INTERVIEW XII

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INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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G: [It is possible] that Lee White and Harry McPherson would have more insights on [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan in that conference [White House Conference on Civil Rights], but were you involved at all in the logistics or the President's involvement with the conference?

C: Did [Ben W.] Heineman chair that conference eventually?

G: Let's see. It was Morris Abram and--

C: And Bill Coleman for the preliminary and they stayed right through.

G: Then Heineman, I think, was involved in the spring.

C: You know, there are a lot of flaps and things, which may come out as I start to go through every memo I got, but going through these papers on the conference--

G: This whole period almost seems to have been a time when the President was trying to garner affirmation of his civil rights programs and was a time when some of the civil rights leadership was becoming a little more outspoken in terms of what was wrong with the country and the administration in terms of civil rights.

C: What was happening with the Negroes, as we said then, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel--they couldn't wait to get out. We thought we were moving as fast as the society could take. We were changing the school system; we were changing the voting system; we were changing the employment system. There were really tremendous fundamental changes among the systems of this country. Johnson was constantly worried, as a lot of us were, that we had a situation [in] which the blacks could blow it for themselves.

On the other hand, he was relentless. I mean there was no give. We were pushing, pushing, pushing. This was going to happen. This was going to be done. And he was willing to put his stack in again and again, his political capital. I have always thought we spent far more political capital on race than we ever did on the war.

Remember also, this was a time when, as everyone's digesting this, he's talking to me and telling me he wanted a fair-housing program. I was in the process of putting one together which we proposed to the Congress in 1966 and I think they almost gasped when we came up with a massive fair-housing program which, as you know, we couldn't get passed until Dr. [Martin Luther] King was assassinated. And even if you look at that--I remember proposing it. It's the only time--and I think if you look at the *New York Times* or something--I was mentioned in the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth paragraph of the story; it's when we first proposed the fair-housing legislation. Those were the only life-threatening letters I ever got at the White House.

We couldn't pass it. We kept revising it. We started with major housing, big public housing, veteran's housing, federally financed housing and big apartment complexes, then to get down to individual housing over a phased period of time. All

kinds of forces in society started to play on it. Remarkably, we ended up moving the bill in the Senate faster than we moved it in the House. We finally had it out of committee and maybe even out of the Senate at the time King was assassinated. We couldn't get it out of the Judiciary Committee.

Manny Celler was the chairman of that committee. He had a district in Brooklyn which was Jewish-turning-black. He was old and he was Jewish and that was where all his "great liberal," all his instincts, all his friends, all his culture was there. He saw these people being moved out of their homes, as he perceived it, and he didn't want to be the floor manager. Finally, after a time, we talked Peter Rodino into being the floor manager.

But Johnson's commitment to that, if you want an example of it, I remember the night King was shot. I was in the White House. He [President Johnson] was in the office with Tom Johnson, I think, and somebody from Coca-Cola, [Robert] Woodruff or somebody, if I recall correctly. I got the ticker; Tom got the ticker. I went down to the office, and among the things Johnson talked about immediately, aside from getting black leaders in and the concern about disturbances which we were having right in Washington immediately, was the fact that we ought to get a letter up to the Hill to get the House to move the Fair Housing Bill out of committee, which we did. Indeed, I'd love to have--at one point in one of the Library displays the original of that letter being edited with my editing marks on it, and his, was on display in the Great Society Programs. In any case, that was the nature of the commitment.

Another example of something he was a master at is no matter how black it got, what could we do? Was there any opportunity here? Was there any way to at least get a

little bit of silver in the lining? He did the same thing with the gun control bill when Bobby Kennedy was assassinated.

G: It shows a sense of timing. Was there an effort during this period, though, to keep the civil rights groups on board as much as possible, to keep them, for example, from getting involved in the Vietnam issue as Martin Luther King was doing?

C: Absolutely. There was an effort to keep them on board, to keep them focused on the importance of legislating, and federal action, and state legislative action, if any of that were possible. I think we probably thought, by and large, it wasn't possible. And to keep them out of the streets. There would be things like trying to get Whitney Young and Whitney Young would be off in Africa and Johnson would say, "You can't get any votes in Africa. You've got to come back here and get people to vote."

G: Did he say that directly to Young?

C: Oh, yes. We called Young. I mean he called Young--we called him in Africa one time and ran him down at some conference over there.

G: What was that with regard to, do you know?

