INTERVIEWEE: DOUGLASS CATER (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

May 8, 1969

M: This is the second session with Mr. Douglass Cater. Once again I'm in his office at the Brookings Institution. The date is May 8, 1969, and my name is David McComb.

Last time you mentioned that you had done some work with the USIA, and I thought I might ask you about that. The USIA, of course, was in existence before you were on the White House staff, but apparently about the time you came onboard there was a controversy over a John F. Kennedy film. Did you have any involvement with that?

C: No.

M: Then, what was your work with the USIA? Did you merely serve as liaison between the White House and the USIA? For what?

C: Yes. It more or less was a casual liaison. Of course, it began mainly under Leonard Marks when he made it his business to keep in touch with me on aspects of his work. This had developed particularly during the period when we were trying to stimulate the whole international education front. I had been the draftsman of the President's speech at the Smithsonian where he laid down the call for an international program in education that would be as imaginative and enterprising as the one in domestic affairs. Out of that a task force was set up that tried to bring together all the forces in the government that could be utilized in mounting an international education initiative. During that period I worked very closely with Leonard Marks and then we did a review of the possibilities for the use of satellite for international education purposes. We had various task forces in which USIA figured. This was mainly the nature of my working relationship.

M: Did you have anything to do with that problem of getting the USIA personnel recognized as foreign service officers?

C: No.

M: Does this work with international educational affairs relate at all to the formation of this corporation for public broadcasting?

C: No, that was quite a separate initiative, although Leonard Marks, because of his interests in this area, also worked closely with me during that period on that initiative.

M: It would seem that you were involved with communications in general in this?

C: Yes, I had to keep up.

M: And you're talking about the use of satellite for education purposes. Now, were there some communication task forces which developed the idea for forming a corporation for public broadcasting?

C: The history is that I was invited to a lunch one day with Scott Fletcher, who had been one of the pioneers in educational television. He pointed out the crisis that was developing. The Educational Television Facilities Act was going to expire, but merely to renew it would not be enough. Educational television was being starved for program money and he pointed out to me that the various forces in educational television were all ready to call on the President to set up a task force to come up with a new initiative in this field.

M: About what point in time is this?

C: I cannot give you a precise date on that. I would suppose that was probably the late summer of '65. Or would it have been '66--let's see--

M: The bill was signed in '67, was it not?

C: Yes, so it would have been the late summer of '65, because after reviewing it and raising it with the President, it was decided that it would be far more appropriate in this sensitive area for a non-governmental task force or commission to review the problem and make recommendations. So it was agreed the Carnegie Corporation would take the initiative in setting up the commission, but the President would publicly welcome this initiative. This is what was done. In fact at the President's behest at least one or two people who enjoyed his confidence were put on that commission. It was headed by Dr. James Killian. It did its work and came in with a report that was actually not received publicly until late January or early February of '67. But we had already been apprised of its contents and we were able to incorporate the call for a public broadcasting corporation in the State of the Union message that January and swiftly to follow up in the education message with legislative initiatives that led to the Public Broadcasting Act. That was how that came about.

M: Did you then work on the Hill for the passage of this act?

C: Yes. I kept in close touch both with Senator Pastore and Senator Magnuson and the staff man, Nick Zappel. The Senate side was keenly interested in this area. I also worked with the chairman of the House committee and worked with Paul Rogers on the committee, who helped make certain that the bill was nudged along.

M: You mentioned a man by the name of Zappel. How do you spell that?

C: I believe it's Z-a-p-p-e-l, but it could be l-e.

M: From what I've read about that corporation, the general idea of helping what might be called educational television, or non-profit television, was fairly well received. There wasn't too much argument about that. But there was argument over funding. Is that correct?

C: Yes. There were some minor disputes over the corporation idea itself. And the funding of course has not come to a head even yet. It is felt that to give this corporation some separation from political processes, it ought to have a method of multi-year funding, so that it's not beholden on a yearly basis to the appropriations committee. It was also felt that it would be exceedingly unwise to ask for that authority in the initial act because, until the corporation could be set up and until it could earn respect, it would be very unlikely that Congress would violate its own principles of having annual budget control. As a result we postponed going for that multi-year authority, and then the President's decision not to run for office affected not doing it in the next year, and as a result it has been put off.

M: But the corporation was set up with Frank Pace as the chairman.

C: Yes.

M: Is there any significance in the selection of Frank Pace, incidentally?

C: I can say the President had keen interest in the selection. He wanted to have a man of great public esteem. The original idea, I might say, was that Milton Eisenhower would be invited to be chairman. He was willing to serve on the initial period of the commission, but did not feel he had the time to be the chairman, so he turned it down. It was then hoped that Dr. Killian could be chairman, but he felt that he too had commitments that would conflict with the full-time obligation that the chairman would have in the initial period. Then the President reviewed quite a considerable number of proposals for chairman. He had known Frank Pace previously and had high respect for his judgment, and this is how he chose Pace.

