

INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 10, 1978  
INTERVIEWEE: CARL T. CURTIS  
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE  
PLACE: Senator Curtis' office, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C.

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G: Mrs. Curtis, if you have anything to add, feel free to do so, because we've long since learned the importance of Senate wives and their contributions in many cases.

Well, Senator, let's have you outline your background very briefly. You are from Nebraska.

C: I'm from Nebraska and this is my fortieth year in Congress. I came to the Congress in 1938, sworn in on January 3, 1939.

It was my privilege to serve with Lyndon Johnson in the House. I recall when he was elected to the Senate. I do not remember anything particular or spectacular about his performance in the House. He hadn't, at that time, gotten up to a point of leadership. No doubt he was doing good work for his state and in many other ways, but it didn't attract attention with all the competition of the leaders in the House.

I do remember hearing about his race for the Senate when he won that primary by eighty-seven votes, I think it was, and they called him "Landslide Johnson." With that memory tucked way back in there in my mind, I read with interest the statement by this election official or party official or Johnson organizational official [Luis Salas] within

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the last year concerning the election returns in that particular county in Texas.

G: Let me ask you a couple of questions on the House years. Do you recall anything in particular about his activities in the extension of the Selective Service Act in 1941 when that passed by I think one vote or so, and he was working on it.

C: No. I do not. I remember Sam Rayburn's activity. Sam made a strong plea for that. I do not recall anything about Lyndon Johnson in that connection.

G: Were you able to get any impression of his association with Rayburn during the House years? Did they seem particularly close? Did he seem to follow Rayburn's lead pretty much?

C: He was regarded as a protege of Sam Rayburn. And Sam Rayburn was a forceful leader, forceful speaker [of the House] and spoke for the vast majority of the Texas delegation, including Lyndon.

G: Let's see, he came to the Senate in 1949. Do you recall your first association with him here?

C: I came to the Senate on January 1, 1955. In that year he served as majority leader. I had known him before and you see a little bit of the other body when you're in the House. You see a few senators now and then. Now I see House members, but you do not get to work with them unless you happen to be on a conference committee. So I hadn't followed Lyndon Johnson very closely until the beginning of 1955.

G: [William] Knowland by then had become the Republican leader.

C: That is correct.

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G: The Democrats had taken over the majority by one or two votes, I believe it was, a very narrow margin. Was Johnson partisan pretty much or was he bipartisan? How would you describe his relationship with the senators on the other side of the aisle?

C: Johnson had a degree of partisanship. It didn't show as much as with some other leaders, but it was there. He was first of all a Democrat. On the floor and in his dealings he was fair with Republicans. He took pride in being a man of his word, and if he made a commitment about schedule, or a commitment to an individual senator, whether he be Republican or Democrat, he kept it. I would characterize Lyndon Johnson not necessarily as a partisan leader, but he was definitely a pro-Johnson leader. He ran the show. Lyndon had to run a show or he would get up and pace the floor, I think. He was built that way. It would appear to Republicans as they watched what was going on that he controlled the committees and who went on. Now and then there would be a Democrat removed from a committee and someone placed in it. We, as Republicans, weren't in on what took place behind the scenes to bring it about, but we felt that Lyndon Johnson ruled pretty much with an iron hand within the Democratic Party.

G: How would you compare Johnson and Knowland as leaders? Did they have a different approach to things?

C: Knowland was a great senator and he was my friend. He was not the best leader. An individual senator with strong feelings and deep feelings on certain issues, who can't compromise very much--and we need those people--was not necessarily the best leader. Senator [Everett] Dirksen was a

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better leader than Senator Knowland. On taking a position and fighting for something, Knowland was tops. A leader has to recognize many viewpoints within his party and draw them out, and sometimes that means that he suppresses his own feelings and convictions. That was difficult for Knowland to do. Now, Knowland wanted to be cooperative, it wasn't anything about it. Lyndon Johnson and Everett Dirksen wanted to hold onto their own personal convictions. But it was easier for them to yield to somebody else's view and bring about some teamwork than it was for Knowland. They were different types.

G: I get the impression that occasionally Johnson would outmaneuver Knowland when they had this--

C: Lyndon Johnson could outmaneuver anybody.

