

INTERVIEW V

DATE: May 2, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT G. BAKER

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

G: The first thing I wanted to ask you about was Johnson and Steve Mitchell, because Mitchell is really in the picture here in 1953.

B: I believe that Steve Mitchell was an Irish attorney from Chicago, but respected. I mean, he was not the bombastic type that Paul Butler was. He was a fellow that professionals could deal with, could talk to, and he would not violate a confidence. There is a possibility that Steve Mitchell was either Adlai Stevenson's law partner or they were closely associated, but I think there was a better rapport between Johnson and Rayburn and Mitchell than there was with Stevenson, because they were always skeptical what Stevenson might say or do, especially in view of the tidelands issue at this particular time. As you will recall, Stevenson publicly announced that he was opposed to the giveaway of the tidelands, and I think that was his position. Notwithstanding that, Johnson and Rayburn did endorse him, but letting the people in Texas know that they did not agree with his position. I believe it was in the platform in 1952 that the Democratic Party was for the country having the tidelands instead of Texas, Louisiana, California.

G: Is it fair to say that he was not close to Mitchell, though?

B: Oh, I think that's fair, because you've got to understand that by Steve Mitchell being Adlai Stevenson's hand-picked chairman of the Democratic

Baker -- V -- 2

Party, of course they were going to be a little leery. But I do recall being in Mr. Rayburn's sort of "board of education" meeting there on the first floor of the House side of the Capitol, that they were a little bit more open with him than they would be with Governor Stevenson.

Irish people like to take a drink and tell stories and he was popular, I would say one of the more popular chairmen of the Democratic Party. He was a practical politician.

G: A theme that runs through some of the correspondence from this period is the need to reorganize the DNC and that LBJ was evidently unhappy with the way the DNC was focused or set up. Do you recall that?

B: Yes. The biggest problem that Johnson had with the Democratic National Committee, as you know, he was super supersensitive about press releases about how the Democratic leadership should be fighting Eisenhower, and what I called the Joe Rauh-ADA-superliberal wing of the Democratic Party had entirely too much control of the personnel at the Democratic National Committee. Labor was unusually strong because they were giving the money. Texas is not a pro-labor state, so this caused Johnson a lot of problems. They always had a deficit. They were always after Johnson and Rayburn to talk to rich oil people to give money to be kicked in the teeth.

The big fight as long as Rayburn and Johnson were there was the curtailment of the 27.5 per cent depletion [allowance]. It's a funny thing, as long as Johnson and Rayburn were in positions of responsibility, the Congress never touched depletion. It was only after they both left town that there was substantial changes. I think the oil people, notwithstanding the fact that they really never trusted Rayburn

Baker -- V -- 3

and Johnson, never had it so good as long as Johnson and Rayburn were there, because they packed the committees to protect their people. But you had to be sophisticated about it. But the oil people generally are not very sophisticated.

G: This is a point that a number of people have taken different positions on. I want you to tell me exactly how the oil producers felt about Johnson and Rayburn, and if they felt differently about one than the other.

B: I think that because of George and Herman Brown and their [influence]--you know, Brown and Root was probably the biggest oil service company in the whole Southwest, maybe in the world--they were able to take care of most major fires with the oil industry. But as big as the state of Texas is, you've always got some fellow that's a farmer, they discover oil in his back yard, and he instantly becomes a world expert. And they can cause you a lot of problems. These are the kind of people that would support Pappy Lee O'Daniel, Martin Dies--they loved to associate with crackpots. And Johnson and Rayburn had a big problem. They were always trying to gerrymander Mr. Rayburn's district, to put him in a district where they could defeat him, which was dumb. But they don't look at the big picture. They believe what they read in the conservative [press]. Your papers were totally different then than they are now.

I was going through some of your memorandums, prodding memorandums, about how the newspapers would just totally black out anything that was favorable to the Democratic Party or to Rayburn or to Johnson, especially in Eisenhower's campaign. A very interesting footnote that

Baker -- V -- 4

you had on Clint Murchison, Sr., Clint Murchison, Sr. liked Lyndon Johnson. Sid Richardson liked Lyndon Johnson. Mr. Bass--I forget his first name.

G: Perry Bass.

B: Perry Bass liked him. Amon Carter. Here were people big in the oil business. And nevertheless, here was Clint Murchison writing to Johnson in 1952 that it may be that there is going to be a new party formed here and you should be a part of it, which Johnson didn't take. Johnson was sort of arrogant with me about my friendship with Clint, Jr. and Bob Thompson [?]. He was always leery, I suppose ever since he got that letter, of big fat cats trying to tell him how to run his business. He was skeptical of them.

G: The suggestion in that letter was that he ought to consider supporting Eisenhower in 1952 so that someone didn't run against him.

B: Yes. That's exactly [right]. You know, he's not saying that "I've turned against you," but "this is the way the wind is blowing." He was urging him to support Eisenhower, and you understand Mr. Murchison's position, that tidelands meant a great deal of money to him and his company.

G: I wonder if I've oversimplified it, if I'm lumping the oil producers into one group, whereas maybe there were factions in the industry, that TIPRO [Texas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners] might have been a faction and the majors were a faction.

