INTERVIEWEE: CLINTON P. ANDERSON

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

May 20, 1969; U. S. Senate

B: This is the interview with Senator Clinton P. Anderson. Sir, do you recall when you first met Mr. Johnson? When you arrived in the House in 1941, he was already there, was he not?

A: Yes, he was.

B: Did you immediately become acquainted with him?

A: I had met him earlier than that. In 1935 I was National Youth Administrator for New Mexico and he for Texas, and we got acquainted at that time; so that I knew him already when I was in the House in 1941.

B: Had you formed a personal relationship in the thirties when you were both NYA directors?

A: Not too close. I wasn't really National Youth Administrator properly, because they had a political problem and couldn't get the appointees through. As I already had a clearance with the Senators and so forth, they put me out on it for a short time, actually about a year, I guess; actually it was a short time, but I did get a chance to review Mr. Johnson's work a great deal.

B: Then when you came to the House of Representatives, did you resume your acquaintanceship with him?

A: Yes, I did. He was immersed in problems and very shortly thereafter, of course, we got in troubles with the warring nations, and I didn't see too much of him at that time. But I had seen quite a lot of him. I got out a scrapbook the other day where we had signature cards and so forth. He

and Sam Rayburn, and the Eugene Worleys were at our house in the country in 1941.

B: During those days, sir, did you and Mr. Johnson ever talk about your future ambitions, about whether or not you'd like to be in the Senate or anything like that?

A: No, we didn't. We talked about the work at hand and, of course, there was only one real person involved in government, we thought, and that was Sam Rayburn. Both of us had a lot of business with Mr. Rayburn. As I said, I didn't discuss things too much with Johnson.

B: Was it clear in those days that Mr. Johnson had a personal relationship with Mr. Rayburn?

A: Yes, it was very clear.

B: Then, sir, both you and Mr. Johnson entered the Senate at the same time, after the 1948 election.

A: Yes, there were three of us that the so-called liberals marked out for slaughter--Bob Kerr from Oklahoma, Lyndon Johnson from Texas, and me from New Mexico. And the Republicans put through a resolution, an investigation of campaign expenditures. I thought I had spent very modest sums of money all the way through; I think that he had also. But the Republicans wanted a hearing and they did it to us. They had some people out in our states and discussed what we had done and ought to do and had quite an excessive session with people about that time.

B: I've heard stories about you and Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kerr sitting in the back of the Senate Chamber talking about your cattle ranches.

A: No. Bob and the President would talk about them. I didn't have much of a cattle ranch. I had a small number of cattle, mostly it was a feeding lot--a difference to a cowboy. And Senator Kerr was just acquiring his

fine herds that he got. He never thought of spending any real money for animals until he had been in the Senate for quite a while.

But we both did come to the Senate at the same time.

B: And the three of you you've mentioned, you and Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kerr, moved pretty rapidly into being leaders and powers in the Senate, didn't you?

A: We had lots of interests. Bob Kerr was, of course, an extremely well-organized individual himself, and I had a great many things that I needed to do and did. We saw this young man then, and we thought Lyndon Johnson had a great deal of savvy and we had excellent ideas about what he might do with his own life. And we therefore enjoyed each other very much.

B: Did you have anything to do with helping choose Mr. Johnson as whip in the early 1950's?

A: I hope so. I don't know for sure, but I was the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee in 1950. And for a short time the Democratic party nationwide was sort of leaderless because the then chairman of it thought he had a cancer. And I had driven home--in those days my wife and daughter drove back and forth to New Mexico a lot--got in town, and Mr. Tune called me that same afternoon and said, "Get back here to Washington!" I gave him a few choices of graphic language, I guess, because I didn't want to do that. It developed that the national chairman was ill. He couldn't tell how long he would be ill; and he therefore urged us to just come into Washington with him as soon as we could. I did that at the time. I also had a project on with Senator Kerr. He wanted to have some water supplies developed through the State of Oklahoma. And he talked to me a great deal. We talked a whole lot more, I think, probably than with Mr. Johnson.

But the Republicans were questioning our elections by saying we spent too much money. It developed they sent an investigator into Texas and cleared Mr. Johnson pretty quickly. They worried more about Bob Kerr who was more of a millionaire by then. By the time they got over in New Mexico they were pretty well tired, I guess, and didn't do too much on me. But at least we all knew each other and talked about each other a great deal.

