

INTERVIEWEE: HALE BOGGS (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

March 13, 1969

B: Sir, may I summarize your career very briefly? Born in 1915, bachelors and law degrees from Tulane, first elected to Congress in 1940 as the then youngest member of the 77th Congress, service in World War II in the Navy in the Maritime Service, elected again to Congress in 1946 from one of the New Orleans districts where you have served since; in 1956 named Deputy Whip and in 1959 Whip of the Democratic party. And, as I say, that is a very brief summary of a long career. When in these years did you first become acquainted with Mr. Johnson? Did you see much of him in the years when both of you were in Congress in the '40's?

Bo: Yes, I saw a great deal of him. He was in the House when I came here in 1941, and he was an active member of the House. I got to know him right away.

B: Was he already by that time moving into a position of leadership in the informal sense?

Bo: Yes, I think so. He took great interest in his work and he had enthusiasm for his job. He was a great favorite of Speaker Rayburn even in those days, and of course that friendship lasted as long as Mr. Rayburn was alive.

B: It is often mentioned that Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson had a kind of father-son relationship. Was that obvious to the other members of the House?

Bo: Yes, I think so. It is very obvious that they were close. Mr. Rayburn had a great interest in Mr. Johnson's career. I guess there was a considerable difference in their ages which would sort of project a father-son relationship, plus the fact that Mr. Rayburn didn't have any sons and children of his own.

B: I know that you too were close to Mr. Rayburn. Was his relationship to Mr. Johnson unique, or did Mr. Rayburn single out other promising young [members] for sort of special attention or guidance?

Bo: Mr. Rayburn had a very unique way about young people. He had a close relationship with young people and he told me

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one time that this was one of the sources of his inner strength that kept him moving, that kept his enthusiasm up--his zest for the House and for living--so I will say that Mr. Rayburn had quite a few younger members that he was close to. Most of these members thought about like the way Mr. Rayburn did, hard working, pragmatic individuals.

B: I guess it would be fair to classify yourself as one of those too.

Bo: Yes, I was very close to Mr. Rayburn, very close to him. I felt this father-son relationship with him. Mr. Johnson oftentimes, long after he had left the House, after he was President, would say to people that he was as close to Mr. Rayburn as he was to his own father.

B: During those years when Mr. Johnson was still in the Congress, did you ever just chat with him about plans for the future--ambitions?

Bo: Never did, really. It was obvious that he was moving rapidly. I remember talking to him when he first ran for the Senate; he showed me a poll that had been made in Texas where he had only 9-percent of the votes. I said, "Well, I don't see how you can run under those circumstances. But he was very optimistic even then. That was his first race--I guess maybe he lost that race by a narrow margin.

B: The one in '41, he lost. I was wondering if he had ever indicated a desire to follow Mr. Rayburn's career in the sense of staying in the House?

Bo: Not to my knowledge. I have no recollection of him ever indicating a desire to stay in the House. He may have had it, but see, he ran for the Senate in 1941 and he ran again in 1948, so obviously he wanted to go to the Senate.

B: Did he develop in those years in the House the beginnings of the kind of leadership techniques that he later showed in the Senate?

Bo: Yes, I would say so; but, you know, the House is in many ways more restricted than the Senate. To begin with, there are three times as many members, or four times as many. Secondly, a man has to specialize when he comes to the House, and he usually does that. Now, Mr. Johnson did a lot of that. He was a member of the Armed Services Committee, and he was very interested in that subject and did quite well in it, and that's a typical House situation.

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B: I guess this applies mostly to after Mr. Johnson became Senate Majority Leader. Did he understand the House as well as he seems to have understood the Senate?

Bo: That's a hard question for me to answer. I think he did. I don't think he understood it as well as Sam Rayburn did, but I don't think anyone else did either.

B: In the meetings that you would have to coordinate Senate and House leadership when Mr. Rayburn was Speaker and Mr. Johnson was Majority Leader of the Senate, did Mr. Johnson just defer to Mr. Rayburn's judgment on how to handle this side of it?

Bo: No, Mr. Johnson always had his opinion and, as you know, Mr. Johnson is a man of very strong opinions and convictions. They would inevitably come to a meeting of the minds, but the idea that Mr. Johnson did exactly what Mr. Rayburn suggested isn't so.

B: Would they thrash it out between them?

Bo: Exactly.

B: I gather never acrimoniously.

