INTERVIEW XXIV

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G: This was your first State of the Union Message that you worked on.

C: Yes. The basic questions were how to handle the war, *vis á vis* the Great Society, whether to continue with the Great Society programs, could the country take another massive legislative dose of medicine, and whether there was any reason to begin putting any brakes on the economy with taxes or anything like that. The other component, I was just getting ideas from people in the cabinet. What we did on the last score, we basically would go out with a memo to every agency; the President sent a memo out. We'd get in any thoughts they had on the State of the Union. They were rarely of much help. And then the last question was who was going to write the State of the Union Message. Dick Goodwin had left the White House. Goodwin was as Valenti used to say--Jack always used to say about Goodwin, "Goodwin's the best political speechwriter in the United States; it's too bad he didn't have any character." He was also, like many people that are good writers or have a strong artistic bent, was difficult when you changed what he wrote.

G: What about the remark that he didn't have any character, what did--?

C: I mean Valenti just didn't trust him. It's the problem that Goodwin has had over the years which really is if he writes a speech, whether it's for [Edmund] Muskie or Lyndon Johnson or John Kennedy, or Robert Kennedy, if it's really a terrific speech, and he can write the best, you know that Goodwin wrote it before it's even delivered. And that's caused problems for him with everybody that he's worked for.

But in any case, we eventually, at Valenti's urging, mine, [Bill] Moyers' urging, the President agreed to let us have Dick Goodwin come down and work on it. Remember, he had worked on the Howard University speech; I mean, he was a hell of a speechwriter.

G: Why didn't the President want to use him?

C: Oh, I don't know. I mean he wasn't--I remember at the Ranch the weekend I was down there Goodwin had a camera and he took his camera out. We were all sitting around the pool and the President said, "Put that camera away. There are no pictures here. No pictures." And there weren't. But I think it was that sense that he didn't trust him and not just because he was a Kennedy man, but he just didn't trust him. That's what I think the problem was.

Valenti wanted to try and put some order into the process of writing the State of the Union, and so did I. Valenti came up with the idea that he could actually put a schedule together by which various sections would be submitted, fundamentally [McGeorge] Bundy submitting the foreign section and me submitting the domestic section. And then in the ideal world he'd have Goodwin write it and he'd edit it. The message went through I cannot remember how many drafts. In various conversations

with the President we agreed that we would go for guns and butter. Basically, that judgment involved I think a recognition of a fact. The fact was that there was plenty of money in the economy to continue with both the war and the domestic programs aggressively and that the issue was the will of the American people. And we miscalculated the will of the American people to do both at the same time. So guns and butter was going to be part of it.

G: Was there also a question of being able to gauge correctly how large the war would become?

C: Well, you have to remember the budgets were calculated on the basis--and explicitly stated if my recollection is correct--that the war would end at the end of the fiscal year for which we were budgeting. Now what that did was compound the underestimate of the war. There was an underestimate because on the military side the chiefs said, "Yes, we have enough," or, "If we have a few more of this," and the rosy reports that were coming back from Vietnam. But if you calculate a budget to end at the end of the fiscal year, the war to end at the end of the fiscal year, there are longer lead items. There are things that you use in the next year that you're not budgeting and paying for in that year so it was underestimated, not twice as much as we would have been, but just underestimate because we didn't gauge the number of troops. There is no question that it was underestimated.

On the tax issue the President used to say or said to me on more than one occasion, one, that the tax bill of 1964 was working. We were in the midst of--and it hasn't been duplicated until [Ronald] Reagan became president--the greatest economic prosperity in the history of the United States. In that context the President used to say

he'd been in Washington for thirty-five years and he'd seen every single president put the brakes on too fast and cause a recession; he wasn't going to do that. The jawboning at least for the moment in terms of holding inflation down appeared to be having an impact. This, you've got to remember this State of the Union in the context we'd rolled back aluminum; we rolled back copper. We had a little program going involving everything. We told the government they couldn't buy wooden desks; they had to buy plastics desks, and we did all kinds of stuff when lumber prices went up. We were churning. And in that context, that coupled with the view on the Hill which was there was no chance of getting a tax increase, none, took care of that. Lastly, continuing with the authorization and seed money for Great Society programs was not very costly because we're sending up legislation in January of 1966 that would pass sometime in 1966 that would need at best a half a year's start-up money in that fiscal year. So the new legislation didn't have a lot of impact on the budget, even something as extraordinary as Model Cities. On drafting the message itself, despite all the best of intentions we really didn't get into high gear until, I would say about a week, right after the first of the year. This was delivered on January 12.