B: What was Mr. Johnson like as whip and later on Majority Leader in the Senate?

A: I think he was about the same as he always has been except he wasn't as "driven." It seems strange to me when I say he wasn't driven as much, but he wasn't yet what he eventually might develop into. After his election to the Senate, he was busy enough and he wasn't casting any nationwide picture very much. And, as I say, there wasn't quite as much pressure from that standpoint as there was later on.

B: More relaxing than being President?

A: Yes, quite a lot more.

B: You were involved in many of his legislative activities in those days--you played a major part in the '57 civil rights bill, I believe, didn't you?

A: I guess that was an accident, probably. I was not an expert on international relations or an expert on local affairs. I had a few ideas of my own. I watched the progress of the bill and thought it never would pass. The Southerners were determined, and the Northerners didn't have enough votes and they couldn't break the filibuster. There were just enough people in the North and South to tie it up, and couldn't break the filibuster. At one time, in 1956, I guess, or 1957, I could see the possibility of clearing this a little bit. I just sat myself down on the floor and glued myself

there for about two days to listen to the reasons they couldn't do it. The South, I believe, was at that time more worried about the question of invasion of its rights, and a lot of people wanted to have civil rights, but wanted to be very careful with what they would grant in the beginning, and the folks worried themselves a great deal. I thought that if you could just remove the Southern fears that we would march an army into the South, it would be worthwhile. I don't say that there was anything really wrong, but they were worried that this might happen. They had heard of the march through Georgia at one time, and were afraid they were going to have another march through Georgia.

So I finally decided one day that we could stop this thing by removing that one threat, and I thought they'd probably yield thereafter, or be forced to yield thereafter. And so I did propose this to Lyndon Johnson, and he was very receptive to it. He thought I should get a really good Republican to join with me. By "get a good Republican," we meant a person who had a good, fine character, and nail it down.

B: That was Senator Aiken, I believe, wasn't it?

A: Yes, it was Senator Aiken, and I also picked up Senator Case from South Dakota. And I put the bill in. Originally it was Senator Aiken and myself, with Senator Case added to it later on; the three of us were there. You know, of course, Senator Aiken had a great reputation and deservedly so. A very fine man and a very thoughtful man. A very sensible man and he sort of pushed it along with us. We finally passed the amendment, with the three of us sponsoring it, and that seemed to eliminate most of the trouble from the Southerners.

B: Yes, that eliminated the Part Three that many people had objected to.

A: We got along with that very fine. The Republicans were grateful to have

a bill passed, and the Southern Democrats were very happy to make sure that it was all right--there had been too much of a temptation filibuster on it--and I thought it was a very successful venture.

B: And you originated the idea yourself of eliminating Part Three?

A: Yes. Someone wrote that Johnson had something to do with it. He didn't at all. He was curious what I was doing sitting there on the floor for about two or three days, and I told him I was going to make an offer somehow to try to end it. I went to him as a friend of mine and told him I was going to introduce this bill, and he did pick it up quickly. Someone said he sent me in advance to do it, but not at all. We were all trying to see what we could do, and he sensed it was a popular move and would help the Democratic Party and everybody. We could make that one issue our own. So we did, and I still enjoy it.

At the time, it was quite different. At the time, there was just a rising of the question of color. Many people were talking about it, but not very many doing anything about it. After this was done and the bill passed, I got quite a volume of mail that fixed me up pretty well. They differed very strongly with what I had done, and said that if I had left it alone the bill could have passed. But they didn't realize how strongly the South was opposed. So I think it was a wise thing probably.

But as I say, I didn't get any great applause from my home state. Two or three people who were very strong, staunch for civil rights, and agitated for civil rights, they blamed me for not doing a better job. We did everything we could do. It was quite evident that our original position was hopeless, and one thing more would have broken the camel's back.

I must say that Mr. Johnson was very, very anxious to help and very sensible with his guidance and direction.

B: And then shortly after that, you were associated with Mr. Johnson in the development of the space program, with the Space Act passed after the Sputnik of '57?

A: Well, that was, again, almost an accident. I had been appointed to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, principally because my state was represented among the work areas. I was appointed by Vice President Barkley. And after we got to working pretty good, we got to making each other suggestions and promises. And the offer was put to us, and we got passage of the bill, and we went along with it. It was not the finest bill in the world, but I thought it was a very good bill.

B: Do you recall who thought of the idea of putting space under the control of a civilian agency rather than a military agency?