C: It was in regard to one of the pieces of legislation; I can't remember. It was one of the civil rights bills.

Also, on the Vietnam thing, yes, there was concern. I remember [J. Edgar] Hoover was also playing out here in this. Hoover was circulating memos about the communist aides that Dr. King had, so there was concern that King would be manipulated. I think it was by and large accepted that Hoover had identified some people who were communist or communist-leaning who had an interest in getting Dr. King

involved in the war for that purpose. Incidentally, I don't know if there are any of those memos in the Library, but I'd like to see one of those.

The first Hoover memo that I saw on King, I was working for [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara as a special assistant. I was really stunned. I brought it in to Bob. Bob read it and said, "Send this back to the Director. This is a disgrace," or something like that, and I sent it back to him. But even granting that attitude, nobody fully discounted the fact that King had or might have had around him some people who were very pro-communist. That fed the concern.

It did two things. It fed the concern about King getting involved in the Vietnam War or black civil rights organizations getting involved in the issue, on the one hand. On the second hand, it diluted for us the impact of King's statements and black civil rights statements on that because they were always a little suspect. Did these guys really know what they were talking about?

G: What was the President's attitude toward King? Did he ever discuss King with you?

C: I think he saw King as both an important leader and a major instrument. You have to remember, we had an agenda and one of the central parts of the agenda was a revolution in black-white relations in the United States and civil rights and to really open that up. King was very helpful in doing that. Like everybody else, Johnson saw King as very helpful when he'd marched in Selma and a real difficult person when he wouldn't do things we wanted him to do. Did Johnson ever say he was great or not great or anything like that? No. Did I ever see him revel in listening to tapes of Dr. King? No. I never sat there with him during that. I don't know whether he did it or not. It's hard for me to

believe that he did because his attention span was so short. I can't believe he'd sit there for thirty minutes listening to anything. Did he read the stuff Hoover was sending over? Sure, but he read everything. He was insatiable. You couldn't get him enough paper.

G: Did he view King as a rival?

C: No, I don't think so.

G: He didn't feel that King was claiming credit for things, for example voting rights, that he himself had put through the Congress?

C: I don't think so. I think he viewed all of it as--"marionettes" is not fair--but I think he viewed all of it as an enormous stage in which he was still the director and King was one of the players--and he was a very important player, but that without his drive it wouldn't happen.

G: Did he lack the personal rapport with King that he had with, say, [Roy] Wilkins or Whitney Young, Clarence Mitchell?

C: I think yes. Or even with Philip Randolph, who was old, but was still around then. I think the answer to that is probably yes. We didn't have--if I just take myself, I probably had twenty-five conversations with Roy Wilkins or Whitney Young for every one I had with Dr. King. King was a little bit lofty, a little bit off up there. Even if I look at the pictures I've got of meetings with black leaders, King is not there nearly as often as Wilkins and the others are. Mitchell was important in a Washington lobbying sense but Mitchell wasn't at a level with a King or any of these other guys.

G: During this period Whitney Young wrote an op-ed piece to the effect that the administration's reorganization of civil rights represented a downgrading of civil rights

enforcement. Did this disturb the President, do you think?

C: I have no recollection of him saying anything about it, but any criticism disturbed him. I'm sure whoever was there at the time he read it heard him shoot out.

G: He never asked you to call Whitney Young or Roy Wilkins?

C: He didn't ask me but he may have asked Harry [McPherson] or Lee White. We called them all at the time of the reorganization. We really--

G: Did you?

C: Oh, yes. We really fanned out.

G: What was their reaction to it?

C: By and large, we got a very favorable reaction to it. As I said yesterday, I really think people do things, especially Presidents, for many, many reasons and the fundamental thing about that reorganization was that it made sense. An organization move can make sense and the constituent groups can't see that, because one, there's change, and everybody always worries about change and where they are going to be in the pecking order when there's change. Two, they're not quite sure--does the vice president's office have more prestige than the attorney general or the secretary of labor? Well, the reality is whatever the optics are, there's no comparison in terms of clout. [Attorney General] Edwin Meese has more in his pinky fingernail in terms of power than George Bush has in his whole office and entourage. So it was right.

Of course, in retrospect now, they're all talking about what a great civil rights president Johnson was. He was still coming off the South. They were still--he had this enormous commitment and maybe some of them thought he was 90 per cent there but not

the 110 per cent that he really was there.