B: You've always had horrible conflicts between the majors--Exxon, Mobil, they're really worldwide empires. Texas is rather insignificant to those worldwide empires, so their wants from the Congress would be

Baker -- V -- 5

totally different than the independent producer. The little independent producer in Waco, Texas, that 27.5 per cent meant a lot of money to him; to Exxon it was like a pimple. They wanted everything, all the largess they could get out of the government, but they needed the protection of the national government in their oil fields in Saudi Arabia and places like that, so that's where they tried to use their influence. It was a horrible conflict of interest, if you are a major getting a dollar-a-barrel oil in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait and a poor old farmer out there in Texas. Because I remember the time when it was about a dollar to two dollars a barrel for oil. It didn't appreciably change until, I believe, Nixon's administration when they permitted the Shah of Iran to increase the price. We went, I believe, from three to six to ten and all the way up to almost forty dollars a barrel in the last twenty years. The Texas [independents], they couldn't sell their oil, they couldn't give away their natural gas. So you can see the conflict that the independents would have with the major producers. The major producers were Wall Street-oriented. So the independents, they were all throwing their money to get conservative people, ultra-right-wingers that would fight the big banks and the majors. There was horrible blood--there was at that time, I don't know what's happened in the meantime. But they hated each other.

I never will forget--talking on this subject--that Frank Ikard, who had defeated Walter Jenkins for the congressional seat from Wichita Falls, first thing Mr. Rayburn did was make certain that they made a friend out of Frank and they secured one of Texas' seats on the House Ways and Means Committee, which is the tax-writing committee and

Baker -- V -- 6

controls depletion. So by the time that Frank became one of the most influential members of the Ways and Means Committee, the independent oil producers come up here and offer him a job at seventy-five thousand dollars a year plus unlimited expenses. I believe he made twenty-five thousand as a congressman, so this looked like big money for a poor little fellow from Wichita Falls. And Mr. Rayburn fumed, he said, "Those sons of bitches," and that's precisely what he said. He said, "Can you believe those idiots? Here I've got the best man in the country, the best respected man the oil men have ever had, and by God they bribe him and give him a job, pay him three times the money he's making! That shows you how fucking stupid they are."

G: Just amazing.

Well, this was also the year that you had--well, throughout the mid-fifties I guess you had a terrific problem with the droughts. Farmers were having problems, ranchers were. Was this an issue for legislative action? I know that LBJ wanted Eisenhower to do more to aid the--

B: Well, you had a distinguished Mormon secretary of agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, and in many ways he's sort of similar to James Watt, who retired as secretary of the interior. He had a proclivity to put his foot in his mouth frequently, because he really believed in the principles of the Mormon Church, that it's not the government's province to take care of every farmer in the country when we have a drought or a flood. He was very, very anti-governmental aid to the farmers. In this particular period Texas had, and the whole Southwest, the worst drought that they'd had in a hundred years. And Benson just flatly refused to do anything.

Baker -- V -- 7

You'll see all the Texas delegation, I believe, were unanimous in trying to prod Eisenhower to do something for the farmers, because they were desperate. It was in many ways worse than the Depression, because the cattle were dying, they didn't have money to buy feed, and Washington was turning its head.

Eisenhower was a much softer man, I mean, you could deal with Eisenhower, but he also was protective. He had appointed Ezra Taft Benson as his secretary of agriculture, and being a former military leader he believed in protecting his troops. He caused great harm to the Republican--I'm talking about Republican candidates for Congress. All during Eisenhower's administration, he could never understand why Republicans could not get elected. And one of the most fascinating interviews I've seen in a long time was former President Nixon's interview on "Sixty Minutes" about two weeks ago, where he said the first time he ever heard Eisenhower use foul, four-letter words as president was when Eisenhower and Nixon were re-elected in 1956 but they failed to win the Congress, either the Senate or the House. And the reason that the Republican Party did not become a majority party when Eisenhower was one of the most popular men in the history of the country was precisely because of their failure to pay attention to farmers, like in Texas when you had the drought.

So where Lyndon Johnson was able to help himself politically with people who normally would not support him was [by] trying to do something, introduce legislation, go into the White House. Between his generalship and his relationship--like I believe you had a Congressman [W. R.] Poage [who] was chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, and

Baker -- V -- 8

they would control putting money into the agricultural appropriation bill and they had terrible fights with the administration. Even when they would appropriate the money, Benson wouldn't spend it.

G: Yes, that was another issue.

B: Sure was.

(Interruption)

Eisenhower was very strong in his belief that we should have a balanced budget. He campaigned that the Democrats were a bunch of wild spenders and that here he was, a man that knew the military and there was plenty of waste there. President Eisenhower had recommended sort of massive reductions in the Defense Department expenditures. In addition to that he had recommended massive cuts in agricultural aid. He wanted to do away with the low-cost REA loans. Now, boy, when you start talking about REA loans, if you wanted to raise Lyndon Johnson's hackles and Sam Rayburn's--because the REA was their prize baby. Because you look at what it did for Johnson's district, Roosevelt sunk more REA money in Johnson's district probably than any district in America, because of his friendship for him. You know, it showed you Johnson's genius for being the only guy that ran on a pro-Roosevelt ticket. So Roosevelt sort of paid him off by building all those dams and setting up those REA districts. I guess when Johnson was a youngster nobody had electricity.

