

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 23, 1974
INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT G. BAKER
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Mr. Baker's residence, Washington, D.C.

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G: I believe, Mr. Baker, you're from Pickens, South Carolina.

B: That's correct. Pickens is the county seat of my home town, which I moved to from Easley. I was born in Easley, which is the main road of the Southern Railroad. During the campaign in 1960 when Lyndon Johnson was the vice presidential nominee, we stopped the train in Easley for him to go up to a place called Rocky Bottom, South Carolina, which he could never remember; he always called it Bottom Rock. They had a big affair for all the politicians in which I introduced him there. We had a lot of laughs about Bottom Rock or Rocky Bottom, South Carolina. We flew in a helicopter, and a little bit later in the interview, I'll tell you what happened to us in the helicopter ride, and how the man at a Baptist summer camp told us that we couldn't land the helicopter there, and we had to hitchhike. Here was the Democratic nominee for the vice presidency, along with a telephone lineman and myself in a helicopter for two people, whereby that we had to get out and go through the cockleburs to hitchhike a ride over to my classmate, who presently is the lieutenant governor of South Carolina, Earl Morris, Jr., who was a candidate for governor and who was defeated.

I moved to Pickens. My father was the village carrier, then became postmaster during Eisenhower's administration, thanks to Senator

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Dirksen. I lived there, say, from the time I was about three months old until I left there in December of 1942, when I was fourteen.

G: You began in the Senate as a page, I understand.

B: Yes. I was appointed as a page boy by the late Burnett Maybank, whom Franklin Roosevelt, our late President, had asked to run for the Senate. Burnett Maybank was in many, many ways ideologically similar to Lyndon Johnson. He was basically a New Deal Democrat and a man of the people. He was a Charlestonian, and he had great difficulty speaking the language of--especially with the people from the up-country, like Pickens. Like when he ran for governor, he got beat nine to one. But the man who was responsible for my appointment as a page boy got to be friends with him after he had gotten into the run-off in the governor's race, and he carried my county about eight to one. Senator Maybank was the first vote that I received for Lyndon Johnson to be the minority leader when there was a vacancy, after Senator McFarland had been defeated by Barry Goldwater.

G: Did you just stay on continuously?

B: Yes, yes. I served, beginning in January 1, 1943. I arrived in Washington, say, two days after Christmas in 1942; I stayed until October 7, 1963, when I resigned under fire.

G: This places you in the Senate, as we said earlier, considerably before Lyndon Johnson arrived, and I'm just wondering who taught you all the things about the Senate that were so important to you and Lyndon Johnson later.

B: I think like any profession, that everyone must serve an apprenticeship. If you will realize that I started to work as a page boy when I was

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fourteen in January of 1943, which means that I met and had known and had gone through World War II with all the trials and tribulations of the war with Harry Truman and President Roosevelt, Mrs. Roosevelt-- everybody that was anybody in America during this, probably, darkest hour in the history of our country. But I learned my trade from January 1, 1943. I had not mastered my trade when Lyndon Johnson came there, when he was elected with Harry Truman in 1948. Lyndon Johnson became a senator January 3, 1949 by a tremendous landslide. They called him "Landslide Lyndon"--I've forgotten whether it was eighty-seven or seventy-eight votes, you correct me.

G: Well, I think it was 87--I believe it was actually 110.

B: Between the three of us, we're reasonably close.

G: What about Senator Russell or Senator George, some of these southern senators who really knew how the Senate worked? Did these people take you along?

B: That's an excellent question, and the reason being my mother and father were born and raised in Hartwell, Georgia. As a consequence of this, and the relationship of Senator Maybank to Senator George and to Senator Russell, I was, you know, sort of like one of their boys. I was on the inside. Southerners are unusually patriotic people. They were great supporters of Franklin Roosevelt, because the South suffered more during the Depression, probably, than any other part of the country. Because of the fact that my mother and father were from Georgia and my boss, Senator Maybank, who appointed me as a page boy, was from South Carolina, would never cast a vote, you know, without the approval of Senator Russell or Senator George. They were really the leaders of the Senate.

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Franklin Roosevelt lost control of the Senate and the Congress after he tried to pack the Supreme Court in 1937, which Lyndon Johnson had been elected on as being his supporter. But there was a coalition in the Senate when I was there. Senator Russell and Senator Robert Taft, who was the titular head of the Republican Party, they controlled the Senate. As a consequence of the power that they had and the closeness of the division in the House of Representatives, there was just a coalition that was running. Roosevelt did not have control of anything except running the war. You couldn't pass any social legislation; everybody's time was spent on what can we do to end this great calamity, which was World War II.

G: When did you first meet Lyndon Johnson, and do you recall your first--?

B: I sure do. I met Lyndon Johnson on the fifth floor of the Old House Office Building, which I believe now is called the Cannon Office Building. We had had a considerable number of court conflicts as to getting certification as to whether he had won or not won. So I was summoned to his office--for some reason it sticks in my mind--on a late Friday afternoon. He was, at this particular time, about six foot four and looked like he weighed, you know, 240, 250 pounds, and here I was, a kid that weighed about 140 pounds, so there was quite a contrast in physical size. I recall John Connally was his administrative assistant; Walter Jenkins was with him, Mary Rather; I was working with him. He had heard that I knew more about the inner operations of the Senate and how to get committee assignments and so forth, and he wanted to meet me.

