INTERVIEW VI

DATE: March 29, 1990

INTERVIEWEE: DONALD J. CRONIN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

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G: I wanted to begin today if we could with a discussion of some of the education legislation in the mid-1960s. In 1964 you had legislation extending and expanding the National Defense Education Act and also an incentive for canceling the student loans, or a portion of them, if the student assumed a teaching career. Do you remember that?

C: I do.

G: Tell me about that.

C: I'm going to start at the beginning and say, as I have previously said somewhere to you in one of these sessions, that Senator Hill and I were in Europe when Sputnik I was launched and then and there he made the statement, "This is the basis for enacting a national defense education act." That's where it got its name. But the whole concept then was to gear that to certain disciplines such as engineering, sciences and so forth. The expansion then--and I'm interrupting myself--when we got back from Europe that year, we went down to Montgomery, Alabama, and had Carl Elliott--who was then chairman of the House education subcommittee. We had Carl and we had our general

counsel and other people come down to Birmingham and we met in the Tutwiler Hotel, which is no longer there. That's where we really hammered out a draft of the National Defense Education Act. At that time it was limited to, and only to, engineering, the sciences. I don't remember in categories exactly how it was spelled out, but that's the way it was.

This expansion you're talking about finally came to pass, and we didn't oppose it, because we had been trying for many, many years to enact an education bill and we could not because of the separation-of-church-and-state issue. That was always the bugaboo. But here we saw a means of getting the camel's nose into the tent, and that's what it really amounted to. So that this expansion you're talking about was not surprising to the chairman--in this case Senator Hill--nor to Carl Elliott nor really to too many other people. And this is what they were afraid of, i.e., that once you begin this you go all the way. We had no problem with going all the way. We felt and we had numbers at that time to show that we were at a distinct disadvantage insofar as Russia and the competitive edge. So we were for whatever it took, and let some future Congress change it if they wanted to, if they felt things had improved. I remember the 1964 bill well.

G: Anything on the emphasis on promoting teachers here?

C: I don't specifically recall any emphasis in that direction. I had thought from the outset that there was a forgiveness clause in there for teachers. You're suggesting that may not have been.

G: Well, no. I think it was not so much the--I think it had to do with teachers attending private schools. Before, it had been restricted to the public schools rather than teachers

who became private school teachers. I think that was the expansion of the forgiveness clause.

C: Yes. This was always a problem, the separation of church and state. The NEA, National Education Association, as I remember at the time was very heavy on this side of it. They saw a potential problem in letting this go beyond the public schools. So that this historically was always a question, always a problem. And one really--because it looked up to this stage of the game impossible--one really along with the fact that the Senator's father had been a famous physician and so on and was the first fellow in North America to suture the human heart, in Wetumpka, Alabama, and held it out in his hand and sewed it up. The blood gushed everywhere, and it was then and there that--he had taken his son, Lister, with him, who decided, "This isn't for me. I'm never going to be a doctor. I can't take this kind of thing." And he never became a doctor probably largely because of that.

It was during this era here that we run into all the flak, and there was lots of it, on the separation of church and state. So there we took it slowly because we recognized that once the people are conditioned to this sort of thing, once they see that it's not going to really work in this way--or at least we didn't think it would, and I don't think it has. And, secondly, so what? As long as you don't have a proposition whereby religion is taught by these same teachers, as long as there's that separation, what's the difference whether aid goes to a private school or to a public school? This was pretty much our thinking at the time, which was not an easy political issue. In fact, it was a very, very difficult one and it took some years to work out. But it was in the mixture of all of that, that--I guess it was the amendment here to the general education bill that provided that private school

teachers under certain conditions could also be forgiven, which I think they should have been.

G: How did Senator Hill feel about that, did he support that extension to private schools?

C: Yes, he did.

G: Was this a political problem for him in Alabama?

