INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN A. BAKER

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Baker's residence, Arlington, Virginia

Tape 1 of 2

G: Mr. Baker, let's start today on the War on Poverty task force. Let me just ask you how you got into working with proposals to alleviate poverty for this task force?

B: Primarily because that is what I had been doing for about three and a half years prior to that as assistant secretary of agriculture. The reason I was that kind of assistant secretary of agriculture is because of many years experience on the old Farm Security Administration. Land economics was my major subject at graduate school at Wisconsin.

G: You were part of a group, I understand, that developed ideas before Sargent Shriver was named to formally head up this group.

B: As I recall it, and as some of these memorandam indicate--and there are not enough that really tie it down--[that group was formed] sometime in the early fall of 1963 as a result of a [James] Patton visit to Jack Kennedy, some comment he made on the way out the door based on Patton's getting somebody to finance the Twentieth Century Fund to do a study on something called pockets of poverty. [Theodore] Sorensen I think or Mike [Myer] Feldman asked the cabinet members to send a

knowledgeable representative to meet I think usually with either Lee White or Mike Feldman to talk about what Kennedy as president could do about pockets of poverty.

One reason [Orville] Freeman sent me is because I had kind of been an informal adviser to Patton in getting that Twentieth Century Fund project set up. I don't really have a list in anything that I can find, since you called, of who those people were, who the others were. But they brought [Paul] Ylvisaker in from the Ford Foundation in this pre-assassination period. I don't know whether [Adam] Yarmolinsky was in on it at that time. It seems to me like [Richard] Goodwin was in on it. It was fairly low key and there wasn't any feeling of great urgency or "hurry up and get something ready in a package"--at that time, and then of course the assassination just floored all of us for a while.

G: Was there something that President Kennedy had read I wonder, like I've heard that he read Night Comes to the Cumberlands and was impressed with the points about rural poverty there? Was there any writing that you felt was influential in focusing on the [problem]?

B: I think more than writing, the thing that was influential to Kennedy on rural poverty was his experiences in the West Virginia primary. I don't know quite how to fit together where his interests in the urban poverty really originated, but it was very quickly involved as a part of that program of the Department of Justice on juvenile delinquency.

G: Youth crime.

B: Dave Hackett and somebody else.

G: Dick Boone?

B: Yes. Dick Boone is the name I was trying to remember. I have no tangible evidence that it was any reading on President Kennedy's part.

G: Did he talk about his experiences in West Virginia, the impact that seeing poverty had on him?

B: Almost every time this subject would come up.

G: Really?

B: Yes.

G: Did he do it in your presence?

B: Yes.

G: Can you elaborate what he would say?

B: He'd just refer to somebody he'd seen or conditions that he'd seen. I don't remember any specific ones.

I also think probably the urban part of this came from President Kennedy's desire to do something for urban blacks without it being pro-Negro. Urban poverty was the way to do that, because most of the poverty-stricken people beginning then were central city blacks. He wasn't quite ready to take on civil rights head on like LBJ did later. He figured his mandate was too thin. Then he was kind of like Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. They didn't see any point in losing a presidency just for civil rights. You know what I mean. I'm saying

that very crudely, but that's about what it amounted to. They were right and all of that, but they weren't going to lose blood over it.

Now it might have been at that early period when they brought in the Litton Industries guy whose name I can't remember right now. But I remember for a fact that Sarge brought the Avis fellow in.

G: Did you attend any of these meetings at the White House before Shriver was named?

B: Yes. I don't remember which ones or when and I don't have any record because undoubtedly I must have gone with Secretary Freeman.

G: Was there a good deal of squabbling among the departments with regard to how the program would be formulated and which departments would handle it, and whether there would be a new agency as opposed to having HEW--?

B: Which period, is this pre-assassination or post-assassination?

G: No, post-assassination.

B: Post-assassination, the answer is yes to your question.

G: Can you sort it out for me?

B: Yes. The struggle--as I remember it and as my documents kind of support, and Jim Sundquist's documents--was mainly between what later was called HEW, and the Department of Labor against each other and against the White House in terms of the location. All the rest of us, we knew we couldn't get it so we were in favor of having it go to the White House. No, we thought if you really wanted to put it upstairs instead of being buried down in the hierachy somewhere,

the thing you had to do was to put it in the White House. We had had previous experience under Kennedy of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which got smothered over in the Department of Interior, and the Water Resources Council, which we had finally forced into being a multi-cabinet council, independent agency. Then the War on Poverty thing came along and we had done an awful lot of staffing on those previous things, the previous two years.

There had also been a struggle prior--and this was very early in the Kennedy time--over the EDA, Economic Development Administration--it later became the Area Redevelopment Administration--where it was going to be located and how organized. The end result or net result of the struggling on that was that Bill Batt kept the urban part of Economic Development Administration decision-making over in the Commerce Department, and he turned the rural decision-making over to me in the Department of Agriculture. I set up a little agency that's called Office of Rural Areas Development and then about three lead agencies to go with them. We made the first loan in the whole country.

G: Did that division of responsibility work out pretty well?

B: That worked fine from our standpoint. It had started earlier in the fifties when Paul Douglas had been introducing the textile workers, what we later called area redevelopment. John Sparkman introduced the rural version. Neither of these got passed during the Eisenhower Administration, but Kennedy had promised to activate

them, implement [them]. Then Clyde Ellis heard somewhere in late November of 1960 that it looked like Kennedy was going to take the Douglas part but not the Sparkman part. Clyde and I got busy and decided there was going to be a rural part as well as an urban part and when they actually sent the bill up it had the two parts.

Clyde Ellis was the general manager and executive vice president of the Rural Electric Cooperative Association. We'd been working together for ten years, lobbying for it. This and being born together down in northwest Arkansas, which helps.

Not only in that immediate--like January, February, March, April, May of 1964--time, but way on down the road up to 1968 when the problem was devolution of OEO functions to departments, it seemed like there were continuous meetings at which different ones of us really didn't understand what they were arguing about. Blood would run six and eight inches deep on the floor between HEW and Labor fighting over who was going to get what. My main interest was to try to keep Job Corps out of the [struggle] and not get all slashed up in the process. From our standpoint Job Corps and these rural conservation centers were really great. The Forest Service just did too good a job and they had too much esprit de corps, such fine people in their leadership positions, that there just wasn't anything to slash up.

G: Do you think the kids in those rural conservation centers were really acquiring skills that they'd use later on?

B: I'm not sure. Have you been noticing that the Washington Post has been running a bunch of thumb suckers the last--just in time for you to get here?

G: Yes.