I had been a personal admirer of his, although I had never met the man, because I really believed that Franklin Roosevelt had saved this

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country from destruction. I think that had we not been able to come out of the Depression, we could very easily have turned into a totalitarian country, which fortunately did not happen. But it was a very warm meeting, very near Christmas time, and he was one of the most generous people. I've forgotten, I believe that in 1949 either my wife was pregnant or we had just had a new baby, and he sent a fifty-dollar war bond. I never will forget that. He was always a generous fellow, and he was very generous to his colleagues, both in the Senate and in the House, and I think this was very, very helpful to him politically.

Talking about politics, you see the press is very critical of Governor Rockefeller right now, who's being considered to be the vice president. I have a lot of compassion for him, because he is by far one of the wealthiest men in the history of the world. Yet, when some of [his] colleagues have problems, he tried to help, and I think that Lyndon Johnson gave a lot to more people than the world will ever know. One of the reasons that he had the support of a lot of people who maybe did not agree with him philosophically--they loved him as a human being, because he was a real, warm, Christ-like character in certain areas.
(Interruption)

G: Can you remember the first time that Johnson relied on you for advice? When he first wanted to meet you, did he have something specific in mind, or was he just getting acquainted?

B: If you will recall, Truman's number one campaign issue in 1948 when he won, contrary to the views of practically every professional politician in the country, including the speaker here--his number one campaign commitment was the repeal of Section 14b of the Taft-Hartley Act. As

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part of the leadership team, it was my responsibility to see how many votes we could get to support the President's position. I did not know the commitments that Lyndon Johnson had made in Texas, that under no circumstances would he vote for the repeal of Section 14b of the Taft-Hartley, which is the so-called right-to-work law. I used whatever persuasiveness, capacity, ability, know-how, opportunities for advancement to be a part of the team, and so forth, to try and get him to support the President's position, but to no avail. And I think because of those many conversations that we developed a respect and rapport. And when the end result came, he voted what he had committed himself to, and that was to continue to believe that Section 14b should not be repealed. Now, he may have changed in later life, but this is where we really got to know each other as two individuals.

So we started out pretty quickly because, if he took office January 3, 1949, it would have been some time within six months that we would have been negotiating almost daily trying to get him to change his vote, because as I recall, the vote was very close [which Truman lost].

G: In this early period, did he follow the leadership of Senator Russell pretty closely?

B: Yes, yes. Without any doubt. He realized, you know, having served in the House, and having known the power structure--I think he, probably more than anybody in the Senate, being close to President Roosevelt as he was, knew about President Roosevelt's real health weakness, which he would not reveal to anybody. But when you look back at history, Franklin Roosevelt should never have been a candidate for re-election in

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1944. He saw that to be a senator from Texas longer than one term, he had to be on a very, very cordial relationship with the southern delegation, which was controlled by Senator Russell. Senator Russell and Senator Taft controlled the Senate at the time that Lyndon Johnson became a senator. While Senator Johnson was much, much more socially oriented than Senator Russell, yet he developed a great respect for Senator Taft. I never had the respect for Senator Taft that Senator Johnson did, and the reason may be that I didn't know him, because being a youngster and of the opposite party, he didn't have time for me. I became a great friend of Senator Bridges, who was a very conservative man, but Senator Bridges and Senator Johnson worked together. What they did with the Preparedness Committee is one of the great records in the history of our government, because every report that they made was unanimous. I think this is the reason that Harry Truman was selected to be vice president, was the record that he had made in World War II with the Senate Preparedness Committee. Few people realized, and former President Johnson told me, that Bob Taft's word was good. But he was not an attractive fellow physically. He was a very ugly debater. And with my southern background, I do not like people with bad manners, and I thought Bob Taft had bad manners. I don't care whether you agree with a man or not, but when he took a position like when he was opposed to NATO--and the older I get, I'm beginning to realize that maybe he was right and we were all wrong, because, you know, we've been supporting the world and we have created this colossal crisis, this oil crisis that we've got in the world, because he may have been a lot wiser than we are. There are things that you have second thoughts about.

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- G: Did style of debating and manners mean a lot with regard to how far you got in the Senate establishment?
- B: I don't think there's any doubt about it. I think that, number one, you must have a good intellect; two, you must have compassion; three, you must have an understanding of the geographical location of your colleagues. A senator from Maine had no water problem; they have plenty of snow and rain. But a senator from Arizona, his whole political life depends upon whether they can steal a little water from the Colorado River. These are things that make this such a great country, is that people have to realize that different parts of this great country have different problems.
- G: How would Senator Johnson rate here in comparison with some of the other southern senators?
- B: Because of the experience that he had gained in the House of Representatives and, I think, being an NYA administrator when he was a young man in Texas and really being out with people and seeing people and their problems, I would say without any doubt that when they write the history of the Senate, if they close the books in the year 2000, that he will be one of the ten ablest, brightest and most competent senators in the history of the country and probably accomplished as much, if not more, than any of the ten.
- G: Johnson once said something to the effect that a man's judgment is only as good as his information. With regard to being bright in the Senate and exercising good judgment, where did he get the information? Did he get it from you? Did he get it from the *Congressional Record*? Did he get it from talking to colleagues?

