

INTERVIEW VI

DATE: July 24, 1984
INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT G. BAKER
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Mr. Baker's residence, Silver Spring, Maryland

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B: You know, in your January 2, 1955 [chronology], your paragraph says that Drew Pearson criticized LBJ's support of Price Daniel over Herbert Lehman for a seat on the Senate Judiciary Committee. Senator Lehman, as your note says, certainly had more seniority than Price Daniel. There was not a written rule but an unwritten rule, in both parties, that you had to be a lawyer to be a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee. For some reason I think that this fellow John East from North Carolina is not a lawyer. You know, he's the paraplegic that's a very, very conservative follower of Jesse Helms. But as far as I know, based on our precedents there, we generally never had anybody but attorneys in the Senate who requested a seat on the Judiciary Committee because they controlled the Senate's prerogatives as far as judges, U.S. attorneys, Supreme Court justices, et al. It's a very powerful committee and as time went by they had jurisdiction over civil rights legislation.

But the significance of Price Daniel going on the Judiciary Committee over Governor Lehman was basically a civil rights fight. I think this one move by Lyndon Johnson did more to solidify his Texas and southern support than anything that he did, because the southern papers

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were rather skeptical of Johnson as to whether he wasn't a Roosevelt liberal. So, as you know, at this particular time all hell had broken loose as far as the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, and the southerners were meeting and demanding that they almost secede from the Union again. I think the smartest thing Lyndon Johnson ever did was not being a member of the southern caucus, because this freed him from that burden. But to sort of what I call protect his ass, he knew that he had to do something positive to keep the respect of Senator [Richard] Russell and the southern contingency. Senator Russell controlled the Senate Democratic Steering Committee, but he would have been in great difficulty had Lyndon Johnson voted for Lehman over Price Daniel. So with Allan Shivers being governor, I believe, at this particular time, with Price Daniel having been the former attorney general leading the fight against the tidelands and really being a very devoted, ardent member of the southern senatorial caucus, it was a brilliant tactical move to protect Lyndon Johnson's southern flank.

I think this one move probably did more than anything that he did to help him in his presidential race in 1960, because it was remarkable, the almost unanimous southern support he had with the exception, say, of the younger governors like Governor [Ernest] Hollings of South Carolina, who was for Kennedy, Governor [James Howard] Edmondson of Oklahoma, who was soundly defeated by the [Robert] Kerr forces, and the Mayor of New Orleans, who was just--Mayor deLesseps Morrison's support really was religious. He was a French Catholic who liked John Kennedy. He didn't have any lines to Lyndon Johnson. Hale Boggs and people like that were devoted supporters of Lyndon Johnson. Russell Long, Allen Ellender.

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But this made it easy for the southerners to stay in the Democratic Party, because Lyndon Johnson had a check in their bank because he delivered when it was really tough to deliver. Lyndon Johnson was lucky that the leaders of the liberal [groups], the labor, B'nai Brith and NAACP didn't understand what he had done.

G: Was this selection of Daniel over Lehman, in strictly mechanical terms, a vote of the Steering Committee?

B: Yes. You see, really the Democratic Steering Committee was what we called our committee on committees. This was where we were able to establish what I call the Johnson rule, that each new freshman was entitled to have one major committee before we recognized seniority for other people. And I doubt that we were able to use that rule for Price Daniel. I've forgotten when Price [was elected]. Price probably got elected in 1952, took office in 1953, and he took a seat on the Interior Committee because Interior had jurisdiction over tide lands. So he had already shot his load as far as exercising that right. So we really got down to basically a seniority right, and based upon the Johnson rule and rules that had previously existed, a senior member would have been entitled to that position. But it didn't happen because Johnson had the votes, and Senator Lehman was bypassed and became very bitter. I think he really despised, loathed and hated Lyndon Johnson because of this. Paul Douglas became very bitter, but after the 1964 voting rights bill he said Lyndon Johnson was the greatest president since Lincoln.

G: With regard to Johnson in this, why was he singled out as the target of Drew Pearson in this? Why not the Steering Committee as a whole? What

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was it that made Lyndon Johnson responsible, the fact that he himself voted for Price Daniel?

B: You've got to understand that Drew Pearson at this particular time was enormously powerful in the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Drew Pearson, his survival depended upon leaks from liberal senators. I mean, it was impossible for us to have a Democratic Conference Committee. That's where all the Democratic senators meet in a conference committee. And we met very seldom, and the reason we met very seldom was that everything that transpired was immediately telegraphed to Drew Pearson, and people like Estes Kefauver who were beholden to Drew Pearson for their support, they not only told their side but they would embellish the stories.

Even though Drew Pearson and Lyndon Johnson were friends for forty years or more, Drew Pearson loved to attack Texas, attack big oil. He was a Quaker. Drew Pearson, he had the appearance of being for the little man. The truth of it is--and was, which few of us knew at the time--Drew Pearson was probably one of the most corrupt men in the history of this city, and the reason was he was a whore! Like anybody that would buy air time for him--and I think Lee Hats [?] was who he used to have a radio program [for], and they paid him a lot of money. Drew Pearson was a very, very wealthy man when he died, but he always gave the appearance that he was pro-civil rights, pro the little man, anti-oil, anti-gas. But he was a whore; he was for hire. The media never investigate their own. But his stepson is a multi-multimillionaire from just the real estate that Drew left. But it's never

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published. And his protege Jack Anderson is not poor either. I want to tell you, it pays to be a successful journalist in Washington.