G: Is that right? Do you recall any particular occasion here?

C: Well, yes. We would go along and we would have legislation up, but nobody knew when we were going to vote. Maybe [we were] almost wasting time. All of a sudden the word would go out, "We're going to vote in a little while." Everybody knew what that meant: Lyndon had counted the votes and he had enough to pass it. If he didn't get enough to pass the bill he was interested in, we would be there for days and weeks.

Also, he had around him a staff that included some hero worshippers. Everybody wanted Lyndon to take care of his health. But if he took a little nap after lunch or in the middle of the afternoon, the rest of us just twiddled our thumbs until it was time for him to come back on the floor, and we had more night sessions. When Lyndon Johnson was majority leader we seldom had dinner with our families. We were here

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every night, eight, nine, ten o'clock--not every night, but several nights a week.

Lyndon was at his best organizing and maneuvering. He made some strong speeches, but he wasn't known for a Daniel Webster speech or an in-depth speech on an issue or a great constitutional address. He was an organizer and a political leader and a strategist. He backed it up with something that leaders since then either couldn't do or didn't want to do: he maintained discipline. I am confident that Democrats served on committees at his sufferance. If they weren't good boys they might be toppled from the committee they wanted and put someplace else.

G: How about private bills and bills that individual senators were interested in? Would he use these as carrots?

C: Yes. Now, he wasn't unfair, but he maneuvered around until a situation was arranged that if I had a private bill that meant a great deal to an individual in my state or to my state, that that was called up under circumstances that it was a special favor by him, and I was supposed to be forever grateful.

G: Would he let you know that this was the case?

C: He was quite tactful about it, but someone engaged in politics was able to figure it out.

G: Did you ever get an opportunity to witness firsthand his Johnson treatment, or the famous Johnson persuasion?

C: Yes, and I experienced his discipline one time. He left the Senate to go to Texas. As I recall, it was toward the end of the week. They called

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up a bill in his absence and his side got licked. He was a most unhappy man the next week, and he took it out on all the Senate in the hours they worked and one thing and another. He ran the show for Johnson. I recall one time he said that we would have business on such and such a Monday. I think it was a Monday after Easter. Everybody came back. Some of them broke family engagements and came back, and he decided on no program and stayed in Texas.

G: Is that right?

C: I've got to go vote.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about Lyndon Johnson's leadership and his use of the powers of the majority leader to influence legislation and cooperation. Do you recall any other particular instances where you had something that you needed for your state where you had to go to him and get his cooperation?

C: I can't recall specific things, but I was interested in reclamation law and other matters and later on in tax matters. Now and then I would have a bill that was more or less restricted to an individual or to Nebraska. You'd never get a turndown that you just couldn't get it passed that session, but you'd wait around until the situation arose and then you passed it because he consented to it.

G: What approach would you take in dealing with him on this score? Would you confront him directly and say, "I've got something that would be a help to my state," and such and such?

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- C: I'd kid him a lot. I recall one conversation [where] I said I wanted certain things. "Well," he said, "I'm a Curtis man. Tell me about it." "Well, I says, "I'm a Johnson man. I always vote with you when you're right." He was good-natured. I think he kind of liked that. He'd usually reply, "Well, I'll see what I can work out."
- G: He had a reputation, I suppose, for being able to win a few Republican votes at times, much to the chagrin of the leadership occasionally. Do you remember any of these instances?
- C: I can't remember such a thing happening with a particular senator. I think Lyndon would use his power as leader to get somebody to go along if he knew that they were very anxious to get a proposal of theirs passed. I don't think he would hesitate at all on that. I think most of the Republican votes he would get would be because of the issue and not because of any persuasion or friendship. But someone might, if they were near deciding to go on his side, be influenced by the fact that they needed his good will.
- G: Senator [George W.] Malone has been mentioned as one Republican that he could occasionally persuade to cross the aisle. Do you remember anything on that basis?
- C: Senator Malone was a strong senator. He had several ideas that he hammered on all the time, and one of them was protective tariff. Senator Malone was a long speaker. Some people would regard it as tedious. Consequently, he'd be on the outs sometimes with his own Republicans and the top-ranking person among the Republicans on his committee. That gave him a temptation to be independent and assert his independence once in a while and he might join Lyndon on something.