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B: It was a total combination of everything you have mentioned. I mean, he, one, was unusually bright; two, he would come to work earlier and stay to work later than anybody. He consulted people. He sought the best information. He knew because of his background that he wasn't an Einstein. He didn't know what the increments were to make an atomic bomb. But he tried because of his position, because of his desire for knowledge, to find out from the best brains in the world, how do we make this system work, or how do we get this war over, or if somebody's hungry, how do we get food to them. It's just like he received a lot of criticism for being for the repeal of the controls on natural gas. A lot of my liberal friends, now--all of a sudden they realize that, in order for us to compete, that the free enterprise system is the only way for it to work.

At the time, I didn't agree with Johnson's position; I agreed with Truman that we should keep controls. But I really believe that the quicker we are able to really make free enterprise work, and do away with monopoly and to raise hell with the fat cats and stay on top of them and make them honest, the better it's going to be for the masses, and that was Johnson's basic philosophy. I really get irritated when I hear a bright fellow who I think is one of the ablest members of Congress, like Bill Proxmire and Hubert Humphrey. Any time there's any bill to raise the price of milk at the expense of the taxpayers, they're statesmen; they're doing what's in the public interest. But any time a man comes from Texas or Oklahoma or California, and they want to have the same system of free enterprise or whatnot, they're a bunch of greedy moneygrabbers. I think that that's the beauty of this country: We *do*

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have problems. Here we have all this great agricultural land with tremendous capacity to feed the poor people of the world and the hungry people. The Arabs will run out of oil sooner or later, but people have got to eat, and this is what's going to make America great. If Lyndon Johnson was alive, I'm sure he would be for a fifty-year loan program to build a system whereby water was available for our farms so we would not have a drought like we had this past year. Because he had that kind of imagination; he could see it. He believed in those old REA loans and he could wax for hours, you know, about what REA had done for his constituents. This is what we've got to do because we, luckily, have got the productivity, the intellectual capacity, and so forth, to really feed the world.

G: I guess part of his brilliance is related to his ability to count votes, and I've read several places that next to Lyndon Johnson, you could count votes better than anyone in the Senate. Can you educate us on the process? How would you do this?

B: One, he had a basic understanding of the Senate. We had forty liberals and forty conservatives, which on any given issue meant that you had to try to--and I'm talking about after Alaska and Hawaii had been admitted, which gave us one hundred senators--which meant you had to find eleven votes. It was a combination. I don't take a back seat to anybody about being able to count--I had friends that he didn't have. I had people that would confide in me that would never convey--they didn't like him because he was from Texas. But I would go to them and say, "Can you help the Leader?" They'd say, "I can't help the Leader, but I'll help you." That was the reason that we had the rapport, and he had a lot of

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people that would give him commitments--and I'll use Margaret Chase Smith from Maine. She was a very distinguished Republican senator from Maine. They had been fellow members of the Senate Armed Services Committee together. On many close votes where we were within one or two votes, I would never have the audacity to ask her how she was going to vote, because she'd get up and denounce you on the Senate floor. But she would confide in him how she was inclined. She would never make a commitment, but he had enough instinctive knowledge after serving with her. I think she served in the House when he served there, and they were great friends, and she saved him on some of the crucial votes that made him into one of the great leaders of the Senate, with a person like Margaret Chase Smith.

G: Can you remember any of these votes that were important?

B: Oh, I'd have to refresh my memory. There were several votes there about railroad retirement liberalization, and I think that they had probably more to do with the censure of Joe McCarthy; I think her declaration of conscience about a senator was more devastating than anything that happened. But I think that she and Lyndon Johnson were working together and a lot of people took credit. He would seek her advice about who would be a good member to sit on the McCarthy censure committee, and she was a powerful woman then.

G: This McCarthy censure is one of the legislative issues I wanted to ask you about in detail, because here you've got a unanimous party position, really, in the Senate. What are your memories about that?

B: What you're saying is, we had unanimous Democratic Party position; the Republicans were not unanimous. I've forgotten how few votes he

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received, but it took two-thirds of the Senate to censure him, and he was censured. When Joe McCarthy first came to the Senate, he was a very popular member, because he was a decent, honorable fellow whose word was good. Few people know it, but Joe McCarthy was a victim of whiskey, and his whole personality changed. When he was making a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, and he said there were 205 card-carrying communists in the State Department, he got big, bold, black headlines all over the country. He believed his own lie. Some speechwriter slipped it in there. It was back in the time when we'd gone through the Alger Hiss episode. But Joe McCarthy was a sick man. He was basically as bad an alcoholic as I have ever known, and he died from cirrhosis of the liver, which was caused from overdrinking. Because of his drinking and because of the greed for power, he lost his sensibilities and he lost the respect of the Senate. It should never have happened, but he lacked the capacity to get up and say that he'd made a mistake, and that's when the press destroyed him.

