INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH A. CALIFANO, JR.

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

PLACE: Mr. Califano's office, Washington, D.C.

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F: I suppose at the outset we may as well dispense with formalities and be first name on this. Tell us very briefly how you came to be something between a young man and eventually a White House special assistant. Where are you from?

C: Brooklyn, New York. Born and brought up in Brooklyn. Then to Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts, where I graduated in 1952, then to Harvard Law School, where I graduated in 1955. From there I went into the navy immediately and spent three years in the navy, almost all of it in navy JAG [Judge Advocate General] in Washington, D.C., at the Pentagon. In 1958 in October I left the navy and came back to New York to practice law with Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer & Wood, a large Wall Street law firm.

F: Did it matter that you were a Democrat by persuasion?

C: No. As a matter of fact, I wasn't really either a Democrat or a Republican at that time.

F: You hadn't declared?

C: I suppose if I had any leanings it was towards being a Republican. In early 1960--it was actually Washington's birthday weekend in 1960--I was sick. My wife by that time had become interested in the reform Democratic politics in New York, and two things happened while I was sick: one, I read James MacGregor Burns' book on Kennedy [*John Kennedy: A Political Profile*], and secondly, I sat in on a couple of meetings that my wife had at our apartment. And I got interested in the Democratic Party, in Kennedy, and in reform politics in New York. At the lowest imaginable level I worked for both the reform political groups in New York and during the Kennedy campaign for him.

F: Both preconvention and postconvention or just--?

C: Preconvention. As a matter of fact, you talk about all these guys that are now on the Kennedy bandwagon--I naively, not knowing anything about national politics, just wrote Kennedy a letter in late February of 1960 and said I'd read MacGregor Burns' book; I thought he was likely to make a very good president; I felt we certainly needed to get the Democrats into the party and would be willing to help him in New York. I had no intention or desire to go into the government at that time.

During the preconvention activities in New York, I debated at the various reform Democratic clubs for Kennedy against both [Adlai] Stevenson and Johnson and [Hubert] Humphrey and [Stuart] Symington, who was also a candidate at that time. You've got to remember now, there were about ten reform clubs at that time. The usual outcome of the debate, you know, if there were a hundred and five people there, would be one hundred votes for Stevenson and five votes for Kennedy and none for Humphrey, none for Johnson, and none for Symington. And in some cases, none for Kennedy--a very liberal group.

When Kennedy was nominated, I did some work, as I said, at the lowest level, just organizing and door-to-door campaigns and things in our neighborhood.

F: Before we leave that, you were associated with the Democratic reform group there, and of course you know the outburst of indignation that ensued after Kennedy named Johnson as his vice presidential running mate. Did you see much evidence of that reaction, or was that strictly a convention reaction?

C: There was some reaction in New York. I myself am not enough of an ideologue to let that bother me. I think I'm more practical. But I do distinctly remember Bobby Kennedy getting all the reform Democrats in New York in a big room in the Waldorf Astoria, maybe two hundred people, and in the most candid, blunt terms, saying, "This ticket is Kennedy-Johnson. Stevenson is not a candidate; Johnson *is* the vice presidential candidate. Kennedy is going to be president and Johnson is going to be vice president, and anyone that doesn't work for them as a Democrat is never going to forget it while they are in office." So they didn't like talk like that, but I think it all wore off as time went on, as Kennedy's image got more liberal and as Johnson's civil rights record got more publicly known.

When the election was over, I began to think a little bit about going into the government, both because Kennedy was appointing such good people, and also the sheer accident, I believe, of the work I was doing on an enormously boring but complicated stock-split transaction. Finally sometime in January I wrote to Cy [Cyrus] Vance, who had just been named as general counsel of the Defense Department. This was before twentieth of January, just before the twentieth. I had heard that he was a very good lawyer and I wrote him cold on a Wednesday.

F: You didn't know him?

C: I didn't know him. I wrote him cold on a Wednesday and sent him a resume and said I was interested in working for him. He called me on that Friday, asked me to fly down on Saturday, which I did. He interviewed me. On the following Monday he called me and offered me a job as his special assistant. He said he wanted a special assistant and Mr. [Robert] McNamara wanted a lawyer as part of a reorganization group that he was setting up in the Pentagon. This was the group that was involved in putting the boxes in the right places, setting up the Defense Supply Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and what have you, as distinguished from the systems analysis group under Charlie Hitch.

I agreed to come down, but it was seven or nine weeks before I could get down there because I had to finish the work I was doing. I got there in early April in 1961, and I spent most of my time writing legal opinions in support of the organization moves that McNamara wanted to take. But in August of 1961, the furor erupted over General [Edwin] Walker and muzzling the military. I then became, next to Vance, the chief lawyer for the Pentagon on that problem, and I spent more than half my time from then until July of 1962 preparing the Pentagon's case in the [John] Stennis hearings, which lasted eight months.

F: Was there much of a controversy within the Defense Department on whether Walker should be muzzled, or was it pretty clear-cut?

C: The controversy in the Defense Department arose over the extent to which military speeches and other public statements should be cleared in advance by civilian officials. And Walker was one element of that controversy and a dramatic one. The other dramatic element of it was the anti-communist seminars that were going on all over the country,

which McNamara wanted stopped, not because there were anti-communist, but because he felt that the military was getting into domestic politics. There was controversy on those two issues, but I think the fruits of the hearing were that the authority of the secretary to clear those statements in advance was clearly established, and military activity in seminars that got involved in domestic political matters, even indirectly, was eliminated for the most part.

In July of 1962 Cy Vance became secretary of the army; he asked me to go with him. I had planned to go back to New York, but I went with him for six months to help him as his special assistant. Mr. McNamara was sending Mr. Vance down to be secretary of the army because the army was becoming a serious problem in terms of getting going on the whole concept of systems analysis, and also because at that point in time it was the civilians in the Pentagon who wanted the airmobile division with the tremendous use of helicopters, the kind we have now in Vietnam, and it was the military that was reluctant to go forward with the experiment.