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G: Would Johnson feed this sort of independence or encourage it?

C: He might have. He never missed any bets.

G: From one of the points that you made earlier I get the impression that part of Johnson's leadership was timing, knowing exactly when to bring up a bill for a vote. Was this the case and, if so, how important was it?

C: I think his man Bobby Baker was uncanny in being able to bring in a correct tabulation as to how the vote would go. How he did it, whether he did it by directly asking an individual, "How are you going to vote?"-- I'm sure some of that is done; it's still done and it's perfectly all right--or whether he just sensed it, or whether he had others find out how so-and-so is going to vote. But the Johnson organization knew where the votes were when they started the roll call.

G: Well, let's look at this outline that has the legislation there in 1955 and see if there's anything here that you recall in any detail.

C: I recall that when Wayne Morse supported the Democrat nominee for president and deserted his own party that Senator [Hugh] Butler of Nebraska advised against punishing him. His advice wasn't taken and Morse went completely over to the Democrats' side.

I'll take that call.

(Interruption)

I remember Lyndon going to Mayo Clinic a time or two. I do not remember the dates or the details. I recall the Formosan Resolution. Lyndon Johnson was a patriot and he was for the defense of the country. He did not belong to that wing who believe in unilateral disarmament. Now, he



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would go quite a ways to keep that group in his party happy, but it wasn't a surprise that he stood with the President on the Formosan Resolution.

G: How about the tax bill? Do you remember that one?

C: Yes, I do. I believed in [Secretary of the Treasury George M.] Humphrey's theory of the taxation. I thought that Lyndon's act was purely a political move, that it was not based on what was good for the economy, but to paint a picture that the Republican tax proposal was geared to the rich when it wasn't; it was geared to job production. That was one of the very partisan performances that Lyndon engineered. There weren't too many, but now and then there would be one. I wouldn't say that the Democrats were more guilty than the Republicans in that regard, but it was a matter of flexing muscles. And I think that he was quite surprised that he lost.

G: I guess two of the Democrats on that committee, Walter George and Harry Byrd, did not go along with it. I'm wondering if you can recall his association with senators like Walter George and Dick Russell, who were senior members of the [Senate].

C: I think he had a good relationship with them, and I think he did with Harry Byrd, Sr. and Walter George. I think they had been long-time members of the committee. They were private enterprisers. They believed in the position, and I wasn't at all surprised they didn't go along.

G: Was he a protege of anyone in particular in the Senate, in your observation?

C: No, because I served under no other leader at that time. I had always felt that his teacher was Sam Rayburn.

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G: Well, let's skip to that second page there. See anything there that triggers memories?

C: I recall when Senator Humphrey proposed a disarmament subcommittee. They came to the Rules Committee for the funds. That's where I served. I thought it was quite ridiculous to spend billions for armament and to give armament to foreign countries, and then have a committee working on tearing it down. I think this was one of the concessions that Lyndon Johnson made in the spirit of compromise. I don't think he particularly believed in it. He might have done it to keep a segment of his party happy. I was told that one of the first things after the committee was organized, they got a staff leader that proposed that the first thing they do is make an inventory of all of our defense establishments. Well, of course, that would have confirmed everything that Russia or anybody else had in their intelligence files. It would not only confirm the fact, but it would confirm the accuracy of their sources of information. I was not in sympathy with it. I don't think it would have ever been thought of if it was left to Lyndon Johnson, but had he opposed it vigorously it wouldn't have happened.

G: How about agricultural appropriations? Do you remember that issue that year?

C: No, I do not. I remember Russell handling it on the floor but what happened back of the scenes and in the committee, I don't know.

G: The highway bill that year, do you remember that one?

C: I opposed my own administration on that highway bill and supported Harry Byrd. The real leader that defeated the highway bill was not [Albert]

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Gore, or not Lyndon Johnson, but Harry Byrd. Because while he wasn't out there as a strategist, the profound respect that conservatives of both parties had for him I think was the controlling factor. I remember that. I think it was a good fight. I always credited Harry Byrd, Sr. with getting our interstate highways paid for as we built them, without a special bond issue.

