INTERVIEWEE: Kenneth M. Birkhead (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWER: T. H. Baker

DATE : January 10, 1970

B: This is the interview with Kenneth M. Birkhead. Mr. Birkhead, to begin with, when did you first meet Mr. Johnson?

Bi: I believe I first met him in 1948 when I was in Washington working with the White House and with Mr. Truman in the 1948 campaign.

Ba: This is when you were associate director of public relations for the National Committee?

Bi: That's correct. That was the title which basically hid the fact that there were a group of us set aside who wrote Mr. Truman's speeches for the campaign. I think at that time I met Mr. Johnson briefly when he was here for some trip. Really I first got to know him in 1951 when I came here to work with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in the House.

Ba: Before you go into that let me ask one question. In 1948 did you have any connection or hear anything about Mr. Johnson's campaign that year? That was the year he won that controversial Democratic primary.

Bi: The so-called landslide? We heard much about it. If you were associated with politics, and particularly Democratic politics, you kept your eyes and ears open on many campaigns and were interested in that campaign. But I didn't really know anything more about it actually than pretty much what I had read in the newspapers and the kind of gossip you picked up around the Democratic National Committee and the White House. I had no personal knowledge of it.

Ba: Do you know if Mr. Truman interested himself in that campaign?

Bi: I can't say the degree. Mr. Truman was a political animal. He was

interested in everything that was going on. I can't honestly say no. I was not so involved, or had no responsibility in that area, so I really am not aware to the degree he did.

Ba: In the early 1950's you were with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee--

Bi: After the 1948 campaign I went back to the University of Missouri and got my master's degree; came back here briefly and worked for the Democratic National Committee in 1950 doing some research work. Then Tom [Thomas C.] Hennings [Jr.], who was running for the Senate in Missouri, asked me to come back--Missouri happens to be my home state--asked me to come back and work in his campaign. I, in a sense, went back and was sort of an executive director of his campaign for the Senate; served from August through November. I came back here and went to work after that with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee as an assistant to the director. The director then was Cap Harding.

Basically I ran a little operation, a part of the campaign committee which we sometimes called the "Minute Man" group. I worked with members of the House to prepare for them statements which they could use under the one minute rule on the House floor each day, and these were essentially political type statements. It was during this period, in early 1951, that I began from time to time to see Mr. Johnson. I think probably the time when he began to be aware that there was a Birkhead even in existence. I didn't have close relationships with him because he was on the Senate side and my work was primarily in the House side. But eventually, for some reason--and I've never been sure exactly what--when Earle Clements was named--.

Maybe it grew out of the fact that I also about this time did some work on Senator [Joseph R.] McCarthy. The Administration was looking

for somebody to put together material--background of Joseph McCarthy--and I was sent out to Wisconsin. I spent a couple of months in Wisconsin wandering from city to city, and going through material out there, and interviewing a lot of people and was--

Ba: This is an interesting point, sir. From where in the Administration did the request for this kind of work come?

Bi: Like sometimes you don't know exactly. I think it came directly from the White House itself. At least part of the request, I know, came from the White House itself. The State Department was worried about--worried is a bad word--they felt that they didn't have enough information about McCarthy--background kind of information. This was not an investigation to go into his personal life, but more his public record, and who he was, and where he came from, and how he got there. It was clear by this time, in late 1950 and early 1951 obviously, that McCarthy was "not going to go away," and so information was sought.

I had a chance to look at his military record and a lot of things like this. Sometimes I didn't ask questions as to why I was able to dig up certain information, or why certain information was made available to me. I just did it. I guess that I would have to say that a guy named Dave Lloyd, who was a member of the White House staff--an administrative assistant to President Truman, who is now dead; Dave is now dead--was the one who sort of gave me my orders and suggested what I do.

Ba: And it was to him that you gave your report?

Bi: Basically. I worked a lot with Adrian Fisher, better known as Butch Fisher, who was General Counsel of the State Department, and with Ed Morgan, who is now an attorney, who had been--I'd have to refresh my recollection. I don't remember whether he actually was then, but he

had been counsel of the so-called [Millard E.] Tydings Committee which had studied the McCarthy matter when it had originally been brought before the Senate.

I did not have much real contact with Mr. Johnson at this point. In fact I don't remember actually ever having a direct contact with Mr. Johnson in connection with this effort, although obviously he was assuming leadership in the Senate. I'm sure that during the course of this he was interested in Mr. McCarthy, who was a phenomenon in the Senate as well as in the nation at the time. I may well have. I just don't specifically remember at this point.

I don't know who this material was going to in many instances. It was quite voluminous. A lot of it was not very valuable. Some of it was information probably that was not generally known. I don't think there was anything very startling.

Ba: None of the sort of thing that could be used as a weapon?

Bi: Not really, no. I don't mean to sound like the great "I am," only maybe because I had the chance to do it, maybe a lot of facts were pulled together in some kind of form for the first time, or nearly the first time; although there was an awful lot of material in being at the time. McCarthy had been of course active since February of 1950, and an awful lot of material had been dug up. Maybe it had not been put together in as much detail.

The only thing I remember out of it may be was this story about--and this shows that it wasn't tremendously significant--but McCarthy had received a medal during the war. In the course of looking through a lot of material, it became pretty clear that he had received his medal for an injury he had received when they were in one of the ceremonies they produced when you crossed the Equator. He had been on

a troop ship going to the South Pacific and had apparently--it was never quite clear--but apparently had fallen over a bucket, and had cut his leg fairly badly. He had to have some treatment; and in the course of this somehow he ended up receiving a medal. It was this kind of little background but really nothing of any major significance.

McCarthy was really sort of a cipher in Wisconsin until he started his campaign. It became quite clear from some of this that he had been in a sense a one-man operation and had run a one-man campaign and had wandered up and down the backroads of Wisconsin seeing everybody he could see. Because [Robert M.] LaFollette [Jr.], who was his opponent, had not come home--had sort of moved to Washington and forgotten he was a Senator from Wisconsin--the people voted for the person they saw. This was Joe McCarthy. He was just a vigorous young guy who knocked on most of the doors in Wisconsin and who won. But it maybe filled out some of the holes in his total life picture, but there was nothing very--

Ba: Was any of it used in the campaign of 1952?