I went down with Vance. Shortly after we were there, maybe three or four months, Powell Pierpont, who was then the general counsel of the army, indicated he was going to resign. Mr. Vance asked me if I would stay on and be general counsel. At that point he asked me if I would be willing to stay on through the end of the first term, and I decided that I would do that. It was a wonderful opportunity for a thirty-one-year-old lawyer. So I didn't actually take that job over until April--it was early 1963, you've probably got the dates there.

F: I've just got 1963-1964.

C: I can get the exact date. I stayed in that job through April of 1964. In April of 1964, Adam Yarmolinsky left the Pentagon to go to the poverty program and become the deputy director.

F: Before we move you out of the army, were you involved at all in the problem down at Oxford, [Mississippi]?

C: Yes. I was involved in the problem at Oxford; I was the top staff man for Vance on that.

F: Have you been interviewed on that?

C: No. I've interviewed people on it, but I haven't been interviewed on it.

F: Do you want to make that a part of this down the line, not now, but--?

C: Down the line, yes.

F: One other thing, were you involved at all in the sending of General Walker to Kirksville, Missouri?

C: Yes, I was.

F: Okay, we'll take that up another day.

C: Let me just make one point about that while I think of it now. It's funny, but from that moment on I was involved in every racial crisis this country had until I left the government.

In April of 1964, McNamara called me up to his office and told me that Yarmolinsky was going to go over and be deputy director of the Peace Corps [poverty program?], that he wanted me to take Adam's place. I told him I'd be delighted to do that, after talking to my wife, and I went up there within forty-eight hours after he talked to me, I was working up there. I remember it was a terrible crush to get out of the army. By this time Vance was the deputy secretary of defense.

F: You really hadn't stayed in any position long enough for your mistakes to catch up with you, had you?

C: No. I stayed there and in that capacity worked in a supersonic transport and all the stuff that McNamara worked on until November, and I did a lot of work with the White House at that time. I was liaison with the White House and I worked a lot with [Bill] Moyers, [Jack] Valenti, Mac [McGeorge] Bundy, rarely, but a little bit with [Walter] Jenkins or [George] Reedy, mostly in responding to a quick phone call. And I did everything from work on the Dominican Republic to get Juanita Roberts promoted in twenty-four hours. It was just a hodgepodge of stuff.

On the day after the election in 1964, Bundy and Moyers called me over to the White House in Moyers' office, and they said that the President wanted me to come over on the White House staff and be one of the special assistants. I said, "To do what?" And they said Ralph Dungan was leaving to become an ambassador [to Chile], and that the President wanted me to, one, do the talent hunt that Dungan had been responsible for, and number two, work on Latin American problems. I told them that I would have to go back and talk to McNamara. They asked me not to talk to McNamara because they hadn't and the President hadn't. I said I couldn't abide that; McNamara was my immediate boss and I had to talk to him. So I went back to the Pentagon. I was actually having lunch on another problem with Bob that day and some other people. During lunch Moyers called McNamara to tell him about this.

F: You hadn't raised the point yet?

C: I had not raised the point; I hadn't had a chance because there were other people in the room. And when lunch ended and McNamara left the dining room to go into his office, I

went in behind him and I told him. And he said Bill had called him, he had told Bill he was out of his mind, that he should go and get a good vacation in Puerto Rico and come back. McNamara then told me that in his judgment there were only two jobs on the White House staff that were more important than the job I was doing. One was McGeorge Bundy's job, and the other was what he said Moyers' job could be in the domestic area. And he told me to forget about it, that he would take it up with the President.

About a week later McNamara went down to see the President, and he went down with the base closure list, which was the first big billion dollar per year base closure list. It was November 10; it was the day before Armistice Day in 1964. He also went down with two appointments, as he later told me the story, two appointment problems. One was he wanted to make Paul Ignatius, who was then assistant secretary of the army for installations and logistics, the assistant secretary of defense for installations and logistics. Ignatius later became secretary of the navy.

F: We have a good interview with him.

C: And number two, he wanted to straighten out my situation, and kill it. In preparation for that, I might say, in typical McNamara fashion we prepared biographies and pictures of two other likely candidates for that job: [Harry] McPherson and Steve [Stephen] Shulman, neither of whom knew about that or know about it to this day, because McNamara operated on the theory that he just couldn't tell the President no; he'd have to give him some alternative.

Bob came back and I asked him what had happened. And he said that he thought he'd gotten me about six months of grace time, but that the President would make another

pass. He also indicated, incidentally, that both [Clark] Clifford and [Abe] Fortas were at that meeting. In any case, I never heard anything more about going to work for the White House until the day that Bill Moyers was announced as press secretary. And I was just reading that over the ticker when Moyers called me--it was a Thursday, as I recall--and asked me to come over to the White House. I immediately said to him, you know, "Is it about working over there?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, I've got to go and talk to McNamara." He said, "The President has already talked to McNamara." So I hung up, called Bob, and Bob said the President had talked to him, but to go over and talk to Bill. I went over and talked to Bill, and Bill said that the President wanted me to take over his duties now that he was going to be press secretary, that he wanted me to handle the domestic programs basically.

I went back and talked to McNamara, and we talked about whether or not this could really be a fruitful job. I didn't know the President; he didn't know me, really. We both--McNamara and I, that is--came to the conclusion that if the job covered the preparation of domestic programs, first, that is, in terms of legislation or administration; second, the coordination of the operation of domestic programs once they were begun; third, the handling of domestic crises; and fourth, heavy involvement in the economic area, you could probably make something coherent out of the domestic part of the government. And we left it at that. McNamara said he would talk to the President. Later that day I got a call from Jack Valenti, saying the President wanted my wife and I to go down to the Ranch for the weekend regardless of what I decided to do. And still later, Moyers called and said the President was having a dinner for the chairmen of most of the

1964 task forces that night, would like me to be there and would like me to meet them whatever I decided to do. As he called it, [I'd] be working with them in the future.

F: He was kind of bringing you around, wasn't he?