G: Johnson took this step in 1955 to ensure his support from the South and then he seems to have moved to the left on civil rights. He didn't sign the Southern Manifesto, he did orchestrate that civil rights bill in 1957. When did this switch take place and why?

B: Based upon my own experience with him and watching him, observing him, of all the politicians I've ever known I don't think Lyndon Johnson had one ounce of racial bigotry in his body. I think that having been raised in Texas, having been around the Mexican-Americans and seen the insensitivity of the white people versus the Mexicans--I don't think he really had a lot of exposure to black people--but I think that I have never known a man who basically had a warmer feeling for minorities and the little guy than this guy. I mean, it was really imbedded in him. I think if you just look at his whole history of trying to get electricity for farmers that had never had--I mean, his whole life, as a congressman and before that NYA administrator, he had a consistent history of trying to do something for the masses. But he also had to face his original tough race for the Senate, his real lack of rapport with the conservative element in Texas. Texas has got its fair share of racial haters and Ku Kluxers and people who at this particular time were very, very powerful politically. I mean, for him to have been defeated by W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel in his first Senate race was conclusive proof of how strong bigotry ranked in Texas.

So Johnson, when he was first elected to the Senate, he had to be prudent and he had to be careful. But every time he got a chance to get

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his foot in the door he took advantage of it, because the country was changing and the Supreme Court decision in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education* opened the door. Those people, the rabble rousers, the secessionists, James Kilpatrick--I think at this time he was the editor of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*--all these guys were advocating anarchy. He knew that that war was over, but they were trying to restart the Civil War and it didn't work. I think that if you and I could be here a hundred years from now that whatever they say about Lyndon Johnson, they're going to say that this fellow had the vision and the imagination to be a leader in developing equality for all of our citizens.

G: But why would he take the one stand in 1955 and another stand in 1956?

B: Well, it was a safe position in 1955 because he at least had some historical precedents that nothing but attorneys had served on the Judiciary Committee.

Now, the Republicans in the last four years were confronted with a similar situation. They have a very decent man, who in many respects is identical with Lyndon Johnson, named Senator Charles Mathias from Maryland. He's from this congressional district. But he has always voted for equal rights. So he was the senior member on the Senate Judiciary Committee when Ronald Reagan was elected president. Senator [Strom] Thurmond was scheduled to be chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which he really wanted. It is his field of expertise because he is a retired major general in the army reserves. South Carolina's biggest cash crop is military bases: Fort Jackson, the air force base at Myrtle Beach, the naval base in Charleston, and the marine base at Beaufort. So his number-one constituency is the military in

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South Carolina. But because of Senator Mathias' liberalism, just like Senator Lehman's liberalism, the conservatives got together and said, "Hey, Strom, we'll take care of you and your military bases in South Carolina, but you've got to protect our ass and become chairman of the Judiciary Committee." So Senator Thurmond was senior [on] both Judiciary and Armed Services. As a consequence, Senator Mathias became chairman of the Senate Rules Committee, which was a housekeeping deal. And he has been a thorn in the side of the Reagan Administration because he votes with the Democrats more than he does with Reagan. I think he's got about a 20 per cent voting record with Reagan.

G: Let's talk some more about the committee assignments. LBJ himself moved from the Commerce Committee to the Finance Committee that year in 1955.

B: Why?

G: Yes.

B: Okay. The reason was depletion. While Johnson had never been an out-front leader of the oil and gas people, he also knew of their financial resources and their power to destroy. As long as Rayburn and Johnson were in Washington they never touched depletion. The Finance Committee and the Ways and Means Committee in the House had jurisdiction over depletion, plus taxation. So Johnson's preference was the Commerce Committee because the Commerce Committee had jurisdiction over radio and television. I knew specifically why he went on the Commerce Committee initially [was] because he knew about the radio and television business. But this [move] was to shore up his Texas constituency, and it was a brilliant move.

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the majority leader of the Senate. So those people who did not like Johnson, and there was a sizeable number there in the Senate, had entertained the idea of maybe having Johnson resign out of deference to Barkley and his position, whereby Barkley would be the majority leader.

Well, you can rest assured Lyndon Johnson never entertained that idea. He was skeptical, he was leery, and he knew of my friendship with Barkley and he also knew that Senator [Walter] George was a very good friend of Barkley's. So he asked me to see what would make Alben Barkley happy.

So I went over to see Senator Barkley and all of his staff, who were just like family. So [it was] just he and I, and I said, "Senator Johnson is your admirer. He likes you. He wants you to be a part of his team. What can he do to help you?" And he looked at me and he said, "Bobby, I have no desire whatsoever to be a part of the leadership team, number one. And you can tell Senator Johnson that. Number two, because of tobacco it is terribly, terribly important that I be named to the Senate Finance Committee. That is one thing that I must have, in view of your new rule, [with] which I agree, of giving a freshman senator one committee of his choice. So that's my first preference. I think I can be of tremendous help to Senator Johnson, the country and the Democratic Party if I am given a seat on the Foreign Relations Committee because of my background and expertise. I think I could be an elder statesman. Also, Walter George and I have known each other, we like each other. He's more conservative than I am, but between the two of us we can sort of keep a balance in foreign affairs. If I could be

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given a seat on the Finance Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee, I would love to be a backbencher. I don't want to be a trouble-maker. Only thing I ask is that you reserve a nice bottle of bourbon every day for Senator George and I to enjoy lunch in Skeeter Johnson's office. If you do that, you'll have no problems out of me."