B: I'm not at all sure. Our impression is from the evaluation study, the results of the evaluation studies and what not, that the conservation centers came out with cost-effective results. Now that doesn't mean that you couldn't find somebody that left two days after he got there because he was homesick and those kinds of things. But as distinct from the urban centers, the Forest Service centers had tried-and-true leadership of very high caliber, the Forest Service officers, in terms of knowing human nature and all those kinds of things. I visited at one time or another, oh, at least twenty-five or thirty of the conservation centers. I've got everything from cups to all kinds of things they'd give me when I'd be out there.

G: Was this program more like the CCC than the. . . ?

B: Well, I think so, and I think part of the reason is that so many of us, older ones anyway, had lived through the CCC thing. For instance, the Director of Personnel at U.S. Department of Agriculture was a CCC graduate as a boy. Many of those higher level forest officers had been CCC camp commanders when the army moved out. For instance Gordon Fox, who's still around town here somewhere--he was the assistant deputy chief of the Forest Service and the Job Corps thing came immediately under his supervision--Gordon had been a CCC camp commander.

Certainly the Forest Service experience in the CCC camp was dug right out of the files, used by our part of Job Corps.

G: I understand that the conservation component of the Job Corps projects was not initially a part of the legislation, but was added.

B: I don't remember that point.

G: Really? Wasn't there a conservation group in Congress that [wanted it]? I understand Representative [John] Saylor was the leader of that bloc and prevailed on [that issue]?

B: Well, he was certainly the lead Republican and one of the few Republicans that was as near right as you can find them on these particular things. Proceeding this, the Forest Service and I had recommended, and the President had sent up--that would have been Kennedy--and the Congress approved something called Youth Conservation. This kind of, oh, in the way of psychology instead of logic, kind of got into the picture, too. There was a deep belief on our part, which many of the urban types didn't agree with, that there was something about just living out in the woods and doing hard work on nature things that helped to rehabilitate the human soul. We had a real belief that that was true out of CCC. Now the thing that we kept telling ourselves but never did really believe, the constituents, the people in the camp, the corpsmen, were a different clientele than the CCC was. So that the lessons of CCC couldn't be bridged perfectly across to Job Corps. Job Corps was real--or at least every effort was made that this would be people off the bottom rungs. CCC was anybody that was unemployed. This was everybody up to including the banker's son in

most of your small towns around the country in CCC. So you had a different [clientele]. These weren't school dropouts; these were high school graduates in CCC.

G: How did those on the bottom rung respond when they got out in the country and worked on these conservation projects?

B: This is based purely on my own personal observation now rather than reading evaluation reports. I was greatly impressed with the educational component of Job Corps. Instead of working all day chopping trees, Job Corps would spend, say, the morning learning basic arithmetic and reading and so on. The teaching materials that were developed by Job Corps were--again my observation--the most attractive and effective kinds of materials that I have ever seen in and out of colleges or grammar schools or whatnot. I was greatly impressed with that. Those kids, never a hundred per cent, but those kids were in there really looking at those picture books and learning English, learning basic mathematics and so forth.

Again, I was a big shot from Washington and everybody including the camp commander wanted to look good because I was there. So what I saw and what they told me was undoubtedly biased in the direction of being favorable to the experience. We had very little trouble with drugs for example.

I really still believe that there is a big difference between having up to a hundred kids way out in the woods working out something,

and having five or six hundred in a high-rise. I was later confirmed in this as a consultant to the University of Massachusetts. One of their big problems, they had built three high-rise dormitories right in the middle of the campus and then they immediately started hiring psychiatrists to find out what all the problems were. I just think there's something about people having a little bit more room to live that. . . . A friend of mine named Herman Hankins[?], who was director of Farmers Home Administration in Arkansas at that time put it in a nutshell. He said, "Hell, I'd rather be poor out in the country than be half rich in the city." So that this is partly agrarian.

G: Weren't these kids going to be moving back to the cities? Weren't they basically city kids that wouldn't be content to live out there in the country?

B: Well, I've often thought about that. These thumb suckers of the Washington Post have started me thinking again on it. I'm inclined to think that Job Corps in one sense was more like vocational education and Boy Scout training than it was like a manpower development course. In other words, it wasn't the final; it shouldn't have been thought of as the final. I think a lot of people thought of it as being [final]. That somehow you get out of Job Corps and then get placed. I think maybe the Job Corps experience for the enrollees was more of a generalized benefit than it was a specific benefit. A lot of them became expert machinists for example and went immediately [to work]. Then of course in later years we--the Forest Service anyway--developed memorandums and agreement and cooperation, actual

operating cooperation, with labor unions. That worked a whole lot better, of course. Part of being a carpenter is getting that union card that you're a carpenter. Unless the carpenter's union will accept Job Corps experience, you don't ever get to be a carpenter unless you start over again at the bottom of that four-year apprenticeship. Whereas if the time in Job Corps worked out toward apprenticeship, he got a handup on it. But it took them from 1964 to 1968 to get that developed with major labor unions. The first breakthrough was in Tennessee.

There was a great to-do about how much it cost per corpsman, and it cost about the same, as much per corpsman per year as it does a student at Harvard for a year. We used to argue which product was better. But that was after Kennedy was gone and after LBJ [was there].

G: Well, was there a problem with discipline in the rural camps and conservation camps?

B: The answer is not very much, partly because they were so thin if you know what I mean. There were a hundred in one place and there weren't ten thousand more around close. Partly because many of these Forest Service officers who were their supervisors had had from one to three or four years experience with CCC. And partly because Forest Service officers, riding herd over forests and grazing, had to learn how to keep people from fighting with six guns, as a public service. I'm going back now seventy-five years. Partly I think also--and you'll find a memorandum in this extra material I gave you--there was early on something that came up in Montana that [Lee] Metcalf wanted to be

damn sure didn't break out. Chief [Edward P.] Cliff of the Forest Service and I and Hamby [?] and other Forest Service-Job Corps guys, and I think [Mike] Mansfield got in on it, developed an agreement. Mansfield got it out of Sarge someway, or one of Sarge's successors, that selected input. We weren't going to take the worst ones at his word. We kind of insisted on creaming the crop from the cities. Some of our early experiences led us to believe that you couldn't just take absolutely unbriefed people that they sent you from the sidewalks of the large city. I realize that's kind of contrary to some of the higher level thinking, most soft-hearted of the group, but that kept down [trouble].

But there were something less than 1 per cent of the camps had any trouble at all, and them only minor. There never was this business of them threatening to blow a building down or drug rings. Of course, there weren't enough corpsmen in one place to have a drug ring. I think I had the communications system set up well enough that I would have heard about it, and there was fully, oh, 80 to 90 per cent of the camps that never had any trouble at all. Now I'm talking about the Forest Service ones. I was never real closely familiar with the details of the Bureau of Land Management and Park Service conservation centers. But I never did hear any of my colleagues talking about any particular trouble. The trouble came up in places like Omaha--as I remember it was one of the bad ones--in these big

urban centers where they'd have people stacked up. And they had as many troubles later in one of the women's centers as they did the men's centers. I still think that just stacking that many guinea pigs up in one cage, but that's purely my bias.

