

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: February 15, 1990

INTERVIEWEE: DONALD J. CRONIN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

- G: Mr. Cronin, we talked about the late 1950s last time and Lyndon Johnson as majority leader. Let's talk a little bit about the 1960 campaign. Tell me about the presidential campaign from an Alabama perspective.
- C: 1960 was the [John F.] Kennedy campaign, and from an Alabama perspective, Alabama was not yet ready for a Catholic president. This was reflected of course in Kennedy's campaign. Kennedy came to Alabama and had [a] good reception because Kennedy had a lot of charisma. He was popular and he went over wherever he went. But deep down, Alabama at that point in time just was not ready for a Catholic president, although Kennedy came out surprisingly well in the state.
- G: He did carry the state.
- C: He carried the state.
- G: Looking at the earlier phase of the campaign, the primaries and conventions, did you attend the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles?
- C: I did not.

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G: Anything on the competition for the nomination? Did you have any--?

C: You'll have to refresh my memory and tell me who was in the competition.

G: Well, Lyndon Johnson was running. Kennedy [was] the front runner. Hubert Humphrey, Stuart Symington--there was some effort to support [Adlai] Stevenson's nomination.

C: The only contact I had--let me interrupt myself and say, generally, we laid back pretty well because, again, we had a candidate who wasn't unpopular but he was not one you could really get out and beat the bushes for. So we pretty much laid back. By laid back, we were not called upon, so that we didn't default in that sense of the word, but there was no active organization really to speak of in Alabama at the time, and nobody really considered [the] Deep South as part of a victory effort for Kennedy. We had in Tuscaloosa, which we attended in 1960, the [Richard M.] Nixon debates, the Kennedy-Nixon debates. And of course, this helped considerably because Nixon was not popular as such in Alabama either.

G: Why not?

C: I would say generally that--Dick Nixon wasn't unpopular, but by this time the real Republican onslaught hadn't taken place in Alabama, and Nixon as a personality really didn't come on and turn people on, whereas Kennedy did. Alabama was in a bit of a dilemma. They didn't care about Nixon that much; just on a personal basis they didn't like the guy that much. They couldn't take a Catholic too much, and they really were kind of in between, twixt and tween, so to speak. The Democratic leaders of course went for Kennedy, went with the party, and we were still a Democratic state at that time. Senator [Lister] Hill really wasn't called upon, and I think for good reason, to get out

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front. I think the powers that be here in the Senate understood Lister Hill's position and didn't try to push him out front. They didn't, and he stayed in the background and that's the way they wanted it, and that's the way we preferred it. So we had no problem with it.

But Nixon was not a popular personality. Kennedy was a popular personality but he was still a Catholic, and we still hadn't quite lived down Al Smith and all that by that day and time. I don't think today it would make that much difference. In that day and time, it did. We were just starting to get over the hump, so to speak.

G: Did the Republicans use Kennedy's religion as an issue?

C: Yes.

G: How so?

C: Well, simply that he was a Catholic. And that moved around by word of mouth. You see, Alabama at that time especially was very strongly a Baptist state, and there were very few Catholics in it. To be a Catholic, of course, you wore horns, so to speak, politically. At least they were able to point it up as though you had horns in your back pocket whether you wore them or not publicly.

G: Tell me about the Nixon-Kennedy debates in Tuscaloosa.

C: The Nixon-Kennedy debate in Tuscaloosa was by television. It was not the two candidates. It was by television. Of course, the difficulty here was, nobody was really turned on much by Nixon and yet nobody wanted Kennedy. By and large--and I attended that debate with Senator Hill, we both attended--by and large, Kennedy carried the day. There's no question. It was an evening.

G: Really.