So in the meantime I said, "Well, I'm graduating from law school, and they have asked me to invite you to be the featured speaker. Your wife is on the board of directors of American University, so you can make your wife happy and really make your friend Baker happy." He said, "I can't say no to you," and he made probably the best speech of his life at the American University Law School graduation--witty. Couldn't get him off. He's like Lyndon Johnson, once he got started and had the audience with him he was up there over an hour. Wonderful. But you're the first person to ask me about the Barkley-Johnson relationship.

Now, Alben Barkley was not a fellow who had friends like Johnson did. He was basically a loner. He told me the story that when he was--you know, he won the majority leadership with President Roosevelt's support by one vote against Senator [Pat] Harrison from Mississippi. The only time [when] he was majority leader that he ever asked the President for a favor was when Senator James Byrnes of South Carolina, when someone had died on the Supreme Court, asked Alben Barkley if he would talk to President Roosevelt about he, Jimmy Byrnes, being the President's nominee for the Supreme Court. Jimmy Byrnes had never gone to law school; he had studied law in an attorney's office and passed the bar. He had been a court reporter. Roosevelt liked Jimmy Byrnes. In fact, Franklin Roosevelt wanted James Francis Byrnes to be his running

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mate in 1944 instead of Truman, but the Catholic Church had notified John McCormack that the one thing they could not forgive would be a person who was baptized a Catholic, which James Byrnes had been when he was a baby, and then he left the church and became an Episcopalian because there were very few Catholics in South Carolina and the Ku Kluxers were strong politically. So he divorced the Catholic Church, became Episcopalian. But the Cardinal from Boston, at the instructions of the Catholic Church, came to Washington and told John McCormack--and John McCormack was my source because I was the director of the Democratic Platform Committee in 1956 when he was the chairman--he was telling me that he told Franklin Roosevelt that the church said that they had no right interfering in his running mate, but as far as they were concerned they could not support Roosevelt if he selected a traitor to their church as his running mate.

So that's one of the reasons why Harry Truman had been selected. Because Bob Hannegan was the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, he was a Catholic, he knew of the anti-Byrnes feeling of Catholics and he was able, because of being chairman of the Democratic National Committee, being an insider, to bypass Bill Douglas. I believe that Roosevelt said that Bill Douglas, [Henry] Wallace and Truman, maybe Byrnes. Maybe it was Byrnes, Truman and Bill Douglas were acceptable to him. I think he wrote a letter to Hannegan to that effect. So Hannegan knew of the church's opposition to Jimmy Byrnes. So the only other fellow he had to get rid of was Bill Douglas. Truman, being in the Senate, being popular, made it possible for him to be the running mate.

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So Barkley went to see Roosevelt, and Roosevelt nominated Jimmy Byrnes. That was the only time he ever asked Roosevelt for a favor. And Jimmy Byrnes was selected. As a consequence of that part of history, Franklin Roosevelt asked the governor of South Carolina, Burnet Maybank, to run for the Senate. Maybank resigned as governor and ran for the unexpired term of Jimmy Byrnes and took office the first Tuesday--he was elected on Tuesday, probably sworn in on Wednesday. Bobby Baker was his first patronage appointment, and that's the way I came to Washington. But had Alben Barkley, with his power as majority leader and Roosevelt's floor leader, not asked Franklin Roosevelt, Jimmy Byrnes would have never been selected and Bobby Baker never would have come to Washington.

G: By the time LBJ sent you to talk to Barkley, he was already majority leader, is that correct?

B: Yes. Yes. See, if I recall correctly, Barkley was elected in November 1954, took office January 3, 1955. You'll have to check your--he either was elected in 1954 or 1956.

G: Well, it was 1954.

B: It was 1954? All right. See, 1954 was an off-year election. So Barkley was elected in November 1954.

G: But this was nothing that enabled--Johnson of course had been minority leader, Democratic leader, two years before.

B: That is right.

G: But this was nothing that enabled him to assume the majority leadership, it was just a question of holding on to the position, is that right?

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B: Well, it took care of a possible source of embarrassment. Even though Johnson had consolidated his personal strength--and I don't say to you that Alben Barkley could have defeated Lyndon Johnson--it would have developed a schism, a fissure in the Democratic Party I don't think that we could have ever overcome. It would be very interesting to see what John Kennedy would have done if he had been confronted with choosing between Lyndon Johnson and Alben Barkley. You see how historically significant [is] the fact that Johnson went out of his way to take care of Barkley? He took care of a possible sore spot.

G: I want to ask you one more question about that, and that was you mentioned Skeeter Johnston's office for lunch. This seems to come up quite a bit in Johnson's appointment book. Why did they want to have lunch in Skeeter Johnston's office?