G: I suppose he was very dangerous still at the time the Senate was trying to bridle him. What was Senator Johnson's strategy here in dealing with the McCarthy--?

B: I think that his basic strategy was to treat him like he was a rattlesnake, you know, to keep a great distance but to realize that he had a lethal capacity. He was very popular in Texas. He could have easily ended Lyndon Johnson's career as a senator from Texas had Johnson not been much brighter, much abler than McCarthy. McCarthy, because of his whiskey problem, didn't realize the intellectual power that he was up against. When they selected the people like Senator Stennis of

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Mississippi, Senator Watkins of Utah, people that there was not enough money in the world to buy, to be on this committee, that's when Joe McCarthy was destroyed. It was the genius of Lyndon Johnson picking people that there was no amount of money to buy that destroyed Joe McCarthy. That's the reason that people like Harry Byrd probably believed that there were that many communists in the State Department. It was a sad thing to say about someone when you didn't have facts, and the old McCarthy era is one of the tragic eras of our history. But it took the genius of a Lyndon Johnson to completely castrate Joe McCarthy, which he did; he destroyed him. There was nobody else in there that had the mentality to destroy a Hitler-type person like Joe McCarthy, and he'd become arrogant because of his obsession with whiskey.

G: Did you ever hear Johnson talk about McCarthy? Did he ever characterize the McCarthy threat or his implications?

B: As I initially said, he knew he was dealing with a lethal rattlesnake. Therefore, when you are in combat with an enemy such as that, the least you say, the best. If you go back and look through the historical notes about what speeches he made and what he did, they're minimal, but where he was so successful was listening and seeing what the colleagues thought. Then he had the Army-McCarthy hearings, and so forth. By a gradual process, he let McCarthy take the rope to hang himself. Johnson didn't hang him; McCarthy hung himself. But had it not been for Johnson's very intelligent, quiet leadership--you have to lead the Senate. You've got a hundred bright people; you don't get elected to something unless--you know, there are exceptions to that, but to be a senator and be able to win the nomination and to be elected and make the

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commitments that you have to make, it takes a man [with] better than normal ability.

G: Appointing senators whose reputations were unassailable was one thing. Did he restrain other senators such as Senator Fulbright, who might go out and confront McCarthy on the floor, let's say?

B: No, I think this is like a brilliant general's strategy. You had to have some suicide forces out front, and this is what I would say, that what Bill Fulbright did initially was like a suicidal attack at Normandy beachhead, because McCarthy was rather popular in Arkansas. It took a lot of guts and a lot of courage. As long as Fulbright and Johnson were in the Senate, they were two great friends, just like Johnson and Wilbur Mills for many years were great friends. But as people develop power, they get jealous, and you have these little problems, but you need a middle man. Whatever accomplishment I served, I was able to work with the staffs, with the people like Fulbright's staff. I always thought Lyndon Johnson had one of the five top ablest staffs on Capitol Hill; Bill Fulbright always had one of the top. We were always able to take care--when we would find out--we were just employees--that one person heard about our boss hurting the feelings of another boss' activities some way, we would solve the problem. But you need that. You've gotta have somebody, and I think that this is the reason that Johnson went out of the presidency with very few friends on the Hill, because he had so many problems. I heard Hubert Humphrey this morning on Barbara Walters' show, saying that he has no regrets about the position that he took in support of Johnson as far as the war--that he really thought that he, one, never personally had the confidence that he could win, that was

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number one. And number two, the fiasco in Chicago was what cost him the election, which I thought was a great tribute.

G: We were talking about Senate staffs. One of the points that I came across was that Johnson would, more than other senators, use the committee staffs and would meet with them regularly and just absorb information from them and find out what their problems were. Was this a normal procedure?

B: You've got to recall that he had the advantage of being, initially, a secretary to a congressman. He knew every detail of a staff member's problems. He had a tremendous advantage over all of his colleagues, because I don't believe there were two senators that had ever been staff members in the Congress. He had the capacity to understand that it was impossible for the senator or the congressman to shake hands with every constituent that came into town or take every one of them to lunch, to go down to the Social Security department to find out why their check was late, or to the Veterans' Administration. So the only way that you can be an effective legislator is that you have got to have a good staff, without any doubt. When you go down the record of the names of people Lyndon Johnson had, and Bill Fulbright had, I don't think you'll find anybody that had two better staffs. And this is the reason that they were so successful so long.

G: Did Johnson attract good people initially or did he make them good?

B: I think he did both.

G: It was no vacation working for him, I guess.