A: Well, it wasn't in the beginning, to the people I knew, at least. We had a committee meeting of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, and the chairman of the committee, who was from North Carolina, Durham, wanted to have a bill for them to consider. And one member of the House, I can't remember now who is was, wanted to be chairman of the committee. It was more like an investigating committee where a person got to be the chairman of the committee finally in the last round. And we didn't quite like what he was going to do, I thought. So I was called and asked if I would conduct some hearings. I said I didn't know anything about space at all, but the idea was to get someone without any previous notions about it.

So we had the hearings for quite a while. We had a man in California who did a very fine job, and we had some very fine witnesses. We had some people who talked about far-out schemes. They're still far-out: proton propulsion, that you could take a "sail" and the light rays would just float it along.

Well, we had all those ideas to go and we were only trying to hold a session to hold the rights to it; not to have a special House committee but to have a joint committee. And Lyndon Johnson called me one day and asked me if I would tell him all of the things I had heard of about the project. And I got my notes out and went over there with him and discussed it, and he then recognized that the bill could be passed by the Senate and the House, John McCormack for the House and he for the Senate, and they put me on the committee and gave me a lot of very fine help.

He was a very good chairman and that was the first I had really seen of his talent for holding men together. He had some fine sentiments and some fine figures, and he succeeded in developing ideas that were useful to us. And we had a good minority section from the Republicans, had an all-star cast from the Senate. We did succeed in getting some real work done.

B: When did you first begin to think of Mr. Johnson as a possible Presidential nominee?

A: Well, I'd have to go look up my calendar. I remember that we were in Chicago one time and someone said, "Well, how about Lyndon?"

B: That was in the 1956 convention?

A: Yes. We had a '52 convention in which he was sort of involved. Dick Russell was the main candidate, and Mr. Johnson was very heavily involved with Dick Russell. He liked him very much and knew him very well. And it might have been that Dick Russell under some other circumstances would have been the nominee. But he wasn't, of course, and Stevenson was the nominee. And I met Lyndon Johnson two or three times at the convention; although he had been ill, he was there and was taking part in things. But I thought he then would make a fine Presidential candidate.

B: You were at the Brown estate in 1955 when Mr. Johnson had his heart attack, were you not?

A: Yes.

B: Can you describe what happened that day?

A: Well, we were taking Mr. and Mrs. Robert McKinney out to this dinner, and I had picked him up and we were driving on out. When I came into the house, George Brown said, "You'd better go in and see your buddy. He's not very well." I didn't think he was serious about it, but Lyndon Johnson was stretched out on the bed sort of, but he was not sick apparently at all. I asked him what his trouble had been and he said, "Well, I ate some bad food," and so then I asked him what he had done. He said he ate some hamburger or wieners, at noon; and he had had a talk with Mike Monroney and he'd gotten sort of exercised and he thought this pressure was building up.

So I stood there a while and watched what was going on, and they were giving him baking soda. Well, that's all right for heartburn, I guess, probably all right to make you belch a little bit, but nothing to do with heart trouble. For instance, I had been going to the doctor right along. By then, I thought I saw the symptoms of what I thought was heart trouble. And I finally tried to say to him that he ought to get up out of bed or else put himself completely in bed. He stayed there a little while and said he felt better, and then he went out to the portion of the old house that had been the slave quarter to lie on a bed. I could tell he wasn't well at all, I didn't think, and he was constantly worrying about it. Well, I'm no diagnostician, but most people think heart trouble is a sharp pain. In reality, you sort of feel like somebody is standing on your chest. This was what seemed to be happening to him. I asked him if he'd let me

feel around a little bit, and I put my hands on his back and pressed with the fingertips on both sides. It seemed to me that it was the sort of thing the doctor had told me about. So I said to him to go to a hospital and have a doctor. And he was sort of furious about that. He didn't want any doctor. I found later that he knew there was a story coming out in the Washington Post about him as a possibility for the Presidency. He didn't want to knock it in the head at the same time; he didn't want to kill it right in the beginning.

And so I talked to him a little bit more about it. I talked to George Brown and I said, "You'd better get a doctor out here. This is not good." "He's all right, he's all right!"

Well, I went back in and questioned Lyndon again. He told me that he had been bothered about ten miles out of Washington, and that he went over and put his fingers down his throat and tried to lose some of his food that was bothering him, and he couldn't get anything up. If he was really sick at his stomach, I felt, he would have been able to throw up. But he wasn't that bad, he thought, and he kept talking.