B: The reason for Skeeter's office was the location. It's immediately off the Senate floor. Number two, you got paid government servants and they're serving you. It's like the old plantation. Anything you wanted was there. The secretary of the Senate is almost like a cabinet office. It's well respected. So it was the watering hole, the luncheon--I mean, this was the most prestigious place in the Senate. If you had a vote, you could immediately be on the Senate floor in thirty seconds. And senators, once they get that senator in front of their name, they like to be waited on. They like to sit out there and tell stories and lies and play cards. Skeeter's office was one of the [most] famous gin rummy places in the world. This is where Joe McCarthy lost thousands and thousands of dollars in there playing with Senator Kerr and Clinton Anderson. They played for big stakes. Joe McCarthy was down over three

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hundred thousand dollars at one time. But the reason for the secretary of the Senate's office, which was Skeeter Johnston--his name was Felton Johnston, he was from Mississippi. He was a drunk. But they liked him and nothing ever leaked out of his office.

G: Would you contrast this with the regular Senate dining room?

B: Oh, in the regular Senate dining room you've got all the press to bother you. Another thing, see, if you used the secretary of the Senate's office, you don't have to be explaining to the press why you're there. If you go to Lyndon Johnson's office, they'll camp outside the door and want to know what the hell you're talking about. So this secretary of the Senate's office gave you a lot of privacy, because the press had better manners than to just stalk the secretary of the Senate's office to see who was there, because there were so many senators going in and out.

But he [Johnston] had sort of what we called the drinking room and he also had the luncheon room. That's where the Democratic Policy Committee would meet, where the committee on committees, the Steering Committee, would meet. You know, I noticed in one of your notes that the British Prime Minister Anthony Eden came and addressed the Senate and they had a luncheon in Skeeter Johnston's office. That's the office that I used to cement the deal for the Apollo project for Tulsa, Oklahoma, with the chairman of the board and the president of North American Aviation, when Senator Kerr wanted to know how many jobs they could create for Tulsa. They had told me prior to the luncheon that if they got the Apollo project that they would create twenty thousand jobs. So that's where the Apollo project was guaranteed to North American.

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G: How many senators could be accommodated in Skeeter Johnston's office for lunch?

B: Well, see, traditionally the majority party, which at this particular time was the Democratic Party, had almost exclusive use of the secretary of the Senate's office. The Republicans would use the secretary of the Minority's office, which was much further away from the floor. As they got older and wiser they created offices for the majority leader and minority leader that were convenient to the floor. But most Democratic senators who were bored with what was going on on the Senate floor, especially after their committee meetings, would go into the secretary of the Senate's office, and they had what I called bull sessions. They developed a camaraderie there. We had a serious problem of people drinking too much. John McClellan at one time was a notorious drunk and very belligerent, very difficult to get along with. Ultimately his doctors cut him off. But alcoholism is a horrible problem for politicians, because every place you go they've got a drink for lunch. You know, having free whiskey available is hard to say no, and you start drinking every day. It develops into a habit.

G: Did the senators pay for the lunches themselves or was it something that you charged off to the--?

B: No, no. We had sort of a [charge account]. Like if a senator had a luncheon, let's say that Senator Johnson was having some Texas editors he wanted, he would put that on his bill. Every senator in every office of the Senate had a charge account at the Senate restaurant, including myself. If you had a group of senators just in and they order something to eat, it's sort of Dutch treat. But if you arrange with the secretary

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of the Senate to have a luncheon, he had a staff of servants that waited on you. But when it came to [liquor], the booze was free, allegedly. A lot of the liquor people would send free liquor to the secretary of the Senate.

(Interruption)

So we were talking about the liquor. Mr. Kronheim [?], who was the biggest liquor distributor in town, was very generous in sending cases of booze to the secretary of the Senate's office for the senators. And Lyndon Johnson was very thoughtful. I mean, he was not a cheap skate. He frequently would send two or three cases of liquor to the secretary's office. Skeeter Johnston was not a wealthy man. But Christmas time, my God, it looked like a liquor store up there, because people who had been there, it was such a prestigious place to be invited so people knew better than to leave cash, but they sent a case of whiskey. They'd call me wanting to know "what can I do?" I said, "Those senators drink a lot of booze up. Send them a case of liquor." So it's sort of a buddy system.

G: Could any senator go in there and have lunch or was it a--?

B: No.

G: What was the--?

B: The protocol was, one, the majority leader had first priority, because if the majority leader didn't like the secretary of the Senate, he got rid of him. This is something that very few people know, but for historical purposes I think it's important for your library. Leslie Biffle was from Arkansas, and when I first came to Washington as a Senate page boy in January 1943, Leslie Biffle was secretary for the

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majority. The secretary of the Senate was Colonel Ed Halsey from Virginia. Colonel Halsey died. Leslie Biffle became secretary of the Senate. After the Democrats took control of the Senate, when Lyndon Johnson was majority leader, Leslie Biffle wanted to return as a secretary of the Senate. For some reason that I don't know, Lyndon Johnson did not trust Leslie Biffle. He did not want him in that position. And even though Felton Johnston, who was a good man and a wonderful man and a very, very dedicated public servant, was an alcoholic--and he'd embarrass Johnson time and time again--one time I had to pick him up at the National Press Club where he passed out at the head table. Mr. Rayburn was furious. But notwithstanding that personal liability, he was a wonderful man. So in his dislike of Biffle and I think his desire to elevate me, he made Felton Johnston secretary of the Senate and made me secretary for the majority. We had to be elected but the majority leader controlled it. So when we're getting back to who had priority in the secretary of the Senate's office, the majority leader did.