C: As a matter of fact, I got my first taste of Lyndon Johnson indirectly that night because I told Bill I could not go to the dinner, that a friend was in from Panama. Actually, it was the CIA man in Panama, who I had met when I was there, and [he] was already at a restaurant waiting for me. A minute after I hung up, Moyers called back and said, "The President told me to send a car out for your friend and take him home and for you to come here." So I went over there and then the next morning I talked to Bob. Bob said he had talked to the President in the terms in which he and I had talked, and he had also told the President that he thought it would be pointless for me to go over there unless I was going to work for him. To work for Moyers or anybody else on the staff--but it was Moyers that Bob was mostly concerned about--would not be a satisfactory situation.

F: Now, up to this time, your relations had been with the White House staff and not with the President?

C: That's right. I had seen the President--well, I had written the defense message in 1965, the one the President submitted in 1965, which was virtually unchanged at the White House. I had done the work on the supersonic transport, and I think the President was aware of that. And I had worked on two or three speeches for the President during the campaign, which he may or may not have been aware of. I don't know. But my contact had mostly been with Moyers, Valenti, and Bundy.

F: And they were suggesting you to the President?

C: I assume that. I don't think the President would have known me until that Thursday night when I went to the dinner if he had walked right into me.

F: On that particular night, did he run a regular receiving line in which you went through and introduced yourself? How did you get together with him that evening?

C: No, he just came over. As a matter of fact, he introduced me as someone on his staff at the dinner, but then after the dinner, he came over to me and said, "Why don't you come down to the Ranch with me tomorrow instead of waiting until Saturday?" And I explained that my wife was out of town and I couldn't get her, couldn't get the kids straightened out until then.

We went down that Saturday morning very early in the morning. Dick Goodwin was on the plane. We got off the plane, and Goodwin had warned us of the tremendous importance of eating upon arrival because you never knew when the next meal was coming. My wife and I immediately ate breakfast, a big breakfast. I'll never forget it. We then went for a drive around the Ranch, and then we went swimming. And we were swimming in the pool and to the best of my recollection, my wife was there, Mrs. Johnson was there, Jack Valenti and his wife, Jake Jacobsen, Vicky McCammon, now McHugh, I guess that's about it. I can't remember whether Goodwin was there at that moment or not; I remember the others though. And he literally asked me in the pool. You know, we were swimming, and he said, "Will you come and help your President?" And I said it would be an honor and a privilege. And that's how it started. The rest of the weekend was a pleasure for the most part. That day, I might say, beginning with the time we got up to leave Washington, it was twenty-five hours before we got to bed. We got to bed about 3:00 a.m. Texas time.

F: Which is later, Washington time.

C: Then I came back to Washington on Monday. McNamara told me to take the week off because the President wanted me a week from the following Monday, and I took the week off. The first I heard of the announcement was lying on the beach on the Jersey shore at my folks' place, the one o'clock news, John Chancellor announcing me as special assistant to the President. And that was it. I went to work the following Monday at the White House.

F: Did you get any chance to wrap up your Defense Department duties?

C: I worked about half and half for a couple of weeks. I used to go back to the Pentagon at night.

F: All right, now, you came over and you moved, in a sense, into a position that Bill Moyers had been filling. Were the lines very clear-cut, or did you more or less have to feel your way?

C: I came over and this was now the last week of July in 1965. The old agenda, so to speak, of the liberal programs, Medicare and all that stuff, was either passed or going through. (Interruption)

The problem that first struck me was the preparation of a legislative program for 1966. And that meant the organization of task forces and blocking out of areas of interest. Within a few days two things were very clear to me. One was that while guys like Valenti and Moyers were of enormous help in a quick piece of advice here and there or getting to know the President, they would absolutely not have one minute of time, because they were so busy, for any of my problems in terms of preparing a program.

Secondly, that to do it intelligently, I couldn't do it alone. One man just could not do it. So I brought Larry Levinson over, and he arrived I think before the end of the first week.

F: You had known Larry previously?

C: I had known Larry in the Pentagon. We had actually been classmates in law school; I hadn't seen him since we graduated until the General Walker hearings that I mentioned before. He was the air force lawyer during those hearings. There had been some thought that McNamara would make him special assistant to succeed me. Bob finally decided on somebody else, so I grabbed Larry. I talked to Larry and he was willing to come over.

F: You had a free hand in picking a staff?

C: I had no problem whatsoever. I mean the President approved the people I brought on the staff, but he never rejected anybody I recommended.

Then we set about blocking out the areas. And I did that basically, as the memos will show, I went around the staff and got their views on to the cabinet officers and got theirs. I can go into this in more detail later. You want a quick brush of how the office got built up?

F: Right.

C: And then I'd get the President's okay on the areas involved, and then I got his okay on the people that sat on task forces. Aside from that, I had no problems. I'd keep him informed on the really difficult problems so it wouldn't come to him all of a sudden one night. But I think aside from what he may or may not have thought about the early work I was doing in the legislative programs, the two things that made it in terms of my relationship with him were, one, there was a water crisis that summer in August in the Northeast and he called me one day and said it was a mess; he wanted something done about it. And I put

together Governor [Buford] Ellington and [Stewart] Udall and some other people and I got them over and talked to them and worked out this water crisis team concept and the idea that plans would come out, and I sent a proposal to the President about bringing the governors in from the New England states, and the mayors, which he okayed. Then we checked that out and it all went very well. It went well in the public sense; all the meetings were amicable and successful, and we got the governors to do what they ought to do and the mayors to do what they ought to do, so that the people felt something was being done. And indeed we did something about the problem.

F: Did you handle the prebriefing of the governors before they came down? Did they come with some idea of what was going on or did--?

C: Oh, yes. My recollection is I probably spoke to [Nelson] Rockefeller personally and maybe Mayor [James] Tate, I just can't remember, but I'm sure Governor Ellington did most of that. I did do the preparation of the paper as to what we'd do, so that everyone was talking from the same paper when we talked to the governors. You know, it was a good Lyndon Johnson effort in the sense that it was a perfect vehicle for his talents, because one of the key problems was that the governors just couldn't get together. People that controlled water didn't want to give up water, and people didn't want to take the steps necessary to preserve water.