Finally, I went to George Brown and said, "You've got to get him out of here. This is just as wrong as it can be." He said, "Oh, he'll be all right." "Well, how would you like to pick up the Washington paper tomorrow and read that Lyndon Johnson had died in the home of his best friend?" And his face got sort of white, and he went over to the telephone, a wall phone, and tried to get a doctor. They were having a horse show that day in this little town of Middleburg, and he couldn't get the doctor. So I said, "They've got a loud speaker; page the doctor from the loud speaker." They did that and the loud speaker blared out the fact that someone was sick at the Brown house and they'd like to have a doctor out there. That,

of course, was a very fine idea, because they got the doctor out there, got him at the right place and at the right time.

And he looked him all over and said, "Well, take him back into town." I had a Lincoln car, which was sort of "close-coupled," and Lyndon got ready to do it, and the doctor went out to look at it, and said, "That's not big enough." He said, "Where is your cabinet car?" I said, "I haven't got any cabinet car." "Where is Lyndon's cabinet car?" He didn't have one either. So finally, he said, "Well, I guess we'd best get an ambulance."

And Lyndon Johnson just almost tore that ambulance to pieces. He wasn't going to have it at all, wasn't going to go at all. And finally we got him talked into it, piece by piece, put his arms inside a little bit, got him in the ambulance. He didn't want to be there a bit, he had no use for it at all. We started off with you. You go through another little town right after you leave the Brown house, and they put some gas in there. That just almost ruined it right then. He wanted no part of it a bit. He was as mad as hell about it.

But he went on into town and by that time, he knew he was sick. And he went out the next day and was put to bed and stayed in bed for quite a while.

B: Then later on, sir, in 1960, didn't you participate in Mr. Johnson's campaign for the nomination?

A: Oh, yes, indeed. I still think he would have made a wonderful President at that time, as he did later. I felt that he ought to run. There were a great many people who had questions about that, because of his health, but I thought he ought to run. I went to New Mexico and tried to get some instructions; did get thirteen to four, I guess, on the votes for the

convention delegates. But through the other parts, we tried to get the nomination for him at that time. I still think that if he had let us campaign in the beginning when there was only one name before the convention--

B: Did you and others try to persuade him to be more definite himself and to let you work harder?

A: Well, it's easy later on to say a thing would have happened. But I actually did work hard on it. I had gone down to Kentucky and met the Senator down there, and he was back up in Washington. I went to him two or three times and said, "Let's go to work and campaign for Lyndon Johnson." He said, "No, that's the wrong strategy." And Lyndon Johnson doesn't know whether himself, I don't think, probably. I thought he ought to run, I thought he ought to be the nominee. I thought we'd be much better off if he did run, would straighten out a lot of other things. These people all sort of believed that he ought to not be a candidate. Just sit around and say it would be accepted.

B: Was Mr. Rayburn influential in that policy?

A: No, he wasn't, I don't think. At least, he wasn't with me. He wanted Lyndon to be the nominee for President, there's no question about that. And he wanted it badly enough to give up his own life almost for it. He was very, very, very strong for Lyndon Johnson. But he thought also, as others had, that if the President [Johnson] had indicated he was willing and available, there would be a nomination for him. My only objection to it was the fact there were too many old men, looking over it now. I'm not so sure about those things.

B: Others had said that Mr. Johnson placed too much importance on Senators and not enough on the primaries.

A: That's right. In the case of Colorado--he loved Ed Johnson. A very fine

old man. A wonderful old man. He was a supporter of Truman's when Truman was reelected. Ed Johnson was going to retire from the Senate, but he was prepared to stay for one more round though. There's a long story about how all this--mixed in the battle cry. And it was a result of this that Ed Johnson decided he'd run for the Senate. And, of course, Lyndon knew that. He asked him if he could carry Colorado.

Johnson was a wonderful man, a great old man. Well, the trouble was that some new people had come in. A young New York sort of lawyer had just come into the community, and he was very strongly attached to a different person. And so you could hear this discussion about they weren't very definite about what they were going to do. We all kept saying that Lyndon should go ahead, but it wasn't very conclusive. And when I got out to the meeting of the state central committee, Ed Johnson was there, but this smart young man from New York, who had moved to Colorado, had tied them up already and we lost the Colorado votes. Never in the world should have lost them, never in the world! It was very easy, very simple. All you had to do was go out there about three weeks earlier and have Ed Johnson open his hand and plead for Lyndon Johnson and the thing would have been settled.

