INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 16, 1972

INTERVIEWEE: MYRON R. BLEE

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: The University Inn in Boca Raton, Florida

Tape 1 of 1

F: First of all, let's sort of identify you, Dr. Blee. How did you get to be in a position where you were wanted by the White House?

B: I had been associated for many years with Farris Bryant, who had been governor of Florida. President Johnson asked him to come and be the director of the Office of Emergency Planning, and it was through my association with him that that came about.

F: You hadn't known Mr. Johnson personally up to this time?

B: No, I hadn't. I had been here at Florida Atlantic at the time of the dedication. Our educational unit had conducted the first VISTA training program.

F: How did that happen, that you were first?

B: We had a combined extension for the university system in Florida. We had people who were sensitive to some of the emerging programs and we had proposed to do that, and the selection had been made. We did it at St. Petersburg. We have a kind of residential conference center there.

F: What did you do? Were you training VISTA volunteers to fan out over the country, or were you actually using them in this area?

B: We trained the first class of volunteers to go fanning out across the country. It was a pilot run.

F: Did you have any sort of guidelines, or were you just feeling your way?

B: The VISTA staff in Washington had some pretty clear notions of what they wanted to do. We got together a professional staff that tried to decide how those things could be accomplished. It apparently went well enough that Mrs. Johnson felt free to come down to deliver the commencement address.

F: Of the first class.

B: Right. So those two contacts were the only contacts that I had with the Johnson family before [I went to Washington].

F: How long did you train them?

B: It must have been about eight or ten weeks.

F: How did you get from northern Illinois down to Florida?

B: I guess the same way I got to Washington, when you come down to it. Farris Bryant and I had served together in World War II, and we had a number of occasions together. He was instrumental in getting me invited down here.

F: Tell me a little bit about Johnson's coming down for the dedication.

B: It was right at the tag end of a bad storm. There's a man by the name of Tom Fleming, who is an influential person in Boca Raton, interested in the University and he had been among the supporters of President Johnson here in Florida.

F: He had kind of been a statewide Johnson leader, hadn't he?

B: Yes, he had. I couldn't say with certainty, but I think he had been chairman of his campaign in the state. The President came, in part I suppose, because of his interest in the University and part because of his concern for Tom.

F: What was that day like?

B: It was a day like the tag end of a hurricane.

F: You're talking literally now, not figuratively.

B: Right.

F: I mean, there are a lot of Johnson days that are like the tag end of a hurricane. (Laughter)

B: Right. And he came zipping into [Miami]. I can't remember what the detail was, but there has been some concern and he flew into Miami. There had been some concern about one of the tires on the limousine that brought him out here. For Boca Raton, the security of a President was quite something.

F: Where did you hold it?

B: On the campus in front of a building that had just been completed.

F: Had the hurricane done any damage?

B: No, not to the building. The flagpole was out there in front of the building and it was tilted, but it had not damaged the building.

F: Did it lean left or lean right?

B: It depends on your point of view.

F: Mrs. Johnson then came down there later for the graduating class.

B: Yes.

F: How long did you keep the first class?

B: I think they were there about eight or ten weeks, as I remember.

F: How many people are we talking about?

B: There must have been twenty-five to thirty.

F: Did VISTA send them? Did you have any hand in recruiting them?

B: No. They had been selected for service and were sent to us as trainees.

F: Did you have the staff already, or did you have to add people?

B: We had to select people for this. At that time our extension unit could

draw on any of the universities for staff and talent. Between those we could bring in--and some we brought in for very short parts of the training program--from the University of South Florida, which is in Tampa; we had a man from Florida Atlantic University full-time. Then we used a number of community people, what today I think we think of as Communtiy Action people, who were involved in the field training for them.

F: Was the presence of Seminole Indians in Florida any help, or were they out of the picture?

B: They weren't directly involved in it. They probably should have been, but there wasn't any association.

F: Were these people ticketed for any particular part of the country?

B: If they were, neither they nor we knew about it.

F: You just gave them all the same training if they were going to the Indians in Wisconsin or the Mexicans in Texas or anywhere else.

B: Right. There was required field work, and they did that, of course, with the people in the St. Petersburg and Tampa area who needed it.

F: Were they working with blacks mainly?

B: Mainly, yes. White families were involved too, but there were a large number of blacks. Of course that posed one of the problems for our staff because we knew that they had to learn to generalize beyond the specifics with which they were working there.

F: How did it seem to work out?

B: The young people had stars in their eyes and were highly motivated, inquisitive, bright, anxious to try it. We were very pleased. We felt it was a very responsive group. We never were in a position to ascertain with the "proof is in the eating" kind of thing to see how they performed once they

were assigned.

F: Maybe it never happened here, but what happens when the generalities and the specifics clash on something like this? You know, it's that old business of the sort of gospel-fed kid who the first time he gets a doubt reacts violently against it.

B: Yes. And we could see some of that, not only with respect to their own training but with respect to their own expectations of what they were going to be able to do. "If I care and I come in to work with you, obviously you ought to respond affirmatively."

