INTERVIEW II

DATE: May 22, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: MRS. E. L. (BOB) BARTLETT

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE McSWEENY

PLACE: Mrs. Bartlett's home, 2343 49th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

M: This is our second interview with Mrs. Bartlett. We had gotten just about up to the point where the battle for statehood in 1958 occurred.

I'd like to pick up a little earlier at this point and ask you initially if you would tell me a little bit about how the Tennessee Plan developed and Alaska's approval of this to pre-elect members of Congress to go down and, I would imagine, lobby for statehood. Can you start with that and tell me how that idea developed and who was involved, and its effectiveness?

B: Actually this was the dream of one man. He was a southerner. His name was George Lee Lightner from Louisiana and Mississippi. He had lived in Hawaii and was aghast at the fact that here was this great territory that had no statehood. That was during the war. He came back to his home in Louisiana, concerned with the effort of getting statehood for Hawaii. Very shortly he discovered the only way to get statehood for Hawaii was to get Alaska statehood first because then Hawaii could come in. So he started to work on Alaska statehood. He was the busiest individual, I think, we had as a lobbyist. He left no stone unturned. He made himself very well known to all of

the southern congressmen and senators and did persuade Russell Long to the effectiveness of his idea for Alaska statehood. That was quite a feather in his cap, I think.

M: It was.

B: So he did a lot of studying, and he discovered through the early history of some of the later states like Michigan and California, Oregon I think, and Tennessee that they had got so tired of waiting for statehood acts for their states to pass that they got busy and elected their own senators and representatives and sent them to Congress. They weren't legally elected of course, but this gimmick helped them achieve statehood, and it came to be known as the Tennessee Plan because Tennessee was the last one and the most successful one--they got statehood almost right away after they did that.

So he decided that the thing for Alaska to do was to do that. However, about the time he decided that this was the thing to do, statehood was very close. It actually wouldn't have mattered whether they did this or not, but he sold the idea to the constitutional convention and so Alaska had this election of the so-called Tennessee planners. They elected two senators and a representative who came down to Congress. Of course they weren't seated, nor were they recognized very much at all. Their standing wasn't very great in a busy Congress that was concerned with statehood for Alaska, but was concerned with statehood bills as they had been studied through the years under the leadership of Bob and the chairman of the committees

in the Senate and the House. The members of the committees in the Senate and the House, after all, are very powerful men and they aren't going to be too much swayed by something that they consider a gimmick in this day and age. What would have been successful a hundred years ago would be something different now.

However, these people did visit or tried to visit every congressmen and senator and this was about all they could do. Write letters to people whom they knew to write their congressmen to persuade them to vote for statehood when it came to the floor. This practically was, in my opinion, the most that could be expected of this Tennessee Plan.

M: Did Senator Bartlett have much contact with them or work with them very much?

B: They had their own office downtown in a building that was then called the Esso Building, which is now gone. They had, probably, daily conferences. They came in for advice and material. After all, the source of the material was in his office.

M: Were they still active in 1957 and 1958?

B: Yes, they were active from the moment of arrival until the moment of passage of the bill.

M: Could you tell me a little bit of what developed concerning Alaska becoming a state before Hawaii, and how this came about? What were the circumstances in that Alaska reached statehood before Hawaii?

B: It boils down to this: we had the votes for Alaska statehood, and the opposing faction decided to do the thing again that had been

successful before: tack the Hawaii Statehood Bill onto the Alaska Statehood Bill. This then would defeat it because the South was against it.

The delegate from Hawaii, Mr. [John] Burns, refused to allow Hawaii statehood to be tacked to Alaska statehood because he knew that this would defeat the bill. If it defeated that bill, it also defeated Hawaii. This meant that he was ruining his reputation at home. As cogent an argument as that was, it still was a very bad political one, but he took this chance of ruining his political career. And he did ruin it for the time being. He was defeated in the first election they had because of it, but of course he has come on to greater things and has come into his own, as he is entitled to. That was a great act of political bravery.

M: How effective in your thinking and in the Senator's thinking was the institution of the constitutional convention and the presentation of the constitution to the Congress before statehood?