G: During this interval also a group of civil rights leaders were on the *Honey Fitz* with some administration people, maybe the Vice President, one evening and they were especially critical, according to [Rowland] Evans and [Robert] Novak, of not having enough federal voting registrars in the South. Do you remember that?

C: I remember dimly, so my recollection may not be right, that we were constantly pressing [Attorney General] Nick Katzenbach and the Justice Department to get more and more people into the voting arena in the South. The Wiley Branton move as a special assistant to Nick and bringing him to the White House was part of that. You have to remember something, not just that Evans and Novak are "Errors and No-facts." You have to remember that everybody is always complaining about not enough once you start giving. I can sit here in a law firm and I can give--my partners are making more money than they ever dreamed they would make in their entire lives but they still want more.

G: The NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] on November 17 issued a scathing indictment of the desegregation progress and it seems that during this time or shortly before then there were a lot of calls exchanged.

C: I'd like to get the attachment to my memo--

(Interruption)

Ask me, I'll do my best.

G: Let's talk about the Northeast water shortage, one of your first crises in the White House. First, did the President relate particularly to this crisis since it was one that afflicted his part of the country, the Southwest, for many years when he was in office and when he

was growing up?

C: I don't have a sense of his relating more to this than to any other problem at that time.

G: He didn't personalize it?

C: Well, I mean he personalized it. In this phase of the presidency, everything was personalized. He took instant responsibility for it in the sense that he was going to bring everybody in and we were going to provide federal funds or federal action or the federal government as a catalyst. In that sense he related to it and thought he would wrap his arms around it and solve it.

I know that he thought I didn't know enough about water because when I was going out to talk to the academic community later in the year and in 1966 about new legislative programs or ideas or what should we do, he insisted that I go to the Southwest--I went to the University of Texas--and that I put water on the agenda for the dinner discussion or whatever it was. I learned a lot about water that I didn't understand as a kid from Brooklyn. This was a drought in which he was prepared to do whatever was necessary to do and he was going to show that we were attentive to the problem.

G: Were there some inherent political problems with getting the major players to work together on this?

C: Well, we were talking about three governors and I guess I never had a sense of political problems with either Nelson Rockefeller or Richard Hughes, the governor of New Jersey. [William] Scranton was always a mixed bag.

G: Really?

C: I think partly because Scranton was this different kind of guy. [Charles] Terry I have no

recollection of. Bob Wagner was always sort of complimented to come to the White House and, my instinct is, basically always supportive of the President so it was never a problem. While James Tate was a nice guy, I think none of us regarded him as strong or much of a force.

I think the meeting was all plus. They were very happy because we were putting out the proclamation. We were announcing that we were providing a lot of funds; we were getting the government to work to come up with a plan to prevent it from happening again. We had gotten the Congress to act. I mean, it was a real plus.

I noticed that great LBJ instinct when I had set up these people to come and he said, "What about Congress? Shouldn't we invite them? Shouldn't we mention them in the speech?" I find when I look at the version of the speech as he finally gave it, he's got Congress mentioned prominently in terms of what the Senate has done and what the House has done.

The thing we did achieve, and because of the crisis it was not hard to achieve, was that we finally got agreement among New York, New Jersey, Penn[sylvania?]--and now that I look at this, I remember. We were worried a little bit about hoarding and how the Delaware Water Commission would pump out the water in the Delaware River Basin. We finally got agreement among the city and the state and neighboring states and Delaware and New York City as to how to do that, and some sense of common commitment. I do remember talking to these governors, some of them, and Governor Terry, and getting them, essentially in return for what we were doing, getting them to agree to stop fighting about the water and make sure that there'd be no fears on anybody's

part.

What puzzles me in the papers here is I don't remember--is Tate's--but also people were all playing for their own corners. I mean, Tate calls me--Mayor Tate of Philadelphia--to make it clear that he doesn't have enough police if he has riots in Philadelphia and he may need troops or the guard, and somebody has to pay for that. Bobby Kennedy writes a letter dated August 5 that obviously was written, or appears to have been written, on August 10.

G: Was that fairly common, for members of Congress to do that?