Bi: A lot of it was used in many ways. I used to see things that obviously had come from this that were used. I worked for awhile quite closely with Senator [William] Benton [Democrat] of Connecticut when he took on the job of questioning Joe McCarthy's position as a Senator. A lot of the material was used then, and I'm sure in other ways.

Frankly, and despite the fact that it filled in lots of holes and I could tell people where he was on a specific day--which maybe nobody knew before, the place he was on a specific day wasn't very important. It sort of filled out his life history, but it really didn't add anything to what was not already known, because considerable was known about him. There were lots of rumors about things, and part of my job

was checking out lots of rumors. I wandered all the way through the morgue at the Milwaukee Journal in Milwaukee; the Madison Capital Times in Madison. I interviewed fifty-seventy-five people in the State of Wisconsin who theoretically had knowledge about various phases of McCarthy's activities; and got a full picture. But it didn't add much to what was already known about him.

Ba: Did the knowledge that you were doing this kind of thing get back to McCarthy? It's conceivable in those days that that might have been dangerous for you.

Bi: It did. And, interestingly, Joe McCarthy in person--when you were not dealing politics with him--was a very pleasant guy. He knew. And when I came back to Washington after I had been in Wisconsin, I happened to see him once. I had not gone to see him, but I was walking through the Capitol and stopped to say hello to a friend of mine who--. At this point McCarthy walked up--I remember this instance--and the friend introduced me to McCarthy.

McCarthy said, "Oh, boy, you've had an interesting couples of months, haven't you!"

I said, "Well, I guess so." He said, "Gee, I wish you would come to see me some time and tell me about myself." Through the years he remembered. I used to see him quite often when I moved in 1952 over to the Senate side, and he was almost always friendly. I'm never aware that he did a thing about it.

Now, he knew that I thought he was a real danger to the country, but he was just as friendly as he possibly could be. Other people used to tell me that people he had some question about, or might have some reason for disliking, he was equally friendly with them. But he was certainly just as friendly with me as it was possible to be, and always

greeted me with a big hello and always offered to take me out to dinner or here, there, or some place else. I have no idea that it ever back-gracked.

No, it was obvious he would know about me, because I interviewed actually friends of his at the time in his home area up north of Madison. I had not gone incognito or tried to keep people from knowing about it. I just went out to collect as much information as I could.

Ba: That brings us up to 1952 when you moved over to the office of the Democratic Whip in the Senate.

Bi: And by that time, I think obviously Senator Johnson knew who I was. We had had some passing contact. I had never worked on any project for him or any directly with him, but I was around a considerable part of the time, and he began to know who I was. Although I came over to work for Earle Clements of Kentucky, actually, a good part of the time I was over there I was actually on one of Mr. Johnson's payrolls. So at that time I began to see him quite often.

Ba: We might clarify this here for the record. In 1952 Mr. Johnson became the Whip?

Bi: Yes.

Ba: What was Mr. Clement's position?

Bi: I came over actually after Mr. Johnson had become the Leader in early 1953--I'm wrong on my dates--when he became the Leader and Mr. Clements had become the Whip, wait a minute. I've bounced around so much. I know, Mr. Johnson was the Whip. Mr. Clements had been made chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. I came over originally from the House side as staff director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Now, I'm getting my years right.

Ba: But that's a pretty fluid arrangement, and this put you in contact with both Mr. Clements and Mr. Johnson.

Bi: Yes. Mr. Johnson was moving up as the Leader in the Senate. Obviously he was much concerned with the 1952 election and how well we did, etc. I had actually come over as the staff director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

It was Mr. Johnson, I think, as much as anybody's hope to try to make the Senate Campaign Committee a more meaningful operation. It had in a sense in the years up to that time been sort of a group that had been hastily put together in election years and then had died down to maybe one person between times, who sort of answered the phone occasionally--or if you wanted to call up, they could tell you who was up for re-election next time, but not much more than that. He wanted to make it into a going operation.

Ba: Did he tell you this in so many words?

Bi: He told me this in so many words, but my main direction of course came from Senator Clements. We tried at that time to begin to put some meaning into it.

Ba: Did Mr. Johnson offer any suggestions as to how to go about this, what to do?

Bi: He felt a weakness in material--not so much for a sitting Senator running for re-election, because they had facilities and they had the government itself. They had their own records, their own staff, etc. He was mainly concerned with those people running against sitting Republicans, that they had no place in Washington where they could call and ask questions and expect to get some real consideration. They had no place in Washington. We acted in a sense sometimes as sort of an office for people who were running against sitting Republicans. He felt that this was something we should provide specifically. I remember shortly after I came over he gave me quite a lecture on this; that he

wanted us--it was pretty much me at that point, when we began to build a little staff--but he wanted this to be a continuing thing. He wanted me to be on the end of that phone for anybody that called in, and that I was to devote my efforts to trying to help these people out in the field in the States who were running and didn't have a Washington base, really.

Ba: How did it work out? Were you able to build a fairly effective service?

Bi: Yes. I think so. At least to the degree that we provided, I think, more than just possible financial help. To some degree the Senate Campaign Committees in the past had, as I say, more or less been put together suddenly in an election year. To some degree they've been not much more than a possible source of financial contributions, or the possible guides to where some financial contributions might be.

For example, in 1952 we started to put together for each of the incumbent Republicans who were running for re-election in a meaningful form--it had sort of haphazardly been kept, but in a meaningful form--the voting record of each of the Republicans, as much material as we could about what they had said in Congress and in Washington about all and various sundry issues. Out of this voting record eventually evolved a system which is now kept in the Majority Leader's office--a voting record on each member of Congress, but particularly useful to Democrats obviously to identify how an incumbent Republican may have voted on issues.

We tried to put this in form that was useful to members. Sometimes in the past when it had been done, some great voluminous mass of material had been sent out to Democratic candidates running against incumbent Republicans--and I know; I've been on the receiving end, and I had been as recently as 1950 when I was running Tom Hennings' campaign. I had

gotten some from Washington, and it was just really sort of useless because it was a great mess of things not very well identified as to what it was, difficult to follow, sometimes just clippings from the Congressional Record with great lengthy speeches that somebody maybe had made on the farm program which could have been useful in Missouri. But when you're running a campaign you don't have time to sit down and wade through this mass of material to find out what is useful.