B: It was important. The fact that it was a model constitution, accepted by the state, gave credence to the fact that these people knew what they were doing.

M: Did this help speed up acceptance?

B: Yes, I think it's one of the factors that helped. But this was like a snowball rolling; it was coming fast. Pressures were coming in from all over: from clubs, from the Rotary, from the Elks, from all over the country. As I think I told you before, when Bob went to see Sam Rayburn at the beginning of 1958, he practically threw up his

hands and said, "Well, I can't fight you anymore." And that was very significant to Bob. He knew then that statehood was in the bag, you might say.

M: Who was the opposition within the state that was working against you? And why were they? And was it very big?

B: It wasn't very big the last few years. Alaskans became dedicated to statehood. It couldn't have been very big at all, because, to save my soul, I can't name an opponent of statehood, but there were some.

M: In the draft which you have, there was a mention of the salmon industry.

B: Oh, of course, the industry. The salmon industry in Alaska is really located in the state of Washington. It's outside capital--the old story. They come in and they take our resources. And they had a very able attorney who led them and led them very successfully through the maze of all the congressional hearings.

M: Did they have very much support among people living in Alaska?

B: No, but they were able to get a lot of support in Congress.

M: Well, wer'e up to the point of 1958, and of course this was the year. Could you tell me just a little bit about what the Senator's main role and activity was in bringing about the presentation of the statehood bill on the floor of the House? And what went on in the months prior to this?

B: The man who was the chairman of the Interior Committee in the House was a man, Mr. O'Brien, from upper New York State, which you'd think would be opposing vote. But he was dedicated to the fact that Alaska

should have statehood. He worked very hard. Beginning with the constitutional convention, he worked very hard for statehood. And he put in a bill. There were many statehood bills, as you probably know. Bob felt that with his position and power as the chairman of a big committee, that that was the bill that would have the best chance. Actually most of the bills were about the same. I rather think that Bob's and his were about the same. Bob didn't care what name was on that bill, as long as it went through, and he was so grateful to Mr. O'Brien--Obie we called him, he is known throughout Congress as Obie--that they worked together on this. And it was the greatest moment of Mr. O'Brien's life when that bill passed the House. He felt that he had contributed to the making of history. He made several trips to Alaska afterwards, received an honorary degree from the University of Alaska, and keeps very close contact with the state.

M: Did the Senator have any further contact with Rayburn to sort of develop the strategy of how this would go through the House?

B: He talked with Rayburn about it, and Bob said, what if he couldn't get it out of the Rules Committee. Sam Rayburn said, "Leave it to me." They circumvented the Rules Committee and got the bill on the floor. Clair Engle got it on the floor.

M: This was a point of order that was used to get it out of the Rules Committee--

B: Which is used on very infrequent occasions. I should correct this. O'Brien was the subcommittee chairman. Clair Engle was the chairman of the Interior Committee.

M: If this was a possibility of getting it out from behind committees, why hadn't this been used before?

B: It had been tried, but they didn't have the votes on the committee. Erosion occurred to such an extent that they finally had the votes to get it out of committee.

M: While it was going through the House, did the Senator have much contact with Mr. Johnson? Did he in any way help him as far as the tactics of getting this through the House and then its presentation in the Senate?

B: I wouldn't say that he had much contact with Mr. Johnson when the statehood bill was going through the House. He had some meetings with him. It think it was shortly after Edward Murrow's "See It Now" on television sometime in February of 1958 that he went to see Lyndon Johnson to talk to him about it. He asked him if he would issue a press statement, saying that he had talked with Bob about statehood, and would he make any statement at all that wasn't contrary. He didn't need to come out in favor of it. But he felt that he couldn't do this. He said he had always voted against Alaska statehood. Well, of course Bob knew this. He'd voted against it because of his southern constituency. He did advise Bob to blast the Republicans for opposing this, but whether that was done or not, I don't know.

M: I believe you have a copy of a memo that talks about these meetings here, don't you?

B: Yes.

M: Would you like to just read the memo into the record?