The second thing that happened was the aversion of the steel strike, which came up in August, late August. This was all within the first month I was there. One night the President called me down to his office--I. W. Abel, who was president of the Steelworkers, had just left--and he handed me a couple of pieces of paper which were Abel's initial demands. And the President said to me, "Learn all about this. It's going to

be a major problem." So I set about learning everything I could, and as you may recall, we had enormous difficulties with the union and the company people, which resulted in our bringing them down to the White House and around-the-clock bargaining over in the Executive Office Building, and a successful settlement within the guidelines, 3.2 per cent, just before Labor Day, complete with an announcement on television and what have you. I did nothing but work on that for the week when it was very hot. And I think those two things, more than anything I had done of the more lasting work in terms of the legislative program or changes in the domestic departments--

F: This was when Joe Califano emerged?

C: --were what did the trick in terms of establishing a personal rapport with the President. During the steel thing, for example, I used to go in every night. When we had them in the Executive Office Building I'd go in to see the President about ten o'clock at night, ten or eleven.

F: Did you have any time to study?

C: What do you mean, study?

F: To learn about steel you had to get some information somewhere. What did you do to learn all this?

C: Well, I studied the papers I had. You know, I used to tell Gardner Ackley I got the best course in economics that anyone could ever have, and that was from the Council of Economic Advisers. They had prepared papers; they had done a big study of steel the year before. I used to read that stuff at night, or early in the morning. But most of all, you know, you picked it up as you went along. That's the only study I did.

F: How did Moyers come to leave? Or go back with that, did you and Moyers find a good working relationship?

C: Yes, I had no problem.

F: He didn't hold on to what he had been involved with?

C: No, he didn't at all.

F: Well, now you changed the concept of what he had been doing.

C: Yes, let me finish that. I suppose I ought to do that. After Larry and I went through the legislative program, during the course of it we learned a lot of things. We'd never done anything like that before; I'd never done anything like that before. One, I learned that every single message had to be rewritten, almost as though it was done from scratch, at the White House. Two, I discovered that we really got very poor staff work from most of the departments, in part because that was the way they always did it, in part because the cabinet officers didn't really have time to get into the new programs in-depth--they had a department to run; they had a whole public constituency to satisfy--in part because we didn't know enough about what we were dealing with to probe deeply enough. So I came to the conclusion that what we--and another thing happened. I noticed that I was increasingly getting involved as the arbiter of disputes between departments, where two people would think they ought to do something or they'd have different views, and as program tumbled upon program, more and more departments got into the same kinds of areas, so that was one practical aspect that hit me. On a more theoretical basis, shortly after I got to the White House, I talked to the President about putting a Planning, Programming and Budgeting System into effect throughout the government and not just

the Pentagon. There was a happy coincidence of people. Harry Rowen, who had been a PPBS man in the Pentagon, was an assistant budget director.

F: Now what is PPBS?

C: Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System, the whole McNamara concept of systems analysis.

F: Some fellow fifty years down the road may not know what you're talking about.

C: In the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, which was and is in many ways still the key domestic department, John Gardner had just brought Bill Gorham, also from the Pentagon and also oriented in systems analysis, over to be an assistant secretary. Third, Charlie Schultze had just begun as budget director; he and I started within a few weeks of each other with the same idea. So I went to the President with that on the theory that he should not have to make decisions department by department in terms of the budget. That the way a president should make decisions, and theoretically did make them, was in terms of all our national resources, our government resources, *vis-à-vis* all our government needs. But as a practical matter he couldn't do that because budgets came up by departments and what have you. And he bought it. So we had a cabinet meeting, a breakfast cabinet meeting, in August--the date August 25 sticks out in my mind; I don't know whether that's the date or not--in which Charlie Schultze and I briefed the cabinet on this system, and the President signed the memo that started it.

Making that system work, and it still probably isn't working too well, but getting it off the ground, I discovered, was going to take a lot of my time as well as the Budget Bureau's time; in fact I think it took 10 per cent of my time for that first six months thereafter. As a result of all these things, it became clear to me that what the President

needed, I thought, and what I needed to serve him, was a domestic staff. While I never said this to anybody on the White House staff at that time, I did later as it got near the end. If I were starting the White House staff from scratch, I'd have one guy in charge of domestic affairs. We didn't have that in the situation which I was faced with. We had [Douglass] Cater dealing with education and health, Harry McPherson [dealing with] civil rights.

So I had to figure out some way to get this done without getting in trouble with my colleagues. I came up with the concept of hiring guys who would work for me but would also be available to service them, and [I] always felt that over the long pull of time, if Johnson had run for two years [terms], ultimately all of us would have been gone and somebody would have come in. When Cater left, you wouldn't have hired another guy for health and education; you would have just folded it in.

So I began looking for people, and I spent a lot of time looking for people. I eventually found out about Jim Gaither, who was the first person I hired, after working with John Douglas on a lot of price problems. John Douglas was then the assistant attorney general and Gaither was his special assistant. I tried to get Gaither. The first time I tried I failed, but a few months later I succeeded and got him over there. I eventually took Jim and put him in charge of poverty, health, education, and manpower training, which really we saw as one ball of wax.

Then the next guy I hired was Fred Bohen. Bohen was assistant dean at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton. I first talked to him and asked him if he would come down and be the staff director of a task force on government organization, which has probably done the best piece of work on government organization in this decade. It

was chaired by Ben Heineman, and McNamara and Mac Bundy, Charlie Schultze, there were several very good people on it. Bohen agreed to do that, and I said after that was over I'd like to bring him to my staff, and we could make that decision at that time. He came. I took Fred and I put him in charge of the cities in the sense of all the housing programs. We never had anyone on the White House staff who understood housing programs; [it's a] very technical business. I put him in charge of all housing programs and then also put him in charge of organization matters--you know, reorganization plans and things like that--and personnel policies to the extent we became involved in them. People like John Macy would come and see me; I had no way to make a judgment, except off the seat of my pants.

I then actually got a letter out of the blue from Matthew Nimetz, who was then clerking for Justice [John M.] Harlan. I interviewed Nimetz and then asked him if he'd like to come to work on crime, civil rights, and, largely because we didn't have anybody else working on it, pollution problems, air and water, and through that all kinds of Interior problems. Nimetz did.