B: No, but I think it was so exciting and that he made you such a part of the family. I'll use myself as an illustration. With all the senators

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that I had known and the favors that I had done for them and worked out committee assignments for them, I would doubt that I had ever been in thirty senators' homes. When Senator Johnson came here, fortunately we lived within five minutes of his house. You never knew when he'd call up and say, "Why don't you and your wife come to dinner; why don't you come to brunch, why don't we go together, why don't we go to this place?" You know, we're all human. It appeals to your ego, and he did this with his other staff members; that's the reason he was able to keep people like Mary Rather, Walter Jenkins, and John Connally for years that would give superhuman effort. And he was repaid.

G: As long as we're on a personal description here, I've heard it said that he regarded you as a son, as almost a political heir, because his father had been in politics, and his father had been active, and he himself did not have a son, and he regarded you as sort of a surrogate son.

B: That is a fair statement. He wanted a son more than any human being that I've ever known in my life. He had two lovely daughters and fortunately, in the later years of his life, he was able to have two grandsons, or at least he has one. One night we were coming back from Austin going to the Ranch. We had been to a cocktail party, and we were in terrible distress--is the best word I know to use--to go to the bathroom. There was Lady Bird and Dorothy, my wife, in the car with us, and he just stopped the car out in that sixty-five mile stretch from Austin to the Ranch--it's rather desolate. He said, "Bobby, we've got to go to the john." So he stopped the car, we got out in the back. And when we had cleansed our bladders, he put his arm around me and he said, "You know, I've always wanted a son. You're closer to me than I was to

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my father." He said, "He was the biggest hero in my whole life, and it's something that you can't forget." Now, my father died with cancer in the last couple of years, and he was the best friend I ever had. I felt that way toward him, and I think he really felt it. And I think he suffered more over what happened, you know, the tragedy of my life, my going to prison for something that didn't happen, and the desire to want to do something. But he was helpless, because I knew that once a man's president, that if he wanted to, he couldn't do anything for you. You see precisely what's happened with President Ford pardoning ex-President Nixon; had Johnson done this, it would have completely ruined him. I think history's going to be much kinder to him in twenty years from now than it is today. Had he asked my advice, I'd have said, "To hell with it. We know the truth, and what's important is that you do what's right." There are just some things you can do politically and some that you can't. I think if President Ford had his life to do over again, that he certainly would have waited until there had been a trial and a conviction and waited till right around Christmas time and say that, "This man has suffered enough, and I'm doing this as a man who's got compassion for a friend." But it's probably the worst political blunder that I've seen pulled in the years I've been in Washington.

G: What do you think there was in your relationship with him that made you two have this rapport?

B: I think a total respect and honesty between the two of us. He never once lied to me, and the same with me. Now I might tell some little white lie when somebody would be angry with him, but I never knowingly

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told him a lie, and I don't ever know of any time he ever lied to me.

We really *believed* in basically the same things.

G: Mr. Baker, Lyndon Johnson, I guess, was really a brilliant legislator.

How much of this was really serving as a broker of what was possible and how much of it was his own principle?

B: I think that's an excellent question. I think he was the broker of doing what was possible. You can be the brightest scientist in the history of the world, and only you know, like, how you're going to break the atom down. But the rest of the world does not comprehend what you're talking about. It took a lot of men with a lot of courage and brains and taxpayers' money to take the chance that it would work, and poor Harry Truman had to make the decision to [drop] those two bombs, that probably saved at least a million American lives. I would have made the same decision, but I sure would never have slept good, because no one wants to do that.

G: Would LBJ draw a line and say, "I personally can't, in good conscience, do this, even though it is possible?" Where would his principles conflict with his pragmatic sense, which was so keen?

B: You sort of are a victim of the times. I'm sure that if there had been any way in this world that Chairman Mao would have seen him during the Indochina crisis, or the Vietnam crisis, that he would have flown anywhere in the world, he would have got down and licked his feet, because there was a practical problem at that particular time that needed to be solved, but when a man says, "Go to hell, I won't see you," it's just like right now with Castro. It's ridiculous for us not have normal relations with Castro. I think if Lyndon Johnson were alive

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today that he would find a way, from a practical point of view, that we could resolve our natural, economic and social contact.

G: Let's talk about specific legislation and legislative issues. I guess the one that springs to mind instantly is the 1957 Civil Rights bill. How did you see it from your vantage point?

B: We both knew beyond every peradventure of a doubt that, once the Supreme Court of the United States makes a ruling, that is the law of the land, irrespective of what a person's personal philosophy should be. Now in our particular case, he had a history and I had a history of being a great champion of the oppressed and the black people, going back from his very infancy in the NYA days, and the Chicanos, et cetera. This is the big quarrel I have, and I think history is going to be very unkind to Senator Russell. Former President Johnson doesn't agree with me in my feeling that I think you've got to be consistent. If the Supreme Court unanimously says that this is the law of the land, we owe a duty to implement what is the law of the land. Where customs are different, which they'd been for over a hundred years in the South, it takes a little longer. Now, Senator Russell could have been president of this country had he stated, after the 1954 civil rights *Brown v. The Board of Education* case, that he is a man who believes in law and order and that our people, especially the southern people, have lived in a totally different society, and you're going to have to be tolerant and kind and give us time to adjust to it, but we're going to. He would have been elected president by the biggest vote anybody ever received in the history of the country, and he wanted it. This is the reason that Lyndon Johnson became president and he didn't, because Lyndon Johnson

believed in law and order and he believed in the support of what the courts--

(Interruption)

G: One thing in particular with regard to legislation that I'm interested in is the Smith bill. Do you remember that, HR 3, the Smith amendment that has sort of gotten farther than the leadership wanted it to go? This is the one that was really a slap at the Supreme Court.