M: Was there any expressed anxiety about the idea that such a corporation might be used for partisan politics? Or it might develop, say, into the voice of the President, the voice of the executive branch for propaganda purposes? Any fear of that?

C: There was awareness all along that we were dealing in an area of peculiar sensitivity and that it was going to require a unique institution that could be held publicly accountable for expenditure of public funds, but also could maintain a necessary separation from government. Of course, the act itself required a political balance in the membership of the commission, so that there had to be--what was the rule?--no more than a majority could be

from any one party. Yes, I would say, there was sensitivity and awareness of the dangers that are being run there.

M: Is there still danger that it might develop into such an organization?

C: Yes, I think there's that danger, unless this corporation and its members exercise very wise and judicious leadership.

M: At this same period of time, 1967, you got into the difficulty with the National Student Association. Apparently that news story broke in February 1967 in Ramparts magazine, which drew the connection between the CIA and the NSA, and made headlines across the country. Can you tell me what the President's reaction to his story was?

C: The chronology there is that, oh, approximately ten days before the story was due to break in Ramparts, I had a call from the president of the NSA asking if he could come to see me. I had maintained contact with student organizations and I didn't know what the visit was about. It was only after he was in my office that he told me that Ramparts was going to carry this article. I asked him, "Is it true?" because it was the first I'd ever heard or suspected that NSA was being financed by CIA. He said it was, and I, at that point, realized I'd been put in a very difficult political position because it was too late to do anything substantive in reorienting the whole government toward this thing. Now, all we could do was ride with the explosion.

I informed the President who, I felt then and subsequently he confirmed to me, was learning about this for the first time. Although he had been in the Senate on a committee that reviewed the CIA, when he checked the record, because he was majority leader, he had not been able to attend more than one or two of the meetings. This had never come up at any time that he was present. This had not been something that he knew.

M: The CIA had been giving them funds since 1952, had they not?

C: Approximately that length of time. This had been something that had grown up over the years that, as best as I was able to judge it, had been a fairly loose relationship. CIA imposed no substantive obligations of any sort on NSA. It was one way to assist voluntary organizations to carry on international relations of various kinds. But, like many other things, it had grown to an extent that I thought it was a very unwise public policy. The problem is, how do you assist these organizations when other government agencies just are not given the funds that will permit them to do that sort of thing! The sequence is the President suggested that we refer this to the state department and ask them to look into it. Secretary Rusk was away at the time and so Mr. Katzenbach did the initial review. When the story broke in the press, the President immediately announced that he was calling on a committee of three men, headed by Katzenbach and including John Gardner and Dick Helms, to review this situation and report to him about it. He indicated in that

initial statement that he did not feel it was wise for voluntary organizations--I don't remember precisely the way it was put--to be subsidized in secret ways.

M: Did he consider this an ethical operation, or what are the dangers involved in such a thing? Why did it make such a sensation? Why did it disturb the President so much?

C: The President, I think, recognized that it had become a serious problem of public policy and that a responsible response had to be made to it; that it was something that had grown up without the kind of supervision that it needed. One can, I suppose, debate eternally. If you had to do it all over again it should have never been permitted. The furor is that it made a first-class news story and the press then used it as an opportunity to trace down and expose every CIA dollar that had gone through front foundations into some form of organization or another. The President was determined equally that CIA should not be unwittingly damaged. Our intelligence organization is a highly necessary branch of government.

M: He appointed the Katzenbach committee then?

C: Yes. They recommended that the CIA funding be brought to an end during that year, phasing out in such a way it would not just needlessly cripple operations that various organizations were carrying on abroad that were worthwhile. He then recommended that a commission be set up to study an alternative way of assisting voluntary organizations to do this very useful international work. The Rusk Commission was set up, headed by Secretary Rusk, including a number of outstanding people who then spent considerable time trying to work out an alternative way. Although the Rusk Commission reported to the President and recommended the setting up of a quasi-governmental corporation or commission somewhat like the Public Broadcasting Corporation, that report was not able to be acted on before the President left office. So it was left to the agenda of the new President.

M: So the fate of the so-called CIA orphans is--

C: Still undecided.

M: Undecided.

C: As far as I know.

M: Yes. From the public statements, apparently the President, Lyndon Johnson, took a more or less neutral stand, did he not--not wanting to castigate, yet not wanting to support this covert action. But the Vice President, Hubert Humphrey, did make some statements that the CIA should not be involved in such an affair. Do you remember anything about that?

C: I think that the President made more carefully framed statements. He enunciated the principles in which maintaining the freedom of voluntary organizations and not being subverted was an important principle. But he did not issue any kind of blanket indictment of what had already gone on. I think Humphrey had been approached about trying to find some alternative private financing for CIA some time in the past. He had made an effort in that regard and had not been successful in getting anybody to contribute.

M: The National Student Association?

C: Yes. And he was, I think, concerned that somehow some better way had to be found.

M: Then the whole affair has more or less died out and blown over, so to speak?

C: Yes.

M: Even though it was somewhat a sensation at the time?