B: There's a memo just about this meeting, and if it's all right I will just read it; it would be so much simpler.

M: It will be fine.

B: After the discussion about blasting the Republicans, Bob said that he got down to business and started out by asking Mr. Johnson if it was all right to mention the meeting, and he said it would be better not to because he always voted against it before. And as Bob said, he knew that.

Lyndon Johnson said that a lot of mail was flowing in from Alaska against statehood. This gibes with statements, Bob said, that had been made to him by others, but he had learned that the main correspondent above all who had urged this flow of mail to Johnson was a man by the name of William Prescott Allen, who owned a series of small country newspapers throughout, I think Arkansas, some in Texas, some in Alaska. So the fact that he owned some in Texas would have a great deal of bearing on Lyndon Johnson. He went on to say that he didn't know what he was going to do. He might even find it necessary to vote against the bill, but later he added, maybe what he wanted to do was to act as a midwife in getting the bill to the floor, just a midwife, he said, <u>not</u> a doctor. He was willing finally to do that, Johnson said. He was willing to take the bill to the floor. This of course was great.

Only the night before Johnson had been talking about statehood with Sam Rayburn and said, "You know, Sam is older. He has more

prestige. He was able to come out for statehood, where I can't right now." Johnson said, "I asked him [Rayburn] how it was that he finally did come out for it." Well, Rayburn told Johnson, "Bob just kept after me so long, I finally gave in." Dick Russell, too, had been giving Johnson fits on this particular issue; Dick Russell had opposed statehood consistently all the time.

Near the end of their conversation Bob asked him a principal question, "Lyndon, do you think Alaska will have statehood this year?" His answer was, "No." And in Bob's handwriting below this memo from which I've partially read was added: "Johnson said, 'After all, the hard core of my support is from the South,'" which explained his no.

Those votes were so close that he didn't have them counted, but apparently he was not opposing statehood actively or he would not have acted as a midwife. He would not have brought the bill to the floor. The date of that conversation was February 7, 1958, and it wasn't consummated until June 30, 1958.

During part of February and March, even into April, much of the talk, as I said before, was tacking the Hawaiian bill onto the Alaskan bill, first in the House and then after Alaska statehood had passed the House, it came up in the Senate. Senator Knowland, who was the minority leader said that he believed that it was inadvisable for Congress to take up Alaska statehood legislation without considering Hawaii statehood also. He said that the two bills were discussed at the meeting of Republican legislative leaders with President Eisenhower the day before, and that Mr. Knowland

had informed Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, the Senate Democratic leader, that the Hawaii bill should be called up for Senate consideration immediately following the Alaska bill. If not, he said, a move will be made to add Hawaii to the Alaska bill. This was a direct threat of course, and this is probably what delayed final action for a couple of more months.

M: Did the Senator think that he was going to have more trouble with the House than with the Senate, or was it an equal battle in both houses?

B: We felt we had the votes in the House this time, as long as we didn't have Hawaii statehood tacked on, and we did. We knew that the vote would be close in the Senate. The Senate is unpredictable anyway.

M: Of course it did get past the House and was sent to the Senate and passage followed in five days after several attempts to kill the bill or amend it so that it would be sent back to the House and tied up in committees.

B: That's right.

M: This is really pretty quick action for the Senate.

B: Yes.

M: Which could have tied it up for a much longer time. Did Senator Bartlett have any contact with Mr. Johnson after it passed the House and while it was in the Senate?

B: Oh yes, often. Unfortunately most of the memos are already gone on their way to the Archives, as yours probably are, too. But there's

this one here. Johnson saw to it, as I keep repeating, that the bill was brought to the floor. The vote was taken and Johnson was absent. He was in Texas. But he was recorded in favor of the bill. He didn't need to do that. He could have just been recorded absent, but he recorded himself in favor of the bill, which Bob sincerely hoped for but hardly believed would come to pass. It was a sentimental thing, I suppose you'd say, with him, but it meant a lot to him that Lyndon would do this.

M: Would you like to read some portions of that one?

