INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 6, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES L. BARTLETT

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE McSWEENY

PLACE: Mr. Bartlett's home, 4615 W Street, NW,Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

M: Mr. Bartlett, I'd like to begin this interview with a very brief outline of your journalistic career. From 1936 through 1963 you were associated with the Chattanooga Times as a reporter, then Washington correspondent, and finally editor of the News Focus service. This last period was from 1958 to 1963. In 1963 you became a columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times, and also became nationally syndicated--I believe you were that before. Also you have received a Pulitzer Prize for national reporting in 1955, and in 1967 you co-authored a book Facing the Brink with Mr. Edward Weintal. Do I have basically the correct information?

B: Basically you are right.

M: Do you have any corrections?

B: No, not one.

M: Mr. Bartlett, have you ever participated in any similar oral history project?

B: Yes, on John Kennedy. I did that one.

M: Could you just tell me what period you covered so we won't have any

duplication? I believe scholars will be able to tie in these two.

B: It was just totally John Kennedy up until the time that he died. I was associated with him from about the war through the time of his death.

M: Mr. Bartlett, your newspaper career has certainly been concerned for a large part with Washington, heads of government and politics, and foreign affairs and domestic problems, so I would like to emphasize in this interview your direct professional associations with Lyndon Johnson, and his staff, and any personal contacts with him. And also I'd like to go into an assessment of some of his presidential problems. To begin with, do you recall the first time that you met Mr. Johnson and/or covered him?

B: I think met would be the wrong word because it was hard not to know Lyndon Johnson if you were covering the Senate in the 1950s. I was one of the mob of newspapermen who was very interested in what he said and his little conferences in his office down in the Office Senate Chamber, so I came to know him in that environment. It was not a personal relationship to any degree until after he became vice president.

M: Does any of this period particularly stand out in your mind during his Senate days as to his press relations or to the events that he was involved in?

B: I thought his press relations were rather brilliant myself. I think that to any man less critical of the way he was treated by the press, it would have been a period of great exultation. I think the press was absolutely fascinated by Lyndon Johnson, and I think that he handled the press very well. He had George Reedy up in the Senate press gallery, sort of keeping reporters in tune with what was going on.

The Senate was Lyndon Johnson, and I thought the press was very kind in most ways. I counted myself among the less kind. To me, there was sort of an element of bullying in his leadership of the Senate. It was enormously colorful and it had a lot of appeal for me. I was always wary of the fact that there was this arm-twisting and that he did dominate the scene to such degree. It didn't seem appropriate to me to have any one senator so much more powerful than the other ninety-seven there were then.

M: Were there any occasions where you were particularly just talking alone with Mr. Johnson that would give you an indication of what his then techniques were with the press?

B: There was one time, I remember, that I wrote a piece in the Chattanooga Times. The syndication didn't really begin until 1958, and it began slowly, and so my pieces were not widely distributed. But I do remember one occasion when George Reedy indicated that the leader was very upset by something I had written. It was on this general theme of his enormous domination of the Senate. I was sort of summoned down, I think, and mildly chewed out. He didn't give me the full treatment that he reserved for some who really acerbated him.

M: It's also said about his press relations during that period that the set-up in the Senate was pretty much a handing out of prepared press releases, that there was not quite the individual inquisitiveness that he later had to deal with in his presidency. Did you see this as the case?

B: No, I didn't feel that. I thought he dealt on a very personal basis. He used to have these sessions in his office. He was really very open to the press and loved having reporters in his office, both the old

office and the more elaborate one that he set up in front of the Capitol. It seemed to me highly personalized. I thought that everybody seemed to have all the access they wanted. He invited many reporters--not me--down to his Ranch for weekends. I thought that the process of press relations that he took up when he became president was really an extension of what he did while he was the Senate leader.

M: Could you estimate in numbers the number of occasions that you did see him through the Senate years? Or was this just a continuous contact?

B: Sort of constant and normally not personal. I was with the mob of reporters. I was one of the young press.

M: You've indicated that he invited some down. Was he playing favorites?

B: No, no. I think when somebody showed an interest--magazine writers particularly, I think of Stewart Alsop and Douglass Cater--they went down and they were given the Ranch experience. They were impressed by it and told their stories. The legend sort of grew from these visits. These people would tell about their experiences and it made great stories over the dinner tables in Washington.

M: As vice president, did you see him very often?

B: Well, I saw him in two ways. John Kennedy was always very careful to have Lyndon at any of the large parties that he had for his close friends. Kennedy liked to have dances, for instance, and Vice President Johnson would always be there. I saw him then.

He was not a news source in those days. I remember once I made an appointment with him and rode from the Capitol to the White House in his car and tried to talk to him about his view of the situation as it was developing, and he said absolutely nothing. He was maintaining a very rigorous self-imposed silence, so you didn't really

deal with him those days as a news source at all. He was, I think, very wisely staying out of all comment and all dealings with the press.

M: Did you have any indication of any experience of frustration on Mr. Johnson's part about the impotency of the vice presidency?

B: I had one. Liz Carpenter called me one day and said, "Charlie, could you get the President to check with Lyndon once in a while on matters of foreign policy that he's considering?" She said the Vice President was very frustrated by the fact that he was out of these deliberations; he felt a little bit sort of out of it, and perhaps if the President would just call up once in awhile and ask his opinion, it would be a great help.

So I did say to John Kennedy, "Why don't you call Lyndon more often and ask his opinion?" Kennedy was struck by the question because obviously he was sensitive to the fact that he hadn't done it as much as he probably should. But he said, "You know, it's awfully hard because once you get into one of these crunches you don't really think of calling Lyndon because he hasn't read the cables. When you get into one of these things you want to talk to the people who are most involved, and your mind does not turn to Lyndon because he isn't following the flow of cables."

That was the only direct sign of frustration.

From the Kennedy vantage point, the feeling you had was that he had sort of pulled back and was almost a passive figure on the scene. I remember the first involvement was when John Kennedy was trying to get him to go to Vietnam after the pull-out from Laos and he wanted somebody to go out and buck up [President Ngo Dinh] Diem. President Kennedy told me that he had a terribly tough time persuading Lyndon Johnson to make

this trip. He balked and balked, and finally Kennedy said, "Lyndon, you've just got to go out there." And the Vice President said, "Mr. President, I don't want to embarrass you by getting my head blown off in Saigon." But finally they did make the trip and he took the Smiths with him--Stephen and Jean Smith--as a sort of personal tender of the President's interest. And the trip from all I know was great fun. They all came back full of stories, and I think the Vice President handled all the party, handled the Smiths very well, and they all had a good deal of fun.

I remember one amusing story that came out of it. They stopped in Honolulu after the visit to Saigon, and they were sitting in some restaurant. I was told the Vice President had on one side Jean Smith and on the other side he had Nancy Hanschman, now Nancy Dickerson, from NBC who had made the trip with him. Jean Smith kept pressing him, "Tell us, Lyndon, which do you think is sexier? Nancy Hanschman or myself?" The Vice President balked very politely at this question. She kept pressing though, and finally Lyndon said, "Jean, I never mess around with Catholic girls," which flattered everybody. (Laughter)

But this was a period, it seemed to me, of very good relations between the Kennedys and Johnson. Kennedy used to love telling stories. I think he thought Lyndon Johnson had a terribly good sense of humor, and he loved telling stories about him. I remember he said that after the election he and Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson were playing golf down in Palm Beach. Sam Rayburn hooked one off into the rough and Johnson and Kennedy were walking down the fairway together. Johnson turned to Kennedy and said, "Do you realize if anything happened to

both of us, that little bugger would be president!" That was the kind of story that Kennedy loved to tell.