C: It had its effect. The CIA is, as of this time, precluded from continuing in this area. So unless some other way is found it means that some very useful types of operations will not be possible.

M: Let me ask you this, then. The funding of those operations did not necessarily have to come through CIA. What you've indicated is that CIA had the money and these organizations needed the money so the CIA gave it to them. But it was not necessarily for intelligence gathering purposes, is that right?

C: That's right. And there was some hope perhaps AID could take over and USIA, to a certain extent, could take over. But when you started examining the budget the money is just not there to do it in any substantial way.

M: This would indicate that these programs that were supported might not be accepted by Congress, say, funded through regular congressional appropriations.

C: That's conceivable that it would--of course, it again puts these private, voluntary organizations in a very awkward position to have to go and sell their programs to Congress as being somehow carried out for a national interest. Many of them are in the national interest, not all of them, I would say, but most of them. But they should not be treated as fronts for selling the government's policy.

M: In your work as a liaison man for these, what would you do? Would you attend meetings, say, in the Katzenbach committee, and then report back to the President what happened? What was your function in all of this?

C: Yes, I just served as a continuing liaison. Although I didn't sit in on the Katzenbach committee, I did keep up with what was going on, kept in close touch with Katzenbach. But then I sat in on meetings of the Rusk Commission after it was set up.

M: And your function then was to be sure there was a smooth flow of information from the committee to the White House?

C: Right.

M: You also served as a liaison to the intellectual community in general. What was your purpose in doing that?

C: I never considered that a distinctive purpose of mine. I think there were a number of us in the White House who tried to make it our business to maintain open relations with people in the intellectual community. I was never impressed that the intellectual community was organized as a tight shop that you could deal with on a group basis. But, yes, my work had very close relations with college presidents and with various people in the field of education. Naturally that rubbed over on other areas besides purely educational matters. In addition, each spring, certainly for the last three years I was in the White House, we would go out on a number of trips. There were two or three of us from the White House usually. Joe Califano, Harry McPherson and I and one or two more junior members of the staff would go out in three-men groups usually to one or another campus in various parts of the country where we had invited a representative group of various intellectuals to be brought in to discuss ideas that might be fitted into the President's program. This became a regular prelude to the task force work of the White House.

M: Did you gain any useful ideas from these meetings? Were they a success?

C: I would say that one of their chief values--since these were just one-evening meetings usually and had to cover a lot of territory--the chief value was to size up prospective members of task forces. Then there occasionally was an idea that you could directly refer to a task force and ask them to consider and to flesh it out.

M: Did you have any contact with Eric Goldman?

C: I had very few contacts, and those were quite early in my White House days. When I arrived in May of '64 he was already there. I had read that he was to sort of serve as the transmission belt for ideas from the intellectual community, and I remember I contacted him about prospective ideas he might have received that would be useful for a speech that the President was going to give out at Irvine, California. This was at the dedication of a new campus out there. But I had comparatively little dealings with him over the years. I found he was a rather prickly kind of fellow and frequently it was more difficult to deal with him than to leave him alone.

M: Have you had the opportunity to read his book?

C: I've only read parts of it. I plan to read it all, but I just haven't yet.

M: Have you read enough to have formed any impression about it?

C: Yes. I have two serious criticisms of it. One, I think he so successfully interweaves memoir and history that you don't know where one leaves off and the other begins. The unwary reader is apt to think he's getting a first-hand account of something where, at best, it cannot be first-hand. I don't believe that's a very valid way to write contemporary history. The other is that I think he tries to conceal his prejudices and there's a pretended impartiality which is really not there. I think he had an unhappy experience at the White House and I think he has wittingly or unwittingly tried to take it out on the President.

M: Did you happen to attend that White House Festival of the Arts that he writes about?

C: I dropped over to, I think, that afternoon affair on the lawn. I was not much involved in it, no. I was certainly not aware of all the turmoil that was going on.

M: You also mentioned that you had something to do with the arts in its relation to the White House. Can you explain that a little bit more specifically?

C: Yes, I helped try to reconcile the differences in setting up the arts and humanities endowment--that is, in proposing the legislation--and then after it was passed and the endowments were created I tried to serve, when asked to by Roger Stevens or Barnaby Keeney. I tried to put any requests they might have before the President.

M: Was the President receptive to this idea?

C: Did he--

M: To the Arts and Humanities Endowment, did he support you in this?

C: Oh yes. He made it an important part of his program.

M: Did he say anything to you specifically about this that you recall that would indicate his position on it or his ideas about it?

C: No, I don't recall anything in particular on it.

M: Now we've mentioned off-and-on the use of task forces. It might be worthwhile to get your opinion about the task force as a tool in the development of the programs and ideas. It would seem that the task force has developed during the Johnson years as a tool for the

executive branch. Do you have any thoughts about its usefulness and when it should be used and when it shouldn't be used?