But when Eisenhower was president and Ezra Taft Benson was secretary of agriculture, they named a new head of the REA administration, which was sort of a subsidiary of the Agriculture Department. We had a massive confrontation, but the Republicans who came from conservative agricultural districts left the administration. Because of

Baker -- V -- 9

Johnson's and Rayburn's leadership they were able to beat the administration on--I think the loans were something like 2 per cent if you wanted to build an REA dam and so forth. The secretary of the treasury was George Humphrey, who was a big investment banker from Cleveland, and he was trying to do away with hidden government subsidies. So REA was one way he wanted to go. Benson wanted to do away with all price support programs. I guess his religion was opposed to government handouts. His church had taken care of its own people. It was his feeling that it was not the federal government's responsibility to give handouts to farmers every time you had a drought or a flood. Just like the administration was unalterably opposed to small business disaster loans, because when you had a hurricane, they just said there was no money available and they didn't want any. But once again, a coalition of the Johnson-Rayburn group and moderate Republicans got together and they crammed it down their throat. They didn't like it, but it continued.

G: There was really a lot of legislative initiative, I guess, in the face of this.

B: And where the public is really ignorant of what goes on, the fact that with the exception of two years of Eisenhower's administration, the Democrats controlled both the House and the Senate. So with the overall congressional knowledge that Rayburn and Johnson had, plus their colleagues on those committees--under the Constitution, revenue measures must originate in the House, and the House is so jealous of its prerogatives. So that Texas delegation, you take old man Poage, he was only interested in agriculture. He didn't give a damn about foreign aid or

Baker -- V -- 10

anything. He wanted to know what he could get for agriculture. So if you got old man Poage to put an amendment through, he would carry a lot of people with him. And this is one way that they were so successful.

G: Would LBJ and Rayburn, for example, or Poage or the Democrats hold hostage an administration-supported bill in order to push through some of their farm legislation that they were interested in?

B: Sure. Eisenhower was a former commander of NATO before he ran for the presidency, and he was well aware of what we called back then foreign aid commitments. It really was military aid but we called it foreign aid. The Congress then wanted to spend money at home instead of overseas. Now, 90 per cent of the money that we spent for foreign aid was really spent here manufacturing our stuff. But the Congress didn't understand that and they didn't want to hear about it. So when you'd get a fellow like Poage who came from a district that, say, the cotton crop had been wiped out with a drought, and Secretary Benson would not give any relief to the cotton farmer--and there was a fellow from Louisiana called Otto Passman--they would just say, "Well, we're going to cut a hundred million dollars out of foreign aid." So by the time you got through logrolling and swapping and so forth, Mr. Poage would get that fifty million they needed to take care of the cotton farmers, and they'd give fifty million for foreign aid. That's the way it worked. But they held that foreign aid bill hostage. I'm telling of some of the meanest battles in the history of the Congress in trying to get that money that we had committed to carry out the foreign affairs of the country. So they just said, "There will be no foreign aid if

Baker -- V -- 11

there's not going to be any help for our people." So it was legislation by hostage.

G: In some respects LBJ seems to have supported the administration's legislation more than some of the Republicans did, particularly the isolationists, [William] Knowland.

B: Well, sure. I was looking at one of the speeches that Johnson had made, I think down in Mississippi, talking about he didn't know which party that the President represented. He said, "Does he represent the [William] Jenner party or the [John] Bricker party or the [Joseph] McCarthy party? Who does represent the Republican Party?" And there was a lot of truth to that, because Eisenhower did not have much in common with the old extreme right-wing Republicans, who were isolationists, were opposed to his foreign policy. They hated him because he had defeated their idol, Robert Taft. So there were people like Margaret Chase Smith, Leverett Saltonstall, Ralph Flanders, George Aiken, those were the people--Glenn Beall from Maryland--that would vote with Johnson against their own Republican Party. The Republican Party normally has much, much better discipline than the Democratic Party, always have. Because basically they are representing management, private enterprise, business, and the Democratic Party have been the farmers, the small businessman, labor unions, the minorities. So we have monumental conflicts.

G: There's one case that came up in 1953, and I notice another one in 1954 when the Democrats were still in the minority--he was the Democratic leader--where he adjourned the Senate out from under Knowland, which

Baker -- V -- 12

must have been an ultimate insult, Knowland then the majority leader.

Do you recall those examples?

B: I don't remember specifically what the issue was that caused Johnson to assume the leadership. It's just a matter of custom in the Senate that the majority leader makes the motion as to when you adjourn and when you continue your sessions. This was just unheard of, for the minority leader to have the votes to take over control of the Senate. Knowland was not an effective leader for Eisenhower--they called him the senator from Formosa, because he had Chiang Kai-shek on the brain. Chiang Kai-shek bought more Republican politicians than any foreign leader in the history of the country. He would take our foreign aid and he'd slip campaign contributions--like, you know, Senator [Styles] Bridges was Johnson's friend and my friend. I remember Johnson and I flew up to Bridges' funeral. We had to go a day before the funeral, and I very well remember Mrs. Bridges talking to Johnson. She said, "Styles has got two million in cash in the safe in here and I don't know what to do with it." Well, a lot of that money was money he would get from people like Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang Kai-shek, based on some knowledge I have, had over a billion dollars in gold in Switzerland. But he sure made a lot of inroads with conservative Democrats, like Senator [Pat] McCarran, my friend and Johnson's friend. Chiang Kai-shek could do no wrong, but the reason he couldn't is he was funneling money. The Chinese throughout the history of the world have been known for their capacity to grease the palm of politicians, and they did a big job of it.