G: Was the State of the Union then more than a speech? Was it actually a distillation of the President's legislative programs for the--?

C: Yes. Well, it was intended to be several things. It was, one, announcing the new legislative program, and in that sense a broad overview of a preview of the messages that would come. There are a lot of special messages behind it. Secondly, we were annunciating our policy on Vietnam again, and kind of giving a report of sorts on Vietnam. And thirdly, something of a report on the economy and values and goals. The

fights were over--arguments, disputes--were over how much legislative stuff to put in there, and what to say about Vietnam. On what to say about Vietnam, the arguments were over how hard to state the down side, candor, but with a recognition that we wanted to go forward with the Great Society; we didn't want to destroy it. We were also at a point where we getting the earliest sniffs of the difficulties of holding the liberals on the war and the reality of having--the conservatives had never been with us on the Great Society.

So there was a lot of delicate nuances to the message. The President went over--I don't know how many drafts were produced. The President went over many of them. I think he virtually never talked to Goodwin directly. Valenti and I dealt with Goodwin. Moyers. On the night before the State of the Union was delivered revising the sort of latest draft or whatever, we went over to--I remember, one, a meeting with the President in which he sort of gave us his last round of comments and then I remember essentially being up all night writing. So I slept on the couch in my office. We got it over to him. With Goodwin and Moyers. Valenti went home. Goodwin, Moyers and I stayed up all night and produced this final draft. Bundy did not like Goodwin. In substantive terms they argued like hell because, you know, it is true the guy who does the last draft has a lot to say about what the presidential policy will be. Goodwin was very aware of that, and Bundy knew he was aware of it.

G: Was there a substantive difference on Vietnam?

C: I think so, yes.

G: Was it with regard to simply how much to say about the possibility of a long-term involvement there or was it a question of what to say about the policy, whether the policy

should be to stay in there as long as possible or to emphasize the negotiation phase of it? Let me rephrase it. Was it simply a question of how candid to be about the possibilities of a long-term commitment?

C: I think everybody agreed that the emphasis should be on peace, and the message reflects that. It's got how many meetings we've had, how many calls, how many everything to get peace and the fact that we want peace, we're ready to talk anywhere, and what have you. The issue was how much to say about the build up and how much to say about what we were willing to invest and what the down side was. I think Goodwin had a much more skeptical view of the military even though Bundy was not without great skepticism and I think my hunch is fundamentally Goodwin, while he was not to my recollection at that point in time opposed to the war, had the traditional sort of liberal left-wing view that we were constantly seeing a Communist behind every tree and this was crazy, what have you. I notice in Goodwin's note he says, "This is *the* speech to the American people. I think some of the stern likelihood should be foretold clearly. I'm not convinced that it's covered by general statements of your determination to stay as long as needed." Goodwin's comments were related to as he put it, "Looking over the final version of Vietnam, I have very serious reservations about the elimination of your warning that the necessities of battle may require bombing or larger forces or greater costs." And that was basically his argument with Bundy. I can't even remember how that turned out. Do you--(Interruption)

C: I think it basically was straight on that. And I'm sure Goodwin's--Johnson used to like to let these arguments bubble along, see how strongly people felt about them. I can remember one time caving on something with him after he raised hell with me and him

telling me, you know, "Don't ever give up if you really believe in what you're telling me. Don't back down."

G: What was Bundy's position now on this?

C: Well, I think Bundy--I guess I can't remember. I wouldn't be fair to Mac. His general position was to--I'm sure this message had more of Bundy--he was after all the national security advisor--than it had of Goodwin in terms of tone. But by the time this particular message went to Congress it was Lyndon Johnson. Most legislative messages I'd send him, he'd make a few changes and send back and we'd send them up. We'd deliver them; they were handed out. I did a briefing on them. The State of the Union is something--you know, he'd been over ten drafts, so it wasn't something--

G: Was he consistent in the changes that he made?

C: No, not always. But he was a terrific editor once we got down to the nitty-gritty. He really was a very good editor and he did have a way of making things clear, easily understood by the American people. See, these are notes--when I look at these notes, these are mine on this memo. And these are obviously notes related to--much of this is stuff that the President wanted put in the message. Just to give you examples, "no leader ever searched more something or more determinedly for peace in two hundred twenty-six different meetings with many countries." I mean that's all Johnson. That's Johnson telling me to put that stuff in the message. "Representatives of good many countries in D.C. and in their capitals; the Pope; Africa. Get the cable traffic."

G: This is the memo from Goodwin to the President with all of the handwritten notations on it?