G: Another problem that the Job Corps seems to have had was the problem of logistics, particularly at the first, getting these centers set up and organized.

B: I think that was true of the urban centers. I don't remember, I guess I never knew about the Interior. But many of ours we set up right on the same sites where the CCC camps were. It's unfair in a sense to compare Forest Service with anybody else in this kind of thing, because they had to be logistics experts going back about sixty years. They had had the experience with the CCC.

But there were times when training materials didn't get there and the boys had to work all day long in the forest, things like that.

G: Initially when the Job Corps proposal was first going through the task force, wasn't there a plan to have the military play a larger role in that?

B: There was a discussion of two things in regard to the Pentagon. One was that these centers ought to be operated by trained military officers. Same argument as had come up thirty years earlier with CCC.

The other had to do with the draftees who couldn't cut it, this program of [Robert] McNamara's where he was trying to rehabilitate draftees that they got that either psychologically or mentally or [by their] educational background or so forth couldn't cut it in the

military. Somehow these could be filtered into the Job Corps centers, or that the two programs could operate parallel. I never was in on the top level fighting over that, except that I was kind of, along with Orville Freeman and I guess a lot of the rest of the more liberal civilians, we didn't want the military to get their dirty paws on it, in a sense of two things. One is that they were losing an awful lot of liberal support for the Job Corps if they looked on it as a training for World War III. Then a great deal of liberal real feeling that the background of an infantry officer don't necessarily teach him how to rehabilitate people from the lowest rungs of society.

G: But hadn't the military also worked with CCC?

B: Oh, yes. As I recall the actual commanders of the camps were military officers. Some of the boys who graduated with me from high school instead of going up to the University of Arkansas went halfway through CCC camp. One of my closest friends, a guy by the name of Leonard Zimmer[?], was the head of a big office machine repair outfit in Kansas City and has been for years now, won the golden football in high school, and he went up to CCC camp and that's where he got his college education, CCC camp. If I recall, his commander was an army captain. Some of them were lieutenants, first lieutenants. According to where the camp was located--I'm talking about CCC now--the number-two man would be either a Forest Service person or what is now called Soil Conservation Service person.

But the Job Corps, there wasn't any military around. That might have overcome some of those early logistical problems. But I haven't

given much thought to how it would have turned out differently if they'd have used the military instead of civilians. But I got the feeling every time I went to one of these things--and I'd stay around there twenty-four, thirty-six, forty-eight hours--I got the feeling of something happening or of there being something vibrant about it. Like I say, they might have been putting it on for a visitor.

G: Did you ever show up unexpected at any of these?

B: Yes, yes, I even did that on occasion. But it had a thing kind of like a pep rally atmosphere. Or put in another way, they got the boys to where they were playing over their head, about like a basketball team if you make it. Sometimes they did a whole lot better than they knew they could do, just from the standpoint of enthusiasm or doing it because it's fun to do it. Like I say, I never did once go to one of those big urban centers, so I don't know how they compared.

But all of us in the Department of Agriculture that participated in it that I know anything about or have talked to in the last twenty-five years still have a real warm friendly supportive feeling about the Job Corps. The first thing I told Ray Marshall when I visited him during the transition in 1976 was that I didn't want him fucking around with the Job Corps screwing up those conservation centers. He kind of jumped because I think he had in mind right up to that point that he was going to transfer them to the Labor Department. I said, "Don't you touch them, Ray." He pointed to one of his guys and that guy wrote something down. I don't know whether that ever had anything to do with it or not. So then I just kind of made it a part of my

private business to ride herd on them not destroying it in the 1977-78 period when they didn't know what they were doing.

G: Was there much criticism about the fact that Job Corpsmen were being flown such long distances to these remote camps and back, just the sheer expense involved?

B: There was a great deal of criticism of the sheer expense involved external. Internal, the signals I got from the people that worked with me was that the closer the Job Corps centers could be to the corpsmen's home bailiwick, the better things worked out. In spite of the fact that I think a lot of us on an intellectual basis really thought that a good thing to do was to get somebody as far from a damn Baltimore ghetto as they could get him before they started trying to rebuild him. But in actual practice our feeling was that it didn't turn out quite that way. Now I never was able with either the congressional people or my own people to figure out how much of this was the feeling that we ought not to be spending this money in Arkansas or New Mexico on trying to do something for those no-goods from Baltimore. We ought to take some of these poor people we got out here and let them benefit from this. I imagine those things were intermingled.

G: Let's go back to this series of meetings and discussions before Sargent Shriver was named. We're talking about the feeling of the other departments that if you couldn't have it in your respective departments, might as well set up a new agency. Was there a feeling that HEW or the Department of Labor could not handle this kind of program? They were not focusing on poor people.

B: More the former than the latter. At least I never did have the feeling that they were anti-poor people. In fact, their departmental traditions were kind of the other way, if you put organized labor as being part of poor people, which they were up until just lately.

On the former, the business [of] whether they could handle it or not, my own observations at the time and more critically since then where I have actually worked closer with them than I did then, their institutional structure, organization, their permanent personnel if you want to put it that way, just did not know how to operate big fast-moving action programs and they still don't.

There was also a struggle in many parts of the OEO program, including the rural part, where the vocational education part of the Office of Education didn't want anybody else to do it, but they didn't know how to do it either and didn't really want to. I've got a number of memos in that thing of yours from Harold Howe way years later from when we're talking about right now. Harold Howe II, isn't that his name? Johnson set him up as a task force chairman. The vocational people, the nationwide lobby is pretty potent and a politician had to take that into account. It wasn't anybody's personal fault or anything.

The Department of Agriculture had been set up in 1864 and then the New Deal came along and we had nationwide action programs--only the world wasn't flat--developed, office of personnel, and budget and finance, and all the rigamarole of government administration, people that knew how to operate action programs. The Department of Labor had piddled along ever since Hoover or somebody set it up--or divided it

from Commerce. Remember, it was first set up combined, Department of Labor and Commerce. Then it was split.

The Department of Labor to begin with wasn't very big, and it was engaged mostly in research--Bureau of Labor Statistics--and education and regulatory. So they didn't have to know how to do logistics for something like the War on Poverty, yet they were fiercely protective of their jurisdictional turf. I don't know why, but this sticks out in my mind throughout from the time you're talking about right on through the end of 1968 when I left, that the Labor Department was constantly in there hollering and squabbling. Now this wasn't Willard Wirtz and it wasn't his predecessor, and it wasn't his executive assistant. It was people further down in the hierarchy that were [fighting]. Now why he sent them to the meetings I don't know.

G: But wasn't Wirtz himself pretty upset with some of what he regarded as jurisdictional encroachments on his turf?