But Knowland liked Lyndon Johnson. But once Bill Knowland took a position, notwithstanding the fact that he was the leader of the

Baker -- V -- 13

Republican Party, if it was contrary to what the President wanted it made no difference with him. And that was the reason that when you look at the history, now [if] you ask most people walking down the street, "What do you think of Bill Knowland?" they don't know who the hell you're talking about, because he was flaky.

G: In the particular case in 1954, if I may jump ahead, [it] had to do with the Bricker Amendment, and I think LBJ's position was that Knowland had not informed the Senate that there were going to be night sessions or something like that, and he just quickly mustered enough votes for an [adjournment]. I'm sure you were involved in that somewhat.

B: I believe that--Senator [Harley] Kilgore had a drinking problem and he had been in Bethesda Naval Hospital. We had the authority to send a police car to the Naval Hospital to run him with a siren right all the way from the Naval Hospital there, and we knew how many absentees that Knowland had. So that was one of the things. We knew where everybody was and when to vote. See, a motion to adjourn takes precedence over any motion, and so we won. Plus the President didn't want the Senate interfering with his conduct of foreign affairs, but he didn't have any influence with his party.

Had Lyndon Johnson not been the leader of the Senate, the Bricker Amendment would be part of your Constitution today. He was solely responsible, because of his parliamentary genius, in waylaying the Bricker Amendment. His Texas friends would not--his conservative friends wouldn't be very happy to hear me say that, but it's true, and I think he did the right thing because you can only have one president. If you don't like him you can defeat him after four years, but you can't

Baker -- V -- 14

have 535 members of Congress running your foreign affairs. It's a disaster. And part of our problems in the world right today is that the Congress, they're saying what you [should] do in El Salvador or what you [should] do in Nicaragua. I mean, if the President is pursuing a policy that the American people don't like, they can vote a new Congress in two years--talking about the House of Representatives and a third of the Senate--and they can oust the president. That's the check and the balance that you have against a fellow who usurps the power of the presidency. But if everybody who's a congressman has got his own foreign policy, you're going to have chaos and disaster. It will do more to destroy America more quickly than anything I know. And Lyndon Johnson had the vision to see that, but he also had the problem of having a very, very conservative Texas constituency, and if you'd put it to a vote in Texas when he was leader it would have carried ninety to ten. So I mean, the reason you elect a man to the Senate for six years is that hopefully for four years he can be a statesman. I wonder what he would have done had [Allan] Shivers been his opponent in 1954. It was a hell of a lot easier for him to be a statesman after he got re-elected in 1954 than it was before then.

G: While you're on the subject of the Bricker Amendment, let me ask you if you recall his dealings with Senator [Walter] George to get Senator George to offer that substitute that would take the wind out of the Bricker Amendment's sails.

B: See, Senator George was probably one of the most prestigious members of what the Senate club was all about. He was the personification of what the Senate establishment was all about. He never used a curse word, had

Baker -- V -- 15

impeccable manners. He was what every senator would like to be, and when he spoke--he had a booming voice--he was respected. So Johnson knew his only hope to sidetrack the Bricker Amendment was to have a man who had the prestige that Walter George had to offer this substitute. Because you could split--Jim Eastland, he was committed to it, the senator from Mississippi. He was really more Republican than Democrat, and he believed in the Bricker Amendment. He was a sponsor of it. But his colleague was John Stennis. John Stennis could survive politically by being associated with Walter George; he couldn't survive being associated with Lyndon Johnson. So you see the wisdom? It was what I call parliamentary brilliance. Because he knew had it been the Johnson Amendment [Substitute] that he would have lost.

G: How did he get George to do that though?

B: Because he pampered Senator George. But Senator George was smart enough to realize--he'd been around so many years and he'd seen all these conflicts. He also knew the game that these right-wingers were playing. Senator George, he'd never voted anything but the Democratic ticket. I think he came to Congress when Woodrow Wilson was president. He was a strong believer in the League of Nations and things like that. So he'd gone through that era of the Henry Cabot Lodges and the people that--the real bitter partisanship, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff days and so forth. He had a wisdom that few people had.

G: Now Johnson was coming up for re-election, as you mentioned, in 1954, but it appears that he ran for re-election in 1953.

B: That is correct. He spent the biggest amount of time in his whole career mending fences in Texas in 1953, doing everything in his power to

Baker -- V -- 16

be so strong in the opinion polls that Allan Shivers would not challenge him. So he really won the election by doing his homework in 1953, by going to all of these--just like we were talking earlier about fighting for funds against the drought and for the farmers and so forth, plus working on his Preparedness [Sub]committee. He had a strong positive image, plus he was brilliant in having bipartisan support of Eisenhower. He really supported Eisenhower more than many Republicans did. So this helped him. I mean, Allan Shivers must have been a pretty able politician because he chose not to be a candidate. So I think that had Allan Shivers campaigned and worked against Johnson, say, from the moment that Eisenhower [was inaugurated], from January 20, 1953, had he really just announced that "I shall be a candidate against Lyndon Johnson because I am going to be a senator who's supporting President Eisenhower," Johnson would have been in terrible trouble and he knew it. That's where Allan Shivers tore his britches.

