killed me.

M: There were some rather abrupt closings during the days that followed the convention. Were these to ward off further demonstrations? I mean, they didn't follow the supposed agenda for that day in a couple of instances.

A: The things that they left out were not parts of the agenda that had to be done at any particular time. The first night when Dan--

M: Inouye?

A: --was in the chair, they began booing him when they wanted to go onto another program. So they decided to adjourn. I think that my first night Criswell wanted to go on late to get

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some of the minor stuff out of the way. I told him that they wouldn't take it, but apparently he wanted it out of the way. But finally we just decided--it got so tumultuous--booing that was so loud, and we decided to recognize somebody and to adjourn until the next day.

M: That was Mayor Daley, wasn't it?

A: No, it wasn't Mayor Daley. I think it was the first night, but it was somebody in the Illinois delegation. I forget who it was.

M: What was Mr. Daley's role in the convention?

A: Oh, he was the host mayor. They always get--

I didn't have any talks with Mayor Daley. He wasn't interfering with the running of the convention in any form at all. He had no advice for us on how to run the convention. Of course, his criticism was what happened outside the convention hall, I think.

M: What was your assessment of his handling of the demonstrators?

A: I have defended him. I don't know all the details. I'm sure that there were instances where some cops went too far. But those people came there--a lot of them were revolutionaries. They wanted to destroy that convention. I have a feeling--this I don't know--but I have a feeling, just going back over the weeks before the convention came along--. You know, they were having trouble, I think a taxi strike in Chicago. There were questions about what could be done and whether the convention could be handled in Chicago. I assumed that the President probably got worried about how the thing would go in Chicago. I'm sure that Mayor Daley wanted it in Chicago and that the President probably told him, well, he had better have the security plenty good. I have a feeling that that's what happened. Of course, Mayor Daley never said anything about it but if the President didn't say that, he would certainly have been subject to criticism if a bunch of people had been killed. I think if he hadn't done that and if he himself had come out there, he might have been killed--the President, I don't know. I was worried about it.

M: Did you discuss Mr. Johnson's attendance?

A: No.

M: Did you consider this a possibility?

A: That he would come?

M: Yes.

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- A: I thought it was a possibility, but I think several people apparently advised him not to come.
- M: That was a rather sad thing, that he couldn't come to his last convention.
- A: Oh, he can go to the next one.
- M: That's true. Did your count of what you knew of the delegates and the voting indicate to you before the convention that Mr. Humphrey would win the nomination?
- A: Oh, yes, there wasn't any question about it.
- M: It was just a matter of letting everybody vent their objections. There were a lot of rumors underfoot. I wonder what your assessment is as to the validity of them. First, the draft-Johnson movement.
- A: At the convention? They didn't come to my attention. All I had was that Johnson was for Humphrey. If there were some draft-Johnson people there, they didn't mention it to me.
- M: What about draft-Kennedy movements?
- A: At that time Bobby was dead, of course, and Teddy was making no drive for it that I knew anything about. And the Senator from South Dakota--
- M: McGovern.
- A: McGovern was sort of a stand-in candidate for the Kennedy organization as I understood it. He's a fine man too--and so is McCarthy. They're both fine men, I think. They've both served under me on the Committee on Agriculture when I was chairman of the subcommittee. They're both outstanding men.

But the problem at the convention was getting the program over in the scheduled time and giving as much consideration as you possibly could to all the elements that wanted to be heard all the time. We had a long debate on the Viet Nam war. I set that up myself. I told Hale Boggs who was chairman of the Platform Committee that they ought to give them two hours on that debate. I don't think we've ever had a longer debate on a key issue. I was contacted by all the people on the anti-side. Everyone of them was a friend of mine. I made sure that they were all going to get time. Phil Burton was one of the ring leaders because he'd been on the Platform Committee and had signed the minority report. Under the rules of the convention thirty minutes is all that would have been allowed on an issue, but I got two hours in addition. So there were actually two hours and thirty minutes on the platform--two hours of which were devoted to the Viet Nam issue alone. Those who were in charge of the anti-Viet Nam program chose the ones to

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speaking that they wanted to speak. If somebody was left out, it was not my fault--it was their fault--those who were the leaders in the Platform Committee of the anti-Viet Nam movement. So that, I think, was something that most people looked--. Phil Hart came to me. Phil wanted to have a vote on a compromise amendment. Well, I know the President didn't want this, and I knew we'd have to beat the amendment. And I tried to get Hale Boggs, who had charge of the time, to yield to--not to close off the previous question so that Phil could offer his amendment. Well, Hale wouldn't agree to it because Hale thought they might take the thing away from him. I mean, he felt that way about it. I don't think they would have, but that's just a matter of judgment because I think the Johnson folks had control over the convention. Hale then wouldn't agree, and Phil came up and said--he sort of dropped it, but he did thank me for it. He had a third point of view, and I was willing for the whole bunch to have the thing out on the convention floor, as far as I was concerned--as much debate as they wanted.