We would very often give them a full speech, but we'd give them a covering memorandum saying that Senator Smith--here's a speech he made on agriculture; these are the key points that he made. And the guy had both. He could glance through this if they were concerned about agriculture, and pick up pretty quickly what Senator Smith had been saying on agriculture. If he wanted to get into more depth, it was there.

We tried to limit the mass of this material sometimes. It's easy to collect material about what a Senator says, but it isn't very important to have great parts of it concerned with every time there's a--. You know, Senators tend, as other members of Congress tend, to make speeches on every national holiday which somebody prepares for them--. Well, this is not very useful to a guy running against him. So we tried to eliminate this kind of extraneous material, and boil it down to the key things, the material that will likely be an issue. We also tried to provide the material about the Democratic position on various issues. We provided the voting record, and we provided much of this on small cards that actually you can carry in your pocket or carry very simply when you're campaigning out in the field. So we tried to do some things like this. Mr. Johnson was aware of all of them and generally pretty much felt that we started along the direction that he felt we should be going along to be helpful.

Ba: Did he actively participate in any of this work with the campaign?

Bi: In the research things--not himself personally directly so much. I used to get comments from him in passing at times. He'd say, "I'm not sure you've put together very good material about Senator X." Or he'd remind me of something. He'd say, "You know, you ought to get to that guy running against Senator X out there, that time he did such-and-such." Maybe I'd gotten some to him, but I hadn't necessarily realized its importance, so I would get this out to him. He was much interested in the voting record thing. I think it's safe to say he was more concerned with the fund-raising activities--trying to help the members in their Washington contacts, potential sources of funds for the campaign--than for material.

Ba: Did he have ready access to possible sources of finance?

Bi: In the 1952 campaign I didn't work too much in finances. I was more working in getting material together, trying to broaden the scope or the increasing impact of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and so I'm not sure. I know that Mr. Johnson's contact with labor was often helpful, and he was a conduit to this. I know there were other people who wanted to contribute. There are a lot of people that don't want to contribute to the national committee, but do want to help individual members. I'm sure many of those were in touch with Mr. Johnson, and he was helpful to members in this effort. I know he was in contact with some members, and particularly non-incumbents running against Republicans, to try to help them.

Ba: How did you merge the work of this Senatorial committee with the Democratic National Committee and the parties in the States? Did you run into difficulties, rivalries, jealousies?

Bi: This was always a problem. I had never been merged very well in the

past. There had always been competition for funds--mainly for funds--between the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (which is the counterpart in the House) which was better organized and was a continuing committee, had a continuing staff through the years, and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Comittee.

So that there was competition in the State. There was always a limited amount of money available for any campaign. There was competition.

We did not do a great job, I don't think, in 1952. We had probably better relationships with the House committee because I had just left there and come over to the Senate, so we had a relationship. I had also been at the National Committee and at least knew the people in the National Committee and knew a lot of the people that were associated with the Stevenson campaign in 1952. So the fact--not because I was anything special but just that I was physically in the Senate Campaign Committee and had these other contacts and knew these people there tended to be more coordination but it too often tended to be after the fact. When we had done something we'd call somebody and tell them, and the same with them. But at least, probably, I guess you can say that we knew more of what was going on in the other committees. Whether there was anything special about it, I doubt it.

Ba: In those days there were some continuing arguments between Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson as the Congressional leaders and the National Committee over policy and the direction of the Democratic party.

Bi: That came later I think, really. Because, see, at that time in 1952 still, the President was in the White House. There were some arguments later in which I got involved. But at this point, in 1952, Truman was still in the White House. He was very close to Mr. Rayburn so that

there was less conflict. There was some conflict with the National Committee because Steve Mitchell came in as chairman and many new people came in to the National Committee. These were not people that were particularly well-known on the Hill. In the days of Mr. Truman, even at one time when you'd had one of the members of the Senate--[J. Howard] McGrath [Democrat] of Rhode Island--as chairman of the National Committee, of course you had much closer ties. But there was a new crew.

I remember right after the convention in Chicago in 1952 a group of us went down to Springfield to meet with Mr. [Adlai] Stevenson and his staff. Mike [Michael J.] Kirwan [D. Ohio], who was chairman of the House campaign committee, and Earle Clements, who was chairman of the Senate campaign committee, and a couple of the other--Mr. Johnson was not there, but there were a couple of other members of the Congress along. There were about thirty-thirty-five people. This was really a case of Earle Clements and Mike Kirway having to meet all these people. These were not people that they knew. This was a whole brand new bunch of politicians. We spent about three days there in Springfield sort of plotting out the campaign. A day of that three days was sort of spent with the Congressional people, fencing with the others until they learned who they were and what their backgrounds were and what their interests were, etc. But you had a whole new crew beginning with Stevenson himself and Steve Mitchell as the chairman, and Clayton Firtchey, and others like this. So you did have a different situation than maybe you'd had sometimes in the past. The Stevenson group was not a well-known group among the Congressional people in Washington. So we went through the 1952 campaign.

Ba: Did Mr. Johnson take an active part in that campaign?

Bi: I was so busy in my little part of it that my contact with him was

limited. My major contact during that campaign was with the National Committee; with Earle Clements; and with specific people running against incumbent Republicans. I didn't have a great deal of contact with him. Very frankly I think the guy that probably had more contact with him during that campaign is Bobby Baker.

Ba: After the campaign while you were still working with the Senate committee there, did you see much of Mr. Johnson as the Leader of the Senate?

Bi: As the Leader, yes. Because after the campaign and beginning in 1953, I began to, in a sense--. Well, this came about when Mr. Clements was named whip, and of course at that point Minority Whip. I became, in a sense, his assistant. Somebody asked me the other day about this, and I can't remember, but actually I became officially the assistant to the Whip at some point, and I don't remember when it was; but for all practical purposes I was acting as the assistant to the Whip. So at that point I began to have practically daily contact with Mr. Johnson or his office--you know, not always with him, with Walter Jenkins, George Reedy, etc.--the guys that were in his office, John Connally, etc. But at that point, beginning in 1953, I began to have nearly daily contact with him. This was to help carry out in a sense Mr. Clements' responsibilities as Whip--vote-counting, etc.