There was another one I remember about when he gave the astronaut program to Johnson, and they were waiting for John Glenn to take off. Glenn was in the capsule and the countdown had begun. They were gathered in the President's office watching very tensely, and Johnson turned to Kennedy and said, "If John Glenn were only a Negro!" It was that kind of story that I would get from the President, which suggested to me that there was a sort of continuing rapport between them. I didn't feel this rapport continued all the way, it seemed to sort of drift off.

I had the feeling that Kennedy was disappointed that Lyndon Johnson didn't play more of a role in the rules fight in the House. I know he thought that in the effort to put through the enlarged membership of the Rules Committee, he felt that Johnson could have played more of a part and was disappointed that he didn't. He mentioned that several times.

But you did have this feeling. I suppose it's endemic in the relationship between presidents and vice presidents you have this feeling of sort of a pulling away, that as time went on they became less and less close.

M: There was rumor that just prior to the assassination that Mr. Kennedy would not ask Lyndon Johnson to be his running mate in 1964. Did you ever talk with John Kennedy about this?

B: Yes. I remember, in the swimming pool, and I can't remember at what point in 1963 this was, but it wasn't too long before the assassination. I said to Kennedy, "Why don't you get another vice president in 1964?" Kennedy turned on me in the pool and he was furious and said,

"Why would I do a thing like that? That would be absolutely crazy. It would tear up the relationship and hurt me in Texas. That would be the most foolish thing I could do."

M: Were you in Washington, D.C. at the time of the assassination?

B: Yes, I was.

M: Did you have any immediate conversation with Mr. Johnson or members of his staff?

B: No, none. I stayed pretty far away during that early period of the Johnson presidency. Like all the Kennedy people, I was shocked. I was not one of those who felt any bitterness towards Lyndon Johnson. I wished him all the best. My own relationship with him by this point had tapered off, along with Kennedy's, and I just had no reason to go near the White House. There was this great gap which immediately developed between all the Kennedy people and Johnson.

M: Did you see any insensitiveness on the part of the Johnson people toward the staff in the assumption of power?

B: No, I really didn't. I personally thought Johnson handled the thing with great gentleness and consideration. I remember one conversation I had with Mrs. John Kennedy, Jacqueline Kennedy, a couple of nights after the funeral at dinner at the White House. Jackie said that Lyndon Johnson had just been marvelous. She said she felt that she had put on him tremendous burdens and that he had been immensely thoughtful. She said, "Of course, I've always liked Lyndon Johnson. I feel that he has been very generous with me. Bobby gets me to put on my widow's weeds and go down to his office and ask for tremendous things like renaming Cape Canaveral after Jack, and he has come through on everything." She was at that point very grateful for everything he had done.

M: Could we continue on the subject of Kennedy?

B: On that one point, of course, there was all this business on the airplane which came back right away, but this was really not generated by Mrs. Kennedy. It came from people like Kenny O'Donnell, who felt very strongly--it was an emotional reaction--that Lyndon had moved in too hard. There had been a misunderstanding. I think one of the tragedies of that period was a misunderstanding. I haven't read the Manchester book so I don't know whether he details this, but in the conversations between Bobby Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson after the shooting there was this question of [the swearing-in]. Lyndon Johnson said, "The Attorney General wants me to be sworn in before we leave the ground." Bobby had a feeling that he would have liked to have had Jack returned to Washington as president, which was not a practical thought in reflection, but emotionally he didn't see why the swearing-in couldn't take place after they had gotten back to Washington. Johnson kept saying, "The Attorney General wants me to be sworn in now," and he [Bobby Kennedy] didn't understand who he was talking about. Of course Lyndon Johnson was talking about the Attorney General of Texas. This wasn't clear and it caused some of the bitterness. I personally think that the bitterness that developed from the whole airplane ride was very largely due to the real shock of the Kennedy staff who had seen their president destroyed and they had a hard time adjusting to it. But in all the piecing together I could do, I couldn't really find any real ugliness or insensitivity on Johnson's part.

M: Mr. Bartlett, I'd like to continue on this area. There's a great deal of talk and analysis of friction between the Kennedy staff and family and Lyndon Johnson's staff and himself. You've indicated what the relations were during the vice presidential years to some extent.

I wonder if you'd continue on and indicate where these breaks came, where they just kind of grew.

B: I've always thought that one of the weaknesses of the Kennedy White House staff was that individuals became rather arrogant. This was certainly not true of Jack Kennedy, who kept a very humble sense of his own role all the way through. But I do remember one instance I picked up when he [Johnson] was going off on that last trip as vice president to Scandinavia. The Vice President indicated to Kenny O'Donnell that he'd like to see the President before he went and sort of have a little bit of a send-off from the President to boost his own role. O'Donnell said it was impossible. I remember that Ted Clifton, who was the military aide, heard about it and felt this was not the way that John Kennedy would really want it, so he made the arrangements for Lyndon Johnson to visit the President just before he departed. They met in Hyannis Port. Ted Clifton will probably put this in the tape, but apparently it was a very touching visit. Johnson came and Kennedy said, "What are you going to say over there?" Johnson had George Reedy produce the speeches that had been drafted for the trip, and they read through some of them and Kennedy made a few suggestions. Johnson was very formal and sat on the edge of his chair. Red [Paul B., Jr.] Fay has told me about the meeting; he was there. He said that it was rather an amazing thing that Johnson was playing the vice president with the President in a very formal way, an almost deferential way, and was very grateful for the conversation.

Clifton saw him to the helicopter after they'd left Kennedy, and after he was all ready to take off, Johnson stepped out again and he said, "I want you to tell that young man that he did a very great and generous thing today." Clifton was very moved.

But there was sort of an arrogant disregard of Johnson by the staff. I frankly think he took quite a lot.

M: Did you ever hear of any reasons for this?

B: I think these fellows were awfully impressed by themselves. I think Kenny O'Donnell particularly was enormously impressed by the role he was playing and had a sort of "we're it and you're not it" attitude towards Johnson. That was a whole other group as far as somebody like Kenny O'Donnell was concerned, and they just didn't really have much time for him. I don't think this was the President's attitude.

M: Did you ever have any occasion to travel with Mr. Johnson on any of his trips?

B: No, I didn't travel with him at all as vice president.

M: Did Mr. Kennedy ever talk to you about the effectiveness of Mr. Johnson as a foreign emissary?

B: No, I don't think he did. I remember that one of the last times we talked about Johnson was in September on a boat up in Hyannis Port. We talked about what Johnson would be like if Kennedy were killed as president. Lem [K. Lemoyne] Billings and I, I think, took a very negative view of Lyndon Johnson's potentials as president. Kennedy didn't really say much. He just sort of listened.

It was interesting that Kennedy raised this point at this time.

M: How had the subject come up?

B: He brought it up. It was a gloomy day out at sea and we were just floating around and couldn't see anything--gray seas. And then Kennedy said, "How do you think Lyndon would be if I got killed?"

M: Was this very much an area that he was concerned about?

B: Kennedy?

M: Yes.

B: Well, there were a couple of times that he brought this up, not in relation to Johnson but in relation to how easy it would be to be killed as president. I think this was on his mind quite a bit.