B: Bob says here, "This is what was so important about the fact that he recorded himself in favor of the bill, although he was called out of town. When he switched, he went the whole route. You and I will never know, but my theory always was that Johnson made all the necessary arrangements to assure the vote's being taken, knowing that it would pass and stated his own position as being in favor of the legislation, and then slipped out of town so his southern colleagues and friends could not hurl too many poisoned arrows at him. I don't know. But I do know that what counts is that he is not only recorded as being in favor of the bill, but as I said in an earlier letter, it would never have come out to the Senate floor for debate and a vote without his consent."

M: Could you tell me a little about some of the tactics as it was on the floor? For instance, there was a threat of a southern filibuster.

B: Many threats.

M: How was this staved off, in your opinion?

B: Well, I think the proponents of statehood were so sincere that they countered the filibuster, and the votes were so close that they overcame it. There was never a time when a southerner was on the floor speaking that there weren't proponents of statehood standing waiting to be heard, as I remember it. Maybe there were a few minutes, but I felt sure that the southerners themselves the last day had given up.

M: Did the Senator talk about or was he aware of any pressure from the White House, from Eisenhower or his staff, regarding this?

B: Yes, there was pressure from the White House. We had a very powerful ally in Secretary of Interior Fred Seaton from Nebraska, who worked around the clock on Alaska statehood, and I'm sure must have been buzzing in President Eisenhower's ear a great deal of the time. He sent many messages to Republican senators.

M: I'd like to have you, if you would, tell me a little about the day, if you can recount the events as you recall them, that the bill passed.

B: It was a beautiful sunny, warm, hot day. There must have been a hundred Alaskans about, maybe more. The galleries were jammed, but the doormen in the galleries were especially gentle with Alaskans and managed to find them seats, sometimes step-seats, but they managed to keep them in the galleries pretty well.

The interest locally was a thousand per cent greater that I expected it to be. The man from the street, I didn't think would come to see this, even though it was an historic occasion, that maybe here was the making of a brand new state, the first since 1913. So I

was surprised at that. But as I recall, there just wasn't an empty seat in the galleries all day long, and it was hard to keep them quiet. You know the rule: you can't write, you can't read, you can't talk, you can't lean over the edge. The doormen had their problems keeping these anxious visitors.

M: How early did you go?

B: I think it opened at twelve. There was a real tense atmosphere. I think everybody thought "This is it." There were several tries at votes during the day and many quorum calls, and each one would raise the pitch of excitement. Not only in the galleries, but you felt it on the floor too. The men that would occupy the chair would gavel the noise down time and time again, but with very little success. As the day wore on and the time allotments grew shorter and shorter, the excitement grew more and more. Finally the vote was taken, as I recall, about six o'clock at night. As the last vote was called, the people in the gallery just rose as one person; this is unheard of, of course, but nature has to have its way.

The senators were just as excited. They roamed about. I don't remember seeing any senator act disgruntled on the floor of the Senate. I do remember very distinctly almost every senator coming up to Bob, the southerners among them. Many of the southerners were some of Bob's best friends. This is one of the things that exists there. Maybe your philosophy differs, but your friendship and respect for a man is just as great as if it didn't differ. I can remember Senator Russell coming up to Bob and putting his

hand on his shoulder. I don't know what he said, but it looked as if he said, "You've done a good job," or something like that. He said, "I thought we might make it." So apparently he thought up till the last minute that there was a chance that Alaska statehood would be defeated. These southerners who worked hardest and most effectively against statehood were among Bob's best friends in the Senate. He served with them on the Armed Services Committee, and they were very close friends. He left the Armed Services Committee for Appropriations.

M: What year did he leave the Armed Services Committee?

B: I would think it would be 1962.

M: I just wasn't sure on that. Was there much of a victory celebration that night after the passage of the bill?

B: Everybody was pretty excited, of course. We didn't know what to do about it, so we streamed out of the Senate. Somebody said, "We really ought to go down to the Little Chapel," of which I had never heard, "in the Capitol." So somebody led us all down to the Little Chapel, which is just off the Rotunda, and we went in there--these sentimental Alaskans--and sat for a few moments of silence.