Now, if the majority leader had no objection, the secretary of the Senate--let's say that Senator George, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had some prime minister in town and he would like to use it, they made it available. But more and more today they have a caterer come to the Foreign Relations Committee if they have someone. It's very seldom you ever read about luncheons in the secretary of the Senate's office.

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G: Well, assuming that there were no formal luncheons outside his schedule, could Walter George or Alben Barkley or Richard Russell just go in and have lunch in there without some sort of prior arrangement?

B: Yes. Yes. Yes, they could.

G: Where did you draw the line? Could any Democratic senator do that?

B: Any Democratic senator could do that, correct. They would go in--most of them would eat in the Senate restaurant. You know, they had the private dining room where nothing but senators sat, for Democrats and Republicans. Then they had a public dining room where you could take your constituents. But it [the secretary of the Senate's office] was more of a watering hole than a luncheon thing.

G: Okay. That clarifies it.

Grace Tully joined the staff this year. What was the significance of that, do you recall?

B: I believe that Grace Tully had some financial problems. I think the pension system when she left the White House left a lot to be desired. It may be that about the only pension she was entitled to was social security. If my memory serves me correctly she was about retirement age when he put her on the payroll of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee. I think that probably the sole reason that he put her on there was he was a kind man and a good man, and while he got some publicity over it, I never did see anything of significance that she did. She was just a lovely lady. She had been a secretary for the President. But when it came to being a policy maker--she's sort of what I call a show dog. When you went to a luncheon or you were trying to impress somebody that here was former President Roosevelt's personal secretary, that was sort

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of her purpose. But I think that Grace Tully's being hired was a kind deed on the part of Lyndon Johnson to help a lady that had no retirement.

G: Okay. LBJ went to Mayo's early in that session. He had a kidney stone, and he went twice and was out quite a bit. Then he came back the second time with a metal brace, a steel brace. Do you remember that?

B: Yes, I remember. Johnson was a great actor, and there's no doubt that having talked to other people that have passed kidney stones, it is very, very painful. He had a series of kidney stones, and I think he had one lodged and the pain was really severe, so they had to operate on him. I suppose it was then, I don't think they do it now, but it was a major surgery to cut that out. I think that he must have gotten infection from that operation because I remember him coming back. He was petrified any time he had to go take a leak because he didn't want to go through passing a kidney stone. I believe he told me that there were a series still there that they did not get while he was there. But I tell you what, the pain was such and he could elaborate on it so much that he convinced all of us we certainly never wanted to have a kidney stone. But he wore that brace. He was a crybaby. He did not sick well, if you understand what I mean. If he was feeling bad or had a cold or had pain, everybody in town knew it from Lady Bird to his help to all of his staff.

G: During that time that he was gone, the Formosa Resolution came up and the SEATO treaty came up, the Southeast Asian Treaty, Quemoy and Matsu. There were a lot of critical foreign policy issues. Do you recall any

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involvement that he had in these while he was away or any concern that he expressed when he came back?

B: You know, in reading your notes I think that the wisdom of people like Senator George and of what I call the elder statesmen was able to help guide Eisenhower through this period. You got to remember now, Chiang Kai-shek was probably the most corrupt leader in the history of the world, but our people didn't know it. He stole over a half a billion dollars of our aid money and sandwiched it away in Swiss banks. We were talking about campaign contributions, I almost, as I get older, just say it's damn bribery. Chiang Kai-shek owned the right wing of the Republican Party. Styles Bridges is a good illustration. Styles Bridges when he died had two million cash in his safe at his house, because Johnson and I went up to pay tribute to his widow the day before they buried him and she talked to us about what the hell to do with the two million.

But this is where most of the money came from, because Chiang Kai-shek was trying to get us to invade the mainland of China. And the vituperation of the [William] Jenners and the Bridges and the [Herman] Welkers and the--Time-Life, old man Henry Luce had been bribed for years by the China lobby. And Quemoy and Matsu, we almost had World War III over those two damn little old indefensible islands, like two rock piles out there in the middle. From a military point of view, wise people, they knew it was reckless and irresponsible, and I think that the respect that President Eisenhower had for Senator George and people of that caliber kept us from having World War III over Quemoy and Matsu. But [William] Knowland was the Republican leader and he was also totally beholden to Chiang Kai-shek. But it's all money; it shows you what

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money will do with politicians. It's never been uncovered. It'll come out.

G: What was Johnson's attitude toward Quemoy and Matsu? Was he skeptical?

B: He knew from his vantage point on the Armed Services Committee plus his rapport with the top military people that Quemoy and Matsu were indefensible. He also knew that based upon our knowledge at that time, that if we were going to have any confrontation with Red China, the only defensible base we had would be Formosa. So I think that in any study of--

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G: You were saying any study of Johnson--?

B: I think that in any study of the history of Johnson you will see when it came to foreign policy that he was a strong, dependable, nonpartisan supporter of that program that was in the best interests of the United States. He was unflappable. And he knew, based upon our experience in Korea and the debacle of the Democratic Party and what happened to Harry Truman, that the American people would not support a land war in Red China. I've heard him say many times that no military adviser that he had thought it was in our national interest to invade Red China. And I think because of the wisdom of President Eisenhower and people of the stature of Lyndon Johnson and Senator George and Senator [William] Fulbright and others, we saved the Republican Party from themselves, because there was tremendous pressure. I think the American people, they'll always support a war if you can get it over with in two days, but this would have been a fifty-year war and nobody wanted to do that. But we came dangerously close to World War III over those two little islands.