Bo: No, I never saw them in an argument that could be described as acrimonious.

B: Do you suppose Mr. Rayburn helped push Mr. Johnson's ambitions?

Bo: Oh, yes, a great deal. To get ahead of the story a little bit, Mr. Rayburn managed his campaign for the Presidency in 1960.

B: When did you first see signs of Presidential ambition?

Bo: In Mr. Johnson?

B: Or in Mr. Rayburn for Mr. Johnson.

Bo: Well, I would say as early as 1956.

B: He wanted to be more than just a favorite son of the Texas delegation at the '56 convention?

Bo: Yes, I think he wanted to be more, although I believe that he was realistic enough to know that that convention was

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pretty well tied up, that Stevenson would be nominated.

B: Is there any chance in the politicking at that convention that Mr. Johnson would have considered a Vice Presidential nomination?

Bo: I think so. I'll tell you a story about that that I've told to very few people. Right before Mr. Stevenson was nominated, Mr. Rayburn called me--I was the liaison man in that campaign between Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson and Mr. Stevenson. I had managed Adlai Stevenson's campaign in the Florida primary campaign in 1956 against a good friend, Estes Kefauver, and I was also his manager in the South in 1956. So I was kind of liaison between Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Stevenson, Mr. Rayburn was the permanent chairman of the 1956 convention in Chicago. After Stevenson was nominated, and he indicated that he was going to leave the Vice Presidency wide open, Mr. Rayburn said to me that he would like to be Vice President, and I was very surprised.

B: Did he give reasons?

Bo: No. Just said he would like to be Vice President. At that time, Mr. Rayburn was 75 or 76 and of course that was the problem--I wanted to go talk with Governor Stevenson about it. Governor Stevenson was very close to Mr. Rayburn, very fond of him, but his answer was that he had left it wide open and it would have to stay that way. Of course, Mr. Rayburn didn't get into the contest. That was a very interesting insight that I had into Mr. Rayburn and his appreciation of the Vice-Presidency, and it served a purpose four years later when we talked about when Mr. Johnson did become a candidate for Vice President.

B: In the '56 convention, was there any suggestion of Lyndon Johnson as the Vice Presidential candidate?

Bo: I really don't remember. I am sure there must have been, but I don't remember.

B: But no direct, overt--

Bo: No, not like Mr. Rayburn.

B: That is interesting. I presume age and so on inclined Mr. Rayburn to think of stepping down and to leave the speakership.

Bo: Well, it would have been more or less in the tradition of

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Mr. Garner.

B: As you said, you were Stevenson's southern campaign manager in the '56 election. Did Mr. Johnson do any campaigning?

Bo: Oh, yes, he did a lot.

B: Well, of course, Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson had that Texas situation on their hands in '56.

Bo: That's right. Both of them were very active in the campaign for Governor Stevenson.

B: On later after the '56 election, did you see much of the struggle between Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson on one hand and the attempt to form a Democratic Advisory Council on the other hand?

Bo: A great deal of that, because I was Vice Chairman of the Democratic National Committee and I saw a lot of it.

B: Who originated the idea of the advisory council?

Bo: I don't know whether it was Mr. Stevenson or Mr. Butler.

B: It was in effect Mr. Butler who carried it out, wasn't it?

Bo: Exactly. Mr. Butler carried it out.

B: It's perfectly clear on the written record that Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn would have nothing to do with it for the reasons they gave.

Bo: That's absolutely correct; they wouldn't have anything to do with it.

B: What was your personal stand on this?

Bo: Well, I was very close to Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson, and I felt that they were correct, at least up to a point. I thought that it was wise to seek counsel from outside of the elected Representatives and Senators. On the other hand, I didn't think that this group could make policy decisions, which Mr. Butler wanted them to do, because Mr. Rayburn was Speaker of the House and Mr. Johnson was Majority Leader of the Senate, and they were very jealous of their own prerogatives, so they didn't want any kind of outside interference.