C: Yes, it was. As a matter of fact, the first group to jump on us, and they jumped hard--and we held several meeting within the office. I was at every one of them. I was the only participant at some of them. We met as to how to answer the Baptists, who focally and vocally were the political force in Alabama--and maybe in Texas, I don't know. But in Alabama if you hoped to be reelected you didn't incur the wrath of the Baptists. The Baptists--immediately when it came out that we were sponsoring this sort of thing, they immediately drafted a letter, which was a good letter. And it was well prepared, and well thought through, and in effect it put Lister Hill on what I'll call the political hot seat, because there was no maneuvering room here. Either you were for or against. We looked for every which way to straddle that and frankly could not. You were either for it or against it. And nobody will ever really know how much political difference it made except that--because the Senator didn't run again in 1968, so we don't know, but it's bound to have made a difference.

G: Do you think, if he had run again, this initiative that he had taken here would have been held against him?

C: Sure.

G: Do you?

C: Sure. How much that would have counted is questionable. Sure, it would have been held against him. Somebody would have recorded--some good Baptists out of all of them we had in Alabama would have noted that this is an issue. If not, we would have gotten by, surprisingly so. I don't think so.

G: What did he say to them when he met with them?

C: We never met with them.

G: You never met with them in these meetings?

C: We replied by letter.

G: Do you recall his response?

C: I don't recall specifically, but what we tried to do was take the edge off the issue of separation of church and state of course. And I would have to review the letter, which I don't have.

G: This sort of support for something that is a genuine political problem for him would almost seem to at least give him some leverage with northerners on some other matter. "Here, I'm supporting this and you people have a lot of parochial schools in your states. Now I want you to support me on"--you know, either farm legislation or something else. Was there anything that he could use this as a *quid pro quo* on?

C: I don't recall specifically. I know what you're suggesting here and I'm certain that that has merit. When you ask specifically or close to specifically what this may have tilted, I don't recall at the time. But yes, I think it definitely would have given him some points insofar as, in this instance, being a member of the southern group who hung on to that

position and didn't let go of it. I think that had to in turn elicit some sympathy, some political sympathy and understanding, sure.

(Interruption)

C: A single piece of legislation, that Senator Hill didn't hand me--he didn't hand it to me with instructions. I knew what he was saying: "Read through before I even consider it and see if it's clean on the racial end; see if I can afford to introduce it. See if I can afford to be a sponsor. And then we'll go to the merits of the bill itself," is what it amounted to.

G: Then the following year in 1965 you had the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Do you recall that?

C: I don't specifically recall too much of the Elementary and Secondary Education Bill. The big one of course was on the other front, which included the teacher forgiveness and so on and so forth at the college level. But I'm going to say that, just in general, in a sweeping type statement, that Senator Hill was an advocate of higher education--of education, period. I remember the first thing I ever worked on in 1953 for Senator Hill was a statement he had been asked to send up to Columbia University on their bicentennial, or whatever it may have been, wherein I started out by quoting a fellow named Thomas Jefferson, that, "He who expects a nation to be ignorant and free expects what never was and never will be," or words to that effect. That was my opening. That frankly got me started a long way with Senator Hill because Thomas Jefferson was one of his heroes; education was one of his advocacies. I knew none of this. As the new kid on the block, I fixed up a statement. Without knowing it, I just happened to hit it pretty right. But I found not too long thereafter, and included in that statement, the fact that

Lister Hill was committed very much to education at all levels. So that the Elementary and Secondary [Education Bill]--while I don't remember a great deal of detail about it, that's part of the same pattern.

G: One of the distinguishing characteristics of the legislation here on this bill was that it was not amended, that it went through with no amendments passed. Apparently there was sort of an understanding that it would just be left as is, perhaps because there was a delicate balance. Do you recall that?

C: I don't. I know what you're asking. I know exactly what you're asking and, as you so well know, this is like twenty-five years ago. I'm trying to remember the details of that and I don't. I have to repeat myself in saying that any legislation of this nature, this controversial, that goes on through unamended is pretty much a tribute to the leader of the forces, in this case Senator Lister Hill. It has to be to get anything like this through.