M: Would you continue from there about what has happened in the Kennedy-Johnson relationships after the assassination?

B: It's puzzling to me from that conversation with Mrs. Kennedy. Then she left the White House and went to Georgetown. Of course you had this bitterness between Bobby and Lyndon Johnson, and I think to most of us at that point it had become clear that Bobby had it in mind to challenge Johnson for the nomination in 1968.

I remember up at Camp David at some point, maybe late 1962 or maybe the spring of 1963, again we were swimming, and [Jack] Kennedy said, "Who do you think the nominee will be in 1968? Bobby or Lyndon?" I didn't have the feeling from this conversation and some others that John Kennedy was particularly thrilled by the fact that Bobby had decided that he would try to succeed him. He didn't indicate to me whom he'd like the nominee in 1968 to be. It seemed to worry him, but he never took a position.

Then of course you had this business about Bobby Baker, the investigation of Bobby's things and the part that the Justice Department played in it. From my conversations with Bobby, I didn't frankly have the sense that Bobby was trying to use the Baker thing as a sword to destroy Johnson. In a conversation maybe a week or two before the assassination, I asked Bobby how the investigation was going. He had a lot of stuff about what Baker had done, investments he'd made and this money, loans, et cetera, but he said he didn't think it really tied into Johnson at all. He said that very flatly.

So I never was one who really believed, as apparently Lyndon Johnson believed it, that Bobby was at this point sort of using the [Bobby Baker case]. Bobby hated wrongdoing of any kind, and when this thing came up, I'm sure he told his people to find out what the story was. One of Bobby Kennedy's great qualities was an enormous crusader sense; it wasn't a muckraker sense. When he saw something that was wrong, he really wanted to get at it, whether he was a Senate investigator or attorney general. And I think he did see that the investigators went to the bottom of it. Of course, you can't tell with Bobby. He may have just been saying that to cover his own position, but he did say to me that he did not think that Lyndon Johnson was implicated.

M: In 1964 there was great speculation as to who would be Mr. Johnson's running mate, and of course for a time there Bob Kennedy's name was put forward. Then due to Mr. Johnson's announcement that no member of his cabinet would be in contention, this put a damper on this. Did you have any conversations with any members of the Kennedy family on this?

B: Yes, I talked to all of them about it as the thing developed. I think Bobby would have liked to have been the vice president. I think that he sort of played with the New Hampshire primary a little bit, I don't think he ever did anything affirmative to get in there. I think that Johnson over-reacted by ordering Bobby to fire a fellow called Paul Corbin from the Democratic National Committee. Paul Corbin, C-O-R-B-I-N, had been a sort of contact point for Kennedy friends in New Hampshire who had said, "We're going to do this and we're going to get a big write-in." They'd called Corbin but I didn't have the feeling that Corbin was particularly anxious to stage a big Kennedy show up there. I didn't feel that he had

any strong encouragement from Bobby Kennedy, and I think that when Johnson reacted so savagely to this, this was one of the factors that threw the relationship off.

All the way it was my feeling that there was a tragic communications gap between the two men, and that if somehow this gap could have been bridged--I tried as best I could, but it just never worked. In other words, when they'd meet some point would come up and they'd both get their backs stiff and the meeting would be non-productive. But what basically was poisoning the well, I thought, were sort of reports that people were carrying from the White House to Bobby and from various sources to the President about what the other ones were doing. It's quite clear that Lyndon Johnson was convinced that there was a great conspiracy to try to steal the government back for the Kennedys. And on the other hand, I think that Bobby was absolutely convinced that Lyndon Johnson was out to destroy him in public life. So once you had these two convictions, there was really no way to bridge it.

I remember once I happened to be at a luncheon at the White House, and it was Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. I had been talking to Jack Valenti in the White House and he [President Johnson] asked us both to come up and have a bite with him. This was in 1965, maybe. We sat around and talked about various things. I did put in a plug then to say that there was a lot of misunderstanding in this relationship, and if something could be done to work out closer communication so that a lot of this poisonous stuff would be nailed quickly, then I thought the relationship could be considerably better. Nobody at the table said a word. There was no reaction at all. So I just dropped it. Obviously the thing had gone too far for mediation.

M: Even in 1965?

B: Yes. These two convictions: one that Bobby was going to try to destroy Lyndon Johnson, and the other that Lyndon Johnson was going to try to destroy Bobby had sunk in very deep. You just couldn't get around them. The stories, the expressions that Lyndon had said about Bobby's statements that he had made to people allegedly in the White House of course would go right back to Bobby, and I'm sure the same was true the other way.

M: Were there attempts by other members of the Kennedy family or staff to sort of mediate in this problem?

B: I don't know that. Of course Sorensen was out very quickly. Mike Feldman was around for a while. I don't know what he did to try to pull the thing together. I think almost any practical man would have had to say that it was hopeless and there wasn't much you could do.

M: Were there other occasions or events that sort of continued this friction along and probably eroded it further?

B: Almost everything. I had a feeling that J. Edgar Hoover played a large role. I had a feeling that J. Edgar, who hated Bobby, was doing what he could to be sure that the President was convinced that there was a Kennedy conspiracy. I think every little action [contributed]. The problem is that the Kennedy thing was such a far-flung movement that there were people who were emotional about the President in almost every city in the country, and there was always somebody who was saying something and making some move on behalf of Bobby, and this would drift back. So it was possible to depict the thing as a sort of a coordinated conspiracy. My impression dealing with Bobby was that this was just the way it happened, it wasn't anything that he was stirring up or that he had any real desire to undermine the

President. I felt that it was just a series of sort of coincidences which made it look more sinister than it was on the Kennedy part, and I suspected that Johnson's hatred of Bobby probably didn't go as deep as Bobby believed it did.

M: Do you think Mr. Johnson lost some of his own initiative or independence by keeping on so many members of the Kennedy cabinet? Of course they did drop out towards the end, but initially they did carry through through the 1964 election.

B: I thought the beginning part was great; in other words, "let us continue," and then working with the staff. I think, obviously, Johnson became more effective as he got his own people, people whom he felt were his men. I think he probably could have moved his own people in faster and would have been better off, yes.

But I think the great hampering factor was with his own sort of sense of Jack Kennedy's impact upon the people. I felt that his reluctance to have press conferences, which I think was one of his great mistakes, probably stemmed from a feeling that he didn't do as well at them as Jack Kennedy would have. I think that when he did have them, he felt that he had to portray the same sort of urbane personality that Jack Kennedy had portrayed. I felt if Lyndon Johnson had just been Lyndon Johnson, with all of his mannerisms and his really personal eccentricities which, by and large, as far as telling things, as far as being persuasive, were enormously impressive. . . But he never let this show. He sort of covered it with a personality which was really a very diluted Lyndon Johnson. I always felt this was because he had this awareness of Jack Kennedy and was afraid of people drawing a contrast between him and Jack Kennedy.

I remember once he said to me in one of our first meetings, "You

easterners, you really hate me!" I said, "That's not true, Mr. President. It seems to me that one of the great virtues in this transition is the fact that you are a very different person than Jack Kennedy. You have your own way and your own personality and your own approach, and it seems to me that the effect of this is to destroy comparisons. There's no reason to compare you and Jack Kennedy because you're totally different, and the difference is one of your great strengths." I didn't have the feeling that I'd persuaded him, but I said it.