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- B: Was it they who saw to it that none of the Congressmen proposed to that committee actually served?
- Bo: I'm sure it was.
- B: Did that create any divisions within the Democratic National Committee itself?
- Bo: I don't think so. Mr. Rayburn saved Mr. Butler's job at the 1956 convention. Governor Stevenson was going to remove him as the National Chairman, and Mr. Butler was terribly upset about this, and Mr. Rayburn was the one who prevailed on Governor Stevenson not to remove Butler.
- B: I didn't realize Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Butler were close to each other.
- Bo: They weren't so close, but I think Mr. Rayburn thought it would be a mistake to change the direction of the National Committee at that time.
- B: Just the change itself would have been a mistake?
- Bo: That's right.
- B: Did that Democratic Advisory Council ever really do anything?
- Bo: I think they did a good bit. They met rather frequently and they made recommendations and they got a lot of attention in the press; they proposed programs which--most of which have now become the law. I don't remember specifically what they were, but they were pretty active.
- B: They were generally on the liberal side.
- Bo: That's correct. Most of them.
- B: That brings up another thing that was going on at the same time. This business of whether or not Lyndon Johnson was a Southerner. How did members of Congress like yourself view his activity in the civil rights bill in '57?
- Bo: Well, my approach to it was that he was the Majority Leader of the United States Senate and that as such he had responsibilities besides representing his own state. And I think what he did was a rather typical thing for Mr. Johnson. He waited to effect compromises, and after he got those compromises, he supported the bill.

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B: Were there rumblings among southern members of Congress in the nature of personal criticisms of Mr. Johnson? Did you have to defend him to other southern Congressmen?

Bo: Yes, to some of course who were very adamant on the civil rights question, but not as much as you would think. Mr. Johnson was a very popular Majority Leader.

B: He generally could do his own defending?

Bo: That's right.

B: In those years in Congress, was there between '56 and '60 an obvious rivalry between Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson for the nomination in '60.

Bo: Well, it became so later as it got closer to 1960. I don't think there was any great rivalry prior to that time.

B: You were close to Senator Kennedy too, weren't you?

Bo: That's right.

B: Did this put you in any kind of awkward position?

Bo: No, it really didn't. It turned out to be a good thing in the end.

B: Your closeness to both of them?

Bo: That's right.

B: You may be hinting on what I was going to ask next. I've seen it written that Hale Boggs was talking about a Johnson-Kennedy or Kennedy-Johnson ticket before the convention of '60.

Bo: That's right, I was.

B: Did you discuss this with either Mr. Johnson or Mr. Kennedy?

Bo: No, I didn't, but I discussed it with people around them.

B: You mean their staff advisers?

Bo: Well, people like Mr. Rayburn.

B: What was the reaction?

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Bo: Well, they just kind of shoved it aside. They would act as if they weren't taking the idea seriously.

B: Just indication--

Bo: It was pretty obvious to me that it made good sense.

B: I've also seen it written that Mr. Rayburn, who was not chairman of the '60 convention so he could concentrate on Mr. Johnson's campaign, tried to promote you for chairman of the convention. What happened?

Bo: I think that's probably correct. Strange thing--what happened was we ran into Paul Butler again.

B: It was he who prevented--

Bo: Well, he said no, and of course Mr. Butler is not with us any more, but I'm quite sure that he wasn't for me but he never did come out and say that. He had a committee, a site committee and a committee to elect the officers of the convention; and his committee voted for Governor Collins of Florida as the permanent chairman. I think Mr. Rayburn was for me, and Mr. Johnson was for me, and I think Kennedy was for me.

B: Kennedy for you too?

Bo: Yes.

B: The idea of making you chairman was a device on the part of Mr. Rayburn to favor Mr. Johnson's candidacy?

Bo: No, I don't think so.

B: Did you participate actively in either of the pre-convention campaigns?

Bo: No.

B: For Kennedy or Johnson?

Bo: No.

B: Or on the floor there itself?

Bo: No.

B: This brings up one of the areas that still is shrouded in a

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good deal of confusion and controversy, the circumstances of the offering of the Vice Presidential nomination and its acceptance by Mr. Johnson. I assume your closeness to Rayburn, Kennedy, and Johnson involved you in that. Could you just trace those events as you saw them?

Bo: Yes, I have a very vivid recollection of that development. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn and Senator Kennedy, all of them, were staying in the Biltmore Hotel in Downtown Los Angeles. I was staying out further at the Wilshire which is quite a little distance. Well, the morning after the night that President Kennedy was nominated, which I think was a Wednesday night, I got a telephone call from Tommy Corcoran asking me if I could get down to the Biltmore Hotel right quick. I did, and he and Ed Foley, former Secretary of the Treasury, were in the lobby. They told me that President Kennedy had offered the Vice Presidency to Johnson, but that Johnson was going to do whatever Mr. Rayburn advised him to do, that up until that time no decision had been made.