G: Do you think that Shivers really intended to run against Johnson? He was making a lot of noise and there was a lot of speculation, but do you think that Shivers was really contemplating it?

B: Yes, absolutely, unequivocally. Had there been any indices that Shivers would have had a fifty-fifty shot of defeating Lyndon Johnson, he would have run. But when it looks like it's seventy-thirty against you, and the mistakes that Eisenhower [made], like [appointing] Ezra Taft Benson and George Humphrey, secretary of the treasury, and Charlie Wilson, the Defense Department cabinet officer who was curtailing a lot of military expenses in Texas, you can imagine the outcry in Fort Worth and at Fort Hood. All of the military bases, if they went through the hit list that

Baker -- V -- 17

they had, half of Texas would have been closed down. And these are the things that precluded Allan Shivers from running. But had Allan Shivers, being the popular governor that he was and having the strength that he had with this new Republican administration, just announced that "By God, I shall run for the Senate because I'm not going to be a namby-pamby guy like Lyndon Johnson," he could have given Johnson fits, and Johnson knew it.

G: What was Johnson's attitude toward Shivers?

B: He was very cautious with him, but he was careful not to offend him. He never made any statement that would hurt Shivers' feelings. Shivers was a gut fighter, he could hurt you, and he could make statements that you should respond to in kind, which Johnson refused to do. He used the old Biblical adage, if somebody hits you, turn the other cheek, and he did that until he had organized his campaign in 1953 whereby Shivers could not defeat him in 1954.

G: And consequently he got Dudley Dougherty as an opponent in 1954.

B: Now, who was Dudley Dougherty? I want to show you how ignorant I am. I don't know who the hell Dudley Dougherty was.

G: He was the candidate for U.S. Senate for the--he was the primary opponent.

B: Was he the Democratic primary opponent of Johnson?

G: Yes.

B: What is he, a nonentity?

G: Yes.

B: And so did he have a Republican opponent of any consequence?

G: I believe that he did. I'm not certain, but I believe he did.

Baker -- V -- 18

B: He won by the biggest margin he had ever won election, because he had not been known to win any race by a big majority.

G: He didn't even campaign in 1954, I don't think.

B: Minimally. Once Shivers was out, nobody could touch him. He was the happiest man; when Shivers announced that he was not going to be a candidate to the Senate it added twenty years to Lyndon Johnson's life.

G: Did it really?

B: Sure it did. He's like all geniuses, when they're winning, you can't stop them; when he was fearful, he was a moaner. The champion moaner, I called him. He could groan, everything's coming to an end.

G: Did he use any other tactics on Shivers? Did he get anybody to put heat on Shivers or persuade Shivers not to get in the race?

B: Well, as you well know, Shivers and Johnson had many, many, many mutual friends, and I'm telling you, there was no one from Texas--the opinion makers were the owners of the radio and the television and the newspapers. So Lady Bird and Johnson, any time one of them came to town, they were treated like royalty. So they sort of denuttied poor old Shivers because they took away his strength. I mean, if Shivers doesn't have the support of the Fort Worth paper and all the major opinion makers in the state of Texas, how can he defeat Johnson? Now, I am sure that Shivers would have had the support of most of the press had he run and had he used Eisenhower beginning January 20, 1953. But that's when he missed the boat.

G: Let's get into some of the legislative issues in 1954. You've talked about the Bricker Amendment. You also had a question of where to locate the Air Force Academy. Do you remember that? San Antonio wanted it.

Baker -- V -- 19

There was a push to locate it near Arlington, I guess, between Dallas and Fort Worth. I think Bryan wanted it too, perhaps.

B: Well, Texas wanted the Air Force Academy as bad as anything that I've ever recalled. There was a Republican senator from Colorado named Eugene Millikin, who was coming up for re-election, had a tough campaign. And my judgment is that the President did this based upon the advice of his advisers, that Millikin, who was really the most brilliant man in the Republican Party as far as taxation, was terribly important to them. I think that is the reason that they made the decision to go to Colorado Springs. I know a lot of the senior officers in the air force, because of the weather in Texas being far superior to Colorado Springs, were secretly meeting and talking with the Texas delegation and with Johnson. Had Knowland been a real forceful leader it would have gone to California. But Eisenhower thought he was nuts most of the time, so he didn't pay any attention to Knowland. California has got a few crackpots, as you well know.

G: Millikin I guess was a powerful man, too.

B: So well respected in the financial community, Eugene Millikin was sort of like Paul Volcker is with Wall Street. I mean, if Eugene Millikin said that there's not going to be any tax bill, you knew that there would be no tax bill. But he also was a team player. He would help his president, and he was not a mean man. So you can see where it was a little payday to try to help him. Then he up and died on us.