M: Mr. Bartlett, did you have a feeling that since you had been a friend of John Kennedy's and were a friend of the Kennedy family that you were sort of on the outside of political reporting in Washington due to this?

B: Well, of course there were a lot of Kennedy people, as you say, still around the White House, so I had plenty of access to what was going on. I developed friends in the Johnson entourage. George Reedy had always been not a close personal friend, but we'd always been very friendly. I became very friendly with Jack Valenti, who was then in the White House. In fact Jack Valenti finally arranged a meeting between me and Johnson--this was some time afterwards--and we had a conversation in Valenti's office. My relationship with Johnson, as time went on, because my reaction was that the guy was president . . . I had seen what Jack Kennedy went through. I realized that Jack Kennedy had never had any solution for Vietnam, that he had left Vietnam in about as bad a situation as it had been at any point. So on that issue I was very sympathetic to Johnson. I never was one of those who saw the point at which he could have gotten out or at which he could have moderated the thing. My inclination was to support him, even though I shared the doubt that this was going to be a very happy aspect of foreign policy.

So my relationship with Johnson as a columnist--I have a letter here that I've dug out because I thought it was interesting. Publishers who went in to see the President kept telling me that he was saying that the Kennedy people really loathed him and that he said, "Well, people like Charlie Bartlett really hate me." This was in 1966. I kept hearing this from these publishers and it annoyed me. So I wrote him and I said:

"I've been chagrined, however, to hear repeatedly from various persons that you were given to saying that I hate you. This is not true or even close to truth, and I want to assert it emphatically. I have absolutely no reason for such sentiments. I was a skeptic in the pre-presidential days, but I have developed a strong admiration for your energy and dedication and deep gratitude for your good sense. Like most Washington newspapermen, I believe I have made a conscientious objective effort to understand the complexities of your nature. Like some of them I am frequently frustrated by the difficulties which you place in our path. However, I suspect that my record of support for your position in the major controversies has been as consistent as most columnists.

In observing John Kennedy in the White House, I always observed that the poison flowed swiftly back to him. I regret that my view of you has been distorted by this process. To be out of favor at the White House is the just lot of the professional critic and it is no hardship, but I'm reluctant to be cast as a hater in circumstances in which there are no grounds for hate."

And I got a letter back from him, the next day I guess, saying:

"I was somewhat surprised at the wording and tone of your letter

of May 12, 1966, concerning my attitude toward you. To set the record straight, I have never thought that you hated me so there is no need for you to have denied this. Frankly, I was greatly surprised by the tone of your letter. Now and then I do read your column and at times I differ with your facts and conclusions, but I have never thought about your writing sufficiently to characterize them. I always reserve the right to differ with critics of my actions, many of whom do not have full background, but as far as I am concerned, no one is out of favor at the White House. I and my staff attempt to deal fairly and equally with all reporters, columnists and broadcasters whose responsibility is coverage of myself and my administration. I am somewhat bewildered as to what occasioned your letter, but in any event your statements are clear. I am sure our objectives are the same: to report accurately and clearly the activities of the federal government."

This cleared the air a little bit and I was in to see him several times after that. We participated in a christening at the Venezuelan embassy. He was the godfather for the Valenti baby, young John, and I held the baby for the Venezuelan ambassador. It was a sort of joint affair. Then we saw each other at the Valentis once. We had what I thought was a fairly even relationship, which was what I wanted. It wasn't a question of friendship, it was just a question of relationship between two people interested in the same issues and the same problems.

I did get a report in February that he had it in his mind to get out of the presidency, not to run again--this was in 1968. I went in and asked for an appointment and was given one. I saw him and came away convinced that he was going to run again. This was late February. We talked about the curious malaise in the public. We talked about the

problem of the dissent on the war, and he seemed to me a man who was trying to understand what was in the public mind, and it seemed to me that he was ready to face the problems. He did say, in retrospect, one thing which might have been a clue to his inclinations. He said, "I was always impressed by the memoranda that you wrote Kennedy. He used to show them to me, and they always showed a great deal of perspicacity and I'd appreciate it if you would do me the same service. When you see something and have some thought, I'd appreciate very much a direct communication." He said, "You won't be doing it to me as a political person, but to me as the president of the United States, who has these problems."

I said, "Well, I'll be glad, if in any way I can, to help." And I did write him one memorandum afterwards. I went up to New Hampshire for that primary that was in full swing, and I came back and reported to him the feeling that the sort of regular Democrats had up there, that his people, the governor of New Hampshire, Governor King, et cetera, were really making a mishmash of his case, that they were treating the McCarthy thing completely wrong and that unless they took a more objective and a more positive approach, that I did see a possibility that his cause would be hurt by the New Hampshire primary. I got just a brief note back, saying "thank you," and that was the end. That was the only memorandum I ever sent him.

M: Many people have attempted to explain what happened to his press relations, and there have been labels made and formed and tagged. One phrase that has been applied to both his dealings with the press and the public has been his credibility gap. Did you see that there was such a thing, and what was it?

B: I think he made an enormous mistake in using the Senate technique of bringing the press in so much. It was a sporadic thing, and in 1964 the press had almost total access to him and he had columnists around. He was enormously generous in giving time to newspapermen. I know that Kennedy's experience had been that this really doesn't pay off for a president. You've got to keep the press at a respectful distance and allow the sort of ennobling aspect of the office to give you some protection. This is a protection that you lose when you get into personal dealings. I remember Kennedy said that he made a great point of having columnists like Walter Lippmann and Scotty [James] Reston in to see him and he had always found that when he had finished seeing them, that they almost invariably went out and wrote rather critical columns because they were trying to prove the fact that having lunch at the White House had not undermined their independence. I think that there is something in this.

I think that Johnson talked so much to the press, and he is an advocate, he's not an objective viewer of any situation. He's a man who takes a position and argues for it. In these sessions with the press, either walking around the Oval Office or in sitting on the porch--I can remember one session up there that went on and on--he would argue for his policies. He was stating his point of view. I suppose that out of this the credibility gap could have developed. I don't think that it would have become such a factor if he had really had biweekly press conferences and gone directly to the American people. The great virtue of television and radio is that the President can really speak over the heads of the pundits and reporters and go right to the people. It seemed to me that if he'd talked that way, it would have kept him on a much more level basis

with the people.

Of course the war in Vietnam was full of credibility booby traps. I remember Kennedy's problem, getting reports back that were accurate. He was pleased that he was having Cabot Lodge send a weekly report back, because he thought this would set it straight. I remember that Kennedy was very bitter at reporters like David Halberstam with the New York Times, who were telling another version of what was going on in Saigon. And I think that this is where this credibility gap gained momentum, because the President of the United States, whether it was Kennedy or Johnson, was getting one view of the situation and the public was really getting another view from some very good reporters. So in a way he was a victim of that.

M: Another term that is applied to White House press relations is the efforts on the part of the staff or the President to manage the news, either directly or indirectly. Is this a problem?

B: It's natural. I always thought that was a phony issue. They raised it against Kennedy, they really did it more against Kennedy than they did against Johnson. The fact is that a president of the United States is concerned with getting the best possible interpretation of what he's doing out to the public. That's just a normal function of leadership. Kennedy did it as best he could and Johnson did it as best he could. I never thought there was any issue in news management.

M: Did you ever have occasion to be aware of an effort to float what is called trial balloons? Or another area would be misdirection of news misinformation.