So I first got hold of D. B. Hardeman who worked for me, he worked for Mr. Rayburn at that time, and he was sleeping right next to Mr. Rayburn, so I had to get him out of bed, and I told him I had to get in to see Mr. Rayburn. So he got me in. Mr. Rayburn was there with John Holden, who was his administrative assistant in those days, and I told Mr. Rayburn that I had talked with Corcoran and Foley about Johnson for Vice President. As a matter of fact, both of these men were with me at the beginning of the meeting--and I knew that in 1956 that Mr. Rayburn wanted to be Vice President himself, so I knew that he had a very high regard for the office of Vice President. And my whole conversation with him was that unless he went along with that suggestion there wasn't much chance of us winning the election. And of course he was skeptical about the Kennedy nomination because he had been very active in the House in this campaign in Texas for Al Smith, and he still believed that it was impossible to elect a Catholic President of the United States--not that he had any prejudice against Catholics because he certainly didn't; he was a man devoid of bigotry of any kind, but he did have this reservation in his own mind. And I just talked to him for awhile and pointed out that this was the only way we could win, what the stakes were, and so forth. And even then he was changing his mind and was beginning to realize the pressures were building up against Mr. Johnson going on the ticket; and that they were shoving other candidates--

B: This was the liberal labor group?

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Bo: That's right, the Michigan group and others. So I called Mr. Kennedy for him and he talked to him (Kennedy).

Kennedy said, "I'll come down to your room." Mr. Rayburn said, "Well, I'll come up there, Mr. President. It was two or three flights up. But Kennedy insisted that he would come down, and Rayburn said, "Hale Boggs will come up and get you." So I went up to Kennedy's suite, and he had a big crowd in the room, including Governor Stevenson who had just come in. I remember Stevenson was there, Averill Harriman was there--Harriman was very strong for Johnson being on the ticket--and Larry O'Brien. After a time I was able to get Larry O'Brien aside to tell him what had developed, we then got Mr. Kennedy and just walked down the steps to Mr. Rayburn's suite. I came in with Mr. Kennedy as did Kenny O'Donnell.

I forgot one thing. In the first part of that conference with Mr. Rayburn, Mr. Corcoran and Mr. Ed Foley were present in the room; and after a time Mr. Rayburn indicated that he wanted to speak to me alone so they left, and when they left was when we contacted Kennedy. Kennedy had with him Kenny O'Donnell and of course Rayburn had John Holden in the suite with him. And when Kennedy came in, he greeted Mr. Rayburn and said, "Would you like for Hale to sit in with us?" And I spoke up and said, "No," I didn't want to sit in with them. And Mr. Rayburn said, "Well, whatever you say, Mr. President, whether you want Mr. O'Donnell or Mr. Boggs or anybody." And I spoke up very firmly and said that I thought it would be a mistake if anybody sat in the meeting other than the two of them, which I'm not sure Kenny O'Donnell liked, but that's what happened.

B: Was this because you thought they would speak more frankly without anyone around them?

Bo: Exactly. And it was then that Rayburn said that he would advise Johnson to run for Vice President on this ticket. Kennedy left after about a half hour and went upstairs and announced that Johnson was his running mate.

B: Did you find out then or later what they talked about?

Bo: Oh, I think they just talked about the fact that Johnson had decided to do it and so on.

B: Did Mr. Rayburn change his mind after that talk?

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Bo: Yes, he did. I think he changed his mind, or began to change his mind, prior to the talk.

B: That meeting finally convinced him?

Bo: That's right.

B: Did Mr. Rayburn then get in touch with Mr. Johnson?

Bo: Yes, he did. It was a combination of pressures on Johnson. You know, a lot of people who were, I guess mostly opposed to Kennedy, kept telling him not to do it, the leadership position in the Senate was a much more important post and so on. But that certainly wasn't universal. Most people that I talked to before I saw Mr. Rayburn wanted him, including men like Price Daniel, who was then Governor of Texas.

B: Did you talk to Mr. Johnson yourself that day?

Bo: I talked to him right after I met with Mr. Rayburn for a few minutes. By that time, the opposition was building up to him.

B: Was Mr. Johnson really insistent that he would not take the position unless he had Mr. Rayburn's approval?