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- C: Yes, he did. I think, again, we were thankful we didn't have to be way out in front, but certainly we gave lip service to Kennedy's effort and it was a good effort. He carried the day, and the presidency, as you know.
- G: Lyndon Johnson came through the South, through Alabama on a whistle-stop train and Senator and Mrs. Hill rode with him in Alabama. Can you tell me about that?
- C: Well, I don't remember too awfully much about that because it was not part of a major effort in that regard. She was from Autauga, Alabama, from Prattville, Autauga County. I mean Mrs. [Claudia Taylor] Johnson, Lady Bird. True, they had the whistle-stop and, true, the Senator and Mrs. Hill rode with them, but again I don't recall that as taken as a real great effort. It was an effort. I think that's about the best you can say for it.
- G: Was Senator Hill reluctant to ride on the train?
- C: No, he had no problem with that. They stopped in Montgomery. I saw the train. Part of the whistle-stop was Montgomery, Alabama. I went out to it.
- G: Did they have a good crowd?
- C: Good crowd. They worked the crowd.
- G: Anything on Mrs. Johnson campaigning in Alabama?
- C: The only thing I recall of Mrs. Johnson's campaign in Alabama was that it wasn't taken poorly, but it was not taken too enthusiastically because, I think, as I recall, her campaign in the state--she sort of overdid the watermelon bit. Most of the reaction--by this time Alabama was getting pretty conservative, because we had had all the civil rights things that you and I talked about. And they were starting to split with the national party, so that in timing as she came through--when I say the watermelon bit, she actually used--"I

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recall, when I lived in Prattville," or Autauga County, or whatever, "we'd crack watermelon open and chew them by the rinds," and all this and that, which was a little too much.

G: A little too country, is that the--?

C: A little too much. You can never be too country in politics in Alabama, at least in that day and time. But just a little bit too much. In other words, people said, "We've never seen her before. Why now does she remember eating watermelon when she was a little child? Why hasn't she been in there telling us this in the past?" But I don't think that made a great deal of difference one way or the other. The die was pretty well cast. But she was not unpopular. She was subject more to a bit of ridicule with her approach to the watermelon and all that kind of stuff.

G: Late in the campaign there was an incident in Dallas at the Adolphus Hotel where a mob of Republican women confronted and were rather abusive toward the Johnsons when they were coming through the hotel. That incident has been cited as sort of a motivating factor for persuading other southern Democratic leaders to take a more active role in the campaign, denouncing this behavior. It's been cited as the reason that Dick Russell took a more active role in the campaign. Do you have any recollection of that, whether or not it was a factor with Senator Hill?

C: I vaguely recall the incident, and really vaguely. I remember some problem out there and so on and so forth. But I can say only from surmise that I don't think this would have had any effect on Lister Hill one way or the other, because Lister Hill at that time understood the problems. He understood Lyndon Johnson. He understood motives. He understood

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reasons. He understood politics extremely well. And I think he would have played it. Leaving out the national scene, I think he would have played it however he had to for survival of himself as a candidate a year later, two years later, four years later, whatever. I don't think really that would have made a lot of difference. I think if it came down to push and pull he would have preserved his own stature. Under very difficult trying times, he would have made sure that he was all right. Of course in 1962 we came along and nearly lost the election. We won it by something like three thousand votes which is six either way. He was acutely aware of what was going on then. He was acutely aware of the transitions in politics, and I don't think he would have let any of these circumstances interfere with that recollection and knowledge of what was going on.

G: Anything on Kennedy's telephone call to Coretta King at the end of the campaign when Martin Luther King was in prison? That was not an issue in Alabama?

C: It probably was some kind of an issue in Alabama. I don't recall it to the extent that it got a lot of play, and I think if it had received an awful lot of play it would have embedded itself in my mind over the years. I don't recall that being a . . .

Of course, all of that was a play. There's no question about it. [Theophilus Eugene] Bull Connor, all of that, was played big. But I'm not so awfully sure that those who really understood what was going on in the state took it as that big a play.

G: Let's move to the administration now and Lyndon Johnson's transition from Senate majority leader, where he had a great deal of power and activity, to being vice president. He was now presiding officer of the Senate, but--how did he seem to you in this new role, in the role of vice president?

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C: I've said to you previously and I'll repeat it here. Lyndon Johnson always gave the impression, and rightfully so, of being extremely ambitious. There was no question about that; he was, and that's to his credit. I think if he had lacked one ounce of that he would never have gotten to where he was, really, so there was nothing wrong with the ambition. Certain people, like Lister Hill, for example, recognized many years prior to that that he would never go beyond being a U.S. senator. He gave up ever being vice president or president at some given point in time. And he did, and we've talked about it and so on and so forth. At one time he entertained the thought as Robert E. Lee's "I will not draw my sword against my own people" statement but he eventually scrapped that in favor of staying with the people. So Lyndon Johnson was able to move away somewhat from some of that heritage and in the process move more onto the national scene than a Lister Hill from the Deep South was able to do or really cared to try to do. At a given point in time he abandoned any effort to try to move away and reconciled himself to the fact that this was where it some day will end, and it did.