C: Yes, that's right. But this is my handwriting. This is me. The handwriting is mine. In other words, we will spend 4.1 billion more on Vietnam in next year's budget and only six hundred million more on all other items. The note here for the G.I. Bill, he wanted to mention a new G.I. Bill in the State of the Union. It's wonderful, I look at these notes. It gives you a sense of the conflict, rural life. He wanted to talk about enlarging the War on Poverty, with our efforts to help the more unfortunate and disadvantaged will continue. "Put this in; put in Chinese expansion." I mean this is him telling me stuff he wants put in whatever the next draft would be. Unfortunately Goodwin's note is not dated.

G: But he was not happy with the draft that he got the day before--?

C: --"but the War"--and it has--I can't read some of this writing. "But the War on Poverty will continue unabated . . . ?" "Respected and revered negotiators like [Averell] Harriman and [Arthur] Goldberg and [Dean] Rusk and [Thomas] Mann make clear our purpose not only in this capital but in capitals around the world, Belgrade and Warsaw and Paris and New Delhi." And I think I should say that at high noon on December 28 someone personally handed a note to a representative of Hanoi--second paragraph on page 26--"already equal in thirty-one states. Thirty-one states do not now have 14-B of the Taft-Hartley provision." I mean these are my notes off of--when, at what draft? I'd have to go through all the drafts. Do they have the drafts of the State of the Union down there?

G: I don't know. I assume they have some of them.

C: Get a few of them. Just the four or five days before. Everything before that isn't--I'm sure we weren't producing more than one draft a day. But that's Johnson responding to whatever draft was in front of him at that point in time. And if you look at the message a

lot of this stuff gets in here. You know, "In 1965 alone we had three hundred private talks. Since Christmas your government has labored again for twenty days. We have dropped no bombs . . . able and experience spokesman . . . . Respected and revered negotiators have visited on behalf of America more than forty countries. We talked to more than a hundred governments. In public statements and private communications adversaries and friends in Rome and Warsaw and Paris and Tokyo and Africa, throughout the hemisphere"--I mean that's . . . . "We have also made it clear from Hanoi to New York that there are no arbitrary"--so . . . . I'm just trying to see. "That other nation within a nation, the poor, whose distress has now captured the conscious of America, I'll ask the Congress to not only continue but to speed up the War on Poverty and in so doing will provide the added energy of achievement to improve the life of our rural Americans in our farm population."

I read this only to--these are only reflections of the notes--to make clear the point that by the time you get to this message, this particular message, it's all Lyndon Johnson. It's very much what he wanted said. The morning of the message as soon as he woke up he read it. And Valenti and I and Moyers were there in the bedroom and he didn't like the order of the message. The message that he had--which is why I'd like to see that draft--started with Vietnam, and then went in to the domestic programs and he thought it was much too long. He wanted to start with a series of, "I recommend, I recommend, I recommend," to just take the breath out of them and then with Vietnam at the end in kind of an emotional way. And that required--there were sort of three sections to the message and that required retooling it and also to cut it by a third. That was a massive job. Moyers was just exhausted and he was devastated and he couldn't work anymore.

Goodwin had been staying awake on pills, I think. He was knocked out; he was not with us that morning. He was in his hotel room at the Hay-Adams. And Moyers went home to bed. Valenti and I went into a little office that was [Horace] Busby's office. I don't know where Busby was. Maybe he'd left by now. Locked the doors, literally locked the doors. We gave Bundy the foreign section to recast and squeeze some words out of. He got that to us, and then Valenti and I locked the doors and redid the message. We literally had guys banging on the doors to get in.

G: Why did they want to get in?

C: Because they were afraid we'd cut their program out. [Douglass] Cater was afraid we'd cut out international health. Somebody else was afraid we'd cut out something else. And it's hard to--once the President said in the State of the Union, "I will recommend a highway transportation program. I will have an international health program," then you knew you were going to have it. We're talking about things that guys had worked on for months and would they make it; would they make the final cut?

G: Were some of these items cut simply for the sake of brevity in the speech?

C: Some we had to cut for brevity in the speech and nobody knew how we were recasting it. We sent it in to the President page by page and literally as we finished a page we sent it to him. He sat in his office--that's January 12. Do we have January? Yes, l/66. I'll find out for sure who was in there now. See, here's who was there. You can just see the day [reading from the President's Daily Diary]. This is the day of the State of the Union. 6:19, he calls Goodwin, who's at the hotel, I'm sure partly to thank him but partly to get him to rev, move some more. 7:15, Moyers, Watson, Valenti, myself, and Jake Jacobsen are in the bedroom. He's now read it. He's now beginning to tell us he wants to recast it.