M: Did you see a serious effort to totally disrupt the convention?

A: Well--

M: In other words, if they couldn't get their way, end it.

A: Of course, some people--you know, if they can't rule, they want to ruin. And there were some delegates there who just constantly tried to interrupt, tried to make speeches during roll calls and such things as that. Well, I don't know whether or not it was just ignorance or whether it was design. It may have been a part of both. I think some of them really would like to--I think there were delegates there who were so opposed to Humphrey and so opposed to the Viet Nam plank that they would have liked to have wrecked that convention.

M: You've spoken of the Johnson forces. Who do you mean in this group, Mr. Albert?

A: I mean the delegates that came there that everybody knew was going to support Humphrey.

M: I mean those in control of the convention. You mean the members of the Democratic National Committee running the convention?

A: No. When I say I know the Johnson forces, I meant that I knew that a majority of the delegates was on Johnson's side. That's all I meant by that. And that they would be on his side when the vote came on the Viet Nam issue, although there would be a big minority vote. Undoubtedly the war hurt us in the campaign. There's no question about that, because it did divide off some of our people who would normally have more eagerly supported the ticket. But I think they were coming back fast for Humphrey as they looked over Nixon. I think had the campaign gone on a little longer that Humphrey would

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have won.

M: Are there any other observations that come to your mind about that convention?

A: I don't think so. The physical handling of the convention could be greatly improved in my opinion, because for one thing, the facilities there didn't look good and really are not good. They had a tremendous draft of cold air right under the rostrum all the time. And Dan had lost his voice the day before, and he didn't think he was going to get to make his speech. I got feverish as a result. I don't know whether it was the draft or just that I had some old virile infection in my throat. But that didn't help it any.

And then the mechanics of controlling the audience were bad. It was under the control of John Criswell, who wasn't the chairman of the convention, instead of me. So I couldn't hear people, you know. You should have a close to--not that he wasn't cooperating with me, he was. But the chairman of the convention ought to be able to hear everybody, ought to be able to know what the motions are, and he ought to be able to turn on the button to spike the mike out there somewhere. A lot of little things like that would make it easier to run the convention.

If that convention taught anything, it is that you can't have a convention in a short period of time if you don't give the chair more power and if you don't give more flexibility about debate. The chair ought to have more control over the program. But the convention officials--that's the people on the national committee--they had to have the authority to frame the agenda because of television time. Television has introduced a new medium into convention activities, you see. They all want to get the right people on at the right time. You're crowded in that and if you don't deliver, you've upset the whole thing.

M: Mr. Albert, I'd like to go on and just discuss a few things that have been talked about regarding Mr. Johnson. I think one of them is the credibility gap and it has surfaced in all forms.

A: I have never found any ground to question Mr. Johnson's credibility on any issue from the time I first knew him until he left the White House--not once! He was telling the truth. I don't know what they meant by the credibility gap, because what he was saying to the press, to the public, about Viet Nam, what he was saying and what his people were saying to the committees was exactly what he was getting from his own people in Saigon and in Viet Nam and from his own advisers here. I didn't see any credibility--that was just something that was concocted, I think, for political reasons because somebody bought something.

I think the origin of one of the things was in a time when they asked for more money or troops or both--that was years ago. The charge was made that they knew they were going to have to do that when they made their initial assessment. I happen to know

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in that case that they didn't. They had different factors to consider. It's very easy, though, to say, "well, they told us they'd do this and this, and they should have known it, and therefore they did know it, and therefore there's a credibility gap."

M: Were you thinking of an annual budgetary program?

A: Yes.

M: Was this 1964, you mean, this first budget? It would be for 1965.

A: 1965--I forget which one. I remember that instance with somebody yelling--that was the first time I heard the expression "credibility gap. 11

M: When he made it under a hundred billion?

A: Yes.

M: And supposedly it was going to be a 102 or 104? What part do you think Mr. Johnson's personality played in this accusation? His own makeup?

A: I don't see that he played any part in that. I think he was just the head of a political party being challenged by people that wanted another political party to win. That's the feeling I had about it.

Now, he was known--and I think legitimately--as an arm-twister, a pusher, and a hard fighting politician. That was true. But that's one thing and lacking in credibility is another. While his push never ceased after he became President, the drive that he always used in his political career--he was a very restless man, you know--he just went on and on and on and was never satisfied--he kept that through the Presidency. I'm sure as President of the United States he had no consideration whatsoever except the welfare of the country. I'm absolutely convinced of that.