[We then] left and went to Bob's office, where several lines were open connected with Alaska. Every Alaskan newspaper had an open line. Bob and other people were on these lines trying to tell everything that had happened. The moment that the news reached Alaska, enormous bonfires in all the big and little cities were lighted. Of course six o'clock here was one o'clock in the afternoon there.

M: Did Senator Bartlett have much contact with Mr. Johnson afterwards?

B: Yes.

M: There would have been the arrangements and the elections and all the things like that all going on.

B: Bob had a deep sense of gratitude to then-Senator Johnson. As you probably know, he supported him for his drive for the presidency the first time out and worked for him. Bob had been a hard-working delegate; in many ways the very fact that he didn't have a vote made his work harder than if he had. So when he was well enough acquainted with certain people in the Congress, he made a greater effort than some to do what he could to help them in the effort to repay their kindness. He felt that Senator Johnson was a master strategist. They had a mutual attraction, [though they were] quite different men of course. Bob was a much quieter type of person and Lyndon was more flamboyant. But Lyndon came to rely on Bob almost wholly as far as any of Bob's Alaska legislation was concerned. Bob always felt that he went out of his way to help him.

M: There must have been many things to do to actually effect statehood involved? Did Mr. Johnson help in any of these matters?

B: He helped to see that that very important bill was passed. He supported Bob in this bill that might have been hard to pass. It was a bill set up to make a federal arrangement for appropriations throughout a ten-year period over and above that granted other states, because this state was so far behind financially the other states. It had been neglected from the federal area. That ten years

is up now. We're on our own completely. This was a difficult bill to pass because the argument would be, "Well, they wanted statehood so that they could get their own resources and collect their own taxes and so forth and so on, so why do they still need extra help over the other states?" Well, Lyndon Johnson could understand why they needed extra help, that they had been a poverty-stricken state too long to come back overnight. He was Bob's great support on that.

M: Mrs. Bartlett, of course your husband and you returned to Alaska and he was one of the senators elected, Senator Gruening being the other senator. I believe I read that they tossed a coin to decide who would be the senior senator.

B: That's right.

M: Could you tell me just a little bit about Senator Gruening's activity involved with statehood?

B: He was an appointed governor of the territory; he was appointed by Roosevelt in December of 1939. He came up to Alaska then in the spring of 1940. An appointive governor is of course a figurehead of the Department of Interior, and it must be very frustrating. We did have an elective legislature. At this time he had come direct from the Bureau of Territories and Island Possessions, so that Alaska wasn't quite unknown to him. He was horrified that so little federal funds had been granted Alaska. He talked at great length of the colonialism of Alaska--that we were merely a colony; that we ought to go out and dump the tea just as they did in Boston. He tried to better conditions, but it was impossible. It was comparable to

Washington, D.C. There's nothing really important that you can do alone.

So four years went by. Bob had been secretary of Alaska, appointed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, which was the same as lieutenant governor. He felt that he had served long enough in that particular job, there was nothing much left to do. The delegate in Congress at that time, Tony Dimond, accepted a federal judgeship and suggested that Bob run for his seat in Congress, so Bob decided to do that. And as I think I told you before, he came out with this plank: Statehood for Alaska. This didn't meet with much approval until some four years later. Senator Gruening did not really support statehood until four years later when the people passed a referendum.

M: Did he have much activity directly in that period of 1958? Was he able to be influential in the passage of these statehood bills?

B: I'm sure every Alaskan that was in Washington was influential. Every Alaskan would have some contact with somebody who would have contact with some congressmen or senator who would speak his piece. And the pressures on these men must have been enormous. As I look back on it, it must have been worse than the Freedom March. (Interruption)

M: Mrs. Bartlett, you have already mentioned that he was in favor of Johnson's candidacy in 1960. Was he very surprised at Mr. Johnson's accepting the vice presidential spot with John Kennedy?

B: Yes. He wasn't sorry, because here was a friend in a high spot, he felt.

M: Did he campaign for the Democratic ticket, and did he foresee that the JFK-LBJ ticket would have any trouble in Alaska.