F: "You ought to care, too."

B: That's right. "You ought to care." And this was a part of the training--to get them to expect and to accept and to work with and through that kind of reaction.

F: What was the day like with Mrs. Johnson?

B: It was a cool day, a beautiful, bright, sunshiny day. It was just made for her, you know. All of the beauty and radiance that I think of with her was present that day.

F: Did she make a day of it, or did she come in just for the commencement, or what?

B: Yes, she made a day of it. She came at nine o'clock in the morning to the center where the training had taken place. She had specified in accepting the invitation that she wanted to get out where these people were working, where they had been trained. She wanted to see the people with whom they had been working, and she did. Some of the classes with children were conducted in the center and she was involved in those. [She] wanted to see the classes in operation and wanted to participate in them. We wondered how the First Lady was going to get by with that, but, I tell you, she did.

She moved in and sat with those children and reacted to them and with them and they to her.

F: Did the VISTA volunteers talk to her fairly freely about problems and aspirations?

B: Yes. She had indicated that she was not here on a political mission. She wanted to get her hands on that program and begin to get the feel of it. We had ascertained that she would be agreeable to attend a luncheon, but she said that if she might, she would stipulate that the people who were around her at the luncheon would be the volunteers.

F: Is that the way it worked out?

B: Yes, that's the way it worked out.

F: It kind of left your luncheon arrangements in a shaky situation, didn't it?

B: What we had to say to the political leaders is that "Mrs. Johnson is having luncheon with the students."

F: "Not you."

B: Right. We had an interesting situation. There was an MDTA training program in the center.

F: What is MDTA?

B: The Manpower Development Training Act was supplying funds for it, and this was back in kind of a fairly early day for that program, too. They were training cooks and bakers and waiters and waitresses. So the meal was served by people who were really in retreading and retraining, and Mrs. Johnson became as interested in those people who had prepared and served the meal as she did in the VISTA people.

I left that day with no doubt in my mind that she and the President had a deep concern and a great care for the people who were the targets of the program.

F: You got the feeling this wasn't just window dressing.

B: No, I knew that it was not. She agreed then in the evening to [meet with others]. [She] said, "Now I realize that coming here, it will be strategic for all of us to meet some of the other people," and a reception was held at the local art museum. She had met, as she moved around the auditorium and during the day, a number of people. I don't know, probably the arrangement of the Secret Service, but as they came through the line, they weren't pressed in close. They'd come and in virtually every case where she had met somebody earlier in the day she could confirm with me by the name of the individual, and then she'd say, "But I've forgotten his connection." Or "This is the man from--" and she'd tell me, "but his name doesn't come back." Just warm and charming.

F: Did she spend the night?

B: No. At nine-thirty or so it came time for her [to leave]. When she was here, and I suppose that's the way she was as the first lady, we couldn't think of her as that. She was just a marvelous, warm human being. And when it came time, the Secret Service came to tell her it was time to leave, she put her cloak on and then had to be the first lady and take off.

The Nelson Poynters were in St. Petersburg, and they were in the newspaper business there, the Congressional Quarterly, and they were friends of Mrs. [Liz] Carpenter, so she had gone out to their house to rest a little while in the afternoon.

F: All of this took place at St. Petersburg?

B: Yes.

F: Governor Bryant went to head up the OEP in March of 1966. Did you have any idea you were going to follow him at that time or did that come later?

B: No. We were in Chicago for a meeting of the Association of Higher Education. I picked up the Sunday paper and read that the Governor was going to OEP,

and [had] just no thought other than, well, this would be an exciting assignment for him. It was, I don't know how much longer, several weeks I think, [when] he called. We were living in Boca Raton at the time, and he called down there.

F: You were still with Florida Atlantic at the time?

B: Yes. He called to ask could I be persuaded to do that. He knew what the answer was.

F: He didn't have to twist your arm?

B: No. I went there first on just a regular appointment.

F: Your first job didn't require confirmation?

B: No, it did not.

F: What did you do, just kind of get your feet wet in that?

B: Yes. The deputy spot was filled at the time. We had to kind of assess the situation and see whether or not he thought we could make a greater impact from the position in which I was on the regular Civil Service appointment. And then when the deputy's position came open, it appeared that, in order to get the establishment to listen, we needed a commission to do that.

F: According to my knowledge, there was no problem with your confirmation.

B: No. Mr. [Richard] Helms appeared before the committee the same day.

F: That's CIA.

B: Yes. I'll admit, as I sat there and heard them question him about his qualifications for the job, I thought "Good heavens, what is a refugee from the world of education going to say about OEP!" There were a few interested questions, but no [problem].

F: No one raised any quarrel with two of you coming from Florida, did they?

B: No. Senator Russell was chairman of the committee and he and the Governor had a long-standing friendship.

F: Did the President take any hand at all in this, or did he leave it pretty much up to Director Bryant?

B: He did not, to my knowledge, take any personal hand in it. I'm trying to think of the name of the man who was his principal assistant for this sort of thing.