B: You're talking about the Howard Smith bill, the chairman of the House Rules Committee?

G: **Sure.**

B: Was it very similar to being like the Southern Manifesto?

G: Right. Yes.

B: I would really have to refresh my recollection to give you a competent answer. To make it interesting for scholars and people that will possibly listen to these tapes, Judge Smith probably, in my opinion, for what it's worth, was one of the most corrupt men that ever served in the Congress. He made an absolute fortune. I'm very proud to be a southerner. I'm very proud to have been associated with Lyndon Johnson. And I'm an absolute nut about law and order, but it has to be reasonable and responsible. I don't believe in, you know, giving a twenty-one-year-old kid a blackjack or a pistol to go out and beat the hell out of everybody or because you don't like blacks and so forth, to beat them. But this was Howard Smith. Howard Smith, to me, was the epitome of everything that America is not. And I think, you know, you bring up this question of Howard Smith. Mr. Rayburn had to get along with him. I didn't agree with Mr. Rayburn about him. I would have told him to go to hell and to

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jump in the ocean or the river and to drown, because I think that he was absolutely--he was getting fat and rich, and he lived to be ninety years old, practically. His contributions to this country are double zero.

G: What about the Bricker Amendment, do you remember that?

B: Oh, dear!

G: Tell me the story about--

B: John Bricker had minus zero intelligence. He was a good looking, handsome, gray-haired man about six foot four. I think Ohio was sort of a bellwether state, and very conservative--was at this particular time. But John Bricker didn't have the intellect to change this system of government. He was completely a tool of the fat cats in the country, and he finally was repudiated and got defeated by--I believe Steven Young beat him. I'd have to refresh my memory. But John Bricker, at best, should have been a high school principal or a country preacher.

G: I've heard that LBJ was more responsible than anyone else for the defeat of the Bricker Amendment, you know, with the George Substitution and this sort of thing. Is that correct?

B: One, it is correct. Two, there was a beautiful friendship and relationship between Senator Walter George, who was one of the truly great men in my lifetime, and Lyndon Johnson. Senator George, with his incisive mind, his patriotism, his charisma, his intelligence, was able to cut down the age of hysteria, and that's what the Bricker Amendment--the Bricker Amendment was hysteria! It's like, I suppose, the Germans, after they'd had such terrible inflation, you know, that Hitler was good. That's what John Bricker was. But John Bricker is the epitome of everything that America is not.

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G: Did Senator Johnson persuade Senator George to offer this substitute?

B: Sure!

G: Were you there when he did it?

B: Yes.

G: Well, tell me about that. What happened?

B: It doesn't happen this quickly. It takes a period--it's like a football game, you know, you've got a plan for the first quarter, the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. So Lyndon Johnson, in his legislative genius capacity, was able to lead Senator George to throw the touchdown pass in the fourth quarter to defeat the Bricker Amendment.

G: Do you remember what arguments he used on Senator George?

B: Well, number one, Senator George, as I previously said, was such a great patriot, and he realized that what Senator Bricker was doing was very partisan and that he really, intellectually, was incompetent to be a United States senator. John Bricker was, in my opinion, if I had to answer a question from you as who were ten of the most incompetent senators that you have known, I would have to say that Senator Bricker was one of the ten. He'd be closer to number one than to number ten. So Senator Bricker defeated himself. It doesn't take any great legislative genius, Senator George or Lyndon Johnson--anybody. That they had used the newspapers to whip up this cold war hysteria, that was absolutely crap!

G: Let's talk about some of the institutions of the Senate. What about the Cloakroom, the Senate Cloakroom?

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B: The Cloakroom was about like my living room. We are seated here. They had more sofas, and they were leather-coated; mine are covered with velvet and linen. But it was a place where you could get away from the press, that you could come get a glass of water, or you could get your telephone calls. We had, as I recall, about fourteen telephone booths in there where you had your own private one--it's just like a public telephone booth. The Cloakroom was a place you could take a man that possibly didn't understand what your position was or why you wanted him to work with you. I can never forget till the day I die when they came on Medicare. I really had a great affection for the late President John Kennedy, but he had never been able to pass any bills, because he was really too liberal for the Congress that had been elected, because he just barely won, as you know. And it was a great question as to whether the election had been stolen in Illinois, and so forth. So it was a very touchy situation.