I did one other thing during the course of that. As the economic problems started to increase and they started to take a lot more of my time, McNamara told me that he thought we ought to get somebody that should work for me full time on price and wage problems. So in late 1966 I talked to John Robson, who later became the undersecretary of transportation. Robson was a roommate of mine at law school, bright, mature lawyer in Chicago. I brought him in to see the President--I might say he was the only guy I hired during that period of time that I brought in to see the President. I brought him before I hired him. The reason I did that was because Robson, unlike these other guys, was going

to have to deal directly with corporations and labor people, and it was terribly important that the President know him and have some confidence in him.

F: Were you looking ahead to the possible Department of Transportation appointment?

C: No. There was none of that at that time. I remember bringing him in. The President told him what he wanted done; the President told John, "I need you more than I need a battalion of marines," and, "Nobody that's ever come to work for me has ever been hurt." John tortured over it. Here you're asking a guy to come down--actually we asked him to come down for six months, that's all; we thought we were just getting over a hump. John came down.

The [Department of] Transportation thing came up in the most casual way. I guess it was late 1967. We were driving around the Ranch one night--the President was driving around--and we were talking about HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] appointments, and the President was thinking. By this time we had become impressed with Robson; he was thinking of making John the assistant secretary of housing and urban development for FHA, which was Phil Brownstein's job. He was very unhappy with Brownstein at that time. I said to the President, "Robson doesn't know anything about this." And the President said, "You don't have to know anything about it; he's a good man and he can learn things." And I said to him, "If you're thinking of him, we really ought to put him in a place like general counsel of Transportation," and that's how that came up. That was just off the top of my head at that moment.

F: The President, incidentally, is a great believer in the transferability of skills, isn't he?

C: Yes.

F: A man can do one thing, he can do another.

C: That's what they teach at Harvard Law School.

Then I talked to [Alan] Boyd, and Robson became general counsel. The other person that I hired was Stan [Stanford] Ross, who was a friend of mine from Dewey, Ballantine in New York; he had subsequently gone to teach tax law at NYU [New York University]. He told me one time he was desirous of getting out of that. So when Robson became general counsel--by this time we had enormous economic problems and by this time I was doing more and more day-to-day things and had even less time. I began to look around for a replacement and I talked to Ross, got him to come down. The President talked to him one night for just a few minutes, five or ten minutes, hired him and we had Ross. Ross ultimately left to become general counsel of the Transportation Department when Robson became undersecretary, but that was all fortuitous.

I might say I used Nimetz on one other thing, I think. It was D.C. affairs. When we got the reorganization plan for the District of Columbia through, it was clear that we shouldn't have any particular assistant doing nothing but D.C. matters because we ought to get things focused in the mayor's office. [Stephen] Pollak agreed with that, who was then the assistant, the President agreed with that, and so Pollak became an assistant attorney general for civil rights. And I took on whatever residual problems there were with the District and let Nimetz handle them.

Now, you're interviewing these other guys, I don't know how well it worked in terms of staff relationships, but my own hunch is it worked pretty well. I didn't have many problems with people. But I would let these guys work for the other people. And in time, the last year for example, I think Gaither did more and knew more about HEW than Cater did; I think Nimetz did more and knew more about civil rights and the Justice

Department than McPherson did. But I don't think there was any real jealousy problem because they fed it up to those guys. I didn't care how they handed it out so long as there was one place in the White House where all these problems were getting considered together. I deliberately put these guys in offices right next to each other so they'd have to talk to each other every day all day long. I tried to get them working on joint problems even though it overburdened them, because I wanted to make sure these things were being interrelated. But that's how the staff got built.

F: And Moyers stayed out of this completely? He was busy with his press--?

C: Moyers, contrary to the press reports, did nothing. The only thing Bill did, Bill did write the State of the Union message in 1966, and he wrote the State of the Union message in 1967. Now, what we would do in that connection would be I'd give him the program. I'd get it briefed down and give him the program. But the rest of the messages, no, we did those. I say "we" did them; I don't mean I wrote them all. They were farmed out around to people in the White House. They did all come through me. I edited them all, but by no means did I write them all. Finally in 1968 my guys wrote all messages except the State of the Union; McPherson wrote the State of the Union.

F: Why did Moyers move out of the position into which you succeeded and into press secretary? I know the President asked him, but do you think it was just a matter of being needed somewhere else, or do you think that he had sort of run his time in that particular position?

C: I just really don't know. You know, I have no feel, I have no reason to believe he did it for any reason other than that the President asked him to.

F: Why do you think he left the President?

C: My hunch is that that is so complicated personally as well as--you know, a variety of reasons. There was a very complicated psychological relationship between the President and Moyers. Bill is a phenomenally able, but phenomenally ambitious guy. I think it was a combination of--well, who knows? I think, one, that press job is one of the hardest jobs in the world. [It's] just incredible, twice a day, standing before those guys. Number two, your impact on substance is marginal in my judgment. And I think that may have started--

F: You're really just a go-between in a way, and not a very satisfactory one at that.

C: And I think Bill wanted to make it out on his own. And I'm sure there were all sorts of personal reasons. I mean, I think that relationship is so complicated you'd probably have to get it from the two guys involved, and then somebody will have to study it.

F: Who still probably don't know the answers.

Along that line, I've picked up around here that you always managed to stay in good rapport with the Kennedy people and that in a sense you were the messenger from the Johnson Administration, the reassurance that Johnson was a proper sort of liberal, progressive person. Is that valid?

C: I don't know how--

F: Well, you started out as a Kennedy man so your credentials were acceptable originally--

C: There was no reason for them ever to know I was a Kennedy man.

F: You weren't that exposed?

C: I don't subscribe to this theory that everybody keeps a card file on everything you do.

Let me say on the Moyers' thing. Bill wrote me what I considered to be a very beautiful and nice note when he left the White House, which will ultimately get into the Johnson papers.