F: It could have been [Joe] Califano.

B: No, it wasn't. Most of my dealings were with Califano after that, but the man who was the Baptist minister--

F: Oh, Bill Moyers.

B: Bill Moyers. He and I had a good long visit before the decision was made.

F: Who made the offer actually--Governor Bryant?

B: The Governor told me that Mr. Moyers wanted to talk to me about it. And the word came back from Mr. Moyers after a period of time, saying that the President was in accord with the action and they were double-checking to be sure that I still was.

F: What did you do as deputy director?

B: We were, I probably should say "I", but I think the Governor shared in it--you know, the country was up to its armpits in problems with Vietnam and we hadn't anticipated the off-loading problems for the supplies that were going to Vietnam. We had ships going around out there waiting to discharge. It was our view the OEP was dealing with problems that had been appropriate maybe five to ten or so years earlier, but they could not or would not, in the main, focus on emerging problems. I can remember at the time talking about, "Gee, I don't know what they are, but we ought to figure out what we would do if the Suez Canal should be closed." That caused a great uproar because that was--

F: I was going to ask you, did you do kind of a Pentagon papers approach to things,

of contingencies that could happen and how you would handle them?

B: Yes. This is what the agency was doing. We were trying to build elaborate mathematical models, computer-base models, through which we could determine how much strategic material would be required to repair the damage of an atomic bomb in Seattle, Washington or Minneapolis, Minnesota. We would be able to tell them how much copper it would take in Louisville, Kentucky after such a thing. We had the impression that while some of those basic things may be very fundamental and necessary, that the country couldn't spend all its effort in contingency planning on such remote things when there were more immediate likely things to happen.

F: You were busy enough meeting the contingencies!

B: Right. And I know it was my strong feelings, and I think the Governor concurred, that we needed to reorient the thinking of our people from such remote possibilities to more immediate and more likely contingencies.

We were a part of the Executive Office exempt from the requirement of the programming, planning, budgeting cycle. One of the steps that, I guess, the establishment found difficult to forgive me for is that we waived that immunity and undertook to use PPBS in our own budget planning, which called for the lifting up of all of the projects which were underway, evaluating the effectiveness of their action to this point, the involvement of some of the younger staff.

F: Did you report directly to the President, or did your report filter through [the Governor]?

B: In virtually every case the reporting to the President was through the Governor. My reporting, when the Governor was away--and he needed to be a good bit--was usually with Joe Califano.

F: When you hit the successive emergencies, what did you do--just go in and try

to poke fingers in the dike.

B: The only kind of emergencies that we ever dealt with were under the authority that the President had of providing aid for hurricanes--that kind of damage, the natural disaster fund that the President had, which was kind of a step-child in the Office of Emegency Planning. We planned for the most part for emergencies which weren't very likely to happen. And when it came to the response to storm damage, our role was that of coordinating the response of the engineers, the Red Cross, whoever it was who actually provided the service.

F: You acted as a nerve center for that?

B: Yes.

F: I was going to ask you, in case this happens--the extreme Midwest flood that comes--would you hit the Army Engineers for instance and get together with them?

B: Right. In fact, so many of the federal agencies were immediately responsive, I couldn't tell from where I sat whether they were responsive to our direction or whether they were responsive to the requirements which were there. There were many determinations which had to be made finally in our office, but the kind of thing where, you know, the guy's house down the street is afire and you have to do something about it, they decided. They did. They moved. We didn't have to tell them it was time to go and turn on their hoses. They knew what to do and they did it. [When] it was a question of when you're going to rebuild it, how much money will the federal government provide for it, our agency was [responsible].

F: Are those various agencies sort of wastefully competitive in what you do?

B: I didn't have the impression that they were, no, not those that were responding to damage and floods and hurricanes. I didn't have that impression. I felt with respect to the research program that we were conducting, you know,

the long-range emergency planning, that it was kind of redundant. Well, if it were productive, it was difficult for me to perceive that it was.

Yet we were living in a world in that time when there were so many things that we did need to foresee. It's something like the conversation I get from students these days. They want their education to relate to the world as they perceive it around them. We were really trying to get the agencies to perceive the problems in the world around them and to plan for and to facilitate the response of government to more likely contingencies than we were wont to do.

F: If you got into a civil disturbance like a Watts or Hough or something that really tore up a city, did that come under your purview at all?

B: Only in a very remote way. I can remember in the summer of 1966 there were problems in Chicago and somebody tried to get helmets and other gear for people who were working in the riot and in the disturbance from the army at Fort Sheridan, and they weren't getting anywhere. There were all kinds of restrictions apparently that kept them from responding. It apparently required some kind of an appeal to get it to the point that we did, because I remember talking to somebody out there, telling them that, by golly, those helmets were needed and they were needed <u>now</u>.

F: Could you pretty well cut red tape?