8:15, he calls [Charles] Schultze. By 8:16, he calls Goodwin in the West Wing but at this point Goodwin is saying, "The hell with it." He's just exhausted. We've taken everything he's got.

G: Did Moyers or any of you others argue with him that it shouldn't be recast?

C: Well, we all knew it was too long. I'm sure we argued with him but there wasn't--

G: How long did he want it to be?

C: He wanted it substantially shorter than it was. It was still pretty long. I don't know how long it took to deliver but I bet it took close to an hour by the time you had the applause and everything else. (Long pause)

In any case we then--no, Moyers did not go back home. Moyers still stayed around but I know he rested that day. And we literally, we worked all day. He kept looking at it. There was a point at which--you can see all these calls to all of us . . . . And then in the afternoon at three o'clock he's got [Abe] Fortas and [Clark] Clifford in the office with him. They're going over the State of the Union. He wouldn't let anybody in. Then he starts this whole series of calls to me and Valenti.

G: Making further changes?

C: Making changes--we were now down to small changes. And we just . . . . Lunch was at 6:17 p.m. that day. And at 6:35--remember this was something--and at 7:32 he is still calling me on this damn message that he's going to deliver at nine o'clock. Gets a haircut I see. Then we went back to the Mansion at 10:15 and watched television. I see that we left at 12:15.

G: You didn't go with him up to the Hill did you, to hear--?

C: I thought I did, but I don't see myself listed here. I know I was in the Speaker's office. I may been--when we handed the message out, I had to brief the press and I may have been stuck talking to the press because I notice that neither Moyers nor I are listed as traveling up there. But I just don't remember. I know I was in the Speaker's office before he delivered it. The Cabinet sits in that first row and we used to just stand off to the side and watch him deliver it.

G: Were there any programs that were deleted that subsequently caused you problems as being one of the--?

C: No, I don't think so. You know he delivered the message. The message was a big hit. I can see why my life was such a shambles. Every one of those little phone calls is about nine things to do from him.

But we come back--first of all, during the message he wanted applause lines and he wanted to count the applause and how much time. He even had Marvin Watson and [Lawrence] O'Brien start some applause at some points if it didn't start promptly enough. But you have to remember, "I recommend that you provide"--he starts . . . . We had celebrated Congress the year before. "This nation is mighty enough." That is not a good copy. "Something as healthy enough as people, strong enough to pursue our goals in the world while building a great society at home, and that is what I've come to ask for tonight." He starts out you know, push forward education, prosecute the war on poverty, more foreign aid, trade. "I recommend to you a program to rebuild completely on a scale never before attempted entire central and slum areas of several of our cities in America." You have to have understood how stunned these guys were. They expected, "Thanks for everything you've done." We've just had a big party in October of 1965 celebrating the

great eighty-nine. We've got the Great Society on the way and we've done our hundred-day thing; let's go. Now it will focus on the war. And they were just--"I recommend you attack waste from degrading and poisoning of our rivers. At the cornerstone of this effort, clean completely entire large river basins." These were massive programs. Meet the growing menace in the streets, revitalizing the federal prison system. And then he said, "Then jury selection, obstruction of civil rights and outlawing discrimination in the sale or rent of housing." Fair housing was an--it's still a big fight today. Create the Department of Transportation, restructure civil service, the four-year term for congressmen, and then all the other stuff that came: the consumer stuff, highway safety, truth-in-lending, truth-in-packaging.

G: Well, all of these flowed from the legislative proposals that you had gone over with him at the Ranch, is that right?

C: There's no question about it; that's right. And very much something that I felt strongly--"not come here tonight to ask for pleasant luxuries or for idle pleasures. I recommend that you, the representatives of the richest nation on earth, you the elected servants of people who live in abundance unmatched on this globe bring the most urgent decencies of life to fellow Americans. I believe we can continue the Great Society while we fight in Vietnam. Those who you do not believe this, then in the name of justice let them call for the contribution of those who live in the fullness of our blessing rather than try to strip it from the hands of those that are most in need." I mean we had--even in speeches I gave--we had a very deep belief that we had this pocket of poverty large as it was--15, 20 per cent, whatever it was of the people--in the richest country in the world and that the maldistribution of wealth was really a tragedy. It was inexcusable, that the

argument wasn't whether we could fight the war and move the Great Society programs. The argument was whether or not we would fight the war on the backs of the poor. We believed that. You look at this country today. Christ, the Catholic bishops a year ago on the maldistribution of wealth. In any case--