Ba: That made you in effect a part of the famous Johnson network in the Senate, I guess?

Bi: I guess in a sense it did. I remember on Inauguration Day in 1953. We were all sort of "dejected," I guess, and we didn't know what to do. I'm not including Mr. Johnson in this so much, but this was Clements and some others. One of us--I don't remember who it was--said, "Why don't we go up on the roof of the Senate Office Building and watch the parade?" So we got a bunch of chairs, and we all went up on the roof of the Senate Office Building and sat up there and watched the parade.

Ba: Mr. Johnson, too?

Bi: In my remembrance--this is what I was trying to recall--I swear I think he came up for awhile; and we brought a table up and a little bit of liquor. It wasn't too bad a day. It wasn't a bitterly cold day. In fact from my remembrance it was a reasonably warm, little overcast. I think it never rained, but it was reasonably warm. Before the end of the afternoon--if you remember 1952 was one of those parades that was going to last for two hours, and it went on for eight or ten hours, just endlessly. We didn't make the whole parade, but I remember we had a great time. My remembrance is that Mr. Johnson came up for awhile and we talked a little bit about "nobody ought to be dejected, but we ought to get going now." Although there were an awful lot of the Democrats who--I remember Theodore Francis Green [D. R.I.], who was the Senator from Rhode Island, I saw him shortly after the Senate reconvened one day, and I said to him: "How are you feeling, Senator?"

He said: "I'm just feeling great."

I said, "That's wonderful."

He said, "Yes. No responsibility." With this he walked off down the hall. There were some that felt that, but not Mr. Johnson. He thought that we had a real responsibility to organize, but yet a constructive opposition.

Ba: He started right then to whip the Democrats into shape?

Bi: He started immediately to put them into shape. There were a lot of them who felt that the Democrats ought to oppose everything the Republicans do. They ought to spend all of their time trying to cut up President Eisenhower, etc. But not Mr. Johnson. And it was true in the Senate--I should remember--but it seems to me that the Democrats only lacked a couple of votes. Let's see, there were ninety-six members, and

it was fifty-forty-six, or forty-nine-forty-seven. It was very close; so that for all practical purposes this was not "a Republican Senate" as such. It was just barely a Republican Senate. The situation wasn't too much different in the House. So Mr. Johnson felt--I won't say on that Inaugural day but shortly in that period--I remember him saying, "If we have our forty-seven members well-organized, this is a Democratic Senate." He worked very hard at that.

I remember once on amendments to the Taft-Hartley Act that the Republicans felt they would be able to make the amendments they wanted to make. There had been agreement as to a time certain for voting. The time came for voting, and Mr. Johnson had every one of the Democratic members sitting in their seats, you know, just an unheard-of thing, not in the Chamber--some of them back in the cloakrooms or anything--but every one of them sitting in their seats when the vote started. He had every one of them, including Harry Byrd [D] of Virginia, and some real mavericks in the party ready to vote hold back on these amendments. I think it was one of the most dramatic highlights of his career as Leader of the Senate when they were not in the majority. This was, I know, not easy for him to get to this point because I know he went through a long, tortuous struggle to get to this point, but this was a significant vote. It meant a lot to labor. He was able to bring them all together. He had Paul Douglas [D., Ill.] and Harry Byrd sitting there waiting for the vote when the roll call started.

BA: How did he do that kind of thing?

Bi: I don't know how he did it with everybody. I know that this was just the--I think one thing to begin with--sometimes people didn't understand this--Lyndon Johnson knew more about particular pieces of legislation than the guy he was talking to. Secondly, he always understood

what it meant to the party, what they were trying to do in the Senate. I'm sure there were other considerations, but because he could devote his full time to it, he had this fantastic way of knowing his players so fully and completely that he knew exactly the buttons to push. And I didn't know in all cases.

I always had some assignments in connection with the vote. My specific assignment [was] to be sure that we knew where they all were, and where they were going to be at the time a vote might come, and how to find them. Occasionally we'd lose them. I remember once we lost John Sparkman [D., Ala.], and had a heck of a time finding him. Somebody I found in Alabama City had left that morning at eight-thirty or something driving to Florida. So we finally found him. Herman Talmadge [D., Ga.]--I think it was when Herman was governor of Florida,* and the Florida State Police described the car that Sparkman was in, and "they arrested him" on the road. They got him in a plane and got him back here. He was driving either to a speech or maybe he was taking a couple of days off to Florida. I don't remember. But it was this kind of thing I guess, as much as anything. I was less a substance man than I was a--the leg work, really. I was leg man for the Whip. And Johnson, I think, picked Clements, and I don't think he could have picked a better guy.

Ba: I was going to ask you about the relationship between them.

Bi: The relationship was just as close as it could be. You know, they weren't guys that sat around and talked for days about things. Clements had a great sensitivity to what Johnson was trying to do. I remember times when a particular action of some kind was coming up. Johnson would explain to Clements in three sentences what he wanted, and Clements would just get the full picture. It would take him an hour to

* (NOTE: Herman Eugene Talmadge, Governor of Georgia, 1948-1955)

give me my orders as to what to do, but three sentences were enough from Johnson. Clements was not a big issue man. He was in some degree himself a good leg man. It was just a hell of a good combination.

Ba: Actually, Mr. Johnson was not really much of a big issue man either, was he?

Bi: You know, he said less about the issues. I still think that there were few guys on the Senate floor that knew more about the issues than Johnson did. He wouldn't admit it. He didn't talk much about it. He didn't make speeches, you know. He seldom took the floor to make speeches, and Clements even less than he did. But I've heard him standing on the back of the floor talking to somebody--somebody who had introduced the legislation. He'd say, "Yes, but now in the third part of this, you know, this is what this does. Now what does that really mean?"

Very often the guy would say, "Well, it means this."

Mr. Johnson would say, "Yes, but what you're forgetting is that also it means this." He had obviously at some point along the line some place--I don't know when--he had done his homework. I always had a feeling that he was not known as an issue man. Yet I always had a feeling also that in what ever way he knew as much about the legislation, knew where its problems were, where its good points were, than sometimes the guys who were actually "promoting" the legislation, or opposing it.