C: I think members of Congress all played for their own constituencies. There was such a difficult and complicated relationship between Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy that it's hard to compare that with any other relationship he had on the Hill. Kennedy didn't want to give Johnson credit for anything and Johnson didn't want to give Kennedy credit for anything. I notice in my own contemporaneous memo that the date immediately hit me. My hunch is it probably hit Larry O'Brien, too. If you want my judgment, I think he predated the letter and rushed it over. That's why Larry rushed it out of his office down to the President. When I note that for the President, I noticed Johnson wanting to not just take anybody's word for anything, immediately having Marvin Watson go and check and find out when it was stamped in, how it arrived. All of that is then nailed down in the record; it was brought by special messenger. So it was obviously dated to be the day before he called for the water emergency thing.

G: Would this sort of thing disturb Johnson or would he merely view it as a--

C: It probably confirmed what he thought about Robert Kennedy. It probably did disturb

him but it probably just served as one more piece of evidence, one more reason why you couldn't trust the guy, in his mind.

See, I notice over these days lots of calls with Secretary [of the Interior Stewart] Udall, with Governor [Buford] Ellington, who was the head of the Office of Emergency Planning. I don't see calls to these governors in [inaudible]. I know I called them. That may be because I just hit the White House button, get the White House operator and said, "Get me Governor"--bang, bang, bang, bang--and then hang up. God, it was really something. While this is going on, where are we in Watts? I mean I really do need a time[line] because I notice calls to General [Creighton] Abrams, calls with [Ramsey] Clark, calls here to Otis Chandler that you asked me about, [and] McNamara.

G: One of the factors in the resolution of this crisis appears to have been persuading the New York--

C: Here we are. Here is . . .

G: Did you find the--

C: No, I just was looking at--here's Dick Goodwin. I get Dick Goodwin at 1:20 on Martha's Vineyard on August 15, which was that Sunday.

G: Persuading New York City to conserve water, to meter its water, for example.

C: Well, New York City had a tradition of not charging for water *at all* and [Mayor Robert] Wagner, Rockefeller, nobody wanted to do that. I think finally we got Mayor Wagner. Was it Mayor Wagner, or did we call for it? I think we finally got--

G: You pushed it, yes.

C: We pushed it, but I think we finally got Mayor Wagner to say that maybe New York City

would have to meter its water. I know that the President thought it was just profligate and was insensitive in a sense. As a New Yorker, I remember when I was [a] kid the one thing everybody was proud about in New York City was that the water was free and was part of its liberal orientation, I guess.

G: There also seems to have been, in addition to conservation, an anti-pollution component to this.

C: There was some, and part of it may have been our grandiose view of the world, although--I mean our right, but maybe it's a little bit grandiose. I remember that it also was the opportunity as well [to] clean up the Hudson. People had been trying to clean up the Hudson for fifty years. Now, let's do it. We've got a water crisis. Let's clean the Hudson so that you can drink water out of the Hudson, and there was a push to do that. What you also have to remember is, we're at this time, if my recollection is right, also pushing water pollution bills through the Congress. I don't think we had the Clean Rivers Act until the next year but I think we had some kind of water pollution legislation.

G: Yes, the Water Pollution Act.

C: About how precious water was and how people didn't understand it. I do remember, as I said to you before, him [President Johnson] telling me, "I want you to put water on the agenda and I want you to learn about water."

Secondly, he was very much engaged in the land, the clean air, the preservation of land, clean water, clean rivers. We got into all that legislation. Did he talk about some specific incident or not? No. The thing I most remember him talking about in terms of incidents was really in connection with highway beautification, and how Bird would point

out to him these stacks of old autos in these auto junk yards and how they had to be removed, buried, taken somewhere, and also the devastation of billboards. Lady Bird had really gotten through to him on that, and we spent a lot of political money--capital, not cash--on the issue of cleaning the highways up with the billboards. Those are the things I remember. He had the instinctive sense *vis-à-vis* clean air, clean water, protecting the land, over-development--he had an instinctive sense about that that came from whatever, from his love of the land, from his background.

That was coupled with the fact that we had a tremendous--one of the things you have when you're sitting in the White House for a president that demanding is an insatiable curiosity, and you have access to the latest scientific knowledge, concerns, worries. So at the same time we were getting, through Udall, through the Office of Science and Technology, through John Gardner--I think water was then in HEW; it's not anymore. We moved it out in one of our reorganizations--a sense of what's happening out there. In ten years, where are we going to be? In ten years, we're going to have all this polluted. In ten years, we're not to going have the land; we've got to stop this.

He also brought from wherever it came from in the West a great sense of public lands, and that's how we got into all the wilderness area legislation. So you had the science saying that gut feeling he's got is right and we've got to do something about it.