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G: Let me ask you, what advice did LBJ give to Mrs. Bridges on the two million dollars?

B: He told her not to put it in the bank, because he said the bank is the government. I've often wondered what she did with it, though.

G: Was Johnson surprised by that?

B: No, everybody in Washington knew that Styles Bridges was Mr. Moneybags for Republican candidates. He was a very conservative member of the Senate. He was on the Senate Appropriations Committee, he was on the Senate Armed Services Committee. So all the munitions makers were always coming up handing him money. Drew Pearson was writing about him getting money all the time. But the biggest source of cash money was from Chiang Kai-shek because he didn't have to report to anybody. There's no way you can check his bank account. This was precisely where--I mean, any time we got into Formosa or anything, you could tell those guys had been getting money from the China lobby.

G: It was really kind of a cyclical process, then, wasn't it? They would vote the aid money--

B: The aid money. We were pouring money down the drain.

G: Well, at least some of it was coming back.

B: Oh, yes, oh, yes. But Chiang Kai-shek was as big a thief as they were. He had probably as big a private reserve as there has ever been in the history of Switzerland, but it was our money. He raped China. You know, if you go to Formosa, which I have, their museums have so much booty that they can't put it on public display often enough. They've got underground storage facilities. It is unbelievable! They absolutely raped all of China of its riches, and it's there on Formosa.

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That's part of the reason that Mainland China wants to take over Formosa. It's all money. They don't give a damn about the people on the island, they want to get their treasure back.

G: Let me get you to focus on the tax bill controversy that year. Almost as soon as Johnson came back from Mayo's you had a big partisan controversy over the Democrats' version of a tax bill as opposed to the administration's. It seems that the Democrats promoted a twenty-dollar per person cut and Harry Byrd supported an administration version that was aimed more at the higher income brackets, it seems. Do you recall that?

B: Oh, I recall it very well. The Democrats had passed in the House, under Mr. Rayburn's sponsorship, a twenty-dollar per person tax credit. So if you owed a hundred dollars in taxes you got a tax credit for twenty dollars, which meant you only paid eighty. Now, the Republicans back then were almost maniacal in their devotion to a balanced budget. It was the position of the Eisenhower tax bill that the way the revenue laws were structured we were really losing revenue, and I think that their position was correct. I think back then we had 90 per cent taxation on upper income people. We just almost forbade people to make a lot of money. Their bill was a hell of a lot better than our bill because our bill would have cost a couple of billion dollars, which would have thrown the budget out of balance. But Eisenhower was so popular and we were so desperate to try and show the American people that the Republicans were for the rich people, that here we are trying to give a poor little guy with a wife and five kids--see, each person would get a twenty-dollar investment credit, so that would be about a hundred and twenty dollars; the man and his wife would be two, five

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[children] would be seven, so it would be a hundred and forty dollars that he would take in.

Well, it was a budget buster, but it went into the pockets of the masses. So we had a hell of a war. But when you really got to the showdown, and when Senator George and Senator [Harry F.] Byrd voted with the Republicans, we never did get over that. Senator Byrd was a Republican, voted with them with the exception of organizing the Senate. He was always for a balanced budget and anything for the rich people. But I would say that probably politically was the most significant defeat that Lyndon Johnson suffered.

G: Lost by one vote I think, wasn't it?

B: It was close, but we got beat. And we never did get over it.

G: Really?

B: No. We were never able to accomplish what we wanted. You've got to understand the Paul Butlers and the people like that were putting a lot of heat that you Democrats have got to do something. You know, we've got to have a bone to go to the people with. So it was a classic confrontation between the haves and the have-nots.

G: Did Johnson think that he had the votes to win that one?

B: No. He did everything in his power to try to get Senator George to change, and at one time he thought he had a commitment. But Senator George--see, Senator George and Senator Byrd, that friendship they had was too strong. Even Johnson couldn't overcome it.

G: Why did he think he had George, do you recall?

B: Because Senator George was coming up for re-election. Herman Talmadge was a very, very popular governor of Georgia. So Senator George at this

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time was an old man; he was in his late seventies and sort of out of touch realistically with the political situation in Georgia. Georgia had changed from an agricultural state to a metropolitan state, and this thing had happened while he was in Washington. So the first senatorial dinner he had to raise money was the Walter F. George Dinner, and it was to gain exposure. But the business community was divided. Talmadge was an archconservative, [had] been governor of Georgia, so he had big influx with conservatives in Georgia and Coca-Cola, people like that. But Johnson thought that he could get Senator George to be for it.

I think Eisenhower had a lot to do with getting Senator George's vote, because I know all of a sudden--the Eisenhower Administration was opposed to using federal funds to build hydroelectric dams--there was a project in Georgia that the funds had been frozen, and before Senator George's vote on the tax bill the administration released the funds to build a dam on the Savannah River. And Senator George stayed with them on the tax bill.

G: Amazing. What was Johnson's reaction to that vote, do you recall? Was he disappointed?