Lyndon Johnson was much more ambitious, there's no question about that. He had a base, in my opinion, where he could afford to be more ambitious, and I'm talking about a base that he built or helped build, if not built, in Texas to where he was able to go ahead on some of these issues that were more flaming in the Deep South like in Alabama or Georgia. He was able to go ahead and venture out some, which made a tremendous difference.

G: In terms of the office of the vice president itself rather than being majority leader, was this a less active, less powerful--?

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C: I think it was.

G: How did Johnson seem to you during this period? Did he seem to be restive?

C: Restive, frustrated, plus the fact as you have probably already interviewed or already know, there was really no love lost between he and the Kennedys, so that this added to all of that. [It] didn't make for a real happy situation in general, politically or otherwise, and I don't specifically recall any events but in general I would say, yes, a restive-type period in his life. I think I'm probably hitting that about right; politically especially, and otherwise, ambition-wise, I think he felt held back. I'm not so awfully sure that the Kennedys--and when I say the Kennedys, Bobby is a factor here--I'm not so sure they held him back that much. If you historically go back to vice presidents, very few of them were turned loose. If you look at [Dan] Quayle today, you don't see him making this trip down to Colombia.

So, by and large, they've never been pushed out to where they could become an active candidate of strength to where they might overturn four years henceforth the power in the White House. That never has been, and I just finished an awfully good book on Thomas Jefferson by [Thomas J.] Fleming, and it wasn't so then. He was vice president, as you know, and then president in different periods of time. It never has started out that way and it never has been in my opinion. Some are a little stronger than others but, generally speaking, I'm not so sure--my bottom line point is that he was held back as much as his ambition probably tended to make him think he was being held back. I'm not so sure that it wasn't the system as much as the man. However, he was not turned loose, we all know that.

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G: Did Lyndon Johnson retain his ties with his Senate colleagues after he became vice president?

C: They were strained. They became strained, I don't recall in point of time, but insofar as with his colleagues in the Senate, he may have been vice president at the time--that I don't recall in point of time. But I do recall--I frequently lunched with Senator Hill in the senators' private dining room. I do recall incidents where different members of the Senate, his colleagues as you put it--and these were especially from the South, because they were really the only ones, with some exceptions, and I have one or two exceptions in mind. But with some exceptions they were southern colleagues who would ask, "How are you going to vote?" on a certain piece of legislation. And I would hear some answer, "All the people in my state, the majority of the people in my state are for it, but I'm going to vote against it because it's known as a Lyndon Johnson bill and we're going to show him." Colleagues had felt ruptured at a certain given point in time and, as I said earlier to you, I don't recall if that's during the vice presidency, but around that period of time.

G: Conceivably, the presidency or the vice presidency.

C: Yes, sir.

G: Did Johnson try to retain some of his prerogatives as majority leader after he became vice president?

C: I think so.

G: There was a rather stormy meeting of the caucus, it seems to me.

C: No, I think so.

G: Do you remember anything about that?

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C: No, I don't specifically recall--you're talking about the Democratic Caucus.

G: Yes.

C: Of which Senator Hill was a pretty active member. And I don't specifically recall, but yes, I do know or at least I'm told or I was told at the time that he did endeavor to hang on to several of those prerogatives that went with being majority leader once he became vice president. I'm sure those were frustrating days for Lyndon Johnson. They had to be because he did not have a solidarity of colleagues with him. He did not have, in my opinion, the White House with him--I'm talking about the Kennedys, not Jack necessarily; he may not have even known what was going on. But he didn't have that solidarity there. He had to operate and be in a frustrated state of mind, in my opinion, a good bit of the time.

G: How did Mike Mansfield's leadership style contrast with LBJ's?

C: The style was far different from LBJ's. I don't know whether by design or otherwise but Mike Mansfield was much more a laid back, trying-to-be-honest sort of guy with all of his colleagues, and, in my opinion again, looking for the favor of the vote, or whatever the issue may have been. Whereas Lyndon Johnson was much more the aggressive schemer type, to where he'd have it figured out how he could manipulate this or that in order to get this or that vote and so on and so forth, again, which is not criticism. I think it was smart. But they were two different types, two totally different types as I remember it.