G: On the other side of the Congress you had Adam Clayton Powell as the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. What was it like to work with Powell on things like this?

C: We really didn't. We didn't have that much rapport with Adam Clayton Powell. Powell stayed in trouble at home a good bit, and Powell would threaten this and that, as I recall. And he would have his hand called here and there, as I recall. He'd either traipse on in or his threat would die a natural death and the Congress would go ahead and enact it, regardless of Adam Clayton Powell. I think for a while he was a force, as I remember Adam Clayton Powell. I think the time came where that force diminished tremendously, where he became more of a joke, with Bimini and all these kind of things. People lost

respect. They looked more in that instance--I think they looked more to the Senate side to a Lister Hill who was rock solid, and they didn't care much about whether this guy was in Bimini or where he was. They were going to do their own thing, regardless of Adam Clayton Powell.

G: Was there someone else on the committee--Carl Perkins or [Phil] Landrum or someone--that you tended to work with closely on the House side?

C: Well, Carl Elliott. Carl Elliott, who takes the title, at least, in every speech that he's given since the enactment of the National Defense Education Act as co-author of that act with Senator Lister Hill. And Carl Elliott, from Jasper, Alabama, who was a congressman at that time, Carl was one--he and Mary Jane, his wife--who met with us in Birmingham at the old Tutwiler Hotel. Carl had worked very hard on this. Carl got into some financial trouble and had some campaign problems and I think we kind of looked the other way when Carl was introduced as the author of the National Defense Education Act. We had asked Carl to come to the meeting.

That didn't make a whole lot of difference, but Carl Elliott was the one we looked to on education, and Carl was a good colleague and a good friend and still is. He's still living. He's a good fellow.

G: Then we had the Higher Education Act that year too, which was the first time that you had scholarships for undergraduate college students. Do you remember that?

C: I remember the Higher Education Act but, you see, a lot of this flowed from the National Defense Education Act and what I'm going to call the liberalization of that act. Once we were able to get that toehold, these things didn't have--and civil rights helped us out too.

Civil rights was always a bugaboo whenever you talked about education, but once that was all put to bed, so to speak, even though there might have been some fervor going on in Selma or wherever else--once all of that got out of the way, it was a lot easier to say what you meant. We weren't always able to, of course, politically, but it was a lot easier for others in the northern states to say what they meant and do what they felt than it had been theretofore. So while I don't specifically recall the details--again, I'd have to review the Higher Education Act and so on and so forth--across the board, education stopped being as much of a problem.

G: One element of this legislation was the proposal for a teacher corps that was sort of a provision for teachers to work subsidized in low income areas, like VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] volunteers or Peace Corps. Do you recall that?

C: I don't recall. I mean, I do recall what you're talking about very well. I think what you're asking me is, "Do you recall the Senator's sentiments or participation at all in that type legislation?" I don't really.

I don't really think that that got off the ground too much. As I remember that legislation, it was tried, wasn't totally popular and I don't think it ever really got too far. Am I right?

G: It was never expanded--

C: I don't think it was ever a major program.

G: Let's talk about the Economic Opportunity Act, the War on Poverty. This is another issue that came through your committee and I guess was handled by Senator [Pat] McNamara.

C: It was his subcommittee who by and large handled all of that. McNamara, as I recall, was a friendly sort of guy who everybody sort of liked. They might not have agreed with him but they liked him. His personality was such that you couldn't dislike the fellow.

As I recall that particular legislation, I think Senator Hill gave McNamara--as head of the full committee--I think he gave McNamara a pretty free hand. And I think he pretty much supported whatever came out of McNamara's subcommittee. You see, there was a lot--it doesn't show up as much anymore, but back in this day and time we're talking about--and it started to dwindle from [the] years after Senator Hill left--not because of his leaving. But back then if you had the reputation of a real solid guy or a real nice guy or whatever and you'd spent some time up there, this carried an awful long way in getting a bill passed, or in getting it amended the way you wanted it, or whatever was possible. If they didn't like you--and that was back then--if they didn't like you, it could be next to impossible. Next to impossible. Because it could be bottled up some way or another.