Bo: Very insistent.

B: And do you suppose that would have held had Mr. Rayburn for some reason not given approval?

Bo: Of course, that's a speculative-

B: Yes, I realize that it is speculative.

Bo: I don't know, I really don't.

B: Was there ever any suggestion either that the offer was not sincere in the sense that it was a political ploy in the belief that Johnson would not accept, or that the Kennedy group itself was not unanimous on the choice?

Bo: I'm sure that the latter is true, that the Kennedy group itself was not unanimous on the choice, but I'm also equally sure that it wasn't a political ploy. President Kennedy definitely wanted Mr. Johnson, and was quite certain that he needed him to win.

B: There seems to have been some confusion created by a visit

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by Robert Kennedy to Mr. Rayburn later that afternoon. Did you see anything of that?

Bo: No, I didn't; but I don't think Mr. Robert Kennedy wanted Mr. Johnson.

B: Do you think that is what he discussed with Mr. Rayburn?

Bo: I don't know.

B: I was wondering if you had found out then or later what that meeting involved?

Bo: No, I really don't know what that meeting involved. I know that Mr. O'Donnell, while we were sitting out in the parlor of the suite when Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Rayburn went into the other room, Mr. O'Donnell and I sat outside, and Mr. John Holden. And of course I said to Mr. O'Donnell that I thought the ticket was a strong one with Mr. Johnson on it, and he himself, O'Donnell, expressed a contrary point of view.

B: You mean O'Donnell was not enthusiastic about Johnson?

Bo: No.

B: Did they have in mind anyone else, any specific other choice?

Bo: I don't know whether it was Symington or someone else. Symington was very prominently mentioned.

B: Would Mr. O'Donnell's point of view have been based partly on the attempted floor revolt that was building up at that time?

Bo: I don't know. But later, Mr. O'Donnell became very close to Mr. Johnson. As a matter of fact, one of the last talks I had with Mr. O'Donnell--was appointments secretary for President Kennedy later on, and there were some Texas politicians who wanted to come up and talk to the President, and I knew these people. They had talked to me. I just passed that on to Kenny O'Donnell just a day or two before President Kennedy was assassinated, and his response was that no one from Texas could see the President unless it was arranged through Mr. Johnson, that he had to know what they wanted to see him about. They were Texas politicians, so his attitude then was strongly pro-Johnson.

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- B: Did you play a part later that day in helping quiet down Governor Williams and the Michigan group and the others?
- Bo: Yes, I think I played a part. I don't know how significant a part of it I played, but I talked to a lot of those delegates.
- B: What was their main objection against Mr. Johnson?
- Bo: They wanted someone they considered more liberal.
- B: Were they not susceptible to just the plain political ticket balancing argument?
- Bo: Some of them were not and some of them were, but oftentimes you will find that these people are not susceptible to the normal thing that politicians are, namely winning.
- B: Do you believe that is what made the difference?
- Bo: Yes, absolutely.
- B: What part did you play in the campaign itself?
- Bo: I was very active in the campaign. I was active at home and elsewhere in the country. I made speeches all around the country. I organized the Louisiana campaign, and we carried Louisiana for President Kennedy.
- B: Did you travel with either of the parties of Mr. Kennedy or Mr. Johnson?
- Bo: I travelled once or twice with them.
- B: Was the campaign pretty well run?
- Bo: I think it was well run.
- B: Were the two--the Presidential and the Vice Presidential campaigns well coordinated?
- Bo: Not as well as they could have been.
- B: Anything more than is usual in a political campaign?
- Bo: No. As a matter of fact, Johnson had a train that year like we had four years later when we had the Lady Bird Special--that was in the '64 campaign--and he whistle-stopped all the way down to New Orleans.

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B: I was going to ask you--his train did end up in New Orleans in '60, didn't it? Was it well received there?

Bo: Very well received. He got a good crowd, and we had done what I thought was a creditable job of organizing the meeting.

B: At that time, the South wasn't showing the kind of almost irrational kind of a political reaction that came a few years later.

Bo: I don't know that that's necessarily accurate because in 1948, which was twelve years earlier, you had had a third party candidacy, Strom Thurmond, and four southern states voted for him. It had been a period of continued turmoil, but I think Johnson did a great deal to bring the South back in that campaign.

B: Did you form an opinion on the issue that had worried Mr. Rayburn, the issue of a Catholic running for President? Do you believe that the '60 campaign meant that that issue is no longer a major one?