B: Yes. I think he set up the campaign. He, too, was campaigning in 1960. Because he drew a two-year term, he was running for a full term. So they were all running.

M: How was the ticket received in Alaska?

B: Very well. Alaska was a Democratic state. Something went wrong, as you know. Kennedy lost by I think it was one vote, and that was Alaska's. Kennedy lost Alaska. The weekend before the election, the Sunday before election on Tuesday, the Nixons came to Anchorage. It took three days to be sure of the vote in Alaska, and many of us felt that that trip was what turned that trick. Many people who were in charge of the campaign in the smaller and half-small towns didn't really work too hard at the election because it was a foregone conclusion that the ticket would win big in Alaska. So that was another reason they lost for Kennedy.

M: Was there any opposition to Mr. Kennedy's Roman Catholicism in Alaska?

B: Yes. There was very vicious, uneducated opposition in the far-flung places of Alaska, not much in the cities or the well-populated villages. But the smaller villages out in the sub-Arctic and way to the west, where there are a lot of off-beat missionary sects who had their radio stations and had very close rapport with the natives in their villages, fought the Catholicism issue very successfully.

M: Did Senator Bartlett have any considerations regarding the developments of the campaign with Mr. Johnson?

B: No, I don't think so. Senator Kennedy opened his campaign in Alaska because, as you remember, the title of the campaign was "The New Frontier." So that's where he officially opened it. Because he opened his campaign there, Senator Johnson was too busy in his part of the world. He didn't come to Alaska.

M: Did Senator Bartlett have very many occasions to see Mr. Johnson while he was vice president?

B: He probably had fewer occasions to see him on particular legislation than he did before when he was in the Senate.

M: Did you socially have much contact with the Johnsons?

B: Very little except that there wasn't anybody in the Senate that didn't feel very close to the Johnsons, that the Johnsons didn't entertain somehow, sometime. You had a very warm feeling to them, as you would to the people next door.

Mrs. Johnson, I think, was probably the first vice presidential wife that was as casual in her entertaining of the wives and who did as much of it and kept as close contact. The fact that of course her husband had been in Congress so long brought her closer to all of us. She knew almost all of us by our first names. And as you know, she has an enormous vitality. She never forgot somebody who was sick or had trouble. I especially know this because I was laid up for two months in traction, and I don't know how many times she called me on the phone. This means a real special amount of energy

for a person in her position, because if she did this for me she must have done this for many, many people. It gives you a depth of warmth for that person that you will never forget. You don't write those things off.

M: How did the Senator feel about Mr. Johnson's talents being in the vice presidential spot? Did he think that he was happy in that position?

B: That's a leading question. Of course his talents weren't used as much as they should have been. And of course his talents weren't really in that direction.

M: Did the Senator see any indication of his frustration in the job?

B: No, I don't think so. Everybody was so pleased that he took his job in the spirit in which he took it. He was serving his country, and he was serving his country the way he thought he was supposed to serve it, whether he liked it or not. Maybe he did like it, but it was certainly different.

M: Did Senator Bartlett have any conversations or meetings with Mr. Johnson right after the assassination?

B: I wouldn't think so, right after the assassination. I was not here. I was in Alaska, and I didn't come back for at least a month. I would think that that first month must have been a month of horror, trying to reorganize a government and keep it going along the lines that had been laid down by Kennedy. And this was President Johnson's choice. He picked up a program that had been blueprinted, and it was very obvious, it seems to me, that he was determined to see that that

program was completed. He had the ability to do that. He had a rapport with Congress, and he did a very successful job.

M: There was a period there, in 1964 and 1965, when there was a tremendous amount of legislation going through.

B: Enormous.

M: And of course the inevitable comparison was that not very much legislation had been able to get through during Jack Kennedy's administration. What did your husband attribute this to?

B: Lack of rapport with the White House and the Senate and the House. And after all, the Senate lost a very powerful leader when it lost Lyndon Johnson. There'll never be a leader as strong as he was in the Senate.

M: Did the Senator think there was much of a question about the 1964 election, the national election between Goldwater and Johnson?