Now all these rules have changed considerably since then to where you can't do a lot of these things anymore. Back then you could and they did. I know because I used to sit, as I've said to you in the past, at these luncheons with Dick [Richard] Russell, Senator Russell of Georgia. "Scoop" [Henry] Jackson always sat at our table. There'd be four or five of us and everything was off the record then. They would go around the table and talk about a bill that was going to be voted on that afternoon. It was amazing to me. I learned an awful lot because I heard guys say, "Well, look, in my state. The mail I'm getting is ninety per cent for this. I've got to vote against it because it's so-and-so's bill.

How are you justifying being against it, Jim?" or whomever. Well, I'm saying this, and I'm hearing all this and saying, "You mean legislation comes out this way?" I'd always learned in college so-and-so, but it didn't work that way.

G: Well, how common was this kind of conversation?

C: I don't know. It may continue today.

G: But then, I mean.

C: It wasn't common. These were people who had been there forever.

G: But would they routinely exercise the vote based on--

C: Well, I don't know that, because twice a week I ate at the Senator's table there in the private dining room, no outsiders allowed, period. There I heard it just about every time I was there.

Now as I have said earlier, today there are certain rule changes and everything else that make a lot of this--not impossible. This kind of thing may still happen for other reasons. But you can't bottle up--the rules have been changed to where you can't bottle or stifle or kill the thing in the way you could in those days. Now there may still be some personality conflicts whereby I'd never vote for a bill that old Senator so-and-so--I don't know that because I don't know Senator so-and-so. That may still be a factor today but in that day and time it was much more blatant because you could in fact kill a bill if you didn't like the guy.

G: Well, likewise if it was something that you couldn't publicly support but something that you were privately interested in or at least neutral on, was there a tendency to tacitly let it go through?

C: There's always that. I'm sure that's still today. There's always that. I remember old--who was the senator? I think it was [Arthur] Vandenberg, and I used it in a speech that I gave to the district directors of the Internal Revenue Service--wherein he said, "I'm going to speak for this bill. I'm going to hold the floor a half a day for this bill. I'm for this bill! Then when it comes to a vote, I'm going to vote against it." Now here's a person advocating the passage of the bill but he votes against it. That's the system. And I used that illustration to tell these people, these district directors from the then forty-eight states, "Congress is a political animal. It's not perfect. It doesn't pretend to be perfect. It's political." Vandenberg was speaking for the bill, but he was voting against it because Michigan was against it. Does that make for a way to legislate?

G: In the case of the poverty legislation, Alabama had a good deal of poverty in it, and so did all of the southern states at this time. What was Senator Hill's attitude toward the merits of the legislation itself?

C: I don't think he had much attitude insofar as the merits because of the legislation and I don't recall his vote, by the way, on that. But the big concern there, the big scare again here, and the thing politically we had to look at, was civil rights. What does passage of this mean insofar as this legislation is directed in the South--the poverty group would by and large be black. What does this mean insofar as our next run for the office? We had long given up on being vice president and president; that was out. But if you hoped to get reelected you had to pay attention to your constituency. The constituency there was not much in favor of the poverty legislation, except the black constituency, the beneficiaries by and large of it.

G: The legislation in effect involved a good deal of community organization and making the poor a viable political force to deal with their own problems as an organized interest group. And critics of the legislation have suggested that Congress really didn't understand this element of the poverty legislation when it passed it and then appropriated funds for it the following year and expanded it. Tell me about this. Do you think that the Senate committee had an understanding of what this legislation was designed to do?