Bo: It's a very difficult question to answer.

B: I know it is, sir.

Bo: You're asking if it applies even now.

B: I'll phrase it more simply. Was it as big an issue as you had anticipated in '60?

Bo: No, because Kennedy handled it so well. When he went to Houston, Texas, to talk to the ministerial association, and in a lot of his other campaign talks, I thought he in many ways turned it to his advantage.

B: You are a Roman Catholic yourself, aren't you?

Bo: Yes.

B: Did you help advise Mr. Kennedy on how to handle this?

Bo: No, I didn't. We may have talked about it, and I may have said to him to hit it head-on like he did, but that was pretty obviously the only way to do it, obviously the only way to do it.

B: In the years after the election, in the years of Mr.

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Kennedy's Presidency, did you see much of Mr. Johnson as Vice President?

Bo: I saw a great deal of him.

B: Could you tell how active and influential he was in the Kennedy Administration, particularly in its legislative program?

Bo: In my judgment, he wasn't too active.

B: Do you think this was by his choice or by President Kennedy's choice?

Bo: I think it was by his choice.

B: Is it that he was just deliberately restraining himself from being aggressive?

Bo: I think so.

B: Did you get the impression that was an uncomfortable role for Mr. Johnson?

Bo: Yes.

B: Sort of unusual restraints.

Bo: Yes, I think he was uncomfortable in the Vice Presidency.

B: Did he ever get really unhappy about it that you could tell?

Bo: Well, that's hard to tell; but I saw him on occasion when he seemed to be very morose, moody.

B: Is it possible for a Vice President, even a Lyndon Johnson, to be really active in assisting the Administration in Congress?

Bo: I don't know.

B: I was wondering if, from the point of view of a Congressman or the Congressional leadership, like yourself, if too much activity from the other end would create an adverse reaction. I realize this is another speculative thing.

Bo: I think that Johnson had a problem that was somewhat unique. He had been a Majority Senate Leader, and of course when he became Vice President, somebody else became Majority Leader,

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Mike Mansfield. And he had to always think about the fact that if he lobbied for legislation that it looked as if he were still trying to be Majority Leader of the Senate.

B: That's what I meant. I was wondering--beyond the personal relationships the situation doesn't just require a certain amount of inactivity.

Bo: I think it does. I think that the Vice President has a rather limited field in which to operate.

B: There has also been a good deal of speculation, and much of it in print, about the relationship between Johnson and the Kennedy group generally, not so much President Kennedy himself, but Robert Kennedy and the staff members. Was there obvious friction there?

Bo: At that time when he was Vice President?

B: Yes, sir.

Bo: I wouldn't say it was obvious, but people who knew Mr. Johnson well knew that that was true, that there was friction.

B: Did he ever complain about it, or did he just accept it?

Bo: I never heard a complaint about anything when he was Vice President.

B: There were at the time at least a few liberals [who felt] that the dumping of Mr. Johnson from the ticket in '64 was being considered. Is there any substance to that?

Bo: I will say that those were rumors; they were rumors, but I don't think the President had any notion of doing that.

B: For the same political reasons that he put him on the ticket in '60?

Bo: In the first place, right.

B: And apparently, again, whatever else existed, apparently President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson had a fairly smooth working relationship.

Bo: I think so. Everything gave that impression, and President Johnson was entirely loyal to President Kennedy; there's no question about that.

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B: In the first year of the Kennedy Administration, Mr. Rayburn's death in the fall of '61 changed the leadership. Did either Mr. Kennedy or Mr. Johnson play a direct or indirect part in the selection of Mr. McCormack as Speaker?

Bo: I don't think so.

B: That was strictly the House handling its own affairs?

Bo: Right. And it was practically automatic.

B: By virtue of seniority and previous position?

Bo: Right.

B: There were also rumors at the time that the White House wasn't all that happy with Mr. McCormack as Speaker of the House.

Bo: I never saw any evidence of that.

B: That the leadership and the Administration got along all right?

Bo: Got along very well.

B: It was of course a different kind of leadership and probably enhanced the position of the other men in leadership posts like yourself rather than one man. Didn't it become kind of a group?

Bo: That's substantially correct.

B: Did it work just as well?

Bo: I think so.

B: Then what happened to the Kennedy legislative program?