And on Vietnam I hope these measures--on the tax thing we asked for restoration of the automobile and telephone excise tax reductions. We got them. We changed the withholding to require corporations to pay up sooner. We got that. And then we said, "I believe these measures will be adequate, but if the necessities of Vietnam require it, I will not hesitate to return to Congress for additional appropriations or additional revenues if they're needed." Then he rattled off--I don't know any straighter way to say it. Then he went off on all the specifics which really pulled him out of the water: pollution, highway safety, truth-in-packaging, truth-in-lending, keeping harmful drugs and cosmetics out of our stores, a new transportation department. They were just--"I've sent legislation [to] revise the present unrealistic restrictions on contributions to prohibit the endless proliferation of committees bringing state and local committees under the act to attach strong teeth and severe penalties to the requirement of full disclosure of contributions, [to] broaden the participation of people, through added tax incentives, [to] stimulate more contribution to the party and the candidate of your choice." This was--he had a very strong sense--it grew while he was in office I think--that it was really demeaning for the president of the United States to go around hat in hand and ask people about whom he was supposed to make judgments, about whose interests he was supposed to make judgments on behalf of all the people, to ask those interests for money, and that led to the

public financing. I don't know when we proposed public [campaign] financing. Was it this year?

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C: --proposals for public financing. In any case, the rest of it--I think we just--we have to go look at the press but I think we really stunned Congress that night with how much we were asking them for, what he intended to do, the fact that he hadn't even, wasn't even going to stop to catch his breath; we were just going gangbusters. And when the messages then started rolling up, bang, bang, bang, bang, they were just--we'd have the legislative leaders over and say, "When you going to move this bill out? When are you going to do that thing?" They knew he was deadly serious. We also worked to get senators and congressmen to be prepared to make statements supporting what we were saying.

G: Was this done through O'Brien's office?

C: I think Larry did some of it. The speechwriters wrote statements. I'm sure Larry's people placed them. We wanted people to be prepared to support us.

G: The remarks on Vietnam at the end of the speech sound almost pacifist in nature, the anti-war--?

C: Well, Johnson--and then later, I don't know when it came--did it come in 1966 or 1965, the Johns Hopkins [University] speech on Vietnam? I mean he wanted out. He desperately wanted out of there. That was the last thing he wanted. One of the cruelties of public life is he gets caricatured as a guy that's sort of a Texan with two guns loaded but he wanted out, because what he cared about were all these social programs. And we had gotten the country revved up. A combination of programs that focus on poverty, the

success of the economic policy, coming off the assassination of a president that was lionized after he was assassinated, Johnson was able to use every bit of it. Also, we were very conscious of the need to move fast. I've been through all the Watts papers I've got. It really brings back--we were very conscious of the fact that you know--he used to cite [Alexis] de Tocqueville, "A reformer never survives his reforms; what once was accepted as inevitable becomes intolerable once there is light at the end of the tunnel." And Watts really started driving that home to us, that we--the promise, the hope that these programs were engendering and the civil rights laws. A sense that that's what the law says therefore it happens immediately and the inability to tell people that are in that situation, "Well, no. It takes eighteen months to implement a law." They don't understand that. So we were very conscious of the need to move fast. And that was another reason. Another reason we went with this program was we did have a liberal majority and I think the President had no illusions at any point about the fact that, the difficulty of keeping a liberal majority in the House of Representatives.

G: With the off-year elections in 1966.

C: We had not had a liberal majority in the House of Representatives probably in the history of the country. I don't know. I don't know what Roosevelt's majority was like in the House. And we did; it was not just a Democratic majority. That made a tremendous difference. And even with that, remember, we were winning. We were winning some of those votes by one and two votes so it wasn't any easy task.

G: But back to Vietnam, such statements as, "To know war is to know that there is still madness in this world," was that something that Johnson himself composed or was that, do you think, Goodwin or Valenti or yourself?

C: I mean I think you'd have to go back through the drafts to see where the words came from. Is that what he felt? Yes. I mean there's no question about that. You have to understand what an incredible albatross this war was. It was not something he wanted. I always thought when I was sitting in the Pentagon that he was remarkably reluctant to become engaged. I was always puzzled and am to this day as to why once he became engaged he by and large gave the chiefs what they wanted until early 1968. Although he was tempered in the sense that I doubt if we've ever had a situation in which people like the secretary of defense and state and the head of the CIA sat around that table every Tuesday literally picking bombing targets and stuff like that. But I think he didn't want the war; he was stuck with it. It was his watch and he had to pursue it, he felt. He had no choice. So I think all the stuff in there about peace, the sending people everywhere, trying to get everybody involved and get negotiations going was all genuine, all a desperate attempt to end it.