So Barry Goldwater was the second coming of Jesus Christ, as far as Arizona was concerned. Senator Hayden came to me and he said, "Bobby, I've got the toughest race of my life." Here's an old man that is eighty years-plus. He started out as the first congressman in the history of Arizona, then senator, until this last term. So we had a vote on Medicare, and he said, "Do you have enough votes to win?" And I said, "Senator, I cannot answer that question until I find out how Senator Randolph is going to vote. Senator Kerr and Senator Randolph are very good friends. Senator Kerr, who is my dear friend--he's like my father--is very adamant in his opposition to Medicare. But once I find out how Senator Randolph is going to vote, I can advise you how to

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vote." "Because," he said, "if my vote will help the President win, I will vote, but if he's going to lose anyway, then I would like to be relieved." I said, "You have a deal." I made a deal with him right there. But I created more hostility in the Kennedy Administration in the staff over that than any other thing.

G: Is that right?

B: Absolutely. The only way that I could be a good operator and a man of respectability was that my word had to be good. Now why go take and defeat a man like Senator Hayden, who was an old, old man eighty-something years old, because Barry Goldwater was running 80 per cent in the polls in Arizona. But Senator Hayden voted against Medicare, because I didn't have the votes, once Randolph voted against the President, to win.

G: Was much of your strategy formulated in the Cloakroom or did you do it in, say, the Majority Leader's office, or where?

B: I would say the Majority Leader's office. The illustration I used about Senator Hayden, I did that in the Cloakroom. I didn't have time to take him out to the Majority Leader's office. But the Majority Leader's office there in that magnificent office overlooking the Supreme Court and the Capitol grounds and everything--there are no memories that could ever equal what happened to me in my lifetime there.

G: P-38, wasn't it?

B: P-38 or P-42--we had two.

G: Were only senators allowed in the Cloakroom?

B: No, sir. Staff members were allowed, but they were unwanted guests, you know. This was one of the problems I had with the staff. I had to keep

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this a very private social club, because if a senator wanted to take a nap, he didn't want some adversary to see him sleeping there or drunk, which they did. You know, they're human beings; they get drunk like everybody else. So I had to run a tight ship, and I created a lot of enemies.

- G: I suppose also in this era of the Senate years, you were almost an instrument of several senators and they might use you to find out how another senator felt about a particular measure or to talk to a senator.
- B: It happened every day, that somebody would ask me, "Could you talk to"--let's use Alan Bible from Nevada, a real, decent, competent legislator. Now, their big problem: It's the only state in America that has legalized gambling. As long as Senator McCarren was alive, and he controlled J. Edgar Hoover, they didn't have any problem. But once McCarren died, they had a big problem about trying to close down their biggest industry, which was tourism and the gambling business. Nevada's problems were very minimal, compared to the rest of the country, but I could go to Senator Bible or to Senator Cannon. It's a funny thing I mentioned Nevada. Lyndon Johnson had some strange mystique over Senator George Malone, who was probably the most conservative senator that ever served in the Senate. But on several key votes, which I can't recall to you now, George Malone voted with him, and the Republicans just threw up their hands in absolute agony. They could not believe. But the reason being, he was a true westerner, and Johnson would give him a commitment that he could go home or that nothing was going to happen about changing the gambling laws in Nevada. And George Malone got elected two terms, I think.

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G: Was there a formula under which you and Senator Johnson operated by which you had to get a certain percentage of the liberals and a certain percentage of the conservatives without, more or less, flying in the face of either ideological--

B: We always started, as I told you in the initial part of our interview-- basically, we had forty conservatives, forty liberals, and the name of the game in the United States Senate is to get fifty-one votes. So how in the hell do you get eleven votes to go with the position the leadership wants? It's just like on 14b, the repeal of 14b of the Taft-Hartley Act. I needed Lyndon Johnson's vote for President Truman so bad you cannot believe, because if I got Lyndon Johnson's vote, I probably could have gotten three more votes, which would have meant that we would have won. He just said, "I made a commitment to the people of Texas, and if I only last one term, this is it." Now Senator Kerr, who was like a father to me, who was from Oklahoma, ran on a ticket that he was going to vote to repeal 14b. He and Johnson were seatmates, and they would fight all day and all night about what to do. Kerr was trying to help me convince Johnson, but Johnson made the commitment, and this is the reason that he went on to become president, in my opinion.

G: What powers of persuasion would you use to get those eleven votes? How would you start out if you had any--?

B: Just good country common sense. You got a man and say, "Would it embarrass you to try and help the leadership?" Lots of times when I'm talking about leadership, I'm talking about the President. I would fly them in, I'd have airplanes--like one time I had a Baltimore city police car drive Senator Fulbright ninety-five miles an hour in for a vote. I

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had command of the presidential airplanes, because my job was to carry out the President's program when my party was in control. Even when we weren't in control, with Johnson, we still could use the police force to bring senators, with sirens going and everything, to get them in to get the vote and hold it up with the expertise. What I did was, I started out at fourteen, and I knew all the tricks of the trade. It's like a football player, a baseball player or whatnot. You learn the little tricks.