B: He might have been, but I was never aware of it. And the reason I might not have been aware of it is because Willard Wirtz is kind of one of our family heroes, and I may have heard him say, well, hell, he's just listening to a bunch of kooks over there. In other words, I didn't want to think anything bad about Willard Wirtz.

G: But I thought, for example, that he wanted to have the Job Corps in the Department of Labor.

B: Well, he might have, he might have. I don't remember them ever--but I know his people. But we never did have any problem on that score, not with Job Corps.

G: Did the Department of Agriculture feel that OEO or this new poverty program was encroaching on some of their turf?

B: There was some of that, and in later years there was maybe some more. See, the first thing I did when I hit there, with Freeman's approval, was start organizing an anti-rural poverty program in January of 1961. We felt like we already had it going with baling wire and the money that I could pull out of Bill Batt and all that kind of stuff. And we had the historical institutional built-in thing that the Farmers Home Administration, as a lineal descendant of Rex Tugwell, thought they were the poverty agents in a way. This partly gets tied in with Hal Cooley and Bob Poage, that what we really needed was for Lyndon to give us some more legislative authority in Farmers Home Administration and a whole lot more money.

Then there is also the business, and you may have seen the maps, I think I sent some in the first thing way back in 1969--the Forest Service, National Forests, are located in the most poverty-stricken areas of America, the people just out the far side of the Forest Service boundaries. Because a lot of that land came into the Forest Service because Teddy Roosevelt or Franklin Roosevelt's people in the Resettlement Administration thought it was land not good enough to support people, and then they drew the line kind of arbitrarily and the people just over the line were pretty much subsistence-oriented. The Forest Service, because [if] somebody gets too mad they can go in there and burn up seventy-five thousand acres of timber, the Forest Service had throughout its history tried to figure out how to get along with their

neighbors who were poor folk, and they gave them jobs and all of this. They had had a lot of [experience dealing with poor people].

The SCS, it took a long time for Soil Conservation Service to warm up to the poverty business. They were land-oriented, soil erosion-oriented engineers. REA, Rural Electrification Administration, went out pretty full-hearted for it. The Agricultural Extension Service was of two minds, and I fought this for eight years, too. They wanted to get in on it, but they didn't really believe in it. As you will notice, I took [Lloyd H.] Davis with me to a lot of the meetings so that he could then pass the word out to these powerful state directors of the Agricultural Extension Service that this really wasn't going to bite them and they ought to have been doing it all the time. And Davis, as national administrator, went full out in cooperation with it.

G: They thought at first, I guess, that they could get vastly increased appropriations.

B: No, the big thing that was a threat to them was community action, because they had a program that they called that, too. They did this through natural leaders in the community, and OEO was proposing to do community action through anti-leaders. You remember the Saul Alinsky tear-down-the-structure school. There was constant creative tension about various subjects.

G: I want to go into community action in some detail in a minute, but let me ask you some more about the proposals that you developed in the Department of Agriculture as part of this rural poverty thing. You

had a commodities program, didn't you? I know there was a community facilities program that dealt with putting in sewer systems and things of this nature. Do you recall the details of that?

B: What turned out later to be one of the largest anti-poverty programs in the government at that time was in the process of moving from an experimental demonstration program that Freeman and Kennedy had started by executive order, now called the food stamp plan. I remember right in the middle of one of the task force meetings when Sarge was by that time chairman, must have been sometime in the late winter or early spring of 1964, one of Sarge's legislative liaison lieutenants came huffing and puffing in and handed Sarge a handwritten note. Sarge read it and looked up at me and he said, "Well, Congress beat your goddamned food stamp plan." Like he thought well, the food stamp plan wasn't worth a damn in the first place, and the goddamned rural congressmen had done it in the second [place]. It took me three or four days after that to climb back up to ground level again, he was so mad.

G: Was that considered a bad omen for the War on Poverty program? It happened right at the [time].

B: They were of two minds. It wasn't part of the War on Poverty because it had started the first week Freeman and I were in office. In fact, I think that's the first thing Jack sent up. Therefore it was very much a farmers' [program], really farmers were wanting to sell more food, even if they had to sell it to poor people. The Ylvisakers and the Yarmolinskys and the Dick Goodwins and the deep breathers really

and Lisle Carter and the rest of them just kind of snarled when they'd think about rural or white southerners, like the president turned into. Anything that came out of the Agriculture Committees, just like anybody that talks with a southern or southwestern accent, was suspect to those fellows. That was their attitude toward the food stamp plan. It did turn out though to be--gosh, it's a multi-billion dollar thing now. Willard and I knew it was going to be.

That had started as an executive order in 1938, I guess, as a food stamp plan as part of the Surplus Marketing Administration program. Then in 1948 and 1949 it was in the rough draft of what later became the [Charles F.] Brannan Plan, and when they finally got the Brannan Plan ready to send over to the White House it came back with two things red-marked. One of them was the food stamp plan. Old Harry had written in the margin saying, "To hell with this damn thing! That fucking Republican [George] Aiken is for it!" There wasn't any more food stamp plan in 1949. He just killed it dead, because Senator Aiken had been introducing it as--oh, he had another name for it but it was the same thing. And it never did pass. He kept introducing it throughout the fifties.

G: How do you explain its defeat in 1964?

B: I wasn't aware really of it. Ken Birkhead, who's now dead, was handling the legislative liaison, Willard Cochrane was doing the staffing from an economy standpoint, and Freeman was in it up to his hocks. And other than the early morning staff meeting every morning or whatnot, them just bringing us up to date, [I wasn't involved

with it]. In any event, it was changed awful fast. The Senate passed it and then the House accepted it. It's been expanding every year ever since, and it's been a controversy every time it comes up, it just gets bigger.

G: Now this community facilities program I understand was defeated by BOB. Do you recall the details of that?

B: The what's now called community facilities program was started in the 1930s, again under the President's emergency [powers], and then was emblazoned in marble by Congress as a water facilities program, still in the 1930s, as primarily a way of loaning money to low-income farmers in the so-called semi-desert areas to get irrigation. Then this turned into water for home use as well as irrigation. And the expansion of the community facilities program from its then existing stature was in Kennedy's very first message.

This is where Baker's Fabian approach comes in. I talked to the guys on the Hill, which I had been working with daily for ten years previous to that, found out what they thought they could pass--that's what I'd urge the White House to put in the message--and get that little bit passed. Then over a long period of time that little water facilities program is now a multi-billion dollar community facilities program, with a little add-on every year as it were. As part of the original asking for part of the War on Poverty, [we tried] just to go all the rest of the way in 1964 instead of staying with the Fabian approach.