B: I had the impression that this was true, and that they sort of reserved something at the level of OEP when the routine ways of doing it weren't there. And I never quite understood. I think a good bit of the influence was exerted when the switchboard operator would say that the White House was calling, and the deputy director of OEP was so little known to people out there that they weren't quite sure what level that was, but the White House was asking them to do something.

F: The White House telephone operator!

B: So she had more influence than I did, I think.

F: More name value anyway.

B: Right. So they released the helmets, and they would send us reports on their whereabouts as they were approaching the city. I'm not sure that I knew all the Governor did, but I don't believe that he was involved in much greater depth than that.

F: What were your duties aside from his? What was distinct about your position?

B: There really weren't any.

F: You tied up the loose ends?

B: Right. And the Governor is the kind of fellow who has to at least have his hand on everything that is going, a very perceptive, very active, very energetic fellow. While I would think that I felt I had, and he felt he had given me, some particular concern for monitoring the response of the staff to whatever requests were coming currently and to try to get them more sensitive to the direction and concern of the White House, that basically I was an alter ego, a deputy acting in his behalf when he was not there.

F: Vice president sometimes.

B: Yes. It was much like that. You know, at times I suppose the vice president wonders whether you really need to have one.

F: Except when you need him.

B: That's right. And it was something of that sort.

F: Disallowing the blue sky possibilities, were you sufficiently funded? I mean, there are always things you can do with more money, we'll grant that, but basically could you do what you thought you needed to?

B: Yes. In fact, I think my particular concern was that we find ways of using

the money we had effectively. I wouldn't for a minute suggest that we had more money going into emergency planning than perhaps should be spent.

F: You didn't have a make-work situation?

B: No. But I did have the feeling that momentum had been set up and we were going on spending money on things that hadn't quite been completed yet, and we would go forever and a day in those directions if somebody didn't do something about it.

F: Did the President ever send down requests himself like "I want to know what we do in case Chile cuts off its copper shipment," or something in that order?

B: No, he didn't. The President, as far as I could ascertain, was interested in the stockpile, the stockpile of strategic materials. Some of this, for a variety of things--copper was one of the hot issues, the price of copper, and how much copper did we need. There were the issues in the government at that time about, "Ought we to reduce our stockpile to keep the price of copper down?". I had presented to me one day when the Governor was away on order to release copper. It had come over from the White House, and the president was in Texas. It called for a substantial release of a substantial amount of copper. Our agency had people who were experts in the area and we were kind of in between the experts who said, "Gee, our present guidelines call for retaining the full supply"; on the other side, there was the pull to get some of it out. I refused--I didn't refuse, I just didn't sign the order--saying that if I were confident that Mr. Johnson had concluded that copper should be released, I would have no hesitation. There never came any further word that that needed to be signed nor any repercussion.

F: You sort of had the feeling that if he had wanted it, you would have heard.

B: I would have heard all the way from Texas. I didn't need even the telephone.

There was some evidence, although it was a little hard to tell where we were sitting in the lines of communication, whether it was the President in person or his staff that exercised considerable interest in the stockpile.

F: Did you ever feel your role to be an economic one in this stockpiling business, to raise or lower prices?

B: Yes, I knew that was a substantial issue. And it was my judgment that the guidelines that we had used in determining our requirements for the strategic materials were very conservative. They were based on the likelihood of very remote contingencies that were not sensitive, in my judgment, either to the political reality or the physical reality.

F: Were you involved with the CIA in this, as far as their intelligence gathering was concerned, on what the possibilities were?

B: I had some reason to believe that they were, but I was not a party to anything jointly with that.

F: Not you directly.

B: No.

B: I'm a little vague about some of my dates from the sources I had. Did Endicott Peabody come in before you left?

B: No. I left just before Christmas, and I think Governor Peabody come in January or February.

F: I guess after his mother, you could call him another Floridian.

B: That's right. Had to replace a Floridian with another one.

F: Right. At least the son of one. You left before Christmas. Why did you leave?

B: I had been appointed president of the Broward Junior College.

F: That's in Fort Lauderdale.

B: In Fort Lauderdale. The board there had agreed that as long as I was serving

some useful purpose in Washington they would keep the appointment warm and everything else. I think two factors were involved. One of them--and my ears perk up when you use the word "economic"--I had become convinced that the fellow who sat in the deputy's chair ought to be a knowledgable practicing economist who had his ears to the political reality around him. The staff was made up of very well qualified economists. In many of the professions we listen only to our own kind and I was being called upon, and the Governor was too, to make judgments on many of the projects that we weren't technically qualified to make. I had talked to John Macy about this possibility a good bit, as we talked about reorganizing and streamlining the agency and trying to get more attuned to the world around it, so I was convinced that that kind of person could fill the bill better than I could; that I had moved the agency about as far as I could in being willing to think about itself, and that the forum that it would finally take ought to be, in my judgment, shaped in part by somebody who was knowledgable in economics and economic research.

F: Did you do spade work toward a reorganization?