G: Yes. Do you remember the Dixon-Yates controversy?

B: Oh, do I remember Dixon-Yates! Yes, sir. Yes, sir. This was the old public power-private power fight. The Democrats got more mileage out of

Baker -- V -- 20

there. It was the biggest bullshit issue in the world, but we acted like it was the biggest steal, like they were just robbing the treasury. Once again, the fat cats from Wall Street were not very careful about the way they were spending their money and the way they were lobbying, and they beat themselves. But it elected an awful lot of super super-liberals, just campaigning on Dixon-Yates. Because everybody was convinced that if the Eisenhower Administration was successful with that Dixon-Yates package that their power bills would quadruple. I don't think there was an iota of truth to it, but they sure sold it.

G: Did Johnson himself utilize this as an issue?

B: Sure he did, because he always had been a public power advocate. This made it easy for him to offset the criticism of the ADA left-wingers that he really wasn't a Democrat. This was a big problem that he had, with Paul Butler being chairman of the Democratic National Committee and trying to set up the Democratic Advisory Committee and [saying] that Johnson wasn't partisan enough and he should not be carrying Eisenhower's mail for him. The Dixon-Yates fight made it easy for Lyndon Johnson to be on the side of the people against high power costs.

G: The administration also that year really made an effort to shut down the Texas City tin smelter, and Johnson just fought like a tiger to keep it open. Do you remember that?

B: I remember his working on it, but I'm really technically not competent to tell you. Walter [Jenkins] and people like that would know of the [details]. I'm sure there's a tremendous amount of jobs involved. But Johnson got really emotional about it because he knew that tin was terribly important if you did have a war. When you're out of a war there's

Baker -- V -- 21

not much need for tin like you need oil, but when you have a war it's one of the commodities that's a necessity.

G: He saw it as more than a pork barrel project, in other words?

B: Yes. He thought it was something that you had to have for the security of the country, but the administration didn't see it that way.

G: Now, you also had some Taft-Hartley amendments that Eisenhower proposed. This is on May 8, 1954.

B: The Eisenhower Administration had been committed to amend the Taft-Hartley Act to make it possible where management could have more bargaining rights with their unions. If my memory serves me correct, they wanted to do it on a state-by-state basis instead of with a national contract. They were trying to break, say, like the Teamsters national contract where they could just go on strike and cut down the whole country. This is one of the leading issues of the Republican Party and what they stood for, and Taft was very strong for these modifications because the way the National Labor Relations Board had been ruling, it had made it possible for labor unions to bargain collectively on a national basis instead of on a local basis. But for some reason there were some sweetheart union contracts in some southern states [so] that there was a little heat on like Senator Harry Byrd from Virginia. I believe it was the tobacco people. Virginia probably is the biggest tobacco manufacturing state in America as far as cigarettes and things like that, around Richmond. So I mean, his vote with us, where we had forty-eight Democrats voting unanimously, I believe it was the first and only time this had ever happened on a labor issue. I mean it just shocked hell out of everybody. But it made a lot of new friends for

Baker -- V -- 22

Johnson in the labor movement, because this was terribly, terribly important to them. Because if they could collect dues on a national basis instead of--the prevailing wage in North Dakota is totally different than New York. But they had been collecting their dues on a national basis, so it meant big, big bucks to them. It helped him.

G: I notice he got, as you say, all forty-eight of the Democrats to vote together. Did he make the appeal of party unity?

B: No, no. He was too smart. He knew--

Tape 2 of 2

G: Okay.

B: So we were talking about how he was able to get all forty-eight Democrats to [vote together]. One, it's a miracle that you can get forty-eight people to be well at any one given time, especially when you take into consideration their age, the commitments that they make to people without talking to you. So it was a miracle. I would say this was one of the miracle votes. But his persuasiveness and his intellect worked wonderfully well for him. Plus he had the respect of his party that nobody had ever had, because the Democratic Party is a party of many heads. Everybody is going off in a different direction. But I'm sure that there were several people who voted with him to say, "Hey, Johnson, you've done a good job and I admire you. I'm going to give you one." I think that's it exactly. I have never in all my years of being in the Senate seen such camaraderie of his colleagues when he pulled that out, because they were saluting their general.

G: Really? On this particular one?

Baker -- V -- 23

B: On this particular thing, because it's a tough, tough issue, especially [because] he's from Texas. Texas is anti-labor. The fact that he was able to have everybody there and to recommit the thing, what you did, you just put it under the bed.

G: It seems that maybe some of the provisions would be more anti-labor and some would be more pro-labor, and he was able to convince them that opening it up again would be bad--

B: Everybody is going to get hurt. So if you've got a dirty bunch of things in the bag, keep the bag closed up. Don't let it out, because everybody is going to get hurt, because I can't tell you what the hell is going to happen, and that's precisely the way he was. As I say, there are some good things for these labor boys over there, there are some bad things over here for you. So why don't we all vote together and just let that dog lie? And that's what they did.

G: Now, the other part of that victory, he got some Republican votes, too. He got [George] Malone and Milton Young and Wild Bill Langer to vote with him.