B: I never really did. I developed a great regard for the Johnson White House staff, frankly; I thought that they were a superlative bunch of

men. I thought that they got better as time went on. I must say that in my dealings with them I always thought that I got no misdirections. I think that they were all so terrified of Johnson, and I think that one of his mistakes was to make them terrified of talking to newspapermen, so that you didn't get the whole story and you found them rather reluctant to talk. I think this was a great mistake on his part. I think he really did terrify his people in their dealings with the press, and I think that they would have given a much fuller version of what was going in the White House, what the problems were, what the alternatives were, and therefore sort of brought the American people in much more if they'd been allowed to talk more freely.

M: Were you ever aware of a case when Mr. Johnson reported or stated that things were going to be and then he managed to, say, undercut it for the more sensational impact of it? Specifically, some of his first budget announcements.

B: There was that business about whether you were going to go over a hundred billion dollars or not. This was a game that he played. I share the view that the game wasn't worth the candle, and I think he probably hurt himself in terms of the credibility gap by making people feel that it was impossible to get the budget below a hundred billion dollars and then coming up with a budget which was below a hundred billion dollars. This was back in 1964. That budget game is so obvious that I don't think a president really makes much mileage out of it.

M: Was this a direct effort on his part to make mileage out of the publicity?

B: Oh, sure. This business of turning off the lights in the White House. I think he probably made some points with the American people that way.

I think in the Washington community it looked a little silly, particularly because we knew that Lyndon Johnson liked all the comforts and was not stinting in adapting the resources of the government to enhance his comfort.

M: How well do you think Mr. Johnson was served by his press secretaries?

B: I thought that George Christian did a remarkable job. I think he's probably the best press secretary that has been in the White House since I've been in Washington. I think that Bill Moyers was a very interesting press secretary. I think he was troubled by his constant effort to secure more and more leverage within the White House. I think you always felt that Bill Moyers had Bill Moyers in his mind. I think that he was right in one respect, though--in urging President Johnson to pull away from the press and not expose himself so constantly in such direct and personal terms with two newspapermen.

M: How do these men compare to other press secretaries, such as [Pierre] Salinger and [James] Hagerty?

B: As I say, I think Christian was far and above in personal character, in integrity, in keeping the White House press corps reasonably happy, I thought he did far and away the best job of any of them. I think there was very little ego in it. He did an objective job of trying to keep the world informed on what was going on in the White House. I rated him very, very highly.

I think that Salinger, like Moyers, was concentrating on being a personality. I think Salinger looked better than he actually was because Kennedy had such a shrewd sense of press relations. I think this was an enormous help to Salinger.

I always thought Hagerty made a great mistake in trying to dominate

the White House and be sure that he was the only press contact, and the result was that it built up hostilities within the White House, and I think it deprived the public of a really full understanding of the problems that the Eisenhower Administration were up against.

My view of it is that the open approach, as the Nixon people call it, is really a pretty good one because it does bring the public in on the actual decision-making process. It makes the public understand better how enormous the problems are in terms of the alternatives that are available to the president. I think that the country in its naivete tends to believe that a president of the United States can do almost anything--if he'll just do it, he can do it. And I don't think that there's enough of the understanding of the limitations upon his role, and how he's inhibited for one reason or another from doing the thing which seems most obvious. I think that the more the public understands how these problems are approached and what considerations have to be taken into account, then the public tends to be more sympathetic to what comes out.

M: Were you ever aware of any friction within the White House staff?

B: I think you had a sense of factions. Yes, I think you had a feeling that people here and there were sort of working for their own good. But I think that Lyndon Johnson did one thing which John Kennedy didn't do, which was to keep everybody rather humble. In other words, he kept them from playing enormously assertive roles in the government community. He kept them from swinging their weight too heavily with the department heads, and it seemed to me that the White House staff under Johnson kept its perspective better than the White House staff under Kennedy, who really licensed his people to go out and be as influential as they could.

M: Did you ever talk with Bill Moyers or discuss what happened during that period when he left the White House?

B: I had lunch with Bill Moyers and some other newspapermen. We had a lot of jokes. I've sort of pieced it together later. I didn't really get it from him. I have the feeling that Bill Moyers was very anxious to project himself in the government. This was his great opportunity. I think he wanted to get into foreign policy. I think he encouraged the appointment of Walt Rostow as McGeorge Bundy's successor on the National Security Council. I think he thought that Rostow would not get along with the President and this would increase his influence in foreign policy. I think that when Rostow did get along with the President and when the dealings became fairly secure between the two men, I think this excluded Moyers. I think it made him want to be secretary of state, under secretary of state, and I think that Johnson got the feeling slowly that Moyers was really working harder for Moyers than he was for Johnson and this cooled the President towards him. This is my impression.

M: There was also some idea that Mr. Moyers was somehow associated with the Kennedy people, too.

B: Well, Moyers was reaching out in every direction. He became part of the Hickory Hill group, and I think he had a feeling that Bobby was the wave of the future and certainly a relationship developed. He had a very close relationship with Sargent Shriver, with whom he had worked on the Peace Corps. So he was more ambiguous than most of the Johnson people in this respect.

M: Did you ever have occasion to submit a story to the President to be checked for accuracy?

B: No, I did not.

M: Were there ever any instances where Mr. Johnson either telephoned you or when you suspected he was behind a call about something you wrote, or proposing something for you to write?

B: No, he never did that, not to me at all.

M: Have you had occasion to be a recipient of what is called the LBJ "treatment?"

B: I really never have, because the relationship was so grounded in hostility that he always regarded me either with great suspicion or beyond the pale. I don't think that he could ever get over a feeling that I was a part of the Bobby conspiracy. After Bobby died, we had a very warm chat in the White House--this was in the early summer of 1968--and that was the first time that I would say that we'd ever really had a reasonably relaxed conversation on rather personal terms. We were both very much at ease.

M: Did you ever have occasion to see or be aware of Mr. Johnson's anger or frustration over something?

B: No, I never got hit by that. You'd hear all those stories, but I never felt it directly.

M: Mr. Bartlett, your book, Facing the Brink, talks about crisis diplomacy, the development of policy to meet the crisis as it arises instead of long-range planning. Whom do you think made foreign policy decisions in the Johnson Administration?

B: I had the feeling that they had a hard time. He relied very heavily on McGeorge Bundy, and I thought this was one of his weaknesses. Kennedy had understood Bundy very well, they came from similar backgrounds, similar universities, and there was a very clear-cut chemistry between Kennedy and Bundy. Bundy had a very arrogant, rather assertive way.

Kennedy knew the errors of judgment that Bundy had made in his time, and I don't think that he was awed by the Bundy personality. I think that that assurance to somebody who doesn't know McGeorge Bundy well can throw you off, and you tend to sort of be cowed by it. I always felt that it was a mistake to keep Bundy on because I don't think that it could have been an easy dealing as far as Lyndon Johnson was concerned, a very different man. So therefore I suspect that there was probably no foreign policy in 1964 except what Bundy and McNamara, who were very close, and Rusk sort of sustained during the period that Lyndon Johnson was concentrating on the re-election.