C: I think the task force as a preliminary way of reviewing new ideas for government is a very useful device. I think the way the President used it, as a private consultative body to him whose works were not published, made it possible to get to the kind of free-wheeling review that is useful to program shapers. If you have a task force which knows that its work is public, it immediately creates an entirely different problem because it becomes politically vulnerable. What it recommends can create problems for a President. Through the use of task forces I think a remarkable number of good ideas were served up at the appropriate stage in the legislative planning process so that they could be incorporated in the President's program.

Generally, task forces operated during the summer and reported in the early fall. They would then be reviewed by White House working groups so that it was possible to cost them out, cost out their proposals, and serve them up to the President in time for his new program review that usually occurred in December. Then once he had made his selection, decisions, they could be incorporated in the various messages to Congress.

M: Was there a beneficial aspect of the task force on people involved in it? Was there a feedback, so to speak, from the President back to the community from where these people came?

C: I would think that would be an interesting thing to pursue, the extent to which it had any kind of feedback or sense of feeling of involvement extending beyond the immediate people utilized from the task force. Certainly task forces over the three or four years, it would be interesting to try to--I'm sure the names of the members are available to review--see exactly how many different individuals from the intellectual community were used during that period. Of course, I'm sure there was certain restiveness on some task forces members if they were not called on. For example, if their competence was in the field of health program planning, they were not called on about Viet Nam. I'm not aware of anyone who refused to serve on a task force because he disagreed with the Viet Nam policy, but I'm sure there were many who felt uneasy about that who may or may not have served on task forces.

M: In the structure of the task force, is the chairman the key position in this? Does he have to get consensus of the members of the task force?

C: Yes. A good task force chairman tries to reach a consensus so that he's not presenting a split report.

M: Yes. From what I've heard mostly the task forces that came out of '64 and '65, had a generally unanimous report. They were not minority reports.

C: I think that's true.

M: Is this important in the task force concept--to have a unified idea?

C: I think it is because since the task force represents at best only a very small fraction of the thinking people in that field, if they seriously split on something it's hardly of much use to even propose it to the President.

M: To follow the mechanics of this a little bit further, you get an idea, say from a task force. The President likes the idea. Then what does he do with it--turn it over to the White House staff for development?

C: Yes. Of course the President himself does not have time to sit down and read all the full task force reports that come in. It was our job to go over them carefully and to summarize some of the ideas. But the President, whereas he was kept informed on certain ideas that were developing, would not be called on to pass any judgment on them until they had been subsequently reviewed by working groups at the White House and then made into part of the options served up to him for the various legislative programs.

M: But how do you know what he's going to like, or what he should know and what he shouldn't know? There has to be some decision down at the staff level to cull out what are supposedly poor ideas. How do you know these shouldn't be fed to the top? How do you decide what the President should know?

C: The man who has to choose between apples, it's a matter of judgment. And this I would say is probably the greatest power and perquisite that presidential assistants have--making those judgments. Of course, they're not final judgments, by any means, because a President who has got his finger on many pulses can learn about things in a variety of ways. I found in my own areas that it was rare that I took the President by surprise on something that was going on in education or health or the like. But, when it came to this matter of screening proposals, it required the judgment of the working groups. Frequently, it depended on what were the budget limitations as to what was the nature of the proposal you could serve up to the President.

M: You would get advice from the Bureau of the Budget on that?

C: They would be members of the working groups, yes.

M: Once an idea goes through the process, and say it's made into a legislative proposal, you fight it through Congress, and it's passed. Then what? How do you follow up on these things? Say it's an act that affects one of the executive departments, say HEW. How do you follow it up to be sure it's going to be carried out as it should be? In other words, how do you control bureaucracy?

C: Let's take an example because it's awfully hard to generalize. Take the Student Guaranteed Loan Program. This was one that was passed by Congress. It was to be administered out of HEW, the Office of Education. But it required a variety of consenting parties to make it work. It required the treasury department, first of all. It required the banking community because if the banks didn't participate it was no use. It required some of the existing agents in the student loan field, particularly the US--I've forgotten the name of it now, but there is a voluntary student loan program already in effect which was working on a comparatively small basis. We held over the course of two years I suppose innumerable meetings there at the White House to review, to get a progress report from HEW as to what were the problems in getting the program going, and try to iron out differences that might block it. Therefore, on a program like this, we did do a great deal to make sure the program kept up and realized its potential. Other programs that did not present quite as many inter-departmental difficulties, generally you relied on the Budget Bureau which keeps a fairly accurate check on how an agency is administratively carrying out a legislative enactment.

M: Did you find the Budget Bureau reviews, which I assume would come out of their annual review of the budget--

C: No. This would be separate from the annual review.

M: They would review--

C: For example, when an agency issued guidelines for the administration of a program the budget officer covering education or health would review those guidelines. If he was experiencing real difficulties, if he felt there was some ingrained problem, he might consult me in the White House and see if I might help get around some of the obstacles.

M: Did you find this a satisfactory control over the bureaucracy? What if a bureau doesn't want to do what they are supposed to do, for example?