G: I almost sense a *quid pro quo* on this drought situation, that the federal government is willing to help but we want your support on conservation and anti-pollution.

C: We want your support on conservation. We want your support on anti-pollution and, it's a thread that came in other areas, we want you to work together. We don't want hoarding.

We want cooperation. We want you to recognize that the boundaries are artificial, *vis-à-vis* the land. We did the same thing with food for India. We wouldn't give them food unless they got some agreement among themselves and did a lot of other things. There were no free lunches, despite what the public might have thought about the Great Society, coming out of the federal government in the Johnson Administration. When we'd give, we'd want them to do something.

G: Do you recall his meeting with the governors and mayors who came into--

C: No, I don't have recollections of that the way I have of some other meetings, the meetings on Vietnam and stuff like that. Meetings like this, generally, we would hint about what we'd do. Because he didn't want any leaks, we wouldn't say we're going to give four hundred million here or a hundred million there or three hundred thousand there. We'd talk to the people involved; we'd find out what they wanted. If it made sense--and we'd always do so much that they'd have to be cheering at the end of the meeting in a situation like this. And they were cheering.

G: You mean literally or--

C: Yes. The meeting was staged in the sense that we brought them all down, part of it was for him to say, "You're signing in blood. Governor Terry, you're going to use that water for New York, and New York, you're going to use it intelligently so that you're not draining this basin, whether you're going to meter it or have a much more effective conservation program." That kind of a situation. Secondly, you had a sense of--this wasn't a controversial meeting. This was all plus. This kind of a meeting was the President calling everybody down. There was a crisis. Lyndon Johnson was going to

solve the crisis. But the meeting is not burned in my mind. I remember the Northeast drought; I just don't have the kind of recollections I have about other things. He did add all the relevant senators and some congressmen, I guess the ones we could get on such short notice. You have to remember, the Water Emergency Conference Meeting lasted--

(Interruption)

--when we had a desire to, and said in one of our messages, as an objective, cleaning up the Potomac. I remember being a big pusher for that.

G: Really?

C: And wanting to get it done and now seeing finally the fruits of it this year beginning to have a rejuvenation. I don't think it was part of this project. Whether it got him interested in it or not, I don't know.

(Interruption)

It rings a bell in terms of the fact that she [Luci Johnson]--that clearly got the President more interested in Catholicism. She also was the one, I guess, that took him to the Dominican church [St. Dominic's Catholic Church] behind HEW to pray--

G: Her little monks.

C: Her little monks, as she called them--to pray, and I think he did get more interested in Catholicism. He went a lot to Catholic church. In fact, there were periods when he went to both every Sunday. He'd go to that--what was the church, the Christian--

G: George Davis'.

C: The Christian--whatever that church--I can't remember [National City Christian Church]. And he'd go to the Catholic church in Fredericksburg or he'd be up here and he'd go to

the Dominican. The first time we went out after the Martin Luther King riots, we went to mass over at that Dominican church over behind HEW, if my recollection is correct. He went to mass a lot. Lady Bird was worried about it. I had a sense that Lady Bird was concerned about Johnson's sort of tilting towards Catholicism.

G: Did he ever talk about converting to Catholicism himself?

C: I don't think he ever explicitly talked about it, but I've got to tell you that I came increasingly to believe that he was increasingly interested in Catholicism. I have no question about that in my mind, partly because--and more and more a believer. He went to Catholic--you probably have the records. He went to Catholic church a lot.

G: He and Father [Wunibald] Schneider were--

C: Well, he and Father Schneider--I can remember Father Schneider with his enormous belly floating in the Johnson pool and Johnson throwing that ball at him, sort of hitting Father Schneider in the belly and playing back and forth. A couple of things I remember vividly about church--not churches. One was the Catholic church in Fredericksburg. Is that Father Schneider's church? Yes. Where was his church? Fredericksburg? [St. Francis Xavier in Stonewall.]

G: It was in that area, but was it Stonewall or Fredericksburg?

C: I think it was Fredericksburg, but we ought to find out.

We went there one Sunday with Jake Jacobsen and Father Schneider. The pews had just wooden kneelers. You know about this. The pews had just wooden kneelers and Johnson was always putting the heat on us to contribute to the church. In the course of the sermon or plea for funds, Father Schneider indicated for all the old people and the

farmers and the arthritic, they had to put their knees down on this hard wood. Johnson promptly committed Jake Jacobsen to buy foam rubber covers for all the kneelers, which Jake did. The other thing was he had me call the Archbishop of San Antonio.