I remember the issue of Quemoy and Matsu. Ike had the fleet take positions there. He told the foreign countries where we stood. He was well respected throughout the world as a military leader. We went through days where the papers were indicating that those islands would be invaded almost hourly and it never happened. The United States stated where they stood and meant what they said and that stopped the aggression.

G: On this [Homer] Capehart amendment at the bottom of the page, that's a situation, I believe, where timing was crucial to Johnson's effort.

C: I don't remember that particular vote that particular day, but I do recognize this statement here, "LBJ postponed the vote for two hours while they got some Democrats to the floor." That was a daily practice.

G: Really?

C: He got the votes there and they voted, and he being the leader, we didn't vote until his side could win.

G: I gather that on occasion it got to the point where if some Republican senator or someone who was opposing the particular measure he was advocating would leave for just a few minutes that something might be brought up for a vote. Is that right? Did you feel like you pretty much had to

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stay glued to your office in order to keep from missing something.

C: Yes. Yes. I don't think he would deliberately take advantage of an absentee. I think he was more on the positive side that when his people got there he was ready to vote.

G: I see.

C: I mentioned a while ago about his announcing the program for a week and then changing his mind and everybody came back. One of the most gentlemanly members of the Senate that I can recall was [Leverett] Saltonstall of Massachusetts, a very scholarly and distinguished and reserved New England gentleman. He made some changes in his family plans and came back and privately expressed his disgust at what had been done.

G: I bet he was upset.

How about the minimum wage bill when it was raised to a dollar? That was a case, I believe, where it was not thought that he had the votes, and the administration was proposing to raise it to ninety cents an hour. Do you recall what went on on the floor that enabled him to get the extra votes.

C: No, I don't. My guess would be that organized labor gave him a great amount of help on that. Of course, he was running the Senate, so anything that happened that he won he was entitled to credit for it, but in this he had more allies than he would have sometimes where it was just left to his own resources.

G: Anything else on that page that [you recall]?

C: No. I don't.

I remember all of the things on page four, but there's no particular

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activity where I have something special to add about Mr. Johnson.

G: Most of what follows concerns the heart attack. I was going to ask you how his heart attack changed him as far as you were concerned. Did you notice a difference in the man after he had that heart attack in 1955?

C: Yes. He slowed up and I think that he became more interested in the health of other people. I want to modify that. I wouldn't say that he wasn't interested before, but he was doing things that showed it. I recall that soon after his attack there was a NATO meeting in Paris. I went to the meeting; the wives went along. Lyndon had had this attack, and Eisenhower offered his presidential plane that had bedrooms on it if Lyndon wanted to go and thought he ought to go and get away for a rest, and he did. I think Ike having had a heart attack, it sort of made them kindred spirits.

G: Do you remember much about that trip in terms of what he did and what he was thinking, this sort of thing?

C: He did not take too much part in discussions in the NATO meetings. He was a very gracious host. He looked after the American delegates. He personally sent flowers to the rooms where they'd brought their wives along. He was chairman of the delegation; he was a gracious host. But he let others who had definite interests in foreign affairs lead out in the discussions. He did address the NATO group, and I recall it was arranged that instead of him being there all the time and being called up that it was announced and whispered around that the Majority Leader of the United States Senate would arrive at such and such a time and address them. I'm not critical of that. I think that the prestige of

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the Senate should be maintained, and he could do it.

G: That's interesting. Well, let's talk about 1956 now. Do you remember the natural gas act?

C: That was known as the Kerr bill?

G: Right.

C: Yes, I do. I voted for it, and even though it was supported by a lot of Democrats and was a Democrat-sponsored bill, my opponent was very rough on me. I'm speaking of an earlier natural gas act and I have to back up there. That was earlier because I was still in the House--the first Kerr bill.

The 1956 act, that was the one that Eisenhower vetoed because of the statement made by Senator [Francis] Case of South Dakota. I realized that any senator from Texas should support the gas and oil industry. I was neither surprised nor critical of Lyndon Johnson for supporting that. Frankly, I believed and still believe in the market place economy on gas and petroleum, so I was not ready to see ghosts in the closets or suspect there was something devious going on, because philosophically I was in accord with the bills that have passed.