B: No.

M: In February of 1964, Senator Bartlett backed Mansfield in a warning about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. I believe you told me off the tape that he, too, had already spoken out on this, even earlier.

B: Yes.

M: Could you tell me a little bit about that, and how he came to think that way?

B: He felt that it was wrong from the beginning, and he read and studied rather fully from the time of Kennedy on the Vietnam crisis. He always felt that we had no place for American soldiers on Asian soil.

M: Did Senator Bartlett talk with Mr. Johnson about it?

B: If he did, to my knowledge, the only time that he did was at a party at the White House when a group of them were talking it out in the very beginning of the discussions, before anybody was labeled a dove or a hawk or anything else. It was just in the very beginning.

N: This would have been in 1964?

B: Yes. I'm sure that they never had any conferences on that. Bob took no active stand--I mean he didn't give speeches on the Vietnam situation. He figured it was well enough covered by those who were.

M: What did the Senator say about this conversation at the White House regarding Vietnam--this one occasion you just mentioned?

B: I would just have to repeat that he felt very strongly that the United States should not engage in any way on Asian soil that would take our men and supplies to Asia.

M: He just expressed this opinion to the President?

B: Yes. As I remember it, there were a half a dozen of them standing in the corner talking about it. They talked for a long time. The party was growing thin in number before they gave up and we went home. This made no difference in their association, as far as I know.

M: Their relationship didn't change at all all through this period?

B: No. The relationship was just as warm at the end as it was at the beginning. I'm sure that Lyndon Johnson understood that some people had to see it one way and some people had to see it another. I am sure that he resented the attack made on him. Who wouldn't?

But Bob was not one of those who made any attack on him.

M: Did the Senator ever talk about getting what has become known as the Lyndon Johnson "treatment," his persuasive talents applied in order to get legislation passage, to change the Senator's vote on something?

B: Oh, yes.

M: Can you think of some occasion and what the Senator's reactions were?

B: No, I can't. I can remember many telephone calls at the house here, though. I would say that Bob would not always be adamant; that there would be occasions when he would change. Often he would refuse to even discuss a vote until he was completely positive how he felt about it, but once he had come to this point, hardly anything would change him. Alaskans were troubled because he so often voted against cloture and voted with the South. They said, "Of course, Lyndon Johnson probably had something to do with that." That wasn't true at all! Senator Hayden advised Bob when he came to Congress that he came from the state with the smallest population, a minority state, and he said to Bob that he would have to vote for minority rights. That meant, in this particular case, going with the South.

The civil rights area, you see, had nothing to do with Alaska. So in Alaska this vote of Bob's was not very popular until he explained, "What if the shoe were on the other foot! What if a vote would come up that would affect us, as we thought, adversely?" Then as a minority we would want to be heard, and we would want to filibuster.

M: Did your husband talk very much about there being a lot of White House pressure to get some of these legislative packages through?

B: No. Actually most legislative packages that got to the floor were on the liberal side.

M: In January 1966 he was among the fifteen Democrats who sent a letter to Lyndon Johnson urging him to halt the bombing in North Vietnam. How did this come about, and what was Mr. Johnson's reaction to it?

B: This is the same group that opposed the Vietnamese War. This just followed his feeling that we had no business there. I don't know what Mr. Johnson's reaction to that letter was. I don't remember. I would say offhand that he didn't especially appreciate it. That was another time when I was in Alaska so I don't [remember]. It was just logical that Bob would be on that letter, because that's the way he felt about it. He was just always against any involvement in Asia.

M: Did he feel, as our involvement escalated, that he had to speak out more strongly?

B: No, because he didn't think it did any good. He thought that we were committed. He was afraid that perhaps we had committed the sin that Eisenhower warned us against--that we had become a tool of the Pentagon.

M: During this period Mr. Johnson's popularity was of course going down. In 1966 your husband was up for re-election. Did his association with Mr. Johnson cause any election problems?

B: Oh, no.

M: He didn't make any effort to disassociate himself with the name?