B: No, he was disappointed, he pouted. Plus he was a bad loser. He was very cautious and he thought it tarnished his image, seemed like it showed that he was a bad leader, he could not lead his own troops. He was defeated by the conservatives in his own party. But he did better than he should have done because our position was bad at that time.

G: Now, I want to go back to something you discussed earlier and that is some of the foreign policy issues and the posture that the Republicans were taking that really constituted saber-rattling and, as you say,

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almost bringing about World War III. Johnson was quoted in an off-the-record remark saying that the administration was trying to scare hell out of the country, and Marshall McNeil picked that up and went public with it. Do you recall that episode?

B: You'd have to refresh me a little bit as to what his off-the-record [remark was]? Was it in connection with Quemoy and Matsu?

G: Let's see. There is the. . . .

B: I am sure that this was John Foster Dulles, who Eisenhower deferred totally to in foreign affairs. John Foster Dulles' law firm represented Chiang Kai-shek. I think that John Foster Dulles gave out a very pessimistic view of what was happening. I think he almost said that the Red Chinese were preparing to invade Formosa, and this was not true. He just willfully lied. I think that's what Johnson was alluding to, that they're trying to scare hell out of them. Here the administration was pressuring the Congress to pass their foreign trade bill, and Dulles is up here leaking stories that Red China is getting ready to invade Formosa. I have never seen a period of more hatred, more bitterness, more partisanship than there was over Formosa. It all got back to those campaign contributions.

G: Was Johnson disturbed by McNeil's release of that off-the-record [remark]?

B: Any time a reporter quoted something that he had said off the record, he was upset. Plus there was bad chemistry between Johnson and Marshall McNeil. Marshall McNeil worked for Scripps-Howard. He was cynical. He's sort of like Sam Donaldson, ABC; he was a sourpuss. He was a straight guy, but anything Johnson did he was cynical about. I think he

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really liked Johnson. I think that he truly wanted Johnson to be president. But they had grown up together, and you have to remember, my not being a Texan and not knowing all of the whys and the wherefores of Texas politics, I believe the only paper that Marshall had was, what, Houston? The *Houston Post* I believe was a Scripps-Howard paper at this time. But Houston was politically very, very significant so Johnson, whether he liked it or not, had to be friendly with him. But boy, he could be obnoxious when somebody quoted what he said that he thought was off-the-record. Marshall McNeil had known him as long as he'd been in Washington, and he took liberties with him and got away with it.

G: Another controversy over publication had to do with the release of the Yalta Papers, the documents and report on the Yalta Conference. Here the Republicans evidently, or someone in the State Department, released them.

B: It was John Foster Dulles who, in trying to placate the [John] Brickers and the Bridges and the Knowlands, for strictly partisan purposes leaked to the *New York Times* the full Yalta Conference Papers, which when read in that context, just cold print, it certainly gave the appearance that Roosevelt was a very sickly old man that had been unduly influenced by people like Alger Hiss who were at the conference with him, and that Stalin had really suckered him into making it possible for the Russians to have a preeminent position in Hungary and Poland and Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and the right of the Russians to carve up the booty of the war.

So I would say without exception the Democrats were incensed that the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, who was not very popular,

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would be so insensitive to release those documents for partisan political gain. And he never got over it. Before he was secretary of state he was appointed to be a senator from New York and he was an abysmal failure. He was never accepted. He was the biggest loss that I've ever seen as a United States senator. He was a theoretician on foreign policy, but he had no warmth and total lack of knowledge of how the Senate functioned and operated. He, I'm sure, was happy--I think he ran and got defeated. I'd have to check it. But he tried to run and we were successful in defeating him. I think Herbert Lehman beat him.

G: There was a controversy over cotton acreage allotments.

B: Yes.

G: This was not only a question of how much but where the allotments would go, how many acres in Texas, how many acres in other states.

B: I read your notes there, and I'm glad that you researched it because I always thought that former Secretary of Agriculture Clinton P. Anderson, and then later Senator Clinton P. Anderson, who always professed what a great friend of Johnson's he was, was not. I think that he was really a mean, petty, crooked politician, and I think that your notes show conclusively that he lied about the amount of acreage that the Texas farmers were entitled to. And he was caught in his lie. They ultimately worked out a more equitable solution, but the original Anderson proposal was a fraud, and Johnson proved that it was.

But Anderson was a diabetic and a mean, mean man. I knew a little Mexican-American boy who was an elevator operator when I was a page boy. We lived in the same boarding house. And Senator Anderson--he was a congressman at this particular time--he just berated the little

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boy like he was just a common slave. I never forgot that, you know, when I was a kid, and then when he was a senator he acted the same way. So your research, it was just a further addition to what I knew personally, and I would not have said anything about it until you showed me this. Because I remember that cotton acreage was of tremendous importance to Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, because at the end of the war they could just produce cotton cheaper and better than anybody. And it was terribly important as an export product for us, did more for our balance of payments than anything we did.

G: What sort of give and take would you have among senators when you had this kind of an issue?

B: Number one, every senator traditionally tries to take care of his own constituency, but since Senator Anderson had been secretary of agriculture in Truman's administration, he acted like he was the only source of information. So when you catch a man in a barefaced lie and then you cram it down his throat, it must be satisfying. But most people like John Stennis and [James] Eastland and Carl Hayden, they're reasonable men, they're not going to lie to you, and you can work out an equitable allocation. But Clinton Anderson was greedy and he got caught.