Bo: I think Kennedy made real progress with his legislative program. He had two bills that were difficult bills to pass at the time of his death; one was the tax bill, and the other was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But both of them were being debated at great lengths throughout the country. And, of course, after Kennedy's death they both passed, but they were both highly controversial. But I think that Kennedy would have eventually succeeded.

B: You think they would have passed in '64 had Kennedy still

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been President?

Bo: I think so.

B: Were you planning, there by the fall of '63, any change in tactics or strategy or emphasis to get those bills?

Bo: In the fall of '63 when Kennedy left here to go to Texas, the main bills that we were concerned about was passing the balance of the appropriations measures that still hadn't passed, and our plan was to pass them and then adjourn. That's really all we did after that.

B: Was there also any hint at the time there in the fall of '63 that Robert Kennedy would resign as Attorney General?

Bo: I didn't hear it, but there was some hint about it.

B: How necessary was the Texas trip?

Bo: I don't know whether it was necessary at all.

B: I was wondering if you were close enough to Mr. Johnson or any of the other Texans to understand whatever it was that was going on in Texas.

Bo: Well, I think the President was anxious to get his campaign underway, and there were several things that brought him to Texas. To begin with, there was a dinner in Houston honoring Albert Thomas. And Albert had worked very closely with him, and of course he knew Albert in the House, and Thomas even then was sick--he lingered a long time with cancer--and I think the President wanted to go, really wanted to go to Albert Thomas' testimonial dinner. Then the rest of it just fell into place to go on to Austin and Ft. Worth and Dallas,

B: William Manchester in his book on the assassination says that you discussed with President Kennedy the possible violence in Texas before the trip.

Bo: The impact of that statement in Manchester's book is not in the right context. What I said to the President was that politics in Texas are so disturbed--at that time they were really in a terrible factional fight--that it looked to me like you are apt to get into trouble. I didn't mean that somebody was going to try to shoot him.

B: You mean politically.

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Bo: I meant politically.

B: Political trouble.

Bo: Exactly. And I remember he kind of laughed about that and said, "Well, that makes it more interesting."

B: But you didn't mean to imply physical violence?

Bo: No, of course not. Never crossed my mind.

B: In the Manchester book, that statement about you is paired with Kennedy's New Orleans visit in '62 where there was some unrest in the crowd.

Bo: Yes. I had quite a talk with President Kennedy about that in 1962.

B: Do you mean before he went to New Orleans?

Bo: Before he went to New Orleans. What happened was that we had gone to a ball game the opening day in April 1962, I remember this quite well, and about the second or third inning it started raining, so it rained hard enough that we had to get under cover. We went into the dugout where the players stay, and the President came over to me and said, "I'm not sure about going to New Orleans." I said, "Why?" You see, he was going in May, May 4, I think. And he said, "Well, I've got reports that it's so tense down there that something could happen." I said, "Well, Mr. President, when the time comes that you can't go to an American city, you, as the President of the United States, then something's got to be wrong." And I said, "That's just conversation. You'll get a very warm, friendly reception when you go to New Orleans," and he did; he got a wonderful reception. At that time, there was--what he was talking about was threats of violence.

B: Had you been active beforehand in trying to calm some of the people in New Orleans?

Bo: Yes.

B: Some of the people of the Perez type?

Bo: Of course Mr. Perez went his own way, but Mr. Kennedy had a very large following in New Orleans, and he carried New Orleans pretty strongly when he ran for the Presidency.

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B: Sir, we are about at a stopping point here.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Hale Boggs

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Hale Boggs, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

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Signed by Hale Boggs on March 15, 1971

Accepted by Harry Middleton for the Archivist of the United States on December 11, 1972

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2313 Red River, Austin, TX 78705

ACCESSION NUMBER 73-12

Hale Boggs Biographical Information:

Congressman; b. Long Beach, Miss., Feb. 15, 1914; B.A., Tulane U., 1935, LL.B., 1937; admitted to La. bar, 1937, engaged in general practice of civil law, 1943, 1946; mem. 77th, 80th, 81st, 82d, 83d, 84th, 85th-87th, 88th Congresses, 2d Dist. of Louisiana; majority whip, 87th-91st Congresses; majority leader, 92nd Congress; Vice chmn. Demo. Nat. Committee, 1956; disappeared while on a campaign flight over Alaska, October 16, 1972, and presumed dead.