Actually we got some simultaneous legislation expanding the community facilities program at that time. Senator Aiken, who was

from Vermont, was very strong for getting water out to those dairy farms. For them to be modern and pass the inspection standards and whatnot, a dairy farmer almost has to have running water. Aiken originally wrote up a proposal that this be an added third function to Rural Electrification Administration. I don't remember now how I got it, but I got Aiken's longhand draft of that bill about the time he finished it. Norm Clapp, who was administrator of REA, and Howard Bertsch, who was administrator of Farmers Home Administration--both supposed to work for me--and I discussed it and discussed it and discussed it. Then I got Clyde Ellis in on it because REA couldn't do anything that Clyde Ellis wouldn't support anyway; at least I wasn't going to let them.

For whatever reason at that time Norm and Clyde felt like they had enough fights on generation and transmission loans to not look like they were trying to expand their empire. Bertsch was just drooling to get it. So Bertsch and I went up and talked the old man into saying it would be administered by Farmers Home instead of REA. It went through the Senate as a vastly expanded water distribution loan program, of the kind they got now. It got over to the House and Bob [Poage] wasn't going to let it rest at that. He added sewer to it. And of course Howard and I thought that was good, too. It passed as a water and sewer loan and grant program. In other words, it's kind of on a separate track. We didn't really fight for it as being part of the OEO, partly because by that time Sundquist had convinced me

there wasn't any point in fighting the Ford Foundation crowd and all these human resource deep breathers.

G: But did you think that you'd have a chance to pass it separately anyway?

B: Yes, oh, yes. I was pretty well leaded with old man Aiken and Bob Poage voting for it. It passed both houses with no adverse votes.

G: Okay. Let's talk about land reform. I'd like you to trace some of the origins of the land reform proposal.

B: Well, like all things, it's according to when you want to start. England had approached the landlord-tenant problem by improved laws governing landlord-tenant relations back in the 1920s, I think back in the 1920s. It didn't work in Ireland and somebody else had approached it by buying the land from the landlords and selling it to the tenants, which is what we think of now as land reform. As a result of the President's Commission on Farm Tenancy, that's President Roosevelt's commission, which reported in the fall of 1934 I reckon, they had recommended an expansion and continuation of programs that had been initiated under the Resettlement Administration and its predecessor agencies who buy land in big blocks, say like in the Mississippi Delta, and sell it or rent it to tenants and sharecroppers, some of which experiments were successful and some of which were hideous failures.

G: These were to parcel out in small, family-sized units or in large cooperatives?

B: Both.

G: Both?

B: The cooperatives failed and the family-sized units succeeded. I even remember the names of the two failures, the worst failures: Terrebonne in Louisiana and Lake Dick in Arkansas. It was awful close to a collective farm, those. The members were paid a minimum wage to work and then the members split up the profits at the end of the year on the basis of the number of hours worked. All of the property was owned in common, owned by the corporation. The mules got wormy, the cotton didn't get plowed at the right time and got a lot of weeds in it. People left or people just laid home, claimed they were sick and wouldn't work. Terrebonne and Lake Dick just didn't [work]. They were just a failure year after year.

On the other hand, the ones that were grounded on the family-farm concept of the tiller being the owner, these have turned out world famous musicians and world famous artists of second and third-generation kids. As late as only eight or ten years ago, fully 80 per cent of all of the people that were still alive at Lake View, which was another one of those early resettlement projects in eastern Arkansas, turned up at the annual convention of the Arkansas Farmers Union. Because the then-President of the Arkansas Farmers Union had been project manager over at that project.

There's something about this family farm ownership and operation that's--I've been reading all of my son's anthropology books and what not and I don't really know the difference now between an instinct and the rest of it--and he told me I ought not to use the word primordial--but there's something about farming that the hand of the husbandman

has to do with making a success of it. I've seen collective farms fail in east Pakistan. They had an awful failure in China over these collectives. I don't know whether you've ever read the New York Times article, "Marx was not a country boy," or "Marx was a city boy." He had one, Stalin and even before him, Lenin, and they still are having trouble with agricultural production, because it's not grounded on the [family farm concept]. This is part of what's going on in Poland now, not the top thing in Poland, but the bubbling thing underneath it, is these family farmers that want to organize and own their land.

I had written my masters thesis on farm tenancy and land tenure at the University of Wisconsin, and there was quite a body of literature and research studies including--I've forgotten the author's name now, the guy that wrote several different evaluative books on the Mexican revolution with respect to land reform. In other words, it was something that was in the libraries and in the internal communications of rural intelligentsia kind of world over, with a kind of a belief that you needed a land-owning yeoman to see that the nation kept a stable food supply and that you maintained stable political things in the country.

Most of the people that had participated in these kinds of things were in the armed forces during World War II. When MacArthur went to Japan--for the full background of this you ought to read

Larry Hughes, Land Reform in Japan, which is an Iowa State University publication. In order to break up the still feudal-type social structure in rural areas of Japan, MacArthur had bought [Wolf] Ladejinsky's idea of land reform. Larry's little book is a very delightful little thing to read. He goes into every little detail.

G: Were you familiar with that program?

B: Yes, Larry and I had both been quasi-big shots in Farm Security before the war. Larry was a regional director before I was. I was still just a smart aleck staffer in the Washington office, and Larry was coming up for his prelims at Harvard in economics. Somebody had told him that I was the only person in Washington that understood [John Maynard] Keynes. The reason was that I had Keynes on one sheet of paper, and he knew durn well on his prelims he was going to get some questions on Keynes. So I gave him that one sheet of paper and he passed. That's just background. Larry and I have known each other a long, long time at Farm Security and around the Department of Agriculture in the 1930s.

I guess it took them four years in Japan if I remember it. I just read Larry's book again a couple of weeks ago. Well, there was a lot of mouthing around that we were going to do it in Korea, South Korea. South Korea was kind of an afterthought to Japan if you remember in the late forties for a while. They took all the pork chops and all the tenderloins off to Japan, we got what was

left on the boat, not just in the way of food but everything. We had, I guess, a paranoid general in Korea by the name of [Archer] Lerch. I don't know what all the other reasons were. Lerch had been military governor for a while in Okinawa when I was in military government there. Lerch had eight jeeps, and he had his tent where he lived and his office, then he had four tents, entrance rooms, with eight jeeps, two in each, running with the driver sitting there. That's just to kind of give you his psychology. He kept saying to Clyde Mitchell and me that, yes, we'd have land reform, but we never could get anything approved. Finally MacArthur, who thought Lerch was a great one, took him to Japan and General [William F.] Dean became the military governor in Korea. It wasn't long until we had a land reform program in Korea.

It was easier in Korea than anywhere it was ever done in the world--the first half--because the military government of the United States in Korea inherited all of the holdings of the old Oriental Development Company in South Korea, coal mines and brandy factories and farm land. Therefore we were already the owner; we didn't have to go through the agonizing process of buying it from existing landowners. Our argument then was between the military governor's economic advisers, who thought we ought to rationalize the farming system of South Korea at the same time we did land reform. In other words, consolidate the units and be sure that

each one of them was an economic size, that nobody that was trifling would get one. Clyde and I, based on Larry's experience in Japan, held out for saying whoever was living on it and working was going to get the first crack at buying it. We finally won, but there was a lot of fussing.