M: I'm almost finished, Mr. Albert. Along with this, I think what comes to mind the decline in his popularity.

A: I suppose that was because the war was unpopular with a lot of people. Wars are never popular, and the sausage-grinder type of war is very unpopular. I think it was more anger. I got many more angry letters during the Korean war than I had during the Viet Nam war--many, many more.

M: What about the attitude in your own district regarding Mr. Johnson?

A: Supported President Johnson. My district would not be classified as a dove-type district,

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although there was some opposition to the Viet Nam war. I think a sizeable majority of people thought we were there for very valid reasons.

M: To move on to just an overall reflection of his Congressional relations, Mr. Albert, I believe that there were probably more Congressmen at the White House in this Administration than ever before.

A: Oh, yes. Well, there was more contact between the White House and the Congress, and that included not only the leadership but the committees and individuals. There was a greater working relationship than there certainly has ever been in my time--far, far greater. They came to the Hill--his representatives; he called members of Congress more in one week than the Nixon Administration does in a month, or the Eisenhower Administration, or the Truman Administration. It was his style. It's the only kind that will work. A more docile President couldn't have gotten his program over. We passed bills in the House of Representatives not by newspaper support and not by a lot of fanfare on the floor. We pass bills by calling Jim Brown and saying, "Jim, I've got to talk to you about this bill." Bingo! "You by yourself and me by myself," and we'd go down the list.

We'd talk all weekend on one bill, just to member after member. That's the way we operated, and that's the way they operated. We went out to get the votes, one by one, and find out whether or not we're going to lose that vote and be sure that we would try to do everything possible to get the vote if we needed it.

M: Reflectively, what one comes to your mind of being the most difficult, or the one that took the most effort?

A: There were several that took enormous effort. One weekend Larry O'Brien was working all weekend, and he called me. I was working late Saturday night--I was still on the phone. I can't remember what bill it was. It was one of those that narrowly passed, but I can't remember the bill. But it happened on nearly every major bill. We'd take a list of the members of the House--the Democratic members--and we had some communication with some people on the Republican side. We didn't count their members, but organizations outside would help us count Republican members. We'd just put a list down here, and we'd go over these members. Well, of course, you could pick a hundred out that you knew were going to vote for it, so you didn't bother them. Then you'd pick out maybe twenty-five that you knew that were going to vote against it, and you wouldn't bother them. But then all the rest of them, you'd call them one by one and talk to them and try to get them to go. And they either went, or they didn't go, and we knew why they couldn't go. Most members want to cooperate with the leadership and with the President--most members.

M: Mr. Albert, behind your desk is a very large plaque of many, many pens. And of course this became something that Mr. Johnson used quite a lot. Was this and the attendance at

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the White House an effort to reward favorable votes for the Administration?

A: I don't think so. The President's very kind and a very generous man. I suppose that he felt closer to his associates in Congress and to his staff, even though he could yell loud when he got mad, but I imagine he felt closer, and I imagine there was a warmer relationship between him and his staff than existed with almost any President.

M: Did the mood of Congress change much during the Johnson Administration?

A: Well, I don't think it changed a lot. Of course, he had a bigger majority in the 89th than in the 90th Congress, and that did affect it some. Then there was a small group in the House--quite small at the time--who joined the dump-Johnson movement, which originated, I think, in New York probably. That did affect him some, but it didn't affect much of his domestic legislation. It just affected his chances of getting their support for renomination.

M: With such a strong President, Mr. Albert, did the power and/or prestige of Congress decline any during the Johnson Administration?

A: I don't think so. I think the 89th Congress is the most prestigious Congress on my twenty-three-odd years in the House. I think it is. I think it's the most effective because I think we had the right majority.

M: The charge of rubber-stamping doesn't enter into this, you mean in terms of accomplishment?

A: There wasn't any rubber-stamping. We were doing what we wanted to do, and we had a President that was very capable in helping do it. Take that list of pens up there. Those are the pens with which he signed the bills of the first session of the 89th Congress, which he calls the--

M: Just the 89th?

A: The inscription reads, "With these sixty pens, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the foundations of the Great Society which were passed in the historic and famous first session of the 89th Congress...."

One of the bills up there is the immigration change. I told you that John McCormack's first speech in Congress before Lyndon Johnson was old enough to be a member of the House was for the very bill that Lyndon Johnson signed into law--the very thing. It changed the immigration standards from the national origins to a more sensible approach.