B: Well, let me explain to you those three votes. Now, Wild Bill Langer was unpredictable. He's from North Dakota and the railway unions were powerful in North Dakota, were and still are. So that vote was no surprise to me, just like Milton Young, his colleague. Young had been the governor of North Dakota, but he was not a bombthrower like a [Herman] Welker or a Jenner. So you could see, coming from a small populated state, if there were, say, five thousand people who either directly or indirectly would be affected by this--and I'm talking about the railway union people--it can make a big difference. So the Young

Baker -- V -- 24

[vote] and the vote of Langer do not surprise me, because nobody could predict what Langer was going to do, including me. I thought I knew what he was going to do most of the time but was never certain.

George Malone is the big surprise. Evidently Lyndon Johnson caught George Malone screwing somebody's wife and he told George he never would tell on him provided that George would give him a vote every now and then. Because that is unbelievable, because Malone was so conservative. He was a mining engineer. He did it again on a social security bill one time that Johnson had. Dirksen talked to me about it, he said, "What in the hell does Lyndon Johnson have on George Malone?" I mean, George Malone will vote 999 times with a straight Republican ticket, and on the most critical vote that the Republican leadership had, Lyndon Johnson would have George Malone. Now, how the hell do you explain it other than what I said? He had to have something on him.

G: What did LBJ say about that? Surely you must have talked to him about Malone.

B: I want to tell you, as close as I was to him, he has never made a full disclosure as to his relationship with George Malone. I don't know. It's the biggest mystery of my life. Everybody else in the Senate I understood, all their foibles and what they wanted and what we had to provide for to get their vote and so forth, but George Malone is the biggest mystery of my life.

Pat McCarran, who was his senior colleague, my ex-wife worked for him, and McCarran loved me. He hated Truman. I had a judge in South Carolina that hadn't practiced law in twenty years, and Truman named him to be a judge. He had sort of ruled for the blacks there in South

Baker -- V -- 25

Carolina. So McCarran said over his dead body would he report any of Truman's nominees. So I went to him and I said, "Mr. Chairman, I need a favor. It's for my state." He said, "I can't say no to you," and he let him out. So I asked him about Malone, I said, "What the hell has Johnson got on Malone?" He said, "It's the biggest mystery of my life.

Now McCarran, whether you know it or not, was on like--the Teamsters Union and those unions that were connected with the airline pilots, and the railroad people, would get McCarran. Big Ed Johnson from Colorado, same thing. So we get back to Langer and Young, that shows you the power of a strongly organized political group in a small state, Nevada, North Dakota, Colorado. Ed Johnson, he talked Dick Russell into coming out for repeal of Taft-Hartley, which surprised everybody. Ed Johnson was supporting Dick Russell for the presidency. These are strange phenomena.

G: During one of our first sessions some years ago we talked about Malone. Then I think you speculated that it might have been related to the gambling interests and assurance that nothing would be done to change the law that--

B: There's no doubt in my mind--you know, Johnson liked Nevada. Also basically because of his belief in the tidelands issue, that it really was the right of the people of Nevada to choose what they wanted to. And I'm sure one of the reasons he had the rapport he had with McCarran and Malone was he just said, "Hey, I'm with you." And you got to remember, he was on the State-Justice [Judiciary]-Appropriations Subcommittee, which controls the money for the Justice Department. So

Baker -- V -- 26

as long as McCarran and Johnson were on the Appropriations Committee, nobody touched Nevada unless McCarran wanted it done.

McCarran was notorious for making enemies. He and [J. Edgar] Hoover were great buddies. He set up that Senate Committee on Internal Security because Hoover, he saw communists under every bed, and they just used that committee recklessly and irresponsibly. The things that Hoover couldn't do with the FBI, he'd use McCarran to hold a hearing. They'd take some guy that I guess--Owen Lattimore or somebody, that lived in China--and they'd just harass hell out of them, and it was because Hoover didn't like him.

G: You mentioned the judge, just for the record, in South Carolina. Which judge was it, do you recall?

B: Waring--

G: [J.] Waites Waring?

B: Yes, Waites Waring. Never practiced the law in twenty years and the American Bar Association just said he was unqualified. But he had delivered an opinion when he was a federal judge--they wanted to hang him in Charleston because he ruled that a black man could go to school or something, I've forgotten what his decision was. But he was much hated.

G: He was courageous as a judge.

B: Yes, he was. That's right. Waites Waring.

G: Now, you also had the fall of Dien Bien Phu that spring and the administration's decision about what to do with regard to aiding the French. There's an indication that Senator Russell and Senator Johnson, Speaker

Baker -- V -- 27

Rayburn I guess it was--Rayburn was not speaker then, was he? Martin was the [speaker].

B: I think Joe Martin, if I recall. This was 1953, right? 1954.

G: 1954.

B: 1954. Joe Martin was the speaker.

G: Well, the Democratic leadership and Republican leadership were called to the White House to discuss alternatives. Do you have any recollection of that?