Then you got into the 1965 period and you had all of this effort to wring a consensus out of the government in support of the steps that were being taken in Vietnam. I always felt that Rusk and Johnson got along famously. I felt that when Rostow came in, Rostow and the President seemed to get along the same wave length. McNamara's decline, you could feel that from the outside as the war went on, as he lost confidence in the steps that had been taken. You did feel a sort of a drift. You felt that Johnson was turning more and more to the generals and less and less to the civilian Secretary of Defense. I had the feeling that at that point it was quite clear that Rusk and Rostow were the men in the saddle, along with the Joint Chiefs.

M: During Mr. Johnson's Senate days he was closely involved in some foreign policy decisions with the Eisenhower Administration, since he was Senate majority leader. Yet this is said to be his area that is the weakest.

B: I think, as we've recounted in that book, that Lyndon Johnson came down very strong in 1954 as Dien Bien Phu was going down, and there were those

like Richard Nixon who wanted to go to the aid of the French garrison. I remember hearing and checking out fully the fact that Lyndon Johnson emphatically tried to persuade President Eisenhower against any deep involvement in Southeast Asia. This is such a vast web of tragedy that I--

M: And yet this was said to be an area where he did not have great ability, did not have strength. Did you see this as true in his foreign policy development?

B: I don't think he had an instinctive sensitive feel for it. I think he had a sense of approaching foreign policy the way he approached the legislative problem, getting hold of the people who pulled the weight and persuading them to go in your direction. I always felt that there was not a broad sensitive understanding of the play of European history and the subtleties of the relationships with those European governments. No, I didn't feel that Lyndon Johnson had that. I thought Kennedy did have that. I thought that was his great strength.

M: Mr. Bartlett, you and Mr. Stewart Alsop were among the first people to use the expression of hawks and doves to portray proponents and opponents of the administration policy on military involvements. I think this was originally for the Cuban missile crisis, but this became a really significant alignment in the Vietnam policy. The critics of the war increased so much, and this has been called Mr. Johnson's war or Lyndon Johnson's tragedy. What is your opinion of our direction of our commitment in Vietnam and the alignment of people?

B: I always felt that Lyndon Johnson was sort of a prisoner of events; that none of the people who talked about getting out ever showed me how you could get out with any kind of honor and without sacrificing

really our stature as a nation. My sympathy toward Johnson's position was the fact that I just never saw a clear alternative. I think that the question, after he had launched the escalation, of whether this was sound militarily or if it had been prosecuted to the end, whether we would have gotten out quicker--these are questions that I don't have the answer to. It never seemed to me that he was the villain in the piece.

M: Do you think that there was a change in the nature of our commitment?

B: Everybody always talks about what Kennedy would have done. I know that Walt Rostow has expressed what he thinks that Kennedy would have done if he had lived. I just don't know. I feel that Jack Kennedy was completely at sea on Vietnam. I remember once he said to me, "We've got to face the fact that the odds"--this was when the Buddhists were tearing the place up in 1963--"are about a hundred to one that we're going to get our asses thrown out of Vietnam." I never found in any expression of his any sense of what you could do and what you couldn't do. I never found any sense of how you could get out if you weren't thrown out.

I did have the conviction that he was determined to stay in through the 1964 election. Whether he would have escalated then, I just don't know. He certainly had a horror of involvement on the continent of Asia, a deep horror, but so did Lyndon Johnson. So I don't think it really is fair to speculate what he would have done because I'm convinced that up to the time he died, he was dealing with Vietnam on a day-to-day basis, just trying to hold our position there.

M: Did you see a change in the Johnson Administration from a feeling that there was a possibility for a military solution as opposed to a

negotiated political settlement? Did it change from the military to the political settlement idea?

B: At what point?

M: I'm asking you, did you see that?

B: As you became aware of the factions that were developing within the administration, I was aware that McNamara was interested in this idea of cutting off the bombing at a certain latitude and giving them a period to respond. I was aware that the administration was determined to play its military hand strongly. And I didn't feel that outsiders were really in a position to question this. Maybe I was too respectful of the fact that we didn't have all the information, and maybe I was too respectful of the information that the President was getting, but I didn't feel qualified to really assess whether Johnson was right in trying to push the thing as hard as he could in helping to make them fold up.

M: Was there a point when this changed, that you feel the administration changed from a military solution?

B: There was this change that happened in the last part of March 1968. That was the first time that there was any sign of it. My conversations around the White House over that weekend: one, gave me no clue that Lyndon Johnson was going to pull out in that speech of March 31; two, they gave me the feeling that this cut-off of the bombing at the 21st parallel was being offered as a sort of a sop to American public opinion and not with any real hope that North Vietnam would pick it up. Certainly Walt Rostow reflected a very strong conviction that these people in Hanoi were determined to play the thing out, and I don't think there was probably any more surprised quarter in

town than the White House when the North Vietnamese did respond to the March 31 speech. I think that they went into that speech, convinced that it was being done more in domestic terms than in terms of really negotiating an end to the war.

M: Mr. Johnson went from a very great mandate in 1964 to very great unpopularity. Do you think that this had an effect on his decision to withdraw from standing for re-election?

B: It's all speculation. I think the Bobby Kennedy thing; I think that there were signs then that the economy was headed for trouble. In that period of March we all got concerned about what was coming in economic quarters. I always had the feeling that Lyndon Johnson's great pride was the fact that he had sustained a remarkable economy and that when he saw that threatened, he began to wonder what his next four years would be like. I certainly don't think he wanted to preside over a recession.

M: Did you think that Mr. Johnson might possibly accept a sort of draft movement at the 1968 convention?

B: It's my impression that he would have, yes, and that he always found it hard to believe that in the end the party wouldn't come back to him. I don't think he had the feeling that Hubert Humphrey would be a strong candidate or a strong president, and I do have the feeling that Lyndon Johnson sort of believed that the party in its wisdom would say,"Let's keep what we've got."

M: Did you have occasion to discuss with Bob Kennedy his candidacy in 1968?

B: I did, yes. I was very much against it, against it in terms of--my position with him was, after all, Lyndon Johnson had inherited the war

at its worst stage from Jack Kennedy, that Jack Kennedy had had no solution to it, and that it wasn't fair for Bobby to go against Lyndon Johnson on the basis of the war in Vietnam. I had the feeling really that Bobby was sort of dragged into that candidacy. I've always thought there were many factors; one, perhaps that he didn't really love the role he was playing; he didn't really love politics; he was leading a miserable life; he was spending vast amounts of money on subsidizing his staff. I think he once told me he was spending one hundred thousand dollars a year. He was leading a life that I think any one of us would have considered miserable. He was up in New York half the time, and half the time he was on that shuttle. He loved his home, he loved his children, he loved the sun, and I don't think he was getting much of any of those things. I often wondered if he just didn't finally say to himself, "Well, by God, it may be there and this is the year to try it." He'd been sort of projected into this challenge.

Bobby was not really a conceited man with an enormous sense of himself as a man of destiny. He really had a very modest opinion of himself. I always felt that others sort of pushed him in this decision that he should be the president, which I think began really about 1962. I felt that Lyndon Johnson was a factor by antagonizing Bobby and by the great gap between them. I think this sort of increased the challenge and personalized it. But it wasn't really something that was executed in cold blood; it was something that Bobby sort of backed into.

M: There was some talk to the fact that a proposed task force of the review of the Vietnam war was either being promoted by Kennedy members for him to be involved in this and in this way he would not get into the presidential race. Do you have any information on that?

B: No, I never heard that.

M: Maybe I'm not making myself clear. Do you recall this particular task force that came up with an idea for a review of the Vietnam policy?