Ba: I was thinking in the sense that he was not known to be doctrinnaire about any special position. Actually, I suppose this is one of the origins of what got into the struggle with the Democratic committee when Paul Douglas--

Bi: Yes. He was not doctrinnaire about it. He tried to sort of act as a computer, I guess you'd say. Everything would be fed into him. I don't mean from other people. In many instances it was himself. There was no guy that made more personal contacts with more people about more things than he did. He was just continuously on the move. It all came in and then through whatever process a human mind goes through, out would come his conclusions and his feelings about something.

I remember on this Taft-Hartley thing, I don't think anybody would have ever thought that you could put all of these forty-seven guys together and get them all there at the same time and have them taking a position in a sense opposed to the Taft-Hartley Bill. In his understanding of the issues, his understanding of the meaning of it etc., he did, and so help me, came up with every damned member of the Democratic--every Democratic Senator sitting there waiting to vote.

Ba: Did you get involved with the censure of McCarthy?

Bi: To some degree, not a lot. I left the Senate in 1956.

Ba: That's when you went to be director of the American--

Bi: American Veterans Committee, yes. So I was really not an integral part of that, although I worked a lot with Senator [Henry] Jackson [D., Wash.] and Senator [Stuart] Symington [D., Mo.] and some of the others who were concerned with it; and more with the staff, I guess. Just because, I think sometimes they felt comfortable having me there.

Ba: Because of your knowledge?

Bi: Supposedly. I frankly at that time found out how little knowledge I really had, but I used to sit wise like an owl. No, I was not intimately concerned with it, no.

Ba: You said awhile back that you did get involved in the difficulties that began to emerge there in the late 1950's between the National Committee and--

Bi: Yes. Well, in 1957 and 1958 I was finance director of the Democratic National Committee. Paul Butler was the chairman, Matt McCloskey of Pennsylvania was the treasurer, and I was the finance director--a job that they don't always have. They've had it from time to time over their history. It isn't an elected position in the National Committee or anything. It's an appointive position, and basically this was at a time when the National Committee was having trouble raising funds when Paul Butler and Matt McCloskey neither one would quit. Yet they were not speaking to each other. I guess I was in the position of knowing both of them, and both of them speaking to me, and in a sense I was sort of the conduit between the two. At the same time we had the Democratic Advisory Council, which was the source of the trouble with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn.

Now originally Mr. Johnson favored the idea of the Democratic Advisory Council. In fact, I remember once seeing a letter from him which he may never have seen, as many people in his position sometimes don't. I'm not saying this is anything wrong, but it was apparently a letter written at the time when the idea of the advisory council was proposed. There was a letter from him saying he thought it probably had some great merit. But then it became clear to Mr. Rayburn, particularly, that the Advisory Council was going to take positions in the name of the Democratic party on lots of issues--and I guess on any issues they wanted to--and that very often the position, or at least potentially the position, of the advisory council would disagree with the position being taken by the leadership on the Hill. This was going to cause a great deal of commotion. Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson were quite opposed, and were quite opposed to members of the Congress joining the Advisory Council, although some did. I remember Stuart Symington

did at one point, and some other members of the House and Senate were members of the Advisory Council.

Ba: Where did that advisory council idea originate? Was it Paul Butler's idea?

Bi: Basically it was Paul's idea. He felt terribly frustrated and a lot of leaders of the party felt trustrated. They felt the National Committee ought to be more than just a caretaker, fund-raising operation. Many of them felt that the position taken by the leadership on the Hill, particularly Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn, was too "friendly to the Eisenhower Administration," was too conservative on some issues, etc. They felt that it did not offer a broad-range look at the problems the nation was facing, that it was more of a day-by-day pragmatic approach to what was happening, and that there ought to be something the Democrats could look to which might state these broader range positions--might take in some instances a somewhat more liberal (I don't want to say left-wing) but a somewhat more liberal position than they thought was sometimes being taken on the Hill. Paul Butler gets the credit for it. I think it was a combination of people.

Ba: ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] was involved in somehow, weren't they?

Bi: ADA to some extent although frankly, you know, I think if you could ever shake the trees enough for all of the fruit to fall out, you'd find out the guy that came closest to proposing this was a guy named Charles Murphy, who now works for Mr. Johnson at the White House and is one of his strongest and most vigorous supporters. I don't think Mr. Murphy ever saw this as any kind of a counterplay to Johnson-Rayburn on the Hill at all. I may be wrong. But I think it's one of those things, you know, that guys get credit for sometimes which really are the outgrowth of an awful lot of people.

Ba: What was the source of the difficulties between Butler and McCloskey?

Bi: Some of it came from the Hill. Mr. McCloskey was very close to some people on the Hill including Mr. Johnson [and] Mr. Rayburn. So I think some of the feeling came from there. I guess as much as anything it came from the fact that McCloskey felt that during this period when the Democrats were out of office and they were out of the White House and when we had these enormous debts, that the National Committee ought to be just reduced to nothing. There ought to be a chairman, a secretary, and a couple of other people it ought to be strictly a caretaker group till we got to the point where we could build a committee to run another Presidential election. Mr. Butler did not. Mr. Butler supported things like the advisory council. He thought we ought to have a good research division, and lots of other things.

I can wander on this stuff for days, and I don't want to put you in a spot.

Ba: Why don't we keep on here? It looks like we've got about a half-hour of tape here, and we can go ahead until it runs out.

Bi: We were talking abuout the troubles between McCloskey and Butler. And I think as much as anything, it was that we owed $750,000 bucks when I came in here in 1957 some of it was left over from the 1952 campaign, and some of it was left over from the 1956 campaign. We had a weekly payroll of about $9,000.