Well, that was part of the background. In the meantime in the late, I guess, Truman years and the Eisenhower time, the Congress, mainly as a result of the hearings of the so-called [Frank] Pace Committee, had completely removed all of the authority that the Farm Security Administration had to buy land and sell it to tenants. When the President's emergency [powers] ran out we didn't have that authority in the department.

Sometime in the early 1960s I got the idea that if we would use Title III of the old Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, which is the sub-marginal land purchase title, instead of Title I, which was the helping poor folks title, that maybe we'd get it back. Dr. Orville Scoville [?], who is now my son's father-in-law, and I went up about seven o'clock in the morning to Senator [Allen] Ellender's office--he was chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee at the time--to present all of the amendments we wanted--this was in 1961--to the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. He--"Uh, huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh," and then he sees this thing--I caved in as fast as Sargent did five years later. There wasn't any way to talk that old man into letting the government buy any land that morning.

I decided, Jesus Christ, I've got twenty--but I still wanted it, Bertsch still wanted it, Freeman still wanted it and that was just laying around there kicking. By that time Larry Hughes was on my staff in the office of Rural Areas Development, and he wanted it. I mean, he made one success in life, thought it wouldn't hurt to make another one then. Then Larry really knows the logistics of land reform, Jesus Christ, a whole lot better than I ever did. I was always a diletante on too many things. I never did really know how to do anything. I just kind of knew what I thought was the thing that was going to be done. We decided--Freeman agreed--we'd just put it in the OEO package. Those urban do-gooders, revolutionaries, kind of thought, "Well, good God, the Department of Agriculture didn't recommend something like this, they just bought it without much discussion." LBJ wasn't opposed to it; hell, he thought it was a good thing, coming out of East Texas. The Kennedyites, who were still his staff people at that time, didn't object in the White House. It went sailing up there and the Republicans and some of the deep-dyed southern reactionaries on the committees--just exactly like the obstacles they tried to throw in our way in Japan and Korea--said, "That's a communist thing." They took out after Sarge and he folded. That was the end of that.

G: Did you all try to lobby for it in the Hill?

B: Not really. Sarge is such a master lobbyist himself and such an energetic lobbyist, he did fully as much, maybe not as effectively, on the War on Poverty lobbying as he did on the original Peace Corps, and

that thing he did in covering the Hill on the Peace Corps lobbying, as a ten-year lobbyist all I could do was just kind of salaam about it. How he could be a fifteen-man windmill and run, ski and. . . .

G: How did he lobby War on Poverty?

B: I don't know. You mean in detail?

G: Yes.

B: I haven't got the faintest idea.

G: Did he see a lot of the members?

B: My impression is that he did. My impression is that he did. And that meant that what Sarge personally understood was what he could talk to them about with fluency. He's the world's best salesman, there's no two ways about it, from the standpoint of persuasiveness and energy.

G: Do you have any examples of him persuading a member or senators?

B: No. Undoubtedly there were some, but I just don't recall them and I apparently have no record of any of it. Ken Birkhead would know more about it and he's dead. Jim Sundquist might remember some.

G: Do you think that part of the opposition to the land reform proposal might have been just sort of a philosophical opposition to what conservatives viewed as Tugwellian economics?

B: Partly. It was what you might call ignorant philosophy. It's the same thing I ran into in Egypt in late 1952 and early 1953. [Premier Mohammed] Naguib wanted to have a land reform program, and the American Ambassador was married to a woman whose family owned thousands of plantation acres in eastern Tennessee, and they were of that

plantation-owning aristocracy. The American Ambassador refused to provide American cooperation for Naguib to carry out a land reform program in Egypt. Later [John Foster] Dulles cancelled the Aswan Dam and we damn near lost Egypt, got it back in spite of it ten to twelve years later. That was based purely on the same thing that Tugwell had fought and the rest of us had fought over the years in trying to do something about improving the conditions of farm tenants. That again goes back to ages all the way back to the Roman Empire that plantation owners kind of. . . . And we're right up against it every day of course in a lot of Latin American countries around here.

G: When Shriver testified before that House committee, at the time the legislation was first presented he said that it represented a careful balance of rural and urban. That it was a unified package, and if one part were deleted that it would hurt the whole program. Did defeating this land reform thing throw it out of kilter as far as the [rural-urban balance]?

B: No.

G: Did you feel like it still had a respectable rural component to it?

B: Rereading my notes at the time indicate yes, that we just considered that was kind of an expected casualty and the overall was worth getting even though that wasn't [included].

G: You did have another provision for loans to farmers that was approved?

B: Oh, yes. Well, that was a long-standing program going back to again 1934.

G: But I understand that initially that was a provision for grants and then it was changed to loans.

B: You mean my recommendation to Shriver?

G: Well, wasn't yours for grants?

B: Yes. Yes. Well, there's still some grants stayed in and there's some that were actually in the bill as passed.

G: Would you expand on that?

B: Well, I'm kind of fuzzy on the details. I'll give you an example down the road a little ways that leads me to believe that we didn't get as much grants for Farmers Home Administration to use as we initially wanted. There was a SWAFCA loan and grant application from something called Southwest Alabama Tenant Farmers Cooperative Association, which by that time Sarge had taken so much beating from the conservatives on the Hill that he was scared of, and the Community Action Agency Assistant Director, a guy from Cincinnati or Cleveland--

G: That was Ted Berry, I guess.

B: Yes, Ted Berry. Ted Berry had gotten beaten over the head so much that they were skittish as hell with SWAFCA, and there were two relatively well-known communists on the SWAFCA board. Or maybe it was just their two New York lawyers that were suspect.

G: This was a black farmers' co-op, wasn't it, more or less?

B: Yes, yes. In black-belt Alabama. And every member of the Alabama delegation including both senators and all the members of the House had already called on the White House and Sarge that they didn't

want that made. Old Berry was just like we used to say, a nigger in a Democratic primary, he was that scared.

I remember I kept poking Freeman to talk to Shriver about it, and Shriver was so jumpy that Sundquist and Birkhead told Freeman not to poke at Shriver about it. So I made a run at Ted. I got Ted over in my office to talk to him about it. I said, "Look, Ted, if you'll make the damn grant, I'll make the loan. I won't look back. The Alabama delegations can't scare me a bit." Well, he mouthed around and went back home and two or three days later said it was a go. Me having the courage gave him the courage to go on and make the grant part of that particular loan. Now that was the loans to cooperatives program. We lost somewhere, and I can't remember and I can't locate in my files whereabouts we lost the grant component of the co-op loan program in the OEO package.