The same thing was in Arizona. This young Mr. Udall was talking right big right then, but it was nothing to worry about. McFarland could handle the votes, and Bob Kerr in there with him. As a matter of fact, I talked to McFarland not very long after--he was working on this case, and he was as happy as could be. It was easy with him. I said I thought we ought not to take a chance. We had a man living in Texas who was willing to put up a little money and an airplane, and he was going to fly me up to Colorado to do some real work on it, and also in Utah. I said let's

take a man in Utah and make him chairman of the regional area of all the West, and he could deal with Arizona and various other states and do a fine job. We never got to where he could do it. He wasn't even asked about it. The national tendency was to play it down the other way. I won't say that we were all wise, but it would have been much better if we had done it.

B: What was your reaction then, sir, when Mr. Johnson was offered the Vice Presidential position?

A: I wasn't happy, but I know he said, "We've got to take something home." I didn't think it was anywhere near enough. I was very strong for Mr. Johnson being the nominee for President, and I thought it would be much better.

B: Did you try to talk Mr. Johnson out of accepting?

A: No. I went over to his room, and he still was in a bathrobe and so was Lady Bird and they were both busying around. I finally said to him that I thought it would be a mistake if he ran for Vice President, under these circumstances. The Democrats could go back and nominate him again--and he had plenty of time--and he shouldn't go for the Vice Presidency. I guess I was wrong as could be, but I thought it was the best thing to do. I was pretty sure that the people who were strongly for him would support that position and not the other.

B: Did you see much of Mr. Johnson during the years while he was Vice President?

A: Not nearly as much, because he was busy. And I was of a different variety of thought after a while. I didn't think that he should spend much time with the Democratic party on the Hill.

B: There was a proposal that he be elected head of the party caucus--

A: And I opposed it.

B: Incidentally, was that Mr. Johnson's idea, or Mr. Mansfield's?

A: I think it was Mr. Mansfield's, but I'm not sure. I wouldn't say so. But Mr. Johnson let himself agree to it. I think it was a grave mistake that he did and also, at the time at least, I didn't support him at all. I made Mr. Johnson angry with me. He didn't like some of the things I said. Carl Hayden had said that Barkley had had his Vice President's job where he could lead the party as well. I knew Mr. Barkley pretty well. I had been in the Truman Administration enough to know a portion of it, at least, and Mr. Johnson had ideas of his own. I tried my very best to get some of the things different, but Mansfield kept saying that this was done in Carl Hayden's day. And I got up on the floor and said this was wrong; Barkley didn't do it all. I knew everything he had and everything he had done, that he was talking about the race for Presidency. He had some ideas that people ought to run the campaign and so forth and he talked to me about it from time to time, and so I knew what his position was. But I think they all went ahead with Mr. Johnson but finally he withdrew. I don't think he should have done it. If he was going to remove himself from a Senator to a national figure, he couldn't go back to it. He shouldn't have.

B: When Mr. Johnson was President, you played a major part in the Medicare proposal. You were one of the sponsors of the Medicare bill, I believe.

A: Yes, indeed.

B: Did Mr. Johnson push pretty hard and help to--

A: Pushed in a very intelligent fashion. He was the smartest politician I ever knew, and I said that the day he finished with the White House and I'll still figure that way for a long time to come. But he was a very smart, astute individual, and he knew what was good and what wasn't. We had gone through the battle of the Lewis Strauss campaign and so forth,

and he had tremendous ideas of success.

We got along fine, and I was grateful that he pushed the bill so heavily. He gave unqualified support and intelligent support. You've got to have intelligent support along with the rest of things. He gave intelligent support and a fine style. We met two or three times and checked my figures. He'd say, "I'm not sure you ought to do that now," and I'd watch and he'd generally be right. He was very, very helpful on floor action. I liked him very much.

B: Sir, I know you have another appointment. To finish up, what is your evaluation of Mr. Johnson's Presidency in general?

A: I thought it was fine. I don't know what the rest of the people thought, but I thought it was fine. I regret that he didn't run in 1968. I'd be for him four years from now. He was a very fine, able administrator, and a very loyal person, and that's all you can ask.

B: Thank you very much, sir.

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By Clinton P. Anderson

to the

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Signed Clinton P. Anderson

Date November 20, 1969

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