B: My recollection was that Secretary of State [John Foster] Dulles was in favor of our giving financial and military assistance to the French. And I believe it was the unanimous opinion of Johnson and Rayburn and Russell and Senator George, that in view of the Korean debacle that we could not have the support of the American people to spend the money and the troops that would be necessary. Plus you have the additional factor, if I remember correctly, that [Charles] de Gaulle was not the easiest man in the world to get along with. I believe de Gaulle was president, or whoever was the head of the French government at the time was not very pro-American, and the timing was wrong. It may have been that Dulles was absolutely correct, that we should have, but there had been so many Democrats defeated because of Korea--and you go back, Scott Lucas had been defeated as majority leader, Francis Myers as the Democratic whip, Ernest McFarland was defeated by [Barry] Goldwater. Well, Goldwater was a better campaigner and so forth. But the Korean War cost a lot of Democratic heads. Wars are popular when you can fight like you did in Grenada. If they last longer than a week, the American people want to get in the boat.

Baker -- V -- 28

G: Now there is in August--

(Interruption)

B: --talking about the [Hubert] Humphrey amendment in August of 1954 that would have precluded the secretary of agriculture from limiting the terms of the soil conservation chairman in each of these agricultural districts. If my memory serves me correctly, each county has a county agent, and he in these rural districts is a very, very powerful man, because he determines what kind of financial support you get for raising trees or soil conservation. He controls a lot of federal largess that goes into each of these districts. So this was one of the original New Deal creatures of Franklin Roosevelt. They were very potent politically. So Secretary Benson was trying to cut down the amount of federal money that was being spent on these programs. He wanted to cut his budget in half. In addition to seeking less funds than the Congress thought that he needed, they would impound funds. They were trying to get rid of people who were troublemakers for them, because a little county agent who lives in Podunk, Idaho gets a lot of attention. I would say that this politically hurt the President more than most people realized. Because when you get in those smaller agricultural communities, these people are powerful. So they command a lot of votes. Once again, this is another illustration of political stupidity on the part of Eisenhower and another good reason why he was never able to elect enough people to carry out his programs. I mean, talking about his programs to curtail the amount of money coming from Washington out to all these little [places], what he called giveaway, but politically it was devastating to them. You remember the way Truman beat Dewey in 1948

Baker -- V -- 29

was that Dewey was really opposed to a farm price-support system. New York had never been a big recipient of the farm price-support program but when you got to Iowa and Ohio and Illinois and South Dakota and Minnesota [it's important]. I mean, when Hubert Humphrey won in 1948 everything that we knew, all the polls, were that Hubert Humphrey was going to be defeated. Joe Ball was a rather popular Republican senator from there. But they miscalculated. Just like this was a dumb issue to get defeated on.

G: Do you recall any details of the parliamentary maneuvering to get that amendment passed?

B: We had the agricultural appropriation bill before the Senate. So Johnson--we always had to know precisely that day we would have our optimum strength, so we would maneuver and do what had to be done to make certain that we had everybody there on that particular day and know how they're going to vote. Because if we were going to lose, we sure wouldn't schedule it.

G: Did you ever have a problem with a senator telling you he was going to vote for you and then not doing it?

B: Very seldom. I guess when Senator Jennings Randolph would never tell me how he was going to vote on Medicare when Kennedy was president, and Larry O'Brien and all the people thought that I had betrayed them because Senator [Robert] Kerr had arranged to bail out West Virginia that had overspent, say, a hundred million dollars on social security so easily. So he put a little amendment in to bail West Virginia out provided Jennings Randolph voted against Medicare, because Kerr had made

Baker -- V -- 30

a deal with the doctors that he was opposed to Medicare. But Jennings Randolph never lied to me; he never told me how he was going to vote.

Generally I'd go up to a senator and I'd say "The Leader would like to know what your position is on this issue." So if a fellow said, you know, "I'm committed on the other side, I can't help you," or "Tell the Leader I would like to help him but it's really harmful for me at home," or "Can you send me on a trip? My wife wants to go to Paris or Rome" or "We've never been to Tokyo," I could arrange a trip right quick, because we controlled like the Interparliamentary Union, because Johnson being the leader, whether he's the minority leader or the majority leader, it was his say-so as to who got to take what trip where. So if it was in the wintertime and I wanted to send a fellow to the Virgin Islands to get him out of there, I would do that.

But Johnson, we had such a tight ship there that we had to know exactly how many votes we had, who was absent, and then who we would pair. Like I had a pairing situation with Senator J. Glenn Beall, Sr. He loved to go to one of the local race tracks. We've got three race tracks around Washington; we got Bowie, Laurel, and Pimlico. So I had a deal with him, I said, "Senator, any time you want to go to the race track, I will guarantee you a live vote if you will guarantee me a live pair when I need one." He said, "You got a deal to the day you die." So on a vote like this, you might look at the *Record* and see that J. Glenn Beall gave me a live pair with some sick senator I had because I had that commitment. You couldn't tell that to the newspapers, but I had his commitment. His word was good. But that's the way you function.

Baker -- V -- 31

G: That's remarkable.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview V

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

ROBERT G. BAKER

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Robert G. Baker, of Washington, D.C., do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on October 23 and October 31, 1974 in Washington, D.C.; December 9, 1983, February 29, 1984 in Olney, Maryland; May 2, 1984 in Washington, D.C.; July 24, 1984 in Silver Spring, Maryland; and October 11, 1984 in Washington, D.C.; and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Robert G. Baker
Donor

May 12, 1999
Date

John W. Paul
Archivist of the United States

6-4-99
Date