B: Oh, no. No, in Alaska everybody knew that Bob had come out for Johnson almost before anybody else, and it was an accepted fact up there that he was a Johnson man through thick and thin. He didn't agree with him on Vietnam, but that was all.

M: Was your husband very surprised by his March 31 withdrawal?

B: Yes.

M: Did he try to talk with him about it?

B: No. I think not. I know he didn't try to talk to him about it. It was one of these things that was done.

M: Did he think he might be up for a possible draft in the 1968 convention?

B: No.

M: Did he think that Vietnam was chiefly the reason that he declined to run again?

B: Yes. Vietnam and the reception of the people of the newcomers on the political scene, that he felt that he had done what he could do and people were changing and their allegiance was going to the opposition.

M: Do you mean by that the opposition party, or other opponents?

B: No, other opponents. That the party was breaking up. He needed a solid party to be elected.

M: Then in retrospect he thought he might not have a successful re-election if he did stand for it, did get renominated.

B: It would depend on the Republican opponent.

M: During this period, and with such a strong president, did Senator Bartlett feel that that the Congress had lost or declined any in power and in prestige?

B: That's a terrible thing to ask a senator's wife! (Laughter) I think that he did feel that the Senate was not operating as efficiently and as honestly as it should. He felt that they were wasting much more time than they'd ever wasted before. The drive seemed to be gone, in comparison to the first few years that he was in the Senate. I think we all feel that way a little bit.

M: Did he think this was more because of the organization of the Senate or from public discontent, or was it emanging from White House antagonism?

M: From all sources. Everything had a little bit to contribute to it.

M: I just have a few rather concluding questions about what your husband thought about the Johnson Administration. That's kind of a big, broad question.

B: The Johnson Administration, he felt, completed the program that the Democrats wanted in 1960, and they got it off to a flying start. It deteriorated the second term, probably because of the escalation of the Vietnamese War, and he was critical of that. He felt that we needed much more work to be done at home than we were getting done; that we had passed a program that could achieve this, but somehow we had slipped back a few feet for every foot we went forward. He was always a little shaky as far as the military was concerned. He feared military influence in this country. He thought it was much too great, always felt that.

M: Did your husband ever remark about any evidence of the friction and growing split between the Kennedy and Johnson people or mention to you incidents that supported it?

B: I can't specify. We felt sorry to see some of the fine intellectuals leaving the Johnson Administration, but Bob always felt that the man who was the boss had absolutely to pick his own workers. They were the ones who gave him their all, their loyalty, their understanding, so he was never critical of the separation there.

M: What did the Senator see as Mr. Johnsons' strengths and his weaknesses?

B: His persuasiveness, his complete mastery of detail, his wonderful memory of detail, his compassionate regard for human nature. What his weaknesses were? Of course the President must have had weaknesses. Everybody has weaknesses. But I think perhaps the only one that I ever heard Bob mention was that he tried to do too much himself, didn't delegate quite as much as he could. He worked too much around the clock, and there were too many phases of government that he could have let others handle completely. That has been said before.

M: How do you and did your husband think that Mr. Johnson would be regarded by history?

B: He will be regarded by history, I think Bob would say, in a dual role, as the man who passed the greatest amount of liberal legislation that had ever been passed, or maybe since Roosevelt, for the betterment of the people and the country as a whole, and that he did make a mistake about Vietnam. And that is yet to be proved.

M: We've talked about a lot of things, Mrs. Bartlett. I don't have any further questions. Is there anything that you would like to

add to anything that we've discussed, or is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to put in?

B: I'd like to say this: The Johnson Administration has certainly been the most interesting administration in my twenty-four years in Washington. And that's saying a lot for me, because fourteen years of that I was wound up in our personal fight for statehood to such a extent that I wasn't fully aware, I think I wasn't fully aware of every facet of legislation and government that was going on. It was certainly a much more interesting administration than the two preceding administrations were, that is, the Eisenhower Administrations. I speak, when I said that, of the Johnson Administration and Kennedy Administration more or less as one because the Kennedy Administration was so short.

M: I want to thank you very much. It has been very interesting.

B: It has been very nice.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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