McCloskey hadn't wanted Butler as chairman in the first place, anyway. At the 1956 convention Matt had thought they ought to make a change, but Butler had pled with Stevenson not to, and Stevenson had gone along with Butler. It was just a combination of things. They're both very strong-willed guys. I used to actually, believe it or not, be in the office with the two of them--Butler sitting on one side of me figuratively

and McCloskey on the other, and Butler would say to me, "Now, you tell that guy from Pennsylvania" you know, something. And the guy from Pennsylvania would say, "You tell that guy Butler something," you know. One of these strange things. Now, I'd never tell the other guy, but they'd answer back theoretically talking to me. It was just two strong-willed guys who had troubles and didn't agree with their approach to things. Very frankly I think in a sense I was brought in there as finance director as much as anything to sort of be a buffer between the two, because neither one of them was about to quit, and neither one of them was about to be fired by the National Committee itself so I sort of acted as a buffer.

Ba: It sounds like an uncomfortable and awkward position.

Bi: It was sort of strange. My main struggle was every Wednesday night to call everybody I could think of to see if I could get enough money in the bank by Thursday morning; and then after I had gotten every penny I could get, I would call Matt and say, "Matt, I'm still $929 short," He'd say, "Okay, I'll call the bank," and some place--I don't know--he'd come up with the money; and we'd make the payroll. Sometimes we made it. We tried to get the checks out early Thursday morning. We paid every two weeks and every week; and sometimes we were a little late getting it out. It was three o'clock in the afternoon.

Ba: Did Mr. Johnson give you any help in getting finances then?

Bi: I'm sure that he was helpful to Matt McCloskey in getting some of the finances that Matt had. I don't remember directly getting any from Mr. Johnson. He was, and I talked to him from time to time, he was sympathetic--maybe more sympathetic to the problems that I had of trying to juggle between McCloskey and Butler--but he was sympathetic to the problems. I never asked Mr. McCloskey where some of the money came from that he came through with to make up the amount we needed--

Ba: Given your background on the Hill, did you also try to be a buffer or conduit between Rayburn and Johnson on one hand, and Butler on the other?

Bi: Not very much. Occasionally I did. I felt very frankly that that was not an area where I was going to work. If anything was going to happen there, it was going to have to be. Well, I'm not what you'd call a bigshot or anything. I don't operate on the level that Mr. Johnson or Mr. Rayburn operated, I felt that the buffers there ought to be guys who, because of their standing in the party or the community or something, were "peers" of Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn. I thought guys like Charlie Murphy or Ed Foley, or these kind of people, ought to be, to the degree there was a buffer--and even Paul himself. Paul, I used to sort of send him kicking and screaming up the Hill to try to talk, but he didn't do a very good job there. Paul--I love that guy. I disagreed with him violently on many things, but give him five minutes with Mr. Rayburn, and he could be in a fight with him. After a few times of it, I gave up on trying to get him to go up there.

Ba: Did you ever hear him talking about Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson? What did he say about them?

Bi: He thought they were both very able legislative people, but he disagreed violently with what he thought was their philosophy. He thought they were wrong for the party, much too conservative, that they were hurting the Democratic party etc. Paul had strong feelings about a lot of people and a lot of things. And his problem was he couldn't express them very--

Ba: He was not susceptible to the argument that "half a loaf is better than none" like the 1957 Civil Rights Bill?

Bi: No. Paul, I think very often felt that you made more points by

fighting the battle and losing than you did by accomplishing something. Yes, this was part of his problem.

Ba: Did he understand the mechanics of legislative leadership on the Hill?

Bi: I'm not sure that he did. I can't honestly say. God, I spent many hours talking to Paul Butler about many things, because at times I was sort of the only one that would talk to him. I think at times I had a feeling he did, and I think down deep in his heart he did. But I don't think he ever really understood the internal workings of the House and the Senate. He didn't ever really quite understand the fact that a member of the House may do something because it's what has to--he never really quite thought of the guy's relationships with his constituents back home, which many people don't.

Paul was a great moralist, and he said, "This is right." Usually, very often, he was right about what was right. And the way you get at it is to go at it and just hit it right in the head, which isn't the way you get it done most of the time. But he just didn't quite realize this.

Ba: How long did this situation last--on up to the eve of the 1960 election?

Bi: It lasted all the way through, yes.

Ba: Until the Kennedy machinery came in?

Bi: Yes. There was never any real relaxation. I think it's safe to say after several years of it, you know, people learned how to live with it. It wasn't as difficult as it was maybe in the early days. But it never changed really.

Ba: Had the troubles affected the organization out in the States?

Bi: Yes, to the degree that it caused commotion in the party, it did. Now, you'll find some people in some states that say that the Democratic Advisory Council was the greatest thing that ever happened to the

Democratic party and that they disagreed violently with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn's position on it. Take a state like Michigan. You'll remember the 1960 convention. Michigan was pretty much opposed to Mr. Johnson. I think some of them there will tell you that the way Mr. Johnson treated Mr. Butler was part of the cause of this. I don't think it was a major part of the cause.

You've got to remember one thing, though, through it all there was still the national committee itself, composed of a man and a woman from each of the States and the territories. Paul Butler never moved on anything unless he counted those people. He never went to a national convention committee meeting without having the fifty-six or fifty-seven, what the majority number is. He was as smart as Mr. Johnson was in this respect. He knew how to count votes.

Ba: That was his constituency?

Bi: That was his constituency, and he knew his constituency. He knew how to count those people. He went into some national committee meeting, people figured he was going to get thrown out, that this was the last of Paul Butler. But when the vote came, Paul Butler got his fifty-six or fifty-seven votes. He was smart enough to know exactly who they were and how far he could go. If you could ever have meshed Mr. Butler and Mr. McCloskey and Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn together--

Ba: A powerful combination.

Bi: Some combination. But I guess as personalities they could never quite make it.

Ba: What part did you play in the preliminaries to the 1960 campaign?

Bi: Well, I left the National Committee after the 1958 election, and went to work for the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation here in Washington. I served "as an adviser" to the National Committee, and particularly as

an adviser to a group they set up to set up the 1960 campaign. This was a group composed of assorted people. I remember Dave Lloyd was on it. I think Charlie Murphy was on it, and they had a representative of each of the potential candidates. Symington had a guy; Johnson had a guy; Kennedy had a guy; Humphrey had somebody on there. I guess that was about it. There were about ten or twelve of us; and we met periodically to plan the arrangements for the convention, to consider possible radio and TV companies to handle the campaign, and this kind of thing.