C: I would hope so. I would hope so. I don't remember what kind of billing it got insofar as the population of Alabama or any other state was concerned. But certainly--I hope so. If a Senate committee voted this only because of arm-twisting I think that's bad. I hope they understood it. I don't remember--I mean I remember the day and time you're talking about, a particular vote on a particular amendment or this or that, I don't remember. But your question went beyond that, and that was, would the Senate committee have understood it at the time? I think there's a lot of reliance, or there was a lot of reliance by the Senate at large on the expertise of a given committee. We didn't necessarily vote for housing solely because it was John Sparkman's legislation. We had confidence that John Sparkman pretty much knew what he was doing and/or agreed generally with that philosophy of John Sparkman's which in turn pretty much represented the people of Alabama. So that we would have gone along with John Sparkman, for example, on housing legislation. I think here--and a lot of people would have even though they didn't understand the ramifications or all the nuances of housing legislation; I think they would have said, John Sparkman is the kind of guy we'll take a chance on voting with.

You see, you can't be wrong too many times. You can only get burned back home by voting wrong a few times and it starts to catch up with you. So there's not a whole lot of room for error. By and large it's pretty well figured out and is pretty well known. That's why I would have to return to the statement, I sure hope the subcommittee or committee knew what it was doing. I would hate to think that a majority of the United States Senate in this case voted for something without understanding it at all. I'm not saying it doesn't happen. I would just hope that it happened so seldom that we don't know much about it.

G: One of the elements of the poverty legislation was the question of whether governors should have a veto over programs like the Job Corps and the Community Action Program. Do you recall this as an issue?

C: Well, it was an issue because George Wallace vetoed some program, some poverty program. He vetoed it and I think it was a result of George Wallace's veto that caused Congress not too long thereafter to enact legislation or to amend that legislation if it had already passed--maybe it had--to say in effect that this is veto-proof; this is outside the bounds of the state governor. George Wallace was the guy who caused that to happen, because he vetoed some part of it that was not at that time politically popular in Alabama. And George Wallace was swatting the people in Washington all he could and this was a good thing to swat them with.

G: How did Senator Hill stand on this, do you know?

C: I don't remember Senator Hill's vote on that but if I had to guess my guess would be that he voted for the poverty legislation and that he voted for overriding the governor. That would be my guess and I'm probably guessing right. I don't remember his vote.

G: Others have suggested that one of the problems with the War on Poverty legislation was that there seemed to be some incident--a crime committed by a Job Corpsman, or some sort of outrage, or some embarrassment inevitably at the time the legislation was up on the Hill for authorization or appropriation.

C: The poverty program?

G: Yes. Do you recall that as being--

C: I don't recall a particular incident. I'm going to repeat myself and say this was not popular legislation in Alabama. This was considered a handout. It was considered to be for the blacks. In this day and time, unlike today, the blacks had been the culprits that caused all this and they just weren't looked upon with a whole lot of favor. And you had George Wallace at the same time blasting the federal government on this and that. The times just were not such that it was a popular time for poverty legislation at all.

G: Anything on the Head Start program, which was a part of this, and whether that gained acceptance in Alabama?

C: No. I remember the Head Start program but I don't recall any insight.

G: Let's talk about the foundation on the arts and humanities and establishing the National Endowment for the Arts and [the National Endowment for the] Humanities. This is something else that came through the Labor and Public Welfare Committee. Any recollections of that?

C: No, we pretty much left that to--as I remember then it was Senator Claiborne Pell. And Senator Hill, the chairman, had a great deal of confidence in Claiborne Pell, and this was an area--I shouldn't say this but there was not much interest in Alabama on this sort of thing for a number of reasons. One, the state was on fire with the racial thing and the overtones and undertones of it and so on. Nobody was thinking about arts and humanities. I mean nobody; they could care less. So at that point in time anyway, this was by and large left to Claiborne Pell. Have you talked to his people at all?

G: Some of them.

C: They had a great appreciation of each other, Senator Hill and Claiborne Pell. I think Claiborne Pell's people would have said about the same thing, that we by and large--we just accepted *carte blanche* pretty much whatever Claiborne Pell's subcommittee came out with.

G: Any insights or recollections of immigration reform? There was a big change in 1965 in the national origins quota system that allowed more Third World--

C: I remember the change. No, the answer would be--you see, I'm thinking again, in the state of Alabama we really don't have an immigration consideration. That was somewhat controversial, as I recall, but again, insofar as back home, we really didn't have any interest in that.