G: Let's say if we were talking about Stennis or another senator from a cotton-growing state, and you had the issue of how many acres for Texas and how many acres for Mississippi or New Mexico or whatever, California, how would they work out an accord on this?

B: You sort of had what we in the law call balance the equities. You had to realize who had the power. Now, on the House side I believe Bob Poage was chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and he was a

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tyrant. So when you got to the Senate, any bill that you agreed to had to be acceptable to Bob Poage. So Lyndon Johnson, because of his relationship with Bob Poage, would know how far he could compromise. In doing any piece of legislative work, you've got to know who's got the horses. Poage was so strong and obnoxious that if you didn't come pretty close to his bottom line you'd have got no bill. The Texas delegation then was really powerful. You have Mr. Rayburn as the speaker, Mr. Poage as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Mr. Mahon as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. So when you combine--boy, you had power.

G: So Johnson's position in the Senate was bolstered by all of the chairmanships in the House?

B: Plus the fact that he had been a member of the House. The House members were jealous of their senatorial colleagues because you're one of four hundred and thirty-five. A senator gets his name in the paper every day. A poor little old congressman, other than his district, he never gets his name in the paper. So I mean the rivalry, the jealousies, the pettiness between the House and the Senate is unbelievable.

But Johnson had that rapport. He'd been a member of the House. He knew their problems. So when they had a bill they wanted, they'd come over to see him, and it got to be instead of bothering him they'd come to me and say, "I don't want to bother the Leader, but this little bill really would help me in my district. Can you pass it?" So when we'd have a Democratic Policy Committee meeting and we'd come to a bill, I said, "Mr. Leader, I didn't bother you, but Congressman Poage came over and said this bill would really help his district and let's try to

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pass it on the consent calendar." And this is the way we functioned. He had a tremendous respect on the House side of the Capitol because he took care of their problems. Walter Jenkins did more than anybody because he handled Texas stuff. But once it got away from the committees and got to the Senate floor, instead of their bothering him they'd come to me and say, "Bobby, will you help me? I don't want to bother the Leader, but it's on the calendar and I need to get it passed." So I'd do everything in my power, because I knew I was helping him with his constituency, to pass their little bill. You've got an immigration bill or--there's all kinds of little bills that you have a hell of a time getting them through the House and to the Senate and out, a postmaster. These things don't seem important to the public but they're damn important to a guy who's a congressman.

G: Did it work the other way? Would other senators from other states come to him and ask him to use influence with his House connections?

B: Many, many times. And this was one of the reasons that he was the genius leader that he was, because he had the rapport with those people who had the power in the House side. The personal relationship that he had with Mr. Rayburn, the relationship he had with Homer Thornberry, who was popular, the relationship that he had with Mr. Mahon, and there was another--the guy from Houston--

G: Albert Thomas.

B: Albert Thomas. I mean, Albert Thomas, he was the biggest wheel. He and Bob Kerr were the champions. Look what Albert Thomas did for Houston, because he was chairman of the Independent Offices Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. But it was their understanding of the

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Constitution that the appropriation bills must originate in the House of Representatives, and boy, they were jealous of their prerogatives.

But Johnson had been there, he knew their sensitivities. Many senators would be having hellacious problems with some of those cantankerous people on the House side. We had a congressman named Mike Kirwan I think; but he was chairman of the Public Works Committee from the House side, cantankerous, mean, ugly Irishman, but he liked Johnson. I'll have to think of his [name], but he's from Toledo, I remember that. He was trying to build a canal to clean up Lake Erie and [William] Proxmire and some of them filibustered. But he came over many, many times to see Johnson. Any time Johnson had a bill, he'd take care of it. Then Senator Kerr got in a fight with him over the building of the Kerr-McClellan dam up to Tulsa. And the reason he got in a fight was when Senator Kerr wrote his book, I think it was called *Wood*--

G: *Land, Water and Wood*.

B: --*Land, Water and Wood*, he didn't mention Mike Kirwan. So the lobbyist and a big truck owner named Neil Curry [?] come to me and he said, "Mike is furious. Senator Kerr didn't pay him enough tribute in his book. We had to change the book even after it had been published, we had to go in it." If you had access to the original book versus the redone one--and Kerr paid for it out of his own pocket.

But Johnson had to sort of be the peacemaker. You raised the question, would Johnson go to the House side? Kerr was too important to Johnson to have Mike Kirwan and Bob Kerr in a public fight. So because of Johnson's intervention, the taxpayers paid two billion dollars to build a twenty-two-foot channel up to Tulsa, and this is the way North

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American got the biggest military contract in the history of the world for the Apollo. But it was Johnson and Kerr's friendship and Johnson's ability to get Mike Kirwan to help.

G: Did Johnson help on cleaning up Lake Erie also?

B: Oh, yes. We tried every way in the world but damn Proxmire filibustered the thing. It came up--he slipped it in in a House appropriations bill toward adjournment, and so Proxmire never did like Johnson anyway and he thought that Mike Kirwan was a big--Proxmire was opposed to all these public works projects. He was voting with Eisenhower that it was a big boondoggle. So toward the tail end of the session we kept the Senate in late, we did everything in our power to pass that for Mike Kirwan, but Proxmire raised so much hell and talked so long we finally had to give it up, and it never was accomplished.

G: That's remarkable.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VI

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