C: I don't recall any particular program that I had to deal with that met that kind of absolute resistance from a bureau. I'm sure there was bureaucratic slippage. There were all kinds of delay. Sometimes programs got shifted off target.

M: It might be useful to get your reaction to the--

C: Certainly, I in the White House would have no systematic way of knowing that unless there was a complainant, and usually you relied on somebody who had been part of the original initiating group for legislation to let you know if something was going wrong. Or, for example, I had complaints from time to time on the administration of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act. I'd get contrary complaints from NEA that perhaps the Office of Education was not being sufficiently rigorous in watching over the

Church-State separation issue. Then sometimes from the Catholic Welfare Council you'd hear that they were not really trying to--in those states where there was a great resistance to the idea of the Catholic parochial schools participating in certain programs--that OE wasn't helping them enough in trying to be sure they were party to the process. You would either call for a report or you could call a meeting and examine the difficulties.

M: One point that I had bears on this same problem. When the idea of the war on poverty came up, according to some of the books I've read, there was the thought that these ideas ought to be put into a separate agency, which turned out to be OEO, for the reason that the Department of Labor would not be able to handle a new idea--the thought being that the bureaucracy was such that it couldn't change. Does this makes sense? Are bureaus so rigid that they cannot take new ideas?

C: I think, yes, this is true at times. And I think it makes good sense sometimes to initiate programs with special administrative arrangements with the idea that you subsequently move them into an old line bureau after they've acquired enough momentum and enough public support so they can stand on their own two feet.

M: Lyndon Johnson has been characterized as a master of legislative process, that is, getting bills through Congress. Is this reputation well-founded?

C: I think so, yes.

M: This would work not only with the Senate but with the House?

C: Yes.

M: Was he as equally able an administrator?

C: It's of course a good question the degree to which a president is ever an administrator. If he tried to conceive his (job as) being the top administrator he could soon become so swamped with details that he would lose all possibility of being an effective president. The President was interested in getting good administration, and he encouraged us and he encouraged department heads to take initiatives in this field. He encouraged new ideas about how to get good administration, such as the PPPB, the program planning budgeting system that had been initiated in the Pentagon under McNamara. He gave enthusiastic support to having that concept initiated in other departments. But I wouldn't say that he was himself a trained or a particularly interested administrator. He administered the White House, certainly, rather loosely. It was not what you'd call an administrator's dream.

M: I was getting ready to ask you about the organization of the White House staff, and you have just said that it was a rather loose organization. Did the duties of the White House staff overlap? Was there any clear division of what people were to do?

C: Yes, there was considerable overlap and it required rather systematic sensitivity and communication to keep from having conflicts of jurisdiction.

M: I would assume from what I've seen of the White House staff that there were a number of relatively young, aggressive, active individuals on this, which by their mere nature would run into conflict with one another. Is there any truth in such an observation? Was there conflict on the White House staff?

C: I felt at the time, and I still feel in retrospect, that it was remarkable the degree to which there wasn't serious conflict. It seemed to me that, except for Goldman, who was not really caught up in that aspect of White House work, that the White House under Johnson was singularly free of prima donnas or people who suffered personality conflicts with one another or were trying to do the business of the President.

M: As an example of all of this, did you ever have a conflict with, say, Joe Califano; did you have an overlap of functions there?

C: To a degree, but I always regarded my role as being less concerned with systematic administration. For example, Califano and some of his staff assistants like Jim Gaither took active interest in education matters and on occasion would carry out some work on some problem with HEW. Well, as long as I was kept informed so that I wasn't ignorant of what was going on I was perfectly content to let this go on. It may have created a little confusion in the department but I think the departments generally knew that I was--HEW certainly knew--that I was aware of what anybody else was doing in connection with them. Now if I had been sensitive that any time anybody else spoke to HEW they were stepping in my territory, it could have caused a problem. I didn't. In fact, I welcomed cooperation because it left me free to do other things that I wanted to do around the White House.

M: Was Califano an able staff man?

C: I think he was very able, yes. He was particularly skilled in keeping a systematic coordination of a variety of different agencies and programs.

M: This wouldn't bring him up to the charge of empire-building then, would it?

C: Well, he certainly built a small empire but I think it was done with the encouragement of the President, and the recognition of others that somebody needed to have that kind of empire.

M: So the White House staff then was a fairly well-working body, even though loosely organized?

C: Given the fact that it did not have a strict administrative structure laid down by the President, it managed to adapt to this situation and to work with remarkable lack of friction.

M: I've also heard that Lyndon Johnson was the type of administrator that might assign two staff men to the same job without telling the two staff men that they were working on the same project.

C: That would generally be when it was something he wanted done or some information he wanted procured quickly. It was more of an ad hoc type of thing in which he would tell several people in the course of the same day because it was on his mind. You would sometimes find that you were making an inquiry that somebody else in the White House had already made--that he himself might have made. He was perfectly capable of calling you and telling you to find out about something and then you'd pick up the phone to find out and find he was on the other line finding it out for himself!