I worked quite closely with Ed Foley in the so-called 750 Club, which was an idea that Ed Foley and I dreamed up to pay off the $750,000 bucks we owed. We went out specifically to get 750 people to pay off this debt. In fact, this was proposed at a National Committee meeting here in Washington in--God, I think it was 1958--and the first ten members in the 750 Club were the McCloskey family. He stood up at the meeting himself and said, "And I'm hereby joining, and my son and his wife, my wife, and all of the kids are joining." I think the first ten members of the club. The members of this club, in addition to getting the usual emoluments of a club--you know, a beautiful membership card and a scroll and this kind of thing--were supposed to get special seats at the national convention in 1960 and if we won invitations to White House dinners etc. But I did work with it during these years.

Ba: Did you pay off that debt? Started the 1960 campaign with--

Bi: We made it. We went into the 1960 campaign without--Oh, it seemed to me we were $20,000 short or something, but without this $750,000 debt hanging over our head. Then Paul Butler, in the amazing way he was--we had the seats set aside for the 750 Club at the Convention Hall in Los Angeles. And so help me, he wouldn't give out the seats. Poor Ed Foley, who was president of the 750 Club, had all of these people clamoring

for their seats at the convention; and Paul Butler had them all in a little box in his office. And he wouldn't give them to Ed Foley.

I remember this was a most difficult time for poor Ed because he'd see people in the hall, say, "Ed, I joined, and I was pleased to help; I didn't come to Los Angeles just because I joined and had a seat, but you had promised me a seat for each membership, and I had counted on the seats."

Poor Ed would have to throw up his hands and say, "Well, I can't get them out." Physically they were there. They were set aside. Paul Butler said he was worried that the membership was loaded with Stevenson supporters, and that if these seats were given out, that there would be a bloc in the gallery that would carry on special demonstrations for Stevenson; and he wasn't going to be a party to this.

Ba: Did he ever release them?

Bi: Finally he released them, but it was still a mess. Some of them were duplicates for other seats; some of them were very poor seats. They were not together, and generally it was a very--you talk to Ed Foley about this, and I'm sure he would--well, I'm not even sure he would talk about it. He'd just throw up his hands and say, "This is just one of the God-awfullest things that I ever went through." On the Friday at the end of the convention, they had a breakfast--a 750 Club breakfast--and all of the members were invited to this breakfast; and Kennedy came. God, I can't remember whether Mr. Johnson came or not, but I think he did. As far as the 750 Club, this was sort of the highlight, this breakfast. They had a "private" breakfast for the 750 Club members.

Ba: Did you participate actively in any pre-convention campaigning for any of the possible candidates?

Bi: Well, in retrospect, I can't give you all the reasons why, but I did. To the degree that I did, I was probably for Stuart Symington. I was working for Mrs. Lasker--the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation--and she was of course one of the strongest supporters of Stevenson. But I did no actual work, no.

After the nomination I worked in an office at Mrs. Lasker's, with her permission. I worked in an office to try to help set up the Johnson campaign. I did not work in the Presidential part. I worked for the Vice Presidential part. I had a little office in an investment building at 15th and K Streets with Liz Carpenter and a guy named Ralph Hewitt, who is now Assistant Secretary of HEW. Liz was handling Mrs. Johnson's part of it, and Ralph and I were trying to put together material for possible use by the Vice President in his speeches etc. Dave Lloyd and Charlie Murphy were sort of the bosses of this operation. I think Bob Berry was the field man. He traveled some with the Vice President. Let's see--who else was around! Well, Bill Moyers and others were in and out of the office. But this was sort of called the Vice President's office.

Ba: Did you volunteer for that, or did Mr. Johnson ask you to--?

Bi: Well, Dave Lloyd was active in it, and Dave was with me in this Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation effort we had. I think it was as much probably that and Charlie Murphy, the reason that I was there. I had worked in the Truman campaign in 1948 with Murphy and Lloyd again and had been with them all through the years. So I don't remember how this evolved. I was just sort of there.

Ba: To back up just a minute, what did you think of Mr. Johnson's campaign for the nomination?

Bi: Well, this is nothing very startling, because it was generally the

feeling, I think he put too much faith or too much trust--that's not the word, whatever the word is--he depended too much on the Senatorial group to get his votes for him. The Senators are a great bunch of guys, but they very often don't have the organization kind of thing. I remember in 1957 -1958, as early as that, particularly in 1958, I saw Jack Kennedy and Ted Sorensen in the Caroline [airplane], bouncing around the country when I was bouncing around the country from the National Committee, and speaking at breakfasts in Denver, and lunches in Cheyenne, and dinners in Sioux Falls, and this kind of thing--and raising money and ingratiating themselves--that's a bad word--but helping the local party--

Ba: Starting work at the precinct and county level.

Bi: Starting work at the precinct and county level, and from this grew the support that they had when they went to the convention in 1960.

Ba: This kind of thing has been pointed out often, and it's a little surprising that someone with Mr. Johnson's political knowledge would--

Bi: Well, obviously he was busy running the Senate, which was not easy and he had a lot of responsibilities. And I think they just did a terrible thing to him. You know, he'd see a Senator from some state, and say, "Well, now, how am I doing?"

"Oh, you're just doing great. I've talked to our people out there, and you're in great order." But the Senators don't, in many instances, don't have to depend on the same kind of political structure that the President and the regular organization--they tend to have their own personal political organizations in states. If you're going to become nominated for the Presidency, you've got to have the votes of the delegates who come to the conventions. They're very often not the guys that the Senators depend on. This was where I think they misled him.

No Senator wanted to say to the Leader that he wasn't doing very well in his state. So Mr. Johnson would check off the states figuratively or literally. They'd say, "You're in good order in the state of Washington," when he was in lousy order, but nobody in the state of Washington wanted to admit he wasn't in good order. I think this was part of his problem.

Ba: Even if Mr. Johnson missed that, it looks like Mr. Rayburn would have noticed and done something about that situation.

Bi: Yes. Well, I think one thing, I think they underestimated the strength of Kennedy. I think they just couldn't believe that he had the kind of strength he said he had. And by the time they realized it, after West Virginia and Wisconsin, it really had become too late to do anything about it. Well, his wins in Wisconsin and West Virginia were vital to his campaign, but what it did was to suddenly surface the fact that this guy had strength out in the country that nobody knew anything about. Nobody believed it.