G: Can you give us some examples of using these tricks? There are obviously some things that you're proud of that you accomplished--

B: No, no. Senator Fulbright told me, after he came in a car that was bouncing at ninety-five miles an hour, "The hell with it. I'd rather you lose a vote than me lose my life." But he did it, and he was proud, and there was a great round of applause after he showed up.

G: Which vote was this, do you remember?

B: I can look it up, but I don't remember.

G: I remember reading about another vote, in which I believe Senator Humphrey was coming in--in the air on an airplane.

B: That's right. I had him in there; I had him in a presidential airplane, and they couldn't land because--exactly correct. See, the big problem is that all these senators are broke, and they go out and make these speaking engagements. Hubert Humphrey's made more money making speeches than anybody in the history of the Senate, but he's always gone, and Wayne Morse was the same way. So you have to juggle. You're got a hundred senators and they're angry. They're trying to do their duty and their job. Here's a guy getting paid five thousand dollars to make a

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speech, and you get to hold it up for them to get back so it'll get up and have quorum calls and long roll call votes, which is not fair.

We're making progress; we're getting away from this stuff of having to pay for your own campaign.

G: How did you deal with the filibuster? What was the best strategy for that?

B: The only strategy in the world, and it's the Baker strategy, and that is to keep their ass there all day and all night and when it gets to be 11:59 Sunday night, you stop and you come back at 12:01 Monday morning. That's the only way to beat a filibuster. The worst culprits in breaking a filibuster were liberals. They always talk about how they feel about the minorities' rights and so forth, but when it came the time for quorum calls and so forth, they were never there. Now the southerners were disciplined, and I'm one and I'm proud of it. I don't agree with their belief; I think the black man can't help it that he was born black. But I admire their discipline. But the liberals are the worst ones, and they got all the publicity. I think that probably the two worst newspapers about not making the liberals stand up for what they claim they are the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

G: Another institution of the Senate, I suppose, was what they called "Morning Hour," when the Senate would go into session each day. I understand that Senator Johnson would sometimes use that to rally Democratic senators and get them going on record, create a little partisan attack on the administration. Say President Eisenhower. If, say, one of Secretary Benson's policies was unpopular or something, he

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would have a Democratic senator stand up and denounce it. What do you remember about that?

B: You are absolutely correct. It was a convenient public relations vehicle to take three to five minutes to put in some very pungent, potent, hurtful lines about a policy that you did not agree upon. Then you can send it out to all of the local country newspapers and so forth, that Senator Lyndon B. Johnson from Texas stated today in the United States Senate that Ezra Taft Benson is the biggest robber from the farmers in the history of the country. This is the way we use it.

G: Was this something that just sort of happened spontaneously, or--?

B: No, it was leadership!

G: It was laid out pretty well on the--

B: Absolutely. No doubt about it.

G: Well, did you have a role in this?

B: No, no. George Reedy and Harry McPherson, people that worked on policy. I was not a speech writer. I knew how to manipulate the rules. I knew how to take care of delaying and all of this. I could have done this, but I didn't have the time. I mean, you know, you're one human being.

G: Can you recall any occasions in the Senate years where Senator Johnson made a mistake or did something legislatively that you thought was wrong and in the end, you were proven right?

B: Well, I have never met a perfect human being, and Lyndon Johnson made as many mistakes as any normal human being. But when you look at his record of accomplishment and his record of non-accomplishment, he accomplished more than he failed to accomplish. So it's like George Allen, who's the coach of the Redskins. They gauge him on how many

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football games his teams win. So the record's there. There's nothing you can do about it, nor I can do about it. When I told you that when you look here in this beautiful, wonderful country--we'll be two hundred years old in the next eighteen months. Lyndon Johnson will go down as being one of the ten most effective leaders as a senator. Now I didn't say president, because I'm not competent to answer that. I really don't have the know-how, the feel for it. But when it comes to being a United States senator, when you look at every senator from the beginning of the Senate till eighteen months from now, he'll go down as being one of the ten most effective that we've ever had.

G: I read in the files about one particular episode. I think in 1955 you had suggested to him that one of the ways that he might get more positive votes out of Senator Holland was to assign him to one of the assistant leadership positions. Do you remember that?

B: No, that's--

G: That's a long time ago.

B: I want to tell you. Senator Holland appointed a young man named Joe Stewart, who is my business partner, and he came here. Joe was the son of a railroad worker, a union man, and the unions were unanimously opposed to Senator Holland. But I never recommended Senator Holland to be in a position of leadership, because Senator Holland was one of the most strong-headed, strong-willed men in the world. Now, had he recommended his wife, I'd have been strong for her, because I'd gotten along great with his wife, but Senator Holland was impossible. He was an able man, honest man, but--Reuben Askew, who is the governor of Florida, is my kind of man. He's sort of the Lyndon Johnson of our age.

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G: Can you recall occasions on which you rendered help to Senator Johnson in passing legislation? Specifically, when he called on you, and you delivered for him?

B: That's too broad a spectrum.

G: I know there are a lot of them--

B: But let's go back to--you wanted to talk about Senator Smathers. Now I think we ought to close the interview off now, and I'm going to tell you a great story about Smathers.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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