B: Oh, yes. We had a little task force at work that really grew out of PPBS. As we undertook our programming and planning and budgeting, it was apparent that the organization was cumbersome, unresponsive. It had--I can't remember the number now--a very high percentage of super-graded appointments in the agency, individuals who were very well qualified. But there appeared to me to be a lot of featherbedding and that we could streamline the agency.

F: A little heavy on chiefs and short on Indians.

B: Yes. And we had at that time two assistant directors who had no role in the operation of the agency and they were presidential appointees. There were two

principal functions: the natural disaster program and the contingency planning. It appeared very reasonable with two assistant directors that one of them could have one responsibility and one the other, with the deputy knowledgable in economic matters and heavily involved in both of them. But you've probably heard other people talking about trying to reorganize the federal government, and that was not a very popular thrust, you know.

And the second factor that was involved in the decision that this was the time to come home: school boards in Florida are elected on the basis of political affiliation, and the Broward school board changed its complexion. Three new Republicans were elected to the school board.

F: This was after you had been sort of stockpiled for Broward?

B: Right. I had been appointed and touched base with them and they said, "Yes, we want you, but we want you now." So it appeared that this was the time to go.

F: Did it make any difference--your recent political alliance?

B: They told me that it didn't when I first went there, but my time at Broward was very short. The members of the school board said in my presence that they were embarrassed with a refugee from the Johnson Administration on their hands. It was one of the factors, I think.

F: Another storm-tossed--

B: Right.

F: On this matter of national disasters, how far do you go on tnat? In previous planning, do you to a great extent react when it happens, or do you anticipate what you're going to do in case an earthquake hits Denver?

B: I'm not sure that it was ever deliberate rational planning. We seemed to draw more on our experience in other similar disasters.

F: You did one remarkable thing. I've seen it happen in Texas, for instance--the contrast between, say, the Galveston storm of 1900 or 1915, and what we had with Carla and Beulah, in which the property damage is enormous but you almost eliminate loss of life. You've got it to a formula, it seems to me. Everybody knows his place.

B: Yes. The agencies that were involved with alerting the population to evacuate the areas were ready to spring into action. We would send a disaster coordinator into an area that was threatened.

F: I presume you've got some sort of a card index arrangement, if not specifically that, something like that, where immediately if it hits the Gulf Coast, East Coast, or wherever, you know who the agencies are, whom to contact, et cetera.

B: Those are kept in manuals and in a variety of ways. Many of the people, the same bureaucracy that I fuss about, that stayed there and wanted to go on its own way made some of that possible. Not only did the book tell you who it was, but you'd worked with them before. I was struck by the human character of the federal establishment and its dependence upon people knowing each other, in somewhat the same way we observed it in state government. There's not much you could do to anticipate an earthquake, but with the hurricanes, the warning system, these mechanisms went into action.

F: When you had a hurricane building up in the Caribbean, did your office receive regular reports?

B: Yes. We had a command center that was set up. While normally communications came there, it became one of the focal points for communications in the federal government. From there, and if we had a field office set up of the impending strike, it too was keyed into the same communication.

F: Did you try to sort of beef up the state agencies that are connected with civil disaster?

B: Yes. Civil Defense was relied on very heavily for the warning in advance and for operations on the scene.

F: There was no problem with federal-state relations?

B: No.

F: You're in this thing together.

B: At least if there were, I didn't observe any. In fact, they seemed to be equally, if not more responsive, as though they had been living for this moment. It was their mission and their time to act. Civil Defense, we found very responsive. Civil Defense, if I remember correctly, at that time was related to the Department of Army, and our role was only one of coordinating its response, but there were no inhibitions that I was able to encounter.

F: Did you ever fill in for Director Bryant on the National Security Council?

B: No, I did not. As I was anticipating your visit, I don't have any certain knowledge that the National Security Council met during the time we were there. It may have. There were groups of people who were members of the National Security Council who met, but I had the general impression that the President did not rely heavily on formal meetings of the National Security Council.

F: Did you get any opportunity to see President Johnson during this period?

B: Yes, on two or three occasions. One of them is particularly vivid. He'd had a series of meetings with cabinet officers and sub-cabinet officers, urging the reduction in federal expenditures. I was there, along with the OEO director. It was about that level. The President was telling us, "I may be captain of this team, but I can't tell you where you have money in your budgets that you need not spend, and I'm going to have to depend on you

fellows to do it." He told us, "You know, I know people laugh at me for turning off the lights in the White House. Turning off the lights in the White House is about the size of the thing that I can do myself. The big things you're going to have to do. You go right home now and you find out where there's a little money on that budget that you don't really have to spend and you turn that back. Issue whatever order you need to impound it."

F: Do you find when you do a retrenchment like that that the most effective place to cut down is in personnel or in program?

B: Our agency had money that we used really almost on a contractual service basis, and we had funds like that that need not be spent. It may in the long run have struck at personnel in other agencies because there had been a kind of long standing expectations that out of those funds so much would go to HEW and so much would go to Labor and so much would go to somebody else. I didn't know that that's what the informal expectations were until we froze a good little bit of money that wasn't going to be spent and the cabinet officers rose up in righteous indignation and wanted the money. But I never heard a peep out of the White House, although one of the aides did call and say, "You know, out of that whole group that was over here last week, you were the only one who did anything. Do you want to rescind your actions?" And I said, "Did the President or somebody find that my action was ill-founded? And they said, "Oh, no, but we just thought you might want to know."