B: This was the idea that Sorensen brought down to the White House. Yes, of course, Lyndon Johnson did have a review. He had his wise men in, and they didn't include any of the Bobby Kennedy people, but he had his review. I remember reading about that; I didn't know of it personally, no.

M: The reason for asking that is there was some talk that if Bob Kennedy could have been involved in some sort of review on that, then he would not have entered the race.

B: I think it's possible. I don't think he had any burning conviction that this was the right thing to do and the right time to do it. I think he was full of misgivings.

M: Mr. Bartlett, I'm sure you've covered many conventions, both Republican and Democratic. Do you have any thoughts of how they have compared over the years, particularly from the nomination of Jack Kennedy in 1960 and the 1964 nomination of Johnson to finally the 1968 one?

B: Well, of course, they were different, the 1960 one was a contested convention. During 1960, I became appalled at the amount of money and energy that went into the business of getting nominated, and I almost decided I was going to quit the newspaper business and spend the rest of my life trying to refine our method of selecting our nominees. I concluded that this was not really wise, that Kennedy learned so much and developed so much from his exhaustive campaign tour that he was tested in so many ways that were useful in testing a man who wanted to be president of the United States. I concluded that our system with all of its inconsistencies and this excessive period of time was really

very good, it really made the man and eliminated the weak ones. I doubt very much that Lyndon Johnson with his Washington orientation and his lack of chemical relationship with the people could ever have survived the primary process in its full elaborate scope. I don't think he had the kind of personality that really could have done it. I think he reached the presidency about the only way he could have reached it.

M: Do you recall when you first heard of the idea of Mr. Johnson being Jack Kennedy's running mate?

B: I was appalled. I had been told by Kennedy's people that Stuart Symington was going to be the man. I had written a story to that effect, and as far as I was concerned, the thing was wrapped up. Then I went around to the Kennedy headquarters and saw Joe Alsop rolling on the floor in joy and most of the Kennedy people looking slightly appalled, and I realized it was to be Lyndon Johnson.

That night I went out to dinner at the house that Joseph P. Kennedy had rented from Marian Davies and we all had dinner together. It was quite a remarkable gathering. Mrs. Jack Kennedy was in a very low state of mind; Bobby Kennedy was in near despair. I remember we stood outside the house--the sun was going down--this very elaborate Spanish house; four or five of Bobby Kennedy's children in their pajamas were splashing around in the fountain in front of the house. Bobby was lying on the seat of the car dictating to the headquarters at the convention hall on the steps necessary to get Lyndon Johnson nominated. Jack Kennedy was reading the New York Times, sort of spread across the trunk of the car. I remember old Joe Kennedy standing there in a velvet dressing jacket, his hands behind his back, saying, "Don't

worry, Jack. In two weeks they'll be saying it's the smartest thing you ever did." And of course he was right. But at that point I think Kennedy was pretty sunk about it. I don't think he really thought that Lyndon Johnson fitted the image that he wanted to carry to the American people. I think he wanted to carry something fresher, and perhaps younger. Stu Symington he respected because he had gone out and fought for the nomination, and fought hard and had gone out and met the people. I don't think he thought that Lyndon Johnson had much potential to project himself with the people. It was very gloomy. I remember Bobby said, "Yesterday was the best day of my life, and today is the worst day of my life." There was a very sad mood running.

M: Did you ever hear Mr. Bob Kennedy talk about how Mr. Johnson was approached for the vice presidency?

B: Jack told the story. He said he went down and everybody told him, "If you don't offer the nomination to Lyndon Johnson, you're going to have a hell of a time in Congress. The best thing to do is get up in the morning, go down and offer it to him. He'll refuse and then you go on with the Symington nomination." So Kennedy went down and Lyndon showed interest, so Kennedy was on the hook.

I remember a few days later he said, "I didn't really offer the nomination to Lyndon Johnson. I just held it out to here"--and with his hand he gestured two or three inches from his pocket. But the next day he said, "I hear your editors are upset because you said that Symington was going to be the vice president. Well, you can tell them if they're surprised, so am I." It was quite a shock, actually. I think that Kennedy had been convinced that Johnson didn't want it

and was sort of trapped into it.

M: The campaign that followed and the very close election that followed certainly proved--

B: Joe Kennedy was right.

M: --Joe Kennedy was right. Do you have any comments on that?

B: No.

M: Was it essential to his election to have Mr. Johnson?

B: Well, of course, if he hadn't carried Texas--and I think that Johnson did a very good job in Texas. There's no question about that.

I personally thought that Johnson was a very loyal vice president. I do know that there was never any word that ever drifted back to Jack Kennedy of any criticism from Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson did pull away from the scene. I don't think that Kennedy knew how tough certain members of his staff were being on the Vice President, but there certainly was not one word--and I'm very sure of this--of disloyalty that the Vice President ever uttered in terms of the President, no comment, no criticism. He was a very, very, very loyal vice president in the strict sense.

M: How would you comment on the 1964 convention and finally the 1968 convention? How would you compare and contrast them?

B: They were very different, I guess. One was a controlled convention and the other was rather open. They were so different that they don't even invite a comparison.

M: Well, Mr. Johnson was involved in all of the last three in one way or another.

B: You didn't feel his hand. I kept getting word from old Johnson loyalists all through the Chicago convention that "Tonight Lyndon is going to show

up. His car is over in the Federal Building. He's going to appear and they're going to nominate him. He's going to spend the night on a boat out in Lake Michigan." This was from very knowledgeable Democrats. I think when the history is finally told, if it ever is told, that it will be very interesting to see how close Lyndon Johnson did come to coming to Chicago. I think his decision was probably a wise one, and I think that that convention had gone so far down the road and was so knotted up on the issue of Vietnam that I don't think that his appearance would have been an enormous cause for enthusiasm. I don't think that it would have probably changed the outcome of the convention.

M: There was talk about the fact that that convention was controlled by Mr. Johnson or by his party loyalists. What was your feeling about that?

B: The 1968?

M: Yes.

B: No. I think the labor people were very strong obviously, and they had determined that they were going to nominate Hubert Humphrey. I think that Humphrey was in command of the convention. I don't think Lyndon Johnson really was a factor. I think the question of whether [Mayor Richard] Daley would not have liked to nominate Johnson is an interesting one to me. His whole role in 1968 fascinates me. I know that he gave some encouragement to Bobby, I know that he indicated to several friends of mine that he had very gloomy thoughts about Vietnam and thought that Johnson ought to cut his losses and get out. He certainly was interested in Teddy Kennedy and suggested to the Kennedy people that he would like Teddy as the nominee instead of Hubert Humphrey. He claimed that he needed some tender of interest from Teddy and Teddy refused to give it,

and eventually Daley found that he did not have the muscle at the convention to swing it over.

I've always thought that what Daley had in mind was to get Teddy committed to some degree and bring him out and have him available and then somehow get Lyndon Johnson in as the nominee and Teddy as the vice president. I've always thought that there was a great Machiavellian scheme there, but I have very little proof of that.

M: Was the draft Kennedy movement that was talked about a serious effort on Ted Kennedy's part?

B: Teddy was absolutely correct in his approach to the thing. He didn't show any sign. Steve Smith, with whom I spent much time during that period in Chicago, was making no aggressive efforts to get Kennedy delegates. There were people moving around listening to the sentiment, and there was a feeling that the Teddy thing was strong. But Daley concluded, and of course Daley was the key and when he finally called Teddy on Tuesday and said, "If you want this thing, you're going to have to show some interest because I can't get it for you without that show of interest. You don't have to come here, but you have to make some statement in Hyannis Port that will show that you're available and that you want to be nominated." Teddy said he couldn't do that, and that was the end of that.