G: Was that [Robert E.] Lucey at the time?

C: I don't know who it was; it might have been. And asked him to put some money into Father Schneider's church and indeed, I think the Archbishop came to the Ranch once. You'd have to check. We drove him by the church to see the church and all the work that it needed.

G: It's amazing that he would involve himself with an internal church matter like this.

C: I think he regarded it as something he could do to help the people in that community, basically. He'd sort of use that power to just--it was all nice. It was all pleasant. It was all fun.

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G: [Did he] talk about Catholic theology? Was this a subject of interest to him?

C: No, he didn't talk about that. But he certainly had, in my judgment, a profound belief in God which got stronger. I only knew him those four years or so but it certainly got visibly stronger. I don't mean in a public display sense. It got visibly stronger in day-to-day dealings.

G: How do you sort out the public display of religion by a president from what you might term a genuine belief or practice? How can you separate what is a politically advantageous appearance from a--

C: I just had a real sense that he prayed in a non-public way. I had a real sense that he was

genuinely more committed to Catholicism as time went on. I can't--I wish I could--maybe as we go through these conversations I'll think of examples. With some exceptions, going to church for him was a meaningful event, I think. It got more meaningful as time went on.

G: What were the exceptions?

C: Well, we had some of these just enormous public events, [like] Manny Celler's funeral in Brooklyn. When Cardinal [Francis] Spellman died and we went to New York, there were light moments to it as well as serious moments. The casket was open and as I recall Cardinal Spellman's head was at the end towards the altar. We entered the church, the President and I, and I think Marie Fehmer--Marie or Jim Jones; he brought the House Catholics with him. We entered the church before the procession of bishops and cardinals and priests and clergy. The President was in the first row, at the end on the aisle and Cardinal Spellman's head was right next to the President. I was behind the President, in the row behind him.

It was a service that lasted well over two hours because the procession was an hour and a half or something. Maybe it was two and a half hours. It was incredibly long and it was hot. I remember he really was uncomfortable with this bald, dead head there and he kept squirming his arm and moving away. It was also just normal impatience in a situation like that that Johnson would have of just sitting still that long. Finally, I knelt down behind him to whisper in his ear. I said, "Mr. President, you know, you're on live television, local television. This is all live." This is about forty minutes. I was getting worried that he was so squirmy that there would be all these shots of him to which he'd

respond, "Goddamn it, why didn't you tell me sooner?"

That was a very difficult funeral, incidentally, because we were very unpopular. It was before the [March 31, 1968] speech withdrawing, and it was very grim. Lots of demonstrators outside. Sort of an angry, hostile crowds.

When we were going to New York for Bobby Kennedy's funeral he called me and he said, "I'm not going to sit through that goddamned procession again, and we're going to go in after the procession." So I called the monsignor or bishop--it may have been Monsignor [Theodore] McCarrick; I don't remember who it was--and said, "The President wants to come to the funeral"--the family had invited him--"but we're coming in after the procession." He said, "No, that's not protocol. Protocol is everybody comes in the church before the procession except the family, and then the procession and then the family." I said, "Well, I don't think the President is going to sit through that procession again. He can't do it." So I reported back to the President. The President said, "We're not going to go unless (inaudible). Goddammit, you get [Terence] Cardinal Cooke on the phone." So I got Cooke himself and I said, "Look, I don't care what the world is. You can rearrange your protocol for a head of state." And Cooke did.

G: Did he?

C: It was late at night. This was something that happened at ten o'clock the night before, because, as with everything, we hadn't decided. This time instead of driving--well, then I went back to the President with--what I'd forgotten--and he said to me--there was a lot of concern about security; the Secret Service was worried about an assassination attempt--"You don't have to come with me tomorrow if you don't want to. It could be

dangerous." I said, "No, no, no. I'll be there. I'll be there." He said it a couple of times. This time, instead of driving in from LaGuardia, we helicoptered to Central Park and drove just from the park. Either as we were coming in on the plane or as we were coming in on the helicopter, we got word that they--they were searching people going into the church--that a guy had gone in with an attaché case with a gun in it and that they'd pulled him out. It might not have been anything.