By that time I knew I wasn't going to be a career appointee of anybody, and it seemed like the right thing to do, so we stayed with it. But I had the expectation that there were individuals somewhere in these other agencies whose jobs were probably jeopardized.

F: How did you find the White House staff from the standpoint of general

intelligence and administrative ability, discernment and so on?

B: Oh, I had great admiration for them, the discernment, perception. In educational activities in state government, I had been dealing with intelligent people, but I found the peers or the superior to the people I had been dealing with there very impressive; people with the ability to relate. Joe Califano, for instance, with his broad range of responsibilities could just like a computer interrelate the information which he had--technical information with what he perceived to be the political implications of things.

F: As a former professional educator now, not specifically detailed to education, were you ever called upon for your educational expertise? Or did you have enough to do as it was? Did people like Douglass Cater ever contact you?

B: No. I had worked with him on other things.

F: You mean before you went up there?

B: No, while I was there, conferences and things where he was involved. But no assignment or request for anything dealing with my profession.

F: Did you get any opportunity to observe Johnson as an administrator?

B: No, not really, save as I watched at that conference where he was. I had seen him on a number of occasions where I think the power of his personality and his office were being used to persuade people in the establishment to do things. But I was not in a position to observe any more normal kind of administrative activity.

F: Did you get the feeling that he was insulated from your agency or that if you really had to, you could get through to him?

B: I had the feeling that we could get through to him if we needed it, you know, if there was something that we really needed to get to him.

F: And conversely, did you feel that you could get away with anything?

B: I had the feeling that our agency was not perceived as having a very

relevant role in the federal government. When practical decisions needed to be made, I observed that we weren't among the first to be called. I entertained the possibility that it would be surprising if a practical idea came out of OEP. And I had occasion with people like John Macy to speculate on that a little bit and never did find anybody who was willing to argue with me when I posed that as a hypothesis.

F: There was an intergovernmental relations committee--I know Governor Bryant mentioned it when I talked with him--on welfare that recommended that the federal government assume the entire welfare burden and relieve the states of it, and the states assume the entire education burden and relieve the the local communities. Did you get in on this at all?

B: That committee was being activated about the time it was clear that I was coming home. No, I did not, really. And I think a good bit of the Governor's chairmanship of that continued after he left OEP too.

F: Yes, this went on, a sort of general continuing federal-state relationship situation.

B: Yes. We had a unit in our office--I can't remember the designation--that worked with state relations a good bit. The Governor was as the director and I guess under kind of a personal commission had been designated as Mr. Johnson's liaison with the governors, and I was involved in some of those activities, but not with the intergovernmental committee.

F: Did you spend a good deal of time on the road?

B: No. The Governor spent a lot of time on the road. I guess a part of the division of labor was for me to stay home.

F: Free him, in other words.

B: Yes. I visited a number of our district offices and the emergency centers for

government.

F: When you have a natural disaster, say a hurricane here on the Florida coast, is it inspiriting for someone to come down from Washington like you or Governor Bryant and sort of be on the scene, or can you just do a maybe even more effective job back up there where you're not clouded with all the people clutching with you?

B: Yes. We had people who were sent to manage these and we had our regional offices around the country. Somebody from the local regional office and somebody from the national office would come and were on the scene, usually with our regional man being the senior one. The Governor went with the President when they inspected the damage in the kind of ceremonial thing.

F: "Let's sort of fly over this."

B: Yes. Our role was involved more heavily in the rebuilding and in the restoration there. The decision would be made how much money could be released, are we going to patch up that road or are we going to build a new one. The law was pretty clear. We could make emergency repairs.

F: Did you actually have the money in your budget for that, or did you have to con some other department out of it?

B: No, the President had discretionary funds, a very substantial sum of money which would be designated then to our agency.

F: "We need X hundreds of thousands to put this causeway back in operation." What do you do?

B: It would come in a more general way. We would make an estimate of how many millions of dollars it would take to carry out the federal government's share early. A part of the psychological thing would be fairly early for the President to announce that he'd set aside two and a half million dollars in aid

to do this while things were very rough out there. It was always urgent to get those things made quickly so that the local governments and the people would know that there was something more than standing by.

F: All right then, the salt water has in effect salted down my cattle, it has ruined my crops, and so forth. This is a private situation, this isn't really--Can you come in on that to help me?

B: No. There were governmental programs which could and while we didn't really have to prod them at all--you know, Small Business Administration and others--Agriculture had ways of doing this. Those monies did not come out of the President's emergency disaster fund.

F: To stay in the Florida complex, what do you do when you have knocked all the birds out of their rookeries and all the alligators out of their nesting places in the Everglades?