I know I ran the Citizens for Johnson campaign in Wisconsin this year, and you just couldn't believe the strength that McCarthy had in some places out there until you actually go there and bumped into it. I think this was part of the problem with the Symington, Johnson, Humphrey, etc. forces.

Kennedy had gone out and dealt with the Joe Blows and the Tom Smiths and the Tom, Dick, and Harrys. Nobody thought about [them]. They were not well-known in Washington where Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn did most of their thinking. But these were the people that ended up as delegates to convention. Mr. Kennedy started with the list of the delegates at the 1952 and 1956 conventions and built from there.

BA: During the campaign itself, after the convention while you were working

with this group of the Vice Presidential campaign, did you have any connection with the Kennedy group?

Bi: Yes. We had liaison with the Kennedy group, but I was not that person. I didn't do much of it. I don't think the liaison ever turned out very well.

Ba: That's what I was wondering about. How they got along?

Bi: I used to hear stories about it, but I was not the liaison with the Kennedy group. This was more in the hands of Bill Moyers and people like this.

Ba: Were there stories running around about friction between the Johnson and Kennedy people?

Bi: Yes. Continuously. It was always a struggle, you know to try to find out what the Kennedy group was doing, where in the hell they were, or what they were saying on issues. Yes, it was considered difficult. You know, having worked with all these people, people sometimes get the idea that I was at some high level. Birkhead was not. But at my level, I felt it was more the kind of thing that happens in most campaigns any way.

I remember in the 1948 campaign, we had a hell of a time keeping track of [Alben W.] Barkley; and Barkley said he had a hell of a time keeping track of us. It's just that you get a campaign going, and everybody thinks it's easy to keep in touch, but it isn't. Physically, it just isn't easy. It's one of the most misunderstood minor facts of American politics that it's harder than heck to get hold of a candidate and/or his staff sometimes.

Ba: You mean, when they're out traveling?

Bi: When they're out traveling. I was staff director or the executive director of the Citizens for Humphrey-Muskie in this recently completed

campaign. It's always a tough--just the pure facts of communication. I knew exactly where both Humphrey and Muskie were, but half the time the connections would never quite work. Even with all of the communications we have today--and we can send three guys circling the moon and send back television pictures, and keep in continual contact with them--it's harder than heck to get hold of a guy running for the Presidency. And I think a lot of times it's just failure in the pure physical means of contact. There isn't as much.

I think some of it in 1960 was that the Kennedy group was--you see, all a brand new group really to the old Washington pros--a little like the 1952 thing of Stevenson. You know, who's Larry O'Brien! You go up on the Hill and ask at that point, "Well, you ought to get in touch with Larry O'Brien," and they'd say, "Larry who?" And Ted Reardon was known some up there. Ted Sorensen some. But it was just a lack of knowing each other. They didn't get it as well organized maybe as they ought to before it started. But I was not integral--not part of my job was any kind of liaison between the two.

Ba: Did your group make any conscious decision to concentrate Mr. Johnson's efforts in any particular place or with any particular group of people?

Bi: We certainly participated in the degree we could in his swing through the South, his famous train trip in 1960. We felt that this could be a major accomplishment.

Ba: Who originated that idea? That was a pretty shrewd--

Bi: I don't know. I honestly can't say. I have a feeling Mr. Johnson as much as anything had a feeling about it; that if they were going to win, the South may have been one of the toughest places, particularly because of religion. I can't honestly say. I don't know. I think it was a thing, like a lot of things, that evolve. Now there may have been

some one person that said, "My God, what we need to do is to get Lyndon Johnson on a trip through the South." I think the train trip part of it was a great idea. It's harder than hell on a candidate. The South is still more attuned to public gatherings or speakings, as they are sometimes called, than some other parts of the country. I think the impact of it probably was what won the campaign. I don't know who started the idea.

Ba: Did you figure that in the South religion was a bigger obstacle than civil rights?

Bi: Bigger. I don't know--bigger. I think it was an obstacle. I happen to be a minister's son, and I know that there have been in many of the churches the Roman Catholic Church is the evil. I know in many areas of the country--I think it's more true in the South--that in the South where it tends to be a little more fundamentalist, that you have more of this. You have less Catholics in much of the South. You don't have the concentration of Catholics as you do in Boston or New York.

Ba: I asked because I've heard it said that the real difficulty might have been in the Midwest, but--

Bi: Well, I don't think there's any question that the religious issue was tough in the Midwest. I think more of a problem in the Midwest with Kennedy than the religious issue--and I know some guys disagree with me on this, I guess most people do--I think it was that a lot of people didn't quite understand Jack Kennedy. He was an Easterner, talked with an Eastern accent, and there's still sort of a regionalism in the Midwest. There's no question particularly in the fundamentalist areas of the Midwest, it was a problem.

I don't think there's any question civil rights was a problem in

the South. It was a problem then and has been for--. Well, we fought a civil war over it, so I guess it's a problem in the South period. It's in varying degrees. But Jack Kennedy was not known as a great advocate of civil rights, although his record was clear. Mr. Johnson's record was clear. I think the South felt reasonably comfortable on civil rights, not that any of them thought that these guys were going to take a Southern position. But I honestly don't think civil rights was as much a problem in the South as the religious issue was--to the degree that it was a problem.

Ba: After the election, you moved in with the Department of Agriculture.

Bi: Yes.

Ba: As Assistant to the Secretary?

Bi: Right.

Ba: How did that come about? Had you known Mr. Freeman before?

Bi: Well, I had known Freeman and Charles Murphy, of course, the Under Secretary, for years in other pursuits. I am not an agriculturalist. I pose as an agriculturalist. As close as I can come to it as having my family was living on a farm when I was born, although I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, which is hardly a farm city. I came in, not because I was an agriculturalist, I came in to work with Congress--Congressional liaison. I came in solely because of my personal relationship with Freeman and Murphy, and have been here ever since.

Ba: We're about at the end of this tape. Do you want to call it a day right here?

Bi: It will be fine with me.

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By Kenneth M. Birkhead

to the

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