On the Kennedy thing, I got to know Bobby Kennedy--well, let me go back. I never really knew Jack Kennedy; I attended, to the best of my recollection, two meetings at the White House which were held with him, both involving Cuba, which I worked on for McNamara. And if you get into that, we've got to put some super classification on the tapes.

F: Seal it in concrete.

C: Yes, really. But in any case, I then got to know Bobby Kennedy during the Oxford incident; I was with Vance at that time. I did go over to see Kennedy during that incident about General Walker because I was kind of an instant expert on Walker from the hearings. And I got to know his people very well because I went into all the planning sessions with them. I got to know Kennedy even further during Tuscaloosa, [Alabama], which I guess was the--let me see. Bay of Pigs was April of 1961; [James] Meredith was September of 1961; Tuscaloosa was September of 1962. Now, I don't know when the prisoners were ransomed from the Bay of Pigs--well, I also saw Bobby occasionally during the post-Bay of Pigs Cuban assessment which I worked on for Vance. This was really post-Bay of Pigs, I think. No, we're talking about early 1962, and when Vance was secretary of the army I spent half my time on Cuba for a period of a couple of months there, and I got to see Bobby then. I then saw him at Tuscaloosa and then during the August 1963 March on Washington. I handled that for the Pentagon. You know, Vance

and Kennedy were kind of at the top and John Douglas and I were the number-one aides on either side.

F: Which I might add I thought was beautifully handled. I don't think they've done as well since.

C: That was one that worked.

Out of the Cuban thing, when the prisoners were ransomed I was charged with putting together a program for them which originally started out as an army program. The army would train them, put them through some kind of basic training and give them English and a lot of other things, which ultimately became--we did a lot of things around the government and HEW and other places. I got to know the Cubans very well during that, all the leaders. And I got to know Bobby a little better during that because he was deeply involved emotionally with what had happened there. As much as anything I've ever seen, it was a matter of enormous personal interest to get them straightened out.

And in 1964 during the campaign for the Senate, McNamara did a couple of things for Bobby and I was part of that. I think I wrote a speech for Ros Gilpatric to make on television, and we provided Kennedy with some material about New York. After the election, when we announced the base closure list and Kennedy came into the Pentagon to complain about the closure of the Brooklyn Navy Yard and the army terminal, I handled our side of the case. McNamara handled it, but I worked on that. That was all argument, but it was friendly argument.

So I had that little rapport in terms of background. I talked to Kennedy about two or three major programs we went with that we were interested in, at the President's direction. He sent me up to see him. He sent me up with the housing bill of 1968; he

sent me up with a couple of things the year before. And I saw him socially a couple of times after I was at the White House; he had me out to Hickory Hill. But I don't want to imply--you know, there was nothing intimate in the sense--I'm not either being defensive or not defensive about it; it was just an ordinary relationship. I happen to think he was a very fine individual.

F: You didn't move, though, in a sort of intimate Kennedy circle?

C: No. I got to know Sarge and Eunice Shriver very well because of the--

F: Of course, there is an argument about whether they're in the intimate Kennedy circle.

C: --because of the poverty program. But, no, I can't say that I did. Now, the last time I saw Kennedy alive was with the housing bill, and I spent an hour with him going over that housing bill, and actually with some success as it turned out.

F: Did the President either encourage or discourage your keeping your lines open to Bobby, or did this--?

C: I think he not only--he used to bitch about people in the third person going out to Hickory Hill. I only went out there, you know--I was there for his fortieth wedding anniversary [?] and I was there on three or four other occasions. But I went there largely because it was a hell of a good party; I wasn't thinking in terms of keeping the lines open. He [the President] used to bitch to me about unnamed third parties, "Why would people go to Hickory Hill and do this?" I'm sure some of that was directed at me. On the other hand, I knew him well enough to know that he'd be damned glad to have somebody in the domestic area, the only area in which there was agreement--

F: He was still a pragmatist?

C: --that could go up and serve something up to him [Kennedy]. For example, when we were announcing the Urban Institute, the President wanted to be nonpartisan. And he said to me, "You call Kennedy, [Eugene] McCarthy, and Humphrey and tell them we're going to announce this and we want their support, and get Edgar Kaiser to get some Republicans to call Rockefeller and Nixon." And I called Bobby on that. I ran him down in Indiana. And he said he would treat it as a nonpartisan problem and he wouldn't attack it in any way. And actually it was a very jovial conversation. He asked if anybody at the White House was saying anything nice about him. And I said, "Oh, it's not that bad." And he said, "Yes, maybe you, and then maybe only to your wife alone at night." (Laughter)

The last thing I had to do with him was after he died, and I did handle some of the arrangements for the funeral, you know, at the President's direction. And the President did take me up there to the funeral with him. I must say, I never of all--we can get into this at some other time--but of all the times I saw the President, I don't think I ever saw him as moved as the night before we went to that funeral.

F: Who broke the news to him about his being shot?

C: I think the Situation Room was probably--either the Situation Room or [Walt] Rostow. The first I heard of Bobby Kennedy being shot was when the wife of Bruce Terris, who is now the chairman of the Democratic Central Committee here in the District--but his wife is a friend of my wife's. He was working for Kennedy. He called and told his wife; his wife called my wife and woke us up about six o'clock that morning to tell us. Then I got a call from Ramsey Clark about it--I can't remember the time; it must have been about six-thirty in the morning--telling me that the President wanted me to get down to the

White House right away, get to work on papers that were necessary and get Secret Service coverage for the candidates. And I went down to the White House and I remember we--I guess DeVier Pierson had been working on some legislation, and I sort of went over that and got Pierson off to the Hill. Then I guess we spent the next couple of days writing all those statements and proclamations.

F: Did you need special legislation, I don't recall, to assign the Secret Service to the candidates?

C: The President just did it without the legislative authority, and then he wanted to get the language in the Appropriations Act changed, which was Pierson's job. DeVier knew [Mike] Monroney very well, who was the key man on the Senate committee. And that was where the President wanted to hook it on and did ultimately hook it on.

F: Were you close enough to McNamara at the time to get any idea in 1963 of where Mr. Johnson stood as vice president? Whether he was going to be dropped, continued, or--?

C: No.

F: You can't go beyond just common gossip?