B: The law said what we could do would be to restore on a temporary basis, make emergency repairs to public facilities. I guess we could rebuild the alligator's cage, but somebody else would have to go catch him and put him back in it. And this was a kind of balancing of what the law said with what the political circumstances required. You know, if it blew down a school house, we were authorized to make emergency repairs. How do you make emergency repairs to a building that has been blown away! Do you put up a temporary facility? Do you lease a trailer, move it in, or do you build a new school building? Local communities wanted a new school building; they had their spokesman in the Congress and elsewhere. At that stage of the game the decision-makers tended, at least during my time, to remain aloof and not get out in those communities. because when you get out there face-to-face with it and say, "Why should we put down a temporary road, why should you spend this much money?" You know, spend another 20, 30 or 40 per cent and you'd have a fine road! This made such good

sense that on the scene it was very difficult. It was easier behind the desk in the Executive Office to say, "This is as far as we can go." So there was at that stage of the game a kind of an aloofness that was a part of the pattern. Our field people would say, "Gosh, we'll use all the influence we can get to get them to approve it," but the requirements of the law were such that we had to deem that we had to be relatively conservative to remain within the law. I think we had reason to believe that the President wanted us to be compassionate and responsive, but he did want us to observe the requirements of the law.

F: Have you seen anything of the President since you left Washington?

B: No, I haven't.

F: What did you get out of government service, besides a fund of good stories?

B: I had been a student of political science, and I guess it confirmed something that has helped me a great deal in education, too. I had studied about government but I didn't really know it. I knew local government a little bit and I knew state government a little bit, but Washington was still something that was remote and impersonal.

F: A little difference between theory and practice.

B: Yes. Then I discovered when I was there that while we are a government of law, we are also a government of people, and the people I knew and worked with could go there and do those things. These weren't especially ordained by the Almighty, they were human beings like the rest of us, and I came to believe that the federal government was indeed a great adventure for human beings. I had an entirely different kind of feeling. It was no longer perfect and theoretical, but it was human and it was humane. I think a good bit of this probably [was that] I kind of drew a distinction between the

political leadership that I knew and the establishment, the bureaucracy, the civil service, which seemed to me to be unwarm and unresponsive and routine and mechanized. I perceived our job was to try to at least serve as an interface between the two and to get these people to believe.

We had a fellow who told us that something that we wanted to do was directly counter to the President's public announcement on the subject. I can't remember what it was; it wasn't anything of great consequence, but it was something that the White House wanted done. I said, "Well, this is interesting. You've been around here a lot longer than I have. Tell me, when did he do that?" He said, "Well, no president has made any pronouncement on this since Eisenhower made that speech in Boston."

(Laughter)

F: That's the last word.

B: That was the last word. And I presumed as a presidential appointee, I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'll go outside and say it to you, but you heard what the President said now: 'Go'." "Oh," he said, "Well, I was still going on that last bit of information, but I see it's outdated."

F: It is awfully easy to build up a precedent of one, you know.

B: Right, and particularly when you agree with it. What did I get out of it? I think I have renewed confidence and expectations from the Democratic process.

F: I think it can be made very responsive.

B: Yes. I have the impression that the battle for freedom and democracy can't be put on the shelf for very long. You have to work at it not only in every generation, but almost in every month of every year in the generation, to keep working at it because hardening of the arteries seems to be a very real danger.

F: You also get in that position of defending whatever it is you've done,

justifying it rather than an examination.

B: Yes. And we find now, talking about educational budgets in the state and trying new programs at a time when our institutions aren't growing, it's a matter of setting priority among the things that you have to operate within the money you have. I found so little willingness to set priority. It was easier to add on than it was to evaluate something that existed, that bureaucracy seemed to grow and to grow and to grow. There wasn't any problem in getting something new started; the problem was in terminating something that had been going on and kind of an increased expectation. I came back to this state which has supported Democratic candidates very well since I came back. You hear people say, "Mr. Johnson was a great spender," all this business, "Isn't that true?" I said, "We never had any pressure from him to spend money. Our pressure from him was always on the other side. The only pressure that we got to spend money came from your representatives in the Congress. We'd catch hell because we didn't spend as much money for programs that they wanted."

I can remember the very conservative congressman from this state thought he was going to run against the Governor for the Senate seat, I think, was greatly disappointed when he found that I was testifying before a congressional committee on extending the President's national disaster fund to restore private property. This fellow was hauling me over the coals because I was taking the position against extending this to restore private homes and things. He came from St. Petersburg and would say, you know, "In my district I have a little old lady who can't afford insurance and she can't do this. Do you mean it's the position of this administration to deny her the benefit of this program!" "Yes, sir, that's the position of this administration because there are other ways she can get it done." But I was impressed at what seems to me to be grave concern, and that is the expectation that we can get the government to do for us what we want it to do and retrench over there, knowing really

that we can't do that either because that congressman and those people aren't going to be able to do that any more than I'm willing to do it here. The kind of self-discipline that you have to exert in your family budget when your appetite gets beyond that which you can do, I guess, if I have any pessimism, it is that I don't see any ready mechanism for changing that. To say that even at the cost of raising taxes, we want these things, but of course we don't really have to raise taxes because we can take it from somebody over there, knowing good and well that you can't do that anymore. So while I have great exhilaration over what it is the federal government can do in response to the needs of the people, I have a great continuing concern--