G: Did he not consider a unilateral withdrawal a realistic alternative?

C: Maybe as we go through the notes--no, I don't think he ever did. I mean I have to look but I don't--the most fundamental review of options that I am aware of--there were two fundamental reviews of the options. One was in July of 1965, the meeting we went over, and I'm sure lots of meetings before that, and the other was prior to the time he made his withdrawal speech. Between those times I think we were basically trying to keep enough heat on and get to the negotiating table. We were also--it's really remarkable. I think to a degree the Bundys of the world will have to really write someday or tell or what have you--he very much thought he was carrying on John Kennedy's policy. He was very much a--he believed in the electoral process. He believed in the democratic process

deeply. That comes through--when Kennedy was assassinated the first things he did were to try and pass the Kennedy programs. He believed that that's what they had been elected to do, and they were going to do that. He didn't really strike out on his own. He moved with the war on poverty in an administrative way in 1964 but he didn't really strike out until he got elected. Then came the Great Society; then came all the programs that he really believed in because he thought he was elected to do that. The tremendous confidence he had in the Voting Rights Act, that that was really the most powerful weapon he could put in the hands of blacks, the right to vote. And that aspect of having been elected, of Kennedy having--really I mean, if you look at Cold War rhetoric, the change in Cold War rhetoric began with Johnson talking about Vietnam with Johns Hopkins, with the kind of stuff that was in here. The rhetoric of Kennedy was really bellicose. We were really--"xenophobic" is probably too strong, but it was really tough. But both these people, both these men, Kennedy and Johnson, had come out of World War II; they had come out of the Cold War and they had--there was plenty of reason to be suspicious, in any case. But I think the struggles, the things, all the attempts all were--if he could have turned that war off, boy, he would have turned it off.

G: Was LBJ pleased with the reaction to the State of the Union Message?

C: Yes, I think he was really like a purring cat if my recollection is right because, one, he had really wowed them. He had knocked--I was standing in that chamber. I could feel guys--they were just stunned that he would go forward with a program like this. And then you'd have guys come up to you and say, "Is he really serious? Are we really going to do this?" And then the bills starting coming up. It was much later but I remember sitting in this incredibly hot room with Bill Barrett, he was the congressman from Pennsylvania,

and he was key on the House side in the Housing Committee on Model Cities. The sweat was pouring off of everybody and Barrett had a toupee and the toupee was curling up. (Laughter) And he was saying, "Joe, you can't be serious. How can you push this program? Where are we going to get the money? How are you going to do it?" I said, "We're going to do it. The President really wants to do it." But I think he loved all of that. And we had--I'd have to go back and total it up but I think we passed more legislation in 1966 than 1965.

We also had great resistance in some parts of the cabinet to going forward with such an aggressive legislative program. In the Model Cities area, [Robert] Weaver and [Robert] Wood were deeply concerned. How could they--they were just going to organize the Department of Housing and Urban Development and be given one of the ten centerpieces of the President's legislative program to get through the Congress. I think John Gardner was concerned about another flood of legislation going forward at a time when we'd dumped so much into HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare]. So it really was the President. I mean I was aggressively pushing for a major legislative effort and it wasn't done--the point is, it wasn't done nonchalantly; it wasn't done thoughtlessly. There were arguments whether to go with this kind of a massive operation again. And the President sided with those of us who wanted to do it. But he wanted to do, he really wanted to do it. I gave a speech down at the LBJ Ranch--at the Library a few years ago. I said, "Make no mistake about it. What Lyndon Johnson was about was a revolution; that's what we were talking about." One of the things we have to do is really effectively paint what government and this country was like in 1964 versus what it was like in 1969. We really have to make it.

G: Home Rule.

(Interruption)

C: (Long pause) I think at least in that first period of time, I think the President in my experience may have made more calls, personal calls to members of Congress on the Home Rule bill than on virtually any other bill. We got a Home Rule bill out of the Senate. The bill had a mayor, elected by the people, a city council of fifteen people, a non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives. It allowed Congress to modify acts, or the President to veto them, passed by the city council. And in terms of financing it provided for a significant federal contribution basically to make up for the fact that so much federal property would not be taxable.