Mike Mansfield came down to Montgomery, Alabama, as majority leader for a dinner honoring Senator Hill. And I recall at that particular time, to sort of underscore

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what I just said to you, after a while I was asked if I would go up and introduce people to Mike Mansfield as majority leader so that he wouldn't be standing there by himself. Now, Lyndon Johnson you would have known was in the room. He would have moved around and made it known. Mike Mansfield you never knew. Two different type of guys.

G: Let me ask you about the judicial appointees of the Kennedy Administration, the whole process of appointing southern judges at a time of sensitivity on civil rights. Was there a balance achieved between getting a nominee who would enforce some of the legislation on civil rights, or all of the legislation on civil rights, on the one hand, versus getting someone who was acceptable to the southern senators and someone who had a distinguished reputation in the South?

C: You know I don't recall that being a problem. It may have been in states other than Alabama. I don't remember in Alabama that being any problem in that day and time at all, and in that day and time we had some particular interests in particular judges, both coincidentally conservative, but that wasn't the reason we had the interest in them. They were just awfully good friends and, we thought, good lawyers, and we also thought, over the years, darn good supporters. The last usually is a large part of the criteria. At least it was; I think there's a new system now whereby they're evaluated and so on and so forth in a way that you can't just appoint them out of friendship anymore, but back then you could pretty much, if you were close enough to the president, just give him a call and say, "Hey, this is the guy I want. I'm going to send his name up." And that was it unless something came out that was scandalous on the fellow. I think a good bit of that's

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changed now. I think the ABA [American Bar Association] does a lot of ranking and rating now that's a little different from the way it used to be.

But we had some at the time with a judgeship bill that created a new judgeship. And we had a campaign manager in Birmingham, Alabama, and we had a state campaign manager who both wanted different people. That ball was thrown my way to resolve, and I didn't want it. Finally, with the new bill creating the judgeships, I figured that we ought to get another judgeship and that would take care of the whole deal. Whether we needed one or not then I don't know; now, I'm sure. It's been justified retroactively. But back then, that had no concern. The fact is I had to solve a problem and that seemed like a good way.

We went down to the White House--Senator [John] Sparkman and myself and Senator Hill. We went down there and met with Lyndon Johnson. We met with--I guess it was Lyndon Johnson. It may have been Jack Kennedy. But anyway, we met with the president, whoever it was at the time, and the whole thing got worked out. I don't recall--I'm trying to recollect various judges at the time, and I can recollect all of them. I don't recall any problems with that.

G: They did create another judgeship?

C: Yes.

G: Was there a shared patronage between Senator Hill and Senator Sparkman? How did that work?

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C: It varied. If we had somebody who had to have an appointment, usually the other one would defer to that. Every now and then we locked horns but it was seldom, seldom, seldom.

G: Was there any regional hegemony in the state?

C: No. No, there really wasn't. I was going to say generally but no. No, there wasn't. We had a good working relationship on that. We never had any problems with that. Sometimes there were problems, but they could always be resolved. We worked them out. We never ended up with a problem. We got everything worked out.

Again, I think most all that's changed now. I think the American Bar Association does a review of all these candidates and rates them and ranks them and so on and so forth, but back then, it was wide open.

G: Any recollections on the appointment of Luther Terry as surgeon general?

C: Yes.

G: Tell me about that.

C: Well, I was very much involved in that. Luther Terry is from Red Level, Alabama, and he was in the Public Health Service out here at NIH [National Institutes of Health]. Luther Terry was a compromise candidate. There were two candidates who both presented problems, and this was the typical "take the candidate who's no problem at all and the other two have to understand why you did." But this happened--as I recall, a lot of this happened while we were in Alabama during the recess period, and then we came back here and formalized it. But back then Luther Terry, who was named after Senator

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Hill's father, so there was a closeness there--somebody here connected with Mary Lasker--you know who she is?

G: Yes.

C: Somebody here when the thing stalemated--because I think it was Kennedy who deferred to Lister Hill to name or to recommend the new surgeon general. It stalemated and somebody here with Mary Lasker suggested Luther Terry. Because of being named after the father and so on, nobody could really fuss with it politically. It was a smart way out. And we went with Luther Terry.

I remember it well because the Senator called Luther Terry up to the Hill and in my office told Luther that he was going to put his name in; the President had asked him to recommend the next surgeon general of the United States and he was going to put his name up. He said, "Now, you fix up the press release. You and Don work it out. I've got to run over to the Senate and when you get through bring it by the floor and I'll take a look at it." So we sat down and worked up the press release for Luther Terry.