F: I'm not regularly proud of Texas politicians--probably not Florida politicians either, I don't know any--but one time I did cheer for former Governor Allan Shivers, who's ultra-conservative. The Dallas Chamber of Commerce was very conservative as a general body and they were holding their annual dinner and they had Shivers up to talk to them. And he went down the list of everything that Dallas was asking for--the canalization of the Trinity River, the coming of a new federal building, new post office, the whole bit--and he said, "Now, you're screaming about cutting down money," and he just chewed them out royally on all their projects. He said, "Surrender these and you won't--" But that wasn't the idea. They wanted to cut out certain other things that were going on. They were against Passamaquoddy or something.

B: When the Governor ran for the Senate, he was reminded that he had been in the Office of Emergency Planning a few weeks when a hurricane struck in Florida and what did he find! That we didn't qualify for national disaster money. He

was interested in helping the people in Indiana and he was interested in helping them in Louisiana, but he didn't care enough about his own people. Indeed, we hadn't met the qualifications. I suppose you could make it appear that we had, but we hadn't, and he had the guts enough to say so. The same people who wanted us not to spend any money wanted to be sure they get their share. I don't stay awake nights worrying about it, but I am continually concerned that I don't see a mechanism that works against that.

F: I don't, either. You, of course, have another side of your coin as a professional academic. President Johnson, in his sometimes sentimental moments, likes to refer to himself as the "education president." Did you feel this when you were making your living as an educator down here?

B: Oh, yes.

F: Do you think he's justified in this?

B: Yes. There's no question in my mind but, as may be apparent to you, in part because I was there during his time and in part because his programs were things to which I responded well. I may not be the most objective person in the world, but with professional associates there was generally the expectation that the weight of the President's office and of the President would be on the side of the support of programs for education. He could be counted on for that.

Beyond that, I had the impression, and I don't know that colleagues generally would share it although I didn't have any evidence to the contrary, that a good bit of the initiative and the priority that were given was his very own. It wasn't some officer here or there, but it was the President's own interest, his own personal interest. I came to think of him as a human being motivated by concern for people, and you'd pick up evidence of that

every once in awhile. I remember being over at the Pentagon, part of the induction that I was having of all of the facilities of government, and met the people there in that command post that runs around the clock. A general was telling us that it was the President's habit to call over there late at night to find out "what happened to my boys," and you'd better know which boys he's likely to be talking about. If you'd know what he'd been briefed on the night before, here was a small party that had been lost, and these were the ones he wanted to know about. They were talking less about him than they were about the information retrieval system. Sombody said, "Mr. President, I'll call you back," and he said, "I don't have anything else to do, I'll just hold the wire."

F: That must be unnerving.

B: Yes, I bet it was. So I came, perhaps to idealize the human being who was over there, but I don't think that gets in the way of my conclusion that he and Mrs. Johnson too, gave great weight to the concern for education. Seeing her with those children, seeing her with young VISTA people and in talking to them, well, you know, she was helping them. She knew that there was going to be some shock between the theory and the idealism and what the world was like.

F: I always thought she did a rather good job of getting rid of that kind of wall that sets off the first lady that it is hard when you're talking to her to realize she was.

B: Yes. I felt that she was just able to lay it aside. The place we entertained her in St. Petersburg was an old maritime base. It wasn't elegant. It was very simple. It fell my happy privilege to go pick her up to take her to some activity that was going on. After I got through all the guards, Mrs. Carpenter was at the door and she said, "Oh, we're so glad you're here. Mrs. Johnson

has some questions she wants to ask you about the artwork." We thought we could liven up those walls with some Florida artwork about the place, and we'd found some delighful young artists. Mrs. Johnson said,"You'll have to accept me as I am. I don't have my shoes on and I need to put my lipstick on, but won't you take me around to see these!"

Then after the guests had been received at the art museum, and she hadn't had much time to spend with my wife or vice versa, she said, "Now, I'd like to have you and Mrs. Blee go with me and let's just walk around and see the things in this museum." If this had been our sister, she couldn't have been any more gracious and warm.

Then the time came for the Secret Service man to say, "It's time to go." By that time, we had gone out in the kitchen. She hadn't had any punch. So out in the kitchen she had kicked off her shoes and she was talking to the ladies who had served the punch and we were enjoying it. It was there that the message came. She put her shoes on, somebody brought her her coat, and she became the first lady again.

She had a remarkable way of divesting herself of that wall. Her concern was for the development of people. It wasn't just doing a few little nice things, but helping them see who they were and what kinds of lives they could lead if together circumstances and their will would get them there.

F: Anything else we ought to talk about?

B: No. I appreciate your coming.

F: I'm very glad to have been here.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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