The issue with Home Rule was racial. I mean that was it. It had--all the discussion related to how can the federal city work and how can you--how can you have the nation's capital, what kind of power, how do you work out the relations between a local government and a capital were not the real issue. The real issue was race. At that time the District had a government of three commissioners who were appointed by the president--I can't remember whether they were confirmed by the Senate or not--two white and one black. And each commissioner had different authorities. And the white commissioner, the chairman, Walter Tobriner, who always had authority over the cops and the fire department because one of the things people talked about was, "God, could you let a black have power over the police department or the fire department?"

We also did not have--you really should talk to O'Brien--my recollection is that we had at best a lukewarm congressional leadership on the House side for this legislation. But you should ask him that when you're talking to him. We got the bill out of the Senate

and we got it passed by the Senate, the southerners all voting against it. We couldn't move it out of the House. We finally mounted an effort to get a discharge petition, which was a petition which would require the House District Committee to report the bill out. To get a sense of what people thought when I just look at some of this stuff and I'm . . . . [Harry] McPherson's note in August to Moyers in connection with a briefing saying we've got to get Home Rule. The President's letter saying we've got to get Home Rule. Congressman [James] Morrison calling in on the President's birthday on August 30 [LBJ's birthday was August 27] and saying instead of wiring or phoning birthday greetings, he thought that telling him he signed the discharge petition for Home Rule today would be a nicer birthday gift. Give you a sense of what--flying in Congressman [Darwin] Schisler of Illinois to sign the Home Rule petition. And Cliff Carter calling the usher over in the living quarters. A congressman's secretary calling the usher in the living quarters to get the message to the President at 7:45 a.m. in the morning, whatever date this was, just gives you a sense of what kind of an effort we were doing. And Larry O'Brien's things you know. "[James] MacKay of Georgia moved from possible to probable. [Charles] Weltner of Georgia moved from possible to probable. [William] Natcher of Kentucky impossible. [John] Slack, West Virginia, will sign this week."

G: Why was LBJ so adamant about this bill?

C: I think it was his--I mean he just thought it was--part of it went to this whole electoral sense I mentioned to you that here you have these people that don't have the right to vote in the capital of the United States. I think it was also--

G: But their delegate in Congress would be non-voting.

C: Yes, only because there was no way to get anything else out of them. And there is just no way to get any more. I think--

G: Did he see it as a way to have a civil rights bill passed in effect that year?

C: No. I think he really thought it was right. I mean I think he thought it was absolutely clearly correct. I think he was conscious of all the racial issues because--we can talk about them when we get to putting the city council together. But I think he was--I think he just thought it was right, really thought it was the right thing to do. And it had just been too long and that it was basically being held up by bigotry. You see these lists coming in from O'Brien, meetings with the Speaker [John McCormack], Jacobsen. He meeting with the Speaker for over an hour. Alan Bible. [In] any case, we . . . . It's really wonderful; I see my note to O'Brien here. "[Oren] Harris will help on procedures but cannot vote for. [Wilbur] Mills, Arkansas, opposes Home Rule. [Sam] Gibbons, Florida, for Home Rule. MacKay of Georgia (inaudible). [James] Fulton of Pennsylvania will support if we help him with two-hundred-thousand-acre wildlife sanctuary at Bedford, Pennsylvania, that the Bureau of Public Roads is putting through. I've called Governor [LeRoy] Collins and asked him to get in touch with Fulton. Will vote. [Fernand] St. Germain, I've not talked to St. Germain but [John] Fogarty tells me he'll support home rule. [William] Hungate will support, [Frank] Karsten, will support but not enthusiastic." The whole place was turned--

G: Did you yourself have more contact with House members on this issue than you normally did?

C: I think everybody in the White House staff had contact. Everybody (long pause) worked on this one. Eventually we got the discharge petition, but then the committee as I recall

reported out a bill we didn't like that much. McCormack then using the House procedures set it up so that our bill was the bill that would be considered on the floor. Bernie Sisk of California came up with a substitute bill, which I just can't--I can't remember what Sisk's bill provided.

(Interruption)

When we looked at the Sisk bill, it was unacceptable. We'll just take that as a given. We recommended that we not take the Sisk bill. This is to the President, this is myself and others, Lee White, [Charles] Horsky. That we try and get an amended Sisk bill. The reason we didn't want to take the Sisk bill was because it would be a defeat in the House and then there would be another defeat in the Senate.