C: Yes. My hunch is--it's just a pure hunch--he never would have been dropped.

F: I think it would have been bad politics.

C: Purely practical political reasons.

F: Now, to go back, you were general counsel of the army when the Panama crisis broke out, and this was Mr. Johnson's first major problem beyond the takeover after Jack Kennedy was murdered. This was probably your first involvement in the Johnson Administration of any depth.

C: The army was responsible for Panama. When the riots broke out, my first recollection of working on that was that Harry McPherson, who was then the deputy undersecretary of the army for international affairs, and I was general counsel, [he] and I stayed up all night to write a paper of the facts and the alternatives for use by Vance and McNamara at a meeting with the President at eight o'clock the next morning. We stayed up all night and did the paper.

F: How far back in history do you go on that? Is this an in-depth thing, or is this one that focuses on the immediate problem?

C: Well, it was both problems. I'm sure that the paper is in the White House somewhere. It was both, what are the long-standing problems in Panama and what about this riot? It was out of that meeting that a decision was made to send Vance down to Panama. My second son was born on January 10--

F: That was good timing.

C: Vance went to Panama; Harry went with Vance. Others did, too. And I was sent around the Hill to talk to congressmen--Mendel Rivers, Russ Blandford, his chief counsel, and some people in the Senate, I forget who they were--to brief them on the situation.

F: Richard Russell maybe?

C: I just don't remember. I think it was Bill Darden, who was Russell's guy. I don't think Russell was in town; I can't remember. To brief them on the situation. Then my son was born that night of the tenth. A few days after that, the U.N. sent an investigating team down and I was sent down as Ed Martin's lawyer. Martin was at that time the assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs. And I went down there about three or four

days with Martin and helped prepare the case for him. I can't remember whether Harry was down there that trip or not.

F: On a trip like that, did you have any direct relationship with the Panamanians, or did you just work completely behind the scenes feeding Martin information?

C: On that particular trip--well, I sat next to Martin the way a lawyer would sit next to his client at all the meetings. I don't think you'd find me saying anything in the record of those proceedings.

Then I came back and the Panamanian Bar Association filed a complaint charging the United States with a violation of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights on three counts. We didn't recognize that; we've never ratified that. But as I understood it--and this is secondhand--Tom Mann wanted to fight that case before that forum. The State Department was opposed, but the President agreed with Tom. The next thing I knew I was called by Vance late one night, five or six o'clock at night, and told, "Assemble a team of lawyers. You're going to go down and try this case."

F: This was the OAS [Organization of American States]--?

C: No, this was after the OAS. This was something called the International Commission of Jurists on which they published an opinion and everything. I took one of the lawyers from my own staff, John McEvoy, who now works for Senator [Joseph] Tydings, two lawyers from the Justice Department from the Civil Division over there--an experienced trial lawyer named John Wolf [?], and a young but bright trial lawyer, I forget his name, who also had had intelligence experience--and one lawyer from the State Department. And I went down to Panama and spent twenty-two days and nights down there.

Let me go back. McPherson was there during the OAS thing. He was there then, because he and I stayed up around the clock, I remember, writing a paper for Moyers. He was not there during this other thing. And we stayed down there and we literally held the trial. My recollection is it went for twenty-two straight days with one day off. And we'd go for two or three hours in the morning and four or five hours in the afternoon. There are verbatim transcripts of that. That was with the Panamanians. That was a real toe-to-toe--and we won on every count. We won that on every single count.

F: You felt that the contention was handled with great judiciousness all the way through, all the proper forms and--?

C: Yes, I think on that particular thing we got a fair shake. You know, it was a bizarre trial, though. It was in a hotel room; we were fighting communist lawyers. Every inch of procedure had to be fought out. The judges were a Swede, an Indian, and a man from Holland. Everything had to be translated even though everybody spoke and understood English; everything had to be said in English and Spanish. It was just a fantastic situation, but we won.

F: Now, the Canal Zone, of course, is heavily larded with military brass, including the making of local policy. Did you have any difficulty with them? Did they show a particular hand in this, or was this pretty well run out of Washington?

C: Actually I had a free hand, and I think I can attribute that to Tom Mann and presumably the President backing him. I was just told to go down there and win that case, and also, to the extent that it existed, prove communist involvement in the riots. And there was a State Department man there named Sterling Cottrell who was I think sort of supposed to keep me from blowing the lid on our long-term Panamanian relations. But on anything

on which there was an issue, whenever I went back to Washington, I was backed. And I talked to Mann on the phone three or four times a week, I guess, while we were down there.

F: Were you ever in direct contact with the President on this?

C: Never.

F: He was working through Mann to you?

C: I assumed that.

F: Were you aware that he was taking an active interest in it?

C: Well, Mann used to indicate that. I don't know whether to believe that or not. You don't know whether--presidents have a lot of other problems. But Mann used to say that.

F: Now then, you got mixed in the Dominican crisis also?

C: I got into the Dominican crisis when I was in the Pentagon and the decision had been made to move the troops in. And a decision had been made, and maybe already taken, after the troops went in to put out that list of eighty-three Communists or near-Communists--maybe it was eighty-eight, I forget. I got involved in really the *ex post facto* problem there initially. Initially it was reconstructing what had actually happened. Remember it became an issue, "Did the President move too fast?"

F: I want to ask you one question. Were the legalities investigated beforehand, or was the action taken and then you went to look for the legalities and the justifications?

C: No, I can't tell you whether the legalities were investigated because that wouldn't have been done in the Pentagon. That would have been done in the State Department. My hunch is they probably were, in the sense that the OAS--can we act this way under the charter and what have you?

What I really did was reconstruct all the cables that had come in, what we had done in the Pentagon, and what we knew had been done in the White House, times of decisions and everything, so that the bases for action were clear. And I put together an enormous book which I am sure is somewhere in the Johnson file on the whole Dominican thing. As I got involved with that, which was while the event was going on, then I ultimately got involved in the ongoing pull-out of the U.S. troops.

F: Do you think that the President did overreact from your study?