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- M: Has Mr. Johnson changed very much over the years of your knowing him?
- A: Of course he became much more serious after he became President, I think--much more concerned because obviously the responsibilities of the office were much greater than that of his Congressional offices. I think he became less political than he was before.
- M: A lot is talked about his persuasive ability and about his temperament. Were you ever on the receiving end of any of these attributes of Mr. Johnson?
- A: No. I don't think he ever argued with me about much of anything. He would argue at length with a group, or he would present his case strongly in his own way. But he never did argue with me. I think the most emphatic statement he ever made to me was the one I told you about the telephone call on the Viet Nam plank. He was very emphatic in his position on that.
- M: Mr. Albert, in your meetings during the Johnson Administration at the White House where Mr. Johnson is such a dominant and strong person himself, was it possible to have a give and take discussion among people?
- A: Oh, yes, sure. He talked a lot generally, but it was always possible to give and take.
- M: What do you think have been his chief strengths and weaknesses during his political career?
- A: His greatest strength, in my opinion, is his talent for tenacity. He just never gives up. He's the world's greatest salesman--pressure-type salesman--of all time, I think. When he sets his head for something, he goes, and no amount of frustration will stop him. In that regard I think he was the most talented man in the world at that time, or any time maybe--any time in our history. I'm sure he was. I think he had a talent for tenacity that no other President has ever had.

Then of course he was almost completely politically oriented. I don't mean that in party politics, but his whole life seemed to be involved around government activities, both before he went to the Presidency and after. He always was very much a political man. If you'd go down to the ranch with him and ride out and he'd show you a steer, "Just look at that steer," but he'd be right back talking about some appropriation bill or something-like that. Nothing interfered very long with his constant pursuit of public issues.

He had very good judgment generally, I think, for political issues, but in some ways I think he was his own worst enemy. Sometimes he impressed me as doing things by power drive that could have been done with less energy in a relaxed manner. I think he and Bob Kerr were alike in that regard. Bob Kerr won his races the hard way by getting out and slugging, whereas, a less pushy type person might have got his way a little easier

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on some things. But he would not rest.

I don't know what his political judgments were on Viet Nam. I presume he came to the conclusion that so much of the country was against the war that it would be very difficult for him to go on and pursue it as he thought it should be pursued. I think that's one of the reasons he probably got out. I don't think he got out of a feeling that he couldn't win. He had the nomination, I think, sewed up, although he did have some serious challenges. But I think he had it sewed up.

M: Did his aggressiveness alienate people at times?

A: I suppose it did. You know, sometimes people feel that a man shouldn't push so much probably. But I don't think he could have done everything he did without it. I think he could have done it easier probably had he on some issues--some it just took constant push. You just didn't have any other way of doing it but push.

M: How do you think that history will judge the Johnson Administration, Mr. Albert?

A: My feeling is--of course I can't be a judge of history myself sitting here--I would say that he would be classified among the strong Presidents in the history of the nation. I don't know how long it will take to have history make a final assessment, but I can't imagine him ever being classified as a weak, do-nothing President. Whether you agree with him or not, he was, I think, the most aggressive President that we've ever had in pursuing political policy and legislative policy--that sort of thing.

He wasn't a mean President although some people think--he was nothing like mean as Andrew Jackson, you know. He wasn't hard on people, and he was very forgiving of people. When he would get mad at people because they wouldn't support him, or they would frustrate his efforts, he'd be just as nice to them when the battle was over as he ever was--very forgiving. He didn't hold long grudges like some Presidents have in the past--you know, personal grudges. He won't do what Jackson did after that and say he only made two mistakes--one was when he didn't shoot Henry Clay and the other when he didn't hang John C. Calhoun. He's not that kind of a man. But he'll be considered a strong President, I think, along with Jackson.

M: Mr. Albert, I have no further questions unless you have something further to add.

A: I hope I've done some good. I've done this out of a kind of incompetent memory. I seem to be forgetting things and getting them out of place.

M: I think it's very important to have your views on record, and we thank you very much.

A: I hope they're some help to you.

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[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

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Signed by Carl Albert on August 23, 1979

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in McAlester, Okla., May 10, 1908; A.B., U. of Okla., 1931; B.A., Oxford U., Eng. (Rhodes scholar), 1933, B.C.L., 1934; admitted to Oklahoma bar, 1935; legal clk. FHA, 1934-37; atty., accountant Sayre Oil Co., Oklahoma City, 1937-38; legal dept. Ohio Oil Co., Marshall, Ill., Findlay, O., 1939-40; gen. practice of law, Oklahoma City, 1938, Mattoon, Ill., 1938-39, McAlester, Okla., 1946-47; mem. of Congress, 3d Okla. Dist., 1947-1977; House majority whip, 1955-62; House majority leader, 1962-71; Speaker of the House, 1971-77. Served in U.S. Army, 1941-46, PTO. Decorated Bronze Star, Democrat.