So the Kennedy people realized by Monday, or at least early Tuesday, that there wasn't that kind of momentum. There was a lot of support, but there wasn't that kind of key delegate momentum to put the thing over in a purely passive way, but they did stay in a passive status.

M: Did you ever discuss with Ted Kennedy his running for the presidency

in 1968?

B: No, I never did.

M: Were you aware of any efforts on the part of the administration to set up any protection for the candidates during 1968? This would be prior, of course, to Bob Kennedy's assassination.

B: Just what I read in the newspapers. I don't think there was any. As far as I know, there were not efforts to protect the candidates at that point until the assassination of Bobby.

M: I just have some very general, summary questions to ask you. If you'd just sort of give me your opinion of what you think were Mr. Johnson's strengths and his weaknesses in his administration.

B: I think his strength was the enormous force of Lyndon Johnson. I think his intimacy with the key members of Congress. I think if he'd been spared the Vietnam war, he had a very good sense of government organization and the moves he made in the direction of tightening up the structure of government were good ones. I think his determination to legislate a far-reaching welfare program was very impressive. He went much further than those of us who didn't think he was capable of original legislation ever believed he would. I think that he had a good team, part inherited, part selected by himself. I think his judgment of who were the real men--I always thought that one of his great qualities as president was his very shrewd judgment of people. I think that he had a good line on people, their strengths and weaknesses, and I thought that he picked and chose extremely well among the Kennedy people that he kept.

His weaknesses were of course his handling of people. He understood them but he handled them badly. He didn't develop a sense of

team. He was abrasive in his dealings and threw people off. I think he had an obvious ego problem, which was obviously tied to some inner insecurity. Then of course his communications failure was partly a result of this insecurity and a curious lack of self-assurance. But I thought in his general directions and in his instincts as to where America should be headed in domestic terms, he was very sound. I think his great mistake, and I personally rate this with the war in Vietnam, was on the tax increase in 1966. Having lived his life in legislative halls, I think that he was so concerned with what you could and what you could not get through Congress that he tended not to do things that a president should do even if he couldn't push it through Congress. And I think the tax increase which was proposed and urged on him by all his advisers in 1966 was certainly an instance of this. It seems to me that if he had raised the flag and said, "Now, look, this economy is headed for trouble if we don't get the tax increase," if he had done that early enough, much of the unpleasant inflation which we've suffered later would have been avoided. I know that his staff pushed him hard and he was impressed; one, by the fact Wilbur Mills would be reluctant to support him; two, by the fact that Congress was going into an election in 1966 and did not want to vote for a tax increase. I think that, having had this legislative background, that he did something which presidents in these days cannot afford to do, which is to defer too much to the congressional inclination. It seems to me that a president now has to take his positions, win some and lose some, and battle with Congress, and it isn't a question of whether you get 90 per cent of your program through Congress. It's just a question of what you stand for that really impresses the people. It

seemed to me that in terms of winning the support of the American people he didn't really take them into account as much as he did the Congress, and I think that it's much more important to go to the people over the Congress, because I think the Congress in so many aspects is anachronistic. The committee chairman, the seniority system, rules of procedure, they're not really keyed to the times, and I think that a president who defers to them falls into the same trap that Congress has fallen into. I think that the president has to stand for what he stands for. And I certainly think that on the tax increase he should have come out early and hard. He might not have gotten it, but he at least would have set the stage for 1967 and he would have made his point.

His record on the economy, therefore, despite the continuing prosperity, is not in my opinion good. I think he blew it.

M: He had a very large amount of legislation in 1964 and 1965, and of course this is invariably contrasted with a lack of legislation during the Kennedy Administration. To what would you attribute this?

B: I think the fact is that Lyndon Johnson had a standing with the Senate that Jack Kennedy did not have. When Jack Kennedy became president, he had been in the Senate for eight years, Lyndon Johnson had been in only four more years, but at the same time Johnson had established himself with the hierarchy. Kennedy had never been a part of the hierarchy, had never deferred to the old Buddhas up on the Hill, and I think that they all were willing to watch him stew. I think Kennedy always believed that if he were re-elected with a handsome margin in 1964, that he would be able to do quite a bit with Congress, but they still thought of him as a young man who had been elected with a bare 50 per cent of the vote and he recognized it. Kennedy recognized

that he didn't really have much clout up there. Johnson had tremendous clout and capitalized in a brilliant way on the emotions that came with Kennedy's assassination and did get the log jam broken. There's no question.

M: One area I didn't ask you about. Did you ever discuss with Jack Kennedy the reason for the Texas trip?

B: I didn't get into all the bickerings on that, the back and forth. I'm no authority on that. I talked to Kennedy the night before he went to Texas, and I know that he was sort of bothered by his problems, of which Texas at that point was just one. But he didn't go into the details of his dealings with Lyndon Johnson at all on the arrangements and the problems with [Governor John] Connally, et cetera.

M: Or motivations for the Texas trip? Being politics or--?

B: It was politics, there's no question. The purpose of going to Texas was to set the stage for 1964.

M: Did Mr. Kennedy have serious doubts about re-election in 1964?

B: I don't think he died convinced that he was a shoo-in. I think he realized that he was going to have to face a tough problem. I think he was scared of George Romney. I think that he didn't dare to hope that his opponent would be Barry Goldwater.

M: Mr. Bartlett, how do you think that history will rate the Johnson Administration?

B: I think it will rate the Johnson Administration as one of the most fascinating periods in our political life. I think as the history books get further and further away--so much of the hostility towards Lyndon Johnson in the Washington community stems from these personal idiosyncracies, from the abrasive treatment of people, from the ego problem, from the fact that people always felt when they dealt with

Johnson as if they were dealing with somebody that they had to be damned careful of. So much of the view of Johnson was tied into this amazing personality that I think the further you get away from it and the more people concentrate on what he tried to do and what he succeeded in doing and the more people really understand the circumstances of the involvement in Vietnam, it seems to me that he's bound to, I think, be rated very highly for his energies and for his basic good sense. I think that his personal idiosyncracies will always be a factor, but I think they will become less of a shadow over the record as time goes ahead.

M: Do you think that he was dealt fairly with by the press, by the news media?

B: Oh, that's tough! The press is so funny. It does the best it can. I always maintain that you've got two thousand reporters, television commentators, and radio people working in Washington, and that out of the whole thing comes a very balanced thing. Johnson had critics. I don't think he was dealt with any more unfairly than any president. Jack Kennedy had some very savage critics. In all this criticism there's always an element of truth. I think from the net flow of commentary out of Washington the average tends to be very fair. I think you've got a few distortions. But I don't feel as I'm told Lyndon Johnson feels that he's a victim of the press. I feel that the press did what it could to represent his multifacets to the public accurately.

M: I have no further questions to ask you, Mr. Bartlett. We've covered a number of topics. Is there any area that we've covered that you would care to comment more on, or anything that we haven't touched on that you happen to have just thought about in regard to your associations with Lyndon Johnson?

B: No, I think you've very exhaustively plumbed my recollections,

Mrs. McSweeny.

M: I want to thank you very much.

B: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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