M: Did you run into this same kind of difficulty when it came to speech writing?

C: To a degree, yes. He had a habit, when one draft came into him, of sometimes then giving it to somebody else without even telling the person who submitted it what he had done with it, so that sometimes the speech would disappear from view. You wouldn't know who had it, and who was working on it.

M: Now you were deeply involved in the speech writing, were you not?

C: Yes.

M: Did Lyndon Johnson demand a certain style in speeches? And if so, what?

C: He wanted speeches in which the sentences were clear and words were not multi-syllabled. He wanted a little poetry in his speeches. He liked alliteration. He liked his speeches to have something that was of a newsworthy character, some idea or an expression of facts that would surprise and interest people. But he was not terribly preoccupied with any particular style.

M: What was the hardest speech, the most difficult, that you ever wrote while you were there--the one most difficult for you to write for him?

C: I found out that I was not a natural speech writer and never did particularly enjoy it. I did a lot of speech editing from time to time. I usually tried to get one of my assistants or others to do an initial draft and then I would work on it. There were several I worked on from the beginning but there was something about speech writing and something about--I don't know--the dynamics of the White House that kept me from having the kind of

reflective moments that made for good speech writing. I don't remember any one speech that I recall as being a particularly difficult one.

M: Were the State of the Union addresses always a relatively hard task?

C: I never served as the draftsman for a State of the Union. I would feed inputs into it, but usually it was either Bill Moyers or Harry McPherson who would be coordinators, both of them.

M: It would seem in the art, in the job, of speech writing that would be a major effort.

C: Yes. Although quite a different problem from most speeches. The State of the Union, no matter how you fight it, turns into a kind of laundry list.

M: Yes. Was your office given the task of writing specific kinds of speeches, say, in the education realm?

C: Oh yes. Any speech that was in that whole education-health front we were the party of the first part in getting those drafts started. It constituted a sizeable portion of his speech making.

M: Did he ad lib much?

C: Yes, he would. He could be quite varied on that. Sometimes he would give a speech word-for-word, as it had been prepared. Other times he would be moved to stop and ad lib quite a bit.

M: Was he fairly able at ad libbing, do you think?

C: Oh yes. When he was in a good speechifying mood, he could ad lib with great eloquence.

M: Were you often under pressure to turn out a speech within a limited period of time?

C: Oh Lord, yes, and he had the habit of sometimes accepting a speech and then as the time grew quite close, deciding it really wasn't adequate and wanting further revision or a new speech. So you could sometimes find yourself within bare minutes of the delivery date having to try to churn out the words.

M: I would assume this would bring you into some long working days?

C: Speech writing tended to be a night time activity. Your days were too full anyway, so after you had finished the day's labors you would go to work on the speeches.

M: What kind of a working day would you have? How long would it be? Can you strike any kind of an average on that?

C: A normal one was to come in generally around 9:00 o'clock and to leave generally around 8:15 or 8:30 in the evening.

M: Were you sometimes called back then?

C: If you were working on a speech you would. It was very rare that you were called back by him, or that I was. But if it was something that was due in his night reading you would sometimes labor right on up until midnight and send it over to the usher's office to be sent up and put on his bedside table.

M: Did he use the telephone as much as he has the reputation? In the books and so forth they say the telephone is one of his chief instruments.

C: Yes. I would say that's true.

M: And you would expect frequent calls from him, not only in your office but at home and elsewhere?

C: With the nature of my work, which was not often involved in crises, I was not as much a recipient of that as others.

M: But he did like to use the telephone?

C: Yes.

M: Did you ever reflect on the nature of his mind and how it worked? The thing that I'm pointing to is that Lyndon Johnson apparently had the ability to keep a lot of things going at the same time, which would seem to me unusual. He could be seemingly thinking of five different things at the same time.

C: Yes. I often marveled at his capacity in meetings, cabinet meetings or other places, to range over the widest range of governmental activities and to have quite precise recollections in each area. Not having that kind of mind, having a mind that seems to reject a statistic almost as fast as I learn it, I was constantly impressed with his capacity to remember. He was particularly fascinated, for example, with the state of the economy and his capacity to remember key indicators and to query his economic advisers on various indicators and to fit them into his own scheme of thought indicated a mind that was very ranging.

M: Did he have lots of energy?

C: Tremendous energy although at the same time the capacity to turn off so that in my observation he interspersed moments of intense energy and moments of languor.

M: So he somehow was at rest while in motion then?

C: Yes. In the middle of a day, if something caught his interest--a person, a visitor or something--he was capable of just relaxing into a kind of an extended bull session or even a monologue on his part about something quite remote from the immediate agenda of the day.

M: I've also heard that he thought of almost nothing except politics and talked of little else but politics.

C: Politics in the broadest sense of the word, in what makes men do things, but not strictly in terms of, say, precise party politics.

M: Did you ever observe him reading a murder mystery, for example?

C: No.

M: Or a western as some former presidents have done?

C: No.

M: Did he ever read for pleasure that you know of?