Eisenhower vetoed it not because of what the bill said. Senator Case made a statement that a lobbyist offered him money. He was up for re-election. I know about that situation very well. The Superior Oil Company had a lawyer by the name of [Elmer] Patman. I think he was a relative of Congressman [Wright] Patman of Texas, maybe once removed. He had been in law school with a country lawyer in the state of Nebraska. This country lawyer was a fine local lawyer. He transacted business in

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in that county seat town for individuals, handled estate and probate matters, and was attorney for the local savings and loan. He had not been involved in federal legislation, and much less lobbying. His old college friend looked him up, enlisted his help on this natural gas bill and said, "The boys that stand with us, we'll support them in the campaign," and apparently left money with him.

I do not regard it as dishonest for people to support congressmen or senators in their re-election who stand for political and economic philosophies and theories that they believe in. I think that's far different than going to somebody before a vote and say, "Here's X dollars. I want to bribe you. Vote my way." That is very wrong. But Americans have a right to participate in politics. Just as a person has a right to go from door to door and say, "Don't vote for Brown. Vote for Smith because I think that's good for our country," other people have a right to give their dollars, after the fact. That's the way it should have been handled.

This country lawyer from Nebraska had never been experienced in any of that. They had him contact senators in surrounding states, and he was the man that contacted Senator Case. No one could bribe Senator Case. I don't think the parties intended that it be involved that way at all. But it had the appearance of not the best ethical operation, and it was terribly blundered. It was terribly blundered. It was not one of those things where someone on the outside stood with the people that voted what they thought was for the best of the country. The ball got out of hand so far as Senator Case was concerned. He got up on the

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Senate floor and stated that he had been offered money, but he didn't want to name names. It went from there and finally there were names named. Many of us were called before the grand jury here in Washington, including myself, although I had nothing to do with it. But the various lobbies got interested in it. Somebody powerful enough in the cabinet convinced Eisenhower that there was the appearance of evil and therefore the bill should be vetoed. I think it was a mistake. I have a feeling that in years following Eisenhower regarded it as a mistake, because some of those same controls are still hounding us.

I knew what Lyndon's position was. There was a committee set up to investigate it. It was well selected by Lyndon Johnson, not to cover up wrong, but to prevent what we might now term as the extreme consumerites, who were fighting the legislation, from taking over. But I can't say that I'm critical of Lyndon Johnson for that. I think that the ultimate course that was followed was best for our economy.

Q: Let me ask you about some other issues here. Do you remember the [George] Aiken amendment to the Agricultural Act of 1956? This was going to eliminate 90 per cent price supports for millable wheat. It was passed by one vote, with Vice President Nixon breaking the tie. Do you remember that vote?

C: I don't remember that specific vote. I remember the issue. The issue was quite involved. Wheat producers in the wheat areas, naturally, wanted a higher price. We produce so much more wheat than we consume. Right



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now we're producing three bushels for every bushel we need. We have to export, and if our support price is too high, the price here is so high that the foreign countries buy it all in Canada, Australia, or Argentina. Further fact, the nation is divided on it. Aiken represented the East. They buy grain. They buy feed for their dairy cattle and their poultry farms and so on. The Northeast has been traditionally for low grain prices. The farm organizations were divided. The farm bureau, which was the strongest, was for lower supports and promotion of foreign exports. I think Lyndon moved in and just took advantage of it in order to make a case in the wheat areas against the administration.

G: Let's talk about Lyndon Johnson and civil rights. Do you recall anything in particular on the 1957 Civil Rights Bill and his efforts there.

C: I don't want to do him an injustice, and I haven't looked back at the record on speeches and votes. I regarded him as a bystander pretty much. Knowland led the fight for civil rights, and Senator [Paul] Douglas of Illinois. Lyndon didn't want to disturb good relations with those elements of the Democrat Party and the country at large who were for strong civil rights; neither did he want to lose the southern support. He was not blocking it, and he wasn't pushing it.

G: As you look back on that period, particularly in terms of civil rights and social issues, what was