We later and almost simultaneously got authority under an entirely different piece of legislation for this land reform thing by not calling it land reform. We called them grazing associations, in which a bunch of farmers would set up a cooperative and we'd make them a loan to buy ten thousand acres of grazing land say in Montana, or say maybe in Florida.

G: Was this strictly for grazing though, or could you use it for crops?

B: Well, whatever you want. It was a grazing association, and if they needed some crops to fill in when the grass wasn't growing in the winter time, the lawyer said that was covered.

So we had a grant component of that in the sense that the government bought it for what they had to pay for it and sold it to the association for what it was worth. But it wasn't a grant. You didn't write a check, see what I mean. This again is what Cochrane was calling my Fabian approach instead of being honest and calling it a federal subsidy. We bought the land for what we had to pay for it and sold it for what it was worth. We were planning to expand that after 1969 if Hubert got re-elected and to really straight outright [start] buying big plantations and selling it to family-type farmers. Because the legal basis for just a straight-out cotton, corn, and soybean operation was just a little shaky.

There was a grant component--we had a loan, didn't we, for new farm enterprises?

G: Fifteen hundred dollars.

B: Yes, something. There was a grant component in that that stayed throughout. That really didn't threaten anybody because it was so small.

G: Well, I thought that was the one that was changed to loans. Even Hubert Humphrey or someone struck it and changed it to [loans].

B: Maybe so. I don't remember in detail all of those special things. Ten years as a lobbyist taught me the correctness of getting a little bit of something instead of a whole lot of nothing, in this sense of compromising for what you can get and then waiting till next year and going after it again for what you didn't get.

G: I think that was also Lyndon Johnson's approach.

B: Yes, yes. I never had any disagreement with Lyndon's lobbying techniques.

Tape 2 of 2

G: Let's talk about provisions for migrant workers, which was another feature of the program that involved rural poverty.

B: Right. Well, let's start in late 1960 after the election. Starting in resettlement time in Farm Security and up through the years, the migratory farm worker program had been a Department of Agriculture function. Some of us, when Brannan was secretary, had gotten [it] devolved off to the Department of Labor, the thinking being that people in the Department of Labor were better insulated from the heaviest and sharpest pressures from big landowners that were intimately involved in cheap migratory labor. We still had I think at that time the housing function and maybe some others. In the transition briefing I had presented the point of view to Freeman and he thought it made sense to him that we should devolve the rest of the migratory farm workers' decision-making, policy-making over to the secretary of labor instead of it being a handicap to the secretary of agriculture. During early World War II, and even later after I went to the navy, the Farm Security Administration had actually operated the Jamaican-British Caribbean Isles wartime farm labor program. We recruited them down there, brought them on ships, put them on trains and took them to Oregon and Michigan and one place or another to do farm work so that

there would be [labor to] take the place of Americans that went off to war industry or to the war, army.

We had successfully under Brannan and then later under Clint Anderson and then--let's see, first even under [Claude] Wickard and then Clint Anderson and then Brannan--devolved a lot of those policy-making functions to the Department of Labor to just get it off the back of the secretary of agriculture. At least that was my feeling, and Freeman was glad to get shed of it. However, we still retained the responsibility for determining twice a year minimum wages in the sugar production and sugar harvesting, and for lack of having anybody else to do it, Freeman said I had to do that every year. I never did get shed of that.

But this was where my working relationships with Willard Wirtz and his executive assistant was one of the most fruitful and pleasant and agreeable inter-agency operations I ever participated in. Because I could participate in the decision-making process, but not have to stick Freeman's neck out to take the hell for it. Besides that, Willard Wirtz had--where he got it I don't know--an instinctively what seemed to me practical and appropriate program and policy ideas with respect to it. It by that time turned out to be migratory rural labor instead of just migratory farm labor. But there was also enough so-called user political strength to--we were still importing legal aliens from Mexico to do farm work and we still had great streams of migrant labor going from Florida to at least Vermont if not Maine, up the East Coast. Then there was a stream that came up from Florida

through the central part of the United States, wound up harvesting cherries in Michigan. Then there was a huge one, of course, on the West Coast in all those vegetable and fruit crops.

G: In California.

B: Again, Larry Hughes, as regional director in California, Arizona and Nevada, had a whole lot more to do with that migratory worker program in the 1930s than I ever did. We didn't have too much of it in Arkansas until I wound up in charge of this Caribbean Island operation. Let's say by 1952 we had pretty well gotten all of the tough ones devolved off to the Department of Labor. Then it turned out that Willard Wirtz was--at least from my standpoint and Freeman's--doing such a good job we never did ever argue with him. I remember my memorandum which I guess I've got somewhere--there may even be one of them in that box that you're going to take home with you--told Freeman that what he ought to do is to keep his mouth shut publicly and support Wirtz privately with respect to migratory farm workers.

Then the War on Poverty comes along. I read a memorandum the other day in which I said that over the years this has been one of the most talked about and least done about problems in America, migratory rural workers. And if you've read the stories lately about the Eastern Shore and the Haitians and Cubans and so on, it still is. There was always a dichotomy--Bill Batt, who was the first administrator of ARA, previous to that had been secretary of commerce for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a lot of the do-gooders thought what you really ought to do is to spend a whole lot of federal money and make living conditions

and schools and housing and everything real good for migrant workers. Another point of view was that that's subsidizing a bad system. What the hell would a landowner spend any money to build a good house if the federal government builds a fine dormitory on his vegetable patch? Throughout the fifties there was a considerable argument among well-meaning people, kind of symbolized in my memory, me and Bill Batt, when we had a fuss in the Senate gallery one day over this one subject.

G: What was your position?

B: My position was that what we ought to do is to pass regulatory legislation and do other things Willard Wirtz was talking about to make migratory labor unnecessary. In other words, labor-saving machinery, rationalization of agricultural production and providing other opportunities for these people to drop off the migrant stream, seemed to me like that was the constructive thing to do.

There was also, if you had international things, and I always did after 1951--well, prior to that in Okinawa and Korea--when you get pushed way back and it's those late night hours that they talk about, you've got extremely poor people in Mexico and now the Caribbean Islands--of course and then, too, we really didn't think about it as much--who even at a substandard minimum wage in the United States make more in a day than they can make at home in a month. From the standpoint of humanity as a whole, why not let them come up here and get some of this? But the other point of view is organized labor saying it undercuts our bargaining power, which it does. It was in the OEO time, and in the pre-OEO time, always this struggle of organized labor

not wanting any of them to come in--which as I understand it, even led to the first immigration acts way back in the twenties--and the conservatives and other kinds of liberals that thought that from a worldwide standpoint one way of helping poor people in Mexico is let them come up here and work at substandard wages.

G: Which would be higher than the wages that they could get in Mexico?