This time we came in after the procession and just before the family and it was a reasonable hour ceremony. Cooke, in his sermon, I remember went out of his way to say some nice things about Johnson and Johnson *vis-à-vis* Kennedy. I remember that. It endeared Cooke to me and it certainly endeared him to the President. We left the church and there was enormous cheering. He'd pulled out and I realized what a tremendous impact the withdrawal had had in terms of people feeling they were dealing with a President who had only the country's interests at heart. There was quite a difference. Cheering, literally.

G: Did he sense that as well?

C: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I don't think he ever regretted that decision. I think he thought he would become divisive, and that was it.

We went back to Washington. He then decided he would meet the train that brought Kennedy back down and we'd go over to Arlington for the burial. He asked me to go with him and I went with him. I remember waiting in the train station, Union Station, in the car, his talking about Rose Kennedy and what she'd been through, and what an extraordinarily difficult life she had and what a strong woman she was, and how

much religion must have meant to her because of her husband and his philandering, because of Joe's death in the war, Jack Kennedy's assassination and now Robert Kennedy's assassination. It was really kind of an interesting Johnson. It was a very compassionate, almost thoughtful Johnson. When the family got off the train he really focused his attention on Rose Kennedy and went out of his way. We then went over to Arlington Cemetery and went through the--

G: How did she react to him, do you recall?

C: I think she was very nice. I even got--I wonder if I have it in my files. I remember getting what I thought at the time was a really quite extraordinary and beautiful letter from Ethel Kennedy to me thanking me for my help to her. The White House helped a lot with funeral arrangements and stuff, as you might expect. That was a day in which you didn't have all the accounting rules and regulations you have now.

G: He seems to have enjoyed a close relationship with Billy Graham.

C: I was not familiar with that. I have--you see that picture over there?

G: Yes.

C: That's in the pool. Everybody is sweating like hell. That's in the White House pool. When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was on the floor, really at high speed, it was a really difficult piece of legislation. The southern Protestants didn't want any money going to Catholic schools. We couldn't pass the bill unless we found some way to give money to Catholic schools and that was anti-Catholic [?]. The urban Jews, a small minority of them wanted money for parochial schools because they wanted some to go into those, particularly in New York City. But the vast majority who were sort of

agnostic Jews, liberal, very First Amendment-oriented, also had a little anti-Catholic spin and didn't want any money going to the Catholic schools. So it was very complicated and further aggravated by the fact that people were increasingly perceiving that the bill was going to help large numbers of black kids.

Billy Graham became--a lot of things became important. I can remember [Johnson] saying to Adam Clayton Powell, "You've got to get the hell out of this country." Powell was chairman of the Education and Labor Committee. "Let somebody else pick up the cudgels." And he ultimately engineered it so that Hugh Carey picked up the cudgels, so we allayed the Catholic thing and told Powell to go to Bimini. I don't know whether he went to Bimini or not but I think if you look at the record, Powell was not around at the critical moments of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. He said, "When we get it passed, I'll sign it. You'll be right there at my side."

G: That seems to be the opposite of the ordinary problem which was getting him back from Bimini.

C: There was a point at which he [Johnson] decided he had to get these forces together. That picture is Cardinal Spellman, Billy Graham, and Arthur Goldberg and the conversation is elementary and secondary education. There is also a wonderful story [Bill] Moyers used to tell of getting a call from one of these Southern Baptist preachers. It was a guy named--I can't remember his name. I'd like to say Gill because that's my mother's maiden name, but it's not. It was some Baptist preacher who was really raising hell about the bill and calling Moyers and wanting to talk to the President. Well, this bill is going on and Moyers saying, "The President's in the pool." This guy said, "The President is swimming

in the middle of the day?" And he [Moyers] said, "He's with Billy Graham." And the preacher said, "With mah Billy?" And Moyers said, "Yes, with your Billy," and everything was fine.

But he got Graham and he got Spellman and he got Goldberg, and he really put it to them on going back to respective constituencies on this bill and they did, and we finally muddled it through. There were lots of compromises, leasing books and stuff like that. I remember that. Yes, he'd call Billy Graham. I think he considered Billy Graham sincere, religious, important. Did Graham provide spiritual guidance to him? I have no idea. I don't know whether they had any private meetings on that level or not.

G: The one example you have cited is more as a political ally than a spiritual counselor.