C: I would say from my observation very seldom.

M: What did he do to entertain himself?

C: He relaxed in talk. He just loved to talk, reminisce. He has a fantastic capacity for just reminiscence, detailed reminiscence about people and situations in his past.

M: Good humor?

C: Tremendous sense of humor. A satirical humor, particularly, in which he would mimic a man or a conversation.

M: Also along this line, it has been reported by his detractors that he was rather crude in his language, or at least used dirty--

C: This has acquired the exaggeration that afflicts all presidents. If a president drinks, he's regarded as a drunkard. If he looks at women, he's a lecher. And if he tells lusty stories,

he's regarded as the ultimate in vulgarity. I never found that the President's humor or his anecdotes were that much different in their crudeness from that of most men who are anecdotalists. He could tell a lusty story on occasion. He was not all that given to four-letter words. If a four-letter word fitted naturally into a story he would use it but he did not adorn them with four-letter words.

M: So you weren't offended by them?

C: No, I was usually amused by them.

M: He also had the reputation of having a rather hot temper.

C: He could have one on occasion, yes.

M: Did you ever have any first-hand experience with that?

C: Oh yes. I generally found that he was lambasting the situation in which I was involved and that incurred his displeasure, not lambasting me as an individual. He, I think, showed a discernment as to whom he made the victim of his temper. Sometimes he would start off in a high fury and right in the middle of it, he would switch into a kind of satirical thing in which you were laughing, even as you were enjoying his temper.

M: Can you give me an example of that?

C: I remember one occasion in which he called me because he felt that I had not caught his seriousness of a request, a policy he had laid down. I forget now exactly the policy, but right in the middle of being rather heated about this he told the story of the mule tamer who was supposed to be able to tame a mule without laying a hand on him; and this man hired him to tame his mule and the mule tamer walked up to the mule and took a great two-by-four and swatted him on the head. And the fellow said, "I thought you didn't lay a hand on him." And he said, "Well, I have to get his attention first!" It was clear to me that he felt that maybe a two-by-four was the only way he could get my attention.

M: On these occasions when he was expressing anger, did you come away from such things insulted and feeling that you wanted to quit, or did your loyalty to him remain intact?

C: I would say it was very rare that I was offended by this. I would feel on occasion that his anger was misdirected, and on other occasions I would feel it was unfortunate that the pressures on him were such that this was causing him unnecessary strain and stress. And occasionally I felt his anger was justified.

I would say, though, the things that caused you to want to leave were more from times when you felt that you weren't making an impact than from the times you felt that

you were getting in the way of the President's anger. The White House assistant has to justify his role to himself almost daily, because he doesn't have a very clearly defined role or routine. And there come moments that you feel just spent, that you're not cutting the mustard any more, and you feel maybe it's time to leave. I had recurrent feelings of that throughout the period.

M: So how do you get over that?

C: One way, I would draft letters of resignation which I would never send. I must have accumulated quite a portfolio of those. At times you try to get embarked on something again that makes you feel useful.

M: Did you have difficulty--

C: I would say this is particularly true when you're working on domestic things in a time of a war abroad in which you know the war is gradually encroaching on the President's preoccupations more and more.

M: So the war then affected work you were doing?

C: It affected my sense of my own utility.

M: Yes. Did this decrease the things you were responsible for? I mean, did the scope of your job reduce because of the Viet Nam war?

C: To a remarkable extent up until the end the President was still willing to launch initiatives in the fields that I was working in. We weren't able to fund them to the degree we would have liked, but there was never a question of just nothing new need be considered. So there was plenty to be considered.

M: Did you ever have difficulty getting a decision out of the President? You needed a decision and he would delay or refuse to decide?

C: Yes. He would not have trouble on things that required just a yes or no. But, for example, the appointment of a commission, when you were serving up nominations and things that would just drag on and on because he wasn't particularly satisfied with the group that had been proposed. We would get delays of that kind.

M: He did seem to be unusually interested in personnel.

C: Yes. He spent a remarkable amount of time just reviewing appointments, even to comparatively minor posts.

M: Now, we've talked about a number of points. Are there any faults that come to mind in Lyndon Johnson as chief executive? Is there any way he was to a degree a failure as a chief executive?

C: That's a hard one to spit out in one wad. I would be inclined to continue to deliberate on that. I don't pretend to know whether there was some way of dealing with the war in Viet Nam that would not have led to the tragedy it led to, which seems to me first of all led to his own "withdrawal from office" tragedy. I think that more than any other inadequacy I would say that communication, the whole relationship with the communication media, would be the one he himself might indicate that he regarded as a failure.

M: Now, is this a question of style, or being attuned to the American people or what?

C: I suppose, first of all, you can't point to any President except conceivably Franklin D. Roosevelt, who has been a success in this field. And Roosevelt, perhaps, wouldn't have been a success by his third term if he had had the kind of leadership problems that Johnson faced. And certainly television has brought a whole extra dimension to the communication problem.