C: I've got no questions of that. The Dominican Republic, the Tonkin Gulf, Panama, I don't have any problems in those areas. I'm not a reconstituted hawk or dove; I think he was right. And the reason why I think he was right in the Dominican Republic is shown by exactly what's happening in Latin America today. We just don't have that kind of problem. We never had it again. [Fidel] Castro cooled off. You go through the CIA files, I didn't read them once I left the Pentagon, but reading them, it was just abundantly clear that that action really cooled down revolutionary activity in Latin America.

F: It's kind of like fire prevention; you don't know what the alternatives would have been if you hadn't prevented it.

C: But I did one other *ex post facto* study which is somewhere in the [LBJ] Library, which was on the Gulf of Tonkin. It started as a result of an issue of whether or not the President had gone on television before the planes had taken off. Actually, that wasn't the key time. The key time was before they had passed enemy radar. And we reconstructed that Gulf of Tonkin event down to the second, which is somewhere in the Johnson Library, I assume. I gave that to Bundy; I never kept a copy of that.

F: You had a peculiar vantage point of two powerful men. Did Mr. McNamara and President Johnson sort of move toward a break with each other? Were they temperamentally unsuited, or has the press overplayed this?

C: I don't think they did. I believe that--

F: President Johnson, of course, is on record as [saying] he's the greatest secretary of defense and so on.

C: I know that. I don't think they moved toward a break. I don't think anyone will ever know for sure. When I went to work for the President, McNamara said to me he was the most complicated man he'd ever met, and I think the President is the most complicated man I *have* ever met. McNamara, in all the time I was in the Pentagon, was absolutely, totally loyal to the President. My judgment is that on every experience I had with him in the White House he was totally loyal to the President. I don't think there was any personal animosity at all on either side. I never really heard it expressed. You'd hear an occasional complaint about McNamara and the Kennedys, but nothing--no, I don't think there was any personal problem at all. Now, they did not get along socially, because I think McNamara was more of a swinger than the President was. And there was a difference in age of twenty years almost. So there wasn't a lot of social intercourse between the two of them in terms of parties and things like that. But Bob always gave unstintingly to the President in my judgment. And vice versa.

I am one of the people that thinks that one of the reasons the President made such an effort to make the Vietnam War his war, Johnson's war, was because he was afraid it would destroy McNamara. It was becoming McNamara's war. I think, I can't prove, that the President did that intentionally and with that in mind. Bob was always there for the

prize fight, even though it had to have enormous personal problems for him in the long run of dealing with some of these corporate executives who had been his friends before. He never hesitated. You go back and--I don't want to get into it now but you know in the first steel fight, the only two guys in the government that were really tough were McNamara and me. The rest of the government would have caved.

F: McNamara, of course, is recognized--sometimes liked, sometimes disliked--for having a superb intellect. Do you think he respected the President's, or do you think--?

C: Yes, one of the things McNamara told me was that he [the President] was the most complicated man he'd ever met, and he also said he was unquestioningly one of the most intelligent. He told me that he was much smarter than anybody ever gave him credit for. There's no question about that.

F: We'll come back to this after we've explored a lot of things together, but what, besides just the weariness of Vietnam and the American weariness with a familiar face, do you think led to the President's slide in popularity? Or do you think we've answered it all right there?

C: No, I don't think we've answered it there. I think Vietnam was a problem, particularly since the President had made another decision I think he made consciously, which was not to whip up a lot of patriotic spirit about it. In part that may have been an overreaction to McCarthyism, which I always thought the President was very sensitive about. Secondly, I think the President did help create in the country a revolution through these major reforms. And if you go back, and I mentioned in one of the speeches I made once, [Alexis] de Tocqueville points out that a reformer rarely survives his reforms because what was once inevitable becomes intolerable to the oppressed once they see they can get

out of it. Well, Johnson showed people they could get out of it. He showed the Negroes they didn't have to live the way they'd been living for a century. He showed poor whites they really didn't have to take that stuff. Again, as de Tocqueville says, no reformer can deliver as fast as he has to say he can deliver in order to get the reforms into effect. So we ran into that. That was the second factor.

Third, I think the President we hurt on little problems of credibility, not big problems. I don't think the President ever really lied about any major things, but there's no question about the fact that things like--let's take Yarmolinsky. I remember the President saying at a press conference that Adam Yarmolinsky had never left the Pentagon. He said that. Two weeks before, an announcement had been put out saying that I was succeeding Yarmolinsky because he was going to the poverty program, a public press release which had been handed out around the Pentagon. That kind of thing hurt.

F: How do you explain that? Slip-up or just a natural reluctance to admit anything?

C: A fantastic ability to rationalize the particular statements or facts.

I think the President also suffered enormously from the fact that he was being compared not with a prior human being, but Kennedy, who had already become a myth of staggering proportions. And it's interesting when you go back and look at some of the pieces that were written about Kennedy before he was assassinated, because he was starting to get hell for the same kinds of thing the President was. *Look* had done a piece on the credibility gap in the Kennedy Administration; Scotty Reston had done a column saying Kennedy was a great disappointment to the intellectuals--

F: I've done an interview very recently with one of your really internationally known names in the newspaper business who told me he thought Johnson's press relations were as good

as anybody's else's. If you doubt it, go look at the last years of Franklin Roosevelt and the way the press was beginning to feel about Jack Kennedy toward the end of 1963. This is just a way of life in this world and that every president is going to have it.

I don't want to get into anything that's going to take much more time. Shall we close it?

C: Fine.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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Addendum to the Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

Joseph A. Califano

Interviewed by: Paige Mulhollan, Joe B. Frantz and Michael L. Gillette

I, Joseph A. Califano, hereby remove the restrictions on the use of the transcripts and recordings that states, "During my lifetime I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime researchers may publish 'fair use' quotations from the transcripts and tape recordings without my express consent in each case." of the sixty-three personal interviews conducted with me by Paige Mulhollan, Joe B. Frantz, and Michael L. Gillette, currently at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library. (see attachment for interview details)

Joseph A. Califano Jr. — Donor

5-28-19 — Dated

Susan K. Donius

Director for Presidential Libraries

July 17, 2019 — Dated