C: Yes, oh absolutely. I don't mean to say that there wasn't any spiritual conversation between them. For all his dislikes and likes and strong views, he was clearly much more open than Lady Bird was. We go back on the civil rights thing. I remember in connection with the Civil Rights Conference or something, at some point in the presidency I remember walking in the East Room area with him and with Lady Bird and others, maybe. He was talking about having a huge White House reception for all the black leaders and all the black legislators and all the black people that had been elected since the Voting Rights Act and everything like that. Lady Bird was scared. She said, "I don't [know] what they'd do. Do you really want to do that, Lyndon?" It was quite interesting. I don't think it reflected an anti-Negro aspect of Lady Bird. I think it just reflected the fact that while she's an extraordinary woman, and believe me, when we talk about King's assassination and stuff we can get into that. But it reflected she was less

willing to take risks, less willing to reach out and open up and go off with anything. I think he'd look at anything.

G: Do you think she had a concern of a white backlash if--?

C: No, I think she had a concern of what would happen in the White House.

G: Is that right?

C: Yes, I really do. My recollection is very distinct. I remember being very struck by it.

I remember when he bounced back and all that stuff and then he showed his gallbladder [scar]. I always thought he showed the scar--it's interesting how it backfired. I think it backfired on him. I always thought in my mind that he showed that scar because he wanted to show people that he had not had another heart attack, that he was worried about the impact of a weak presidency. He certainly went into a funk. Of my four years in the White House, from my point of view, the most difficult time to reach him and talk to him and the only time when I felt a serious hunkering down--I don't mean he was hunkering down from the world, but maybe physically he was worried about how he would recover--was during that period of time. The aluminum thing happened after that. He was very difficult to reach during that at various points of time. I think it's the only time when there are examples when I'd call him--you don't lightly pick up the phone and call the President of the United States, even when you are one of his top aides. You really have something to say to him. It was the only time--and he knows that. He knows that about certain people. It was the only time in the presidency when I wouldn't get a call back as soon as he ended the meeting or when it would be twenty-four, thirty-six, maybe forty-eight hours before he'd call back. So I had a very strong sense of him being in dark

days.

I also had a sense of him--in some ways he was smart enough--he made the decisions he had to make during those days, but where he could find ways to postpone decisions that he expected to be controversial or wanted to think through, like the [Robert] Weaver appointment, he did. And we can get into Weaver. I'd like to have whatever notes and papers there are on Weaver. That's worth telling in some detail.

G: Yes.

C: So, yes. I can't say that I had a sense that he was physically weak because I wasn't down at the Ranch. I didn't start going down to the Ranch until we got into the budget and the--

G: Legislative.

C: Legislative area. By then he was back full blast. You also have to remember that there's a point along here--I can't remember how the war was going. It ate on him a lot. But there was a point along here when he also stopped drinking, effectively stopped drinking, because he was worried about the Vietnam clock being twelve hours off from his. I can remember Lady Bird trying to get him to have a drink at night and he wouldn't have a drink. I can remember the doctors even saying, "Have a little scotch. It'll relax you." From sometime in late 1965 until he left the White House he rarely had much to drink, in my experience. I thought there was a deliberate intention.

I would contrast that with the times before that. When I went out to the Ranch when I first became an aide, he'd drive along the Ranch with a scotch and soda and when he'd finish the scotch and soda he'd stick his arm out, still driving very slowly, and this poor bastard that was working for the Secret Service had to jump out of the back of the

Secret Service car, run up alongside the Johnson car, grab the cup, go back, get into the Secret Service car, mix the drink, and run up with the drink and hand it to him.

When I'd go over at night during the steel strike negotiations, when I was going in night after night, I remember him sitting in that Green Room having several drinks. I don't mean that he was drunk, but he had several drinks. He always used to drink less than he'd give someone else to drink, which I'm sure they were under instructions to do. He'd have less than an ounce and Dirksen would get two full ounces. But that all stopped.

G: He went to Fresca or some--?

C: Well, he drank all those: Fresca, root beer, I guess, wasn't it? Fresca was the big one. He had Coke. It wasn't Diet Coke then. There was another one. Maybe it was root beer.

G: Did he feel that it had been a mistake to show his scar or that the press had abused that, that they had asked to see his scar and he showed it and then they--do you recall his ever talking about that as a reflection of his relationship with the press?

C: I don't recall any explicit comment. I recall him bitching about it.

(Interruption)

G: You say you recall him complaining about the press coverage of that?

C: Yes, but I don't recall any more than any other press coverage.

End of Tape l of l and Interview XII

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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