I would say that what is needed more than ever is for a president to have a firm philosophy of his own toward communications and then stick to it; that perhaps President Johnson's uncertainty in this area represented a shortcoming. He was enormously preoccupied with the press. He devoted more time and energy to personal communication with reporters than I think was by any means justified. He spent more time keeping up with the ticker, to what the instantaneous news was, than was in my opinion warranted in a leader.

M: Is a part of this vanity?

C: I think vanity isn't the key word here. I think it's more sensitivity. This was a man who in the legislative experience had found total mastery of the communication system in a confined environment of Congress was essential to the kind of job he was capable of doing. When it got on the presidential level it was no longer possible.

M: I'll ask you the other side of this coin. What about virtues as a chief executive?

C: I would have thought that we were touching on them throughout this interview.

M: Well, we have. I just want to be sure I cover everything.

C: The first requirement of the presidency is energy. Johnson energized the presidency more than any president in memory with the possible exception of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He broke an impasse that had existed ever since Roosevelt's second term in the legislative

front. He achieved more substantive and far-reaching legislation than any president in history. This, I believe, history is going to give very high marks to.

M: Did the announcement on March 31 that he would not run again come as a surprise to you?

C: Yes and no. I had had several warnings from him that he had not by any means made up his mind whether he was going to run again. In fact, I had talked to him in January about my own desire to make a departure from the White House at the appropriate time. He indicated then that he hoped to make his mind up by April and that he wished that I would stay on until then so that we could see how the situation lay. I did not take that, I must say, as seriously as I ought to have. I thought it was just an indication of frustrations of the moment.

The night of his withdrawal speech I was working on his speech for the next day that he was to give out at the National Association of Broadcasters in Chicago, and I had been keeping liaison with Harry McPherson who was working on the speech for that night, and I remember I called him that Sunday afternoon. I was down at the White House working and he was in his office. I said I was having trouble ending my speech until I knew how this speech was going to end. And he said, "Well, I don't know if you're going to be able to do it because I have a suspicion that the President is planning to add something of his own to the end of his speech that he hasn't even told me about." And I said, "Oh, no, is it what I think it is," because the minute he said that it suddenly flashed on me that this was the only thing that he might be thinking of. And McPherson didn't know.

So I stuck by. I was, in fact, right outside his office when he gave the speech and when he got to that moment when he added that end to it, I just sat there and listened with a sinking heart. I wasn't as surprised at that moment, although I clearly hadn't anticipated it.

M: Then as the campaign developed you eventually went to work for the Humphrey campaign, is that right?

C: Yes, in October.

M: Did Johnson say anything to you when you left the White House?

C: Yes, I went in to see the President in early October and carried with me a draft letter of resignation and I think he anticipated what I was going to do. I handed in the letter and he read it and said, "This is a good letter, very good letter; what do you plan to do?" And I said, "I'm going to return to writing but I was hoping to be of some help to Humphrey in the remaining period of the campaign." And he said he hoped I could, that Humphrey needed all the help he could get. He said a few kind words about how much from very

early years he had respected my judgment, my ability. I expressed appreciation to him, and I left. He gave me a letter of farewell that was indeed a glowing one. And so, at a farewell party that I was given, he sent a picture that was dedicated to me, "To Doug Cater who put the `Great' in the Great Society," which indicated that he thought well of my contributions. So we left on very warm and genial terms.

M: Did you have any contact with him after that?

C: I've seen him only briefly since then. He had a little party some time, I believe around early December--Mrs. Johnson and the President up in his family quarters at the White House in which a number of people in government who had worked closely with him were present. We were there, and then I attended a party in New York that Mary Lasker gave--Mary Lasker and several others, Arthur Krim, and others--that was the last I've seen him. I've seen Mrs. Johnson several times since then, but not the President.

M: I might ask you one last question. Do you have any impression about Mrs. Johnson and her role as First Lady?

C: I have a number. I failed to mention, maybe, earlier that (as) part of my job I was called on from time to time by Mrs. Johnson to collaborate on her speech plans and some of her trips, particularly on one that she went down to Appalachia and examined the education programs as they affected Appalachia. I had known her, although not too well, before I went to the White House, and I acquired increasing admiration for her. She was a woman of tremendous thoughtfulness and she had a poetic mind and a disciplined mind. She worked hard on speeches. She spent more time in direct relationship with those who helped her than the President did. He would call you up and say what he wanted but a lot of times a speech would be worked out without ever sitting down personally with him. But she would go slowly and methodically over each sentence and work it out to the best of her ability. I've never seen her express an angry word. I've never heard her make a snide remark about anyone. She was a genuinely good woman, through and through. She obviously has played a major role in his life although she conspicuously does not jump in to offer her advice or put in her two cents. She waits to be called on by the President.

M: We've touched on a lot of subjects in these two sessions. Is there anything else that we should bring up, or any comment you would like to make?

C: I'll probably think of a thousand things later on, but right at the moment I feel spent.

M: Let's call it to an end then.

C: Yes.

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to the
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