G: How about the Highway Beautification Act?

C: Well, if it's the one I'm thinking about that's the one that Lady Bird had a lot of input on. We never had any problem with that. I still don't have any problem with it. I don't know if she's still active in it or--where is she living now?--junkyards and all that. I don't have

any problem with any of that. Of course I don't remember twenty-five years ago but--I think I would remember if there had been any concerted effort in either direction, and especially opposition. Opposition would have been my forte. But there was not. We never had any problem with that.

G: It was I guess largely the Outdoor Advertising Association that was in opposition to the measure.

C: I would guess in Alabama we still have some of that kind of opposition but I don't remember, at that time, of having any crusade so to speak for or against.

G: Any recollections of Mrs. Johnson's advocacy of the legislation?

C: No. It was then and I think still sort of labeled as a Lady Bird Johnson program but we never--again, I don't recall any flood of mail one way or the other on that.

G: But she didn't lobby Senator Hill or seek his support of the measure?

C: No. He would have--I think he would have been for it. I don't know how the votes show on there or if you even have the votes, but I think he would have been for it. And I'm saying that primarily because politically I'm thinking through--we really then did not have anybody foremost in the billboard advertising sort of business. And this was a hard one to be against. I mean you clean up junkyards and so on, what's wrong with that? My guess is he would have gone for it.

G: Later in 1965 the Johnson Administration tried unsuccessfully to repeal the right-to-work provision of Taft-Hartley and there was a filibuster that prevented it. Do you recall that?

C: Well, I remember a lot of ruckus on that one. Lots of ruckus. Of course Alabama then at least--and I think probably still is--was a right-to-work state. I think there were thirteen or fourteen of them in the country and Alabama was one of them.

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G: --in that you had a lot of mail on--

C: We had a lot of traffic on that. We had both sides because we were chairman of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee--then Labor and Public Welfare Committee--and we had them both from the labor unions and the folks back home. They were stirred up pretty good on repeal of Taft-Hartley. As I remember--and again, you would have check [inaudible]--but as I remember it we probably voted to maintain the right-to-work law as is, being a right-to-work state. But as national chairman of the committee, which goes beyond the state, we had problems. But in resolution we would have voted--I imagine, I'd have to check the record--we would have voted to maintain right-to-work.

G: On this was there an added element in terms of whether or not to vote for cloture?

C: I think there was.

G: Or was this purely decided on the merits?

C: No, I think here there was a cloture vote.

G: Yes. Would Senator Hill, even if he was in favor of the measure itself, been disinclined to shut off debate?

C: Yes, he would have. He would have because that had been for many years--since 1917, I believe, when rule twenty first came into existence--that had been the main weapon of the

southern bloc. Regardless of what the issue is, you don't cut off your nose to spite your face. Politically you just don't do it.

G: How energetically did the administration push for this repeal of right-to-work? Do you know if it was something that they were strenuously trying to get approved or passed, or was it something that since they had made a commitment to labor that they were just going through the motions?

C: I don't recall. I don't recall how strenuously they pushed it. I do know that as being chairman we got an awful lot of heat, and then from Alabama of course we got an awful lot of heat on the question of repeal of 14b. I don't recall just how much the administration pushed it at the time. We had enough heat going in every direction then that I don't remember that.

G: Anything on the Depressed Areas Bill to provide grants and economic assistance to economically depressed areas?

C: The only thing I can recall on any of the poverty/depressed areas/*et al.* legislation is that it was not real popular in Alabama. We tiptoed through an awful lot of that. We recognized that there was some merit to some of it, but at the same time we recognized that we had a very volatile situation politically and every other which way. The South still hadn't calmed down. It still wasn't quiet and we were just not ready to toss the match and let everything explode. So we were very conscious of anything that had to do with poverty, depression and so on because generally it went black. That's what it was all about in that day and time. So politically we were careful.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VI

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