At the time he kept his pipe over here. (Laughter) And he was the one who came up with the idea of the warning on cigarettes, which still is on there in some form or another; I think it's been changed substantially since then. And pipes are supposed to be all right, except for the teeth, but pipe smoke isn't supposed to bother you. But at that time Luther smoked a pipe. And I knew Luther pretty well, and we worked it out and worked up a statement and he went back out to NIH and said, "Take it over to the floor because the Senator is going to ask you these questions. No need for me to be along. If he has any questions, they're going to be directed to you anyway." So we took it over

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and released it the next day. Yes, I do remember the Luther Terry appointment. I remember it well.

G: When he did issue the cigarette warning label some years later, was this a strong controversy in the Senate, one that touched Senator Hill?

C: No. No, we never had any problem with it. I don't have that language in front of me now, but it was *so* watered-down. And I looked at things more like a lawyer I suppose than a layman does, but as you read it, it really said nothing. It was like, "Anybody who smokes may this or that, or could be subject to." You could read it and light up a cigarette with no problem.

G: But the tobacco industry was not in favor of this warning at all.

C: No. Well, they could not be. They would have to be against any labeling, sure. Just like the distillery industry, you know darn well--they're talking now about labeling bottles, "This can do this and that to you." You know damn well they're going to be against it; they've got to be against it. It gores their ox.

G: Let me ask you about the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962. Do you remember that?

C: I remember it. I can't say much more than that.

G: That was something that did go through the Senate Labor Committee.

C: That's right.

You must remember that 1962 is when we had the election that almost defeated us, sent us home. During a good bit of that time I sensed, from people who called me, things that the Senator couldn't hope to sense because they wouldn't say them to him.

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They told me, "You're in trouble down here. Get down here. Have somebody here for this or that. Don't miss this. Be sure and touch that base," and so on and so forth. So a good bit of that year I spent trying to do these things that good friends told us on the telephone, "Hey, you better be down here Friday. They're going to meet in Birmingham on this and you ought to be there," so on and so forth. So that a lot of 1962 is not necessarily intact.

G: Anything on the anti-poll tax amendment?

C: Yes. We were against the anti-poll tax amendment. Again, I'm borrowing from TJ [Thomas Jefferson] but if you go backwards, all this started, you know, in the days of Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson. Because back then it was little more stringent. There was not only a poll tax; you had to be a property owner to be entitled to vote.

But we were against the poll tax [amendment]. I think frankly that it would not have bothered Senator Hill if there had been at that particular time a national anti-poll tax provision. I think that would have been all right. I don't think the poll tax ever really excited--except for rhetoric I don't think it ever really excited Senator Hill. We opposed it. We opposed it strenuously. We opposed it as an interference with the rights of the states and so on and so forth.

G: His opposition was not merely window-dressing, it was spirited, in fact.

C: Again, I'm saying to you, I think he meant what he was saying but I think if the times had been different he could have, without a whole heck of a lot of internal difficulty, gone the other way. I don't think it was a burning issue. I think once we had organization of course--Senator Sam Ervin was sort of our leader--once we decided a position, I think he

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spoke as vigorously as anybody else. But I don't think it was something that really would have turned his world upside down if it had been otherwise.

I'm telling you some things that haven't been said before.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV

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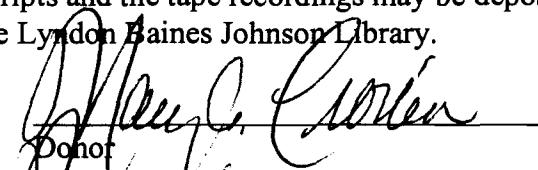
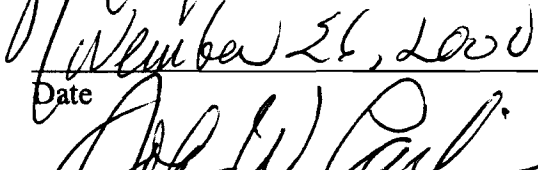
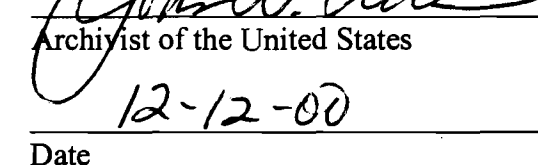
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