B: Oh, ten times, a hundred times as high. And the worst kind of exploitive capitalist industrial owner in the United States loves to have barefooted men in entries, they used to say in my hometown, a coal-mining town. If you've got enough barefooted men in the entry you can go tell a guy to go dig that chock over there whether he likes the looks of the roof of the mine or not. If you haven't got any barefooted men in the entry, you've got to put up with those fellows. That was constantly discussed in the early OEO discussions, these various things.

For instance, one thing that I presented and said that I could talk the Extension Service into doing it if nobody else is willing, family planning. Every other member of that task force literally goddamned near threw me out the window on that one.

G: That's a real hot potato.

B: Family planning then, boy. I said, "Well, I don't mean what you think." They said, "Well, you said it!" Boy, they just ripped me, everybody from Lisle Carter to the guy from Avis. I don't know whether they were all Catholics or not. But goddamned, I took a ripping that day.

G: Was their opposition purely political? It was something to kill the whole program on the Hill?

B: I think part of it was religious. I don't mean religious in the sectarian sense, but just religious. They didn't think that the government ought to be putting money into birth control. They translated that [incorrectly]. Davis and I kind of introduced the word innocently. We were thinking in terms of teaching them to budget and keep records.

We did get some things, didn't we? Or I got some that I got my lawyer to say we could do it with, of setting up--maybe it was just in the rural renewal areas, siphoned people off of the migratory stream and sell them on credit a little farm with a good house and things. We talked about this in part--see, after they had finished picking cherries in Michigan they'd be back to Florida. Or sometimes they'd stay in Michigan. We thought if we could provide them with a chance to purchase a little piece of land and a decent house on a long-term repayment basis that this would help at least part of the year if the stream continued and might get people accustomed to the idea that they didn't need that damn stream of migratory workers any more.

It's the seasonal nature of agricultural production, of course, that made this so necessary. The reason they're so opposed to strikes and so on, if tomorrow is the day to pick your cucumber crop, the day after tomorrow ain't the time. I mainly served as Freeman's liaison man [to the] secretary of labor throughout this time on migratory farm

workers, largely based if we possibly could to just giving Wirtz our full support for whatever he came up with was the right thing to do.

But I did run across a memorandum--and I think it's bound to be in one of these; I didn't tag it because I didn't know you were going to be interested in that--in which I wrote Freeman that either from White House pressure or on his own initiative Wirtz had shifted gears and wasn't as pro-migratory worker as he had been. And I didn't read that. I don't think I marked it, it's just one of those that's in there.

G: Why wasn't there a provision for minimum wage for migrant workers in this legislation?

B: I don't recall. Like I say, I had been running one for sugar producers ever since 1961, which started way back in the Costigan Sugar Act in the 1930s. There isn't even a sugar act now so you may not even know what I'm talking about, but back in the 1930s what to do about sugar was one of the hottest issues in the country. The confectioners and what little representatives the consumers had were on one side; they wanted cheap sugar. The military, going back long before Napoleon, I guess to Caesar, looked on sugar as being as important as ammunition in maintaining a big enough army to whip the world. Therefore they wanted something that would absolutely ensure a continuing ample supply of sugar regardless of the price. Domestic producers, both sugar beet growers and sugar cane growers, wanted protection, high tariff, because sugar was an import commodity. Other nations in the world wanted as free a run at this lucrative American markets for

their sugar as they could get. Senator [Edward] Costigan from Colorado, among I'm sure a whole lot of others, worked out--well, let me say at that time, as is probably still true, the lowest paid agricultural workers in the country are sugar producers, the people that cut the cane, plant the beets and so on. So organized labor undoubtedly had a hoof in it.

Costigan over a period of months, with the help of a guy that was later secretary of the interior, Oscar Chapman, Jim Patton and somebody else, worked and worked and worked for months, I would presume even more skillfully than we did on the Rural Development Act, and developed a program that they would all support, the foreigners and the domestic producers and organized labor and the military and the confectioners. Among other things, to handle the labor end, they set up that minimum wage for production workers and for harvest workers. They thought then mainly sugar cane, but it was also [for beet sugar]. Then there were the predecessors you might say of the Brannan Plan production payments. Instead of raising tariffs all the way, the domestic sugar producer had the market price to sell it for, plus the sugar payment, production payment to keep the price down for the military and the confectioners. And it never was a very big subsidy. But later on, many years later, Bill Fulbright was instrumental in getting the whole thing abolished.

But anyway, the idea of minimum wage was in there. Let's see if I can remember anybody discussing it. I don't believe we originally even recommended it from the Department of Agriculture, and I would

presume, knowing my advisers of that time, Larry Hughes and Phil Beck[?] would have probably been the only two that were beating for it, and the powers in Farmers Home, SCS and maybe even Rural Electrification, REA, were saying that why take that one on, point of view. In any event, maybe one of Freeman's staff guys talked me out of it, like Ken Birkhead said, "It just won't fly and ain't no use starting with it." I don't know. I don't recall what the details of that were.

I know we didn't give it very much visibility, partly because market people and manufacturers like Campbell Soup and the consumer representatives--and I used to argue this with Bill Batt on his Pennsylvania program--they really didn't want to help migratory workers by raising their wages, because that increased the price of Campbell Soup and watermelons and everything else. They didn't feel badly enough about the poor migratory worker to be willing to pay higher prices in the grocery store. Maybe out of all that experience and because the Department of Agriculture was kind of out of the migratory farm labor business by then anyway, we just kind of--we didn't put it in, and I haven't got the faintest idea why Willard Wirtz didn't put it in. I would suppose that Willard's predecessor was still secretary of labor right at [that time]. When did Lyndon put the secretary of Labor [Arthur Goldberg]--where did he send him? He sent him to the U.N. didn't he?

G: Well, he was on the [Supreme] Court before that. No, I think Wirtz was secretary of labor at this point.

B: Of course that damn assassination was kind of a trauma, too. We didn't remember as much that we were participating in as we would normally have remembered because an awful lot of us came aboard with Jack Kennedy and were kind of tolerated by the other parts of the Kennedy crowd as kind of the cost of him getting to be president. Kind of like Lyndon was tolerated as vice president. But Freeman had been a nominator of Kennedy, nominating speech.

I don't know, the years run together, you don't know which happened say in 1965 or 1966 instead of what happened in 1963 and 1964. I think maybe we decided the best way to improve the so-called migratory farm worker problem was instead of attacking it direct as a mandatory income requirement on your so-called users or employers, to do it by eliminating their need for migratory workers in the first place by improved machinery and so forth. And in the second, of making alternative opportunities available to people who were in the migrant stream, that the users wouldn't have anybody unless they did pay them a decent wage. Now I think that was at least the way we rationalized it if not anything else.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

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Susan T. Baker for
John A. Baker (deceased 3/2/83

Donor

April 27, 1983

Date

Robert M. Warner

Archivist of the United States

April 11, 1983

Date