We tried to get Bible and Sisk together. This is October 7. O'Brien and I told the President that unless he got into it personally we didn't think we'd have any chance of even getting Bible and Sisk to sit together. October 9 I guess Larry and I met with Senator Bible who was the chairman of the House [Senate] District Committee. Bible said he would not take the Sisk bill unless it was amended. He was willing to try to make changes in the Sisk bill. McCormack then told us that even if we got Sisk to agree to the amendments that Bible wanted, that he'd have to send the bill--he could not send the bill directly to the floor but he'd have to send it to the rules committee. That in effect killed our chances. There was no way for us to get a ruling. We'd have to go through another discharge petition and there was no way we could put the House through that kind of a wringer again. We recommended that we push the whole issue over to the following year.

G: Was there a problem with getting members who had signed the discharge petition under pressure from the White House to actually vote for the measure that you wanted on the teller vote where they were not recorded?

C: There were people that voted for the discharge petition that told us they would vote against the bill. That's not uncommon though.

G: But part of the problem from the documents seems to have been getting roll call votes rather than teller votes.

C: Oh, all right. Yes, there was no question about that because people did not want to be recorded. Well, it was a situation in which we would be able to get more votes on a teller vote than we would on a roll call vote for Home Rule.

G: Really? It seems the reverse here.

C: I think. Maybe I'm wrong. Let me just . . . (Long pause)

G: Okay, for example, Wayne Hayes had a motion to strike the enacting clause which passed on a teller vote by four votes and was later rejected on a roll call.

C: Yes, you're right. When did we lose the vote on the floor of the House? When did Sisk get substituted?

G: September 29, I believe. Describe Joe Rauh's role in this.

C: I will. Let me just . . . . (Long pause) I'm trying to--we didn't get Home Rule until 1967?

G: That was when the reorganization was passed.

C: (Long pause) Rauh was the local gadfly. When I look through these papers--I've got to get times straighter in my head. We had great problems getting the civil rights leaders to come in here.

G: A lot of them were apparently in Europe then.

C: Yes, I see that. I don't know what the hell they were doing over there. I know we had great problems getting them to come in to turn the heat on which we wanted to do. At some point I notice in December the President really decided--I see him sending me a note. I'm trying to get him to come up with some compromise, and he says, "I gave you my views by telephone. I'm for the Senate bill." There was a point at which it became clear to me that he just wasn't going to compromise, period. I had forgotten how much churning we did after we lost--I guess what happened in the House was Sisk's bill was substituted for our bill on the floor and that bill passed.

G: So you had two different versions.

C: And the Sisk bill was unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons. It was also complicated because Sisk was sort of an upstart member. He wasn't on a subcommittee. I notice Henry Wilson's really zinging note about Charlie Horsky and Sisk. And the Speaker was mad at Sisk. I think to piece this together I need--we went with the board of education, an elected school board. I really need that.

G: That comes later. That comes in--

C: It came before the Home Rule bill. In the grossest terms I remember losing this, going with an elected school board somehow or other, then going with a reorganization plan for the District of Columbia. So we got out of the D.C. committees and into the Government Operations committees, working it through those committees. Then I remember picking the first city council and knowing why it was important to elect people instead of having somebody like me pick the first nine members. I mean I remember that vividly.

G: But the two issues here that the opponents brought up were the spector of the D.C. government being able to evaluate and tax federal property and two, D.C. government

providing the police protection and fire protection for the federal government, the Capitol.

C: Well, both of those issues we were able to deal with. One, by the federal payment and not allowing them to tax federal property, and two, the Capitol Police and what have you. Those weren't the real issues. This was really a civil rights issue. This was a race issue all the way. It was a race issue and it was sort of quote, "liberal democratic issue" versus Republicans and conservative Democrats because everybody knew the District was--it wasn't just 90 per cent Democratic; it was 80 per cent liberal. And always the lingering concern that if you take this step then do we get a congressman and two senators. I mean, to get Alaska and Hawaii you had to take them both basically. And there was that concern. That's what was driving it. That's why when you look at--when Joe Rauh, left liberal Democrat, pushing, very hard, civil rights--out in the forefront of civil rights--trying to get the black leaders in here. I don't think the black leaders at that point in time really cared that much about the District of Columbia. I'm not sure they shared Johnson's sense of the importance of getting the vote here or of the symbolic importance.

G: Were there any interests in Washington, let's say, aside from the southerners, who wanted to keep the D.C. government the way it was?

C: Well, I always felt that by and large while people talked about wanting Home Rule that much of the white establishment in Washington was happy the way it was, because they were in total control. Whether Republican or Democratic they had access to the president or the White House staff in terms of the appointment of the three commissioners. It was a much more comfortable situation for them.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XXIV

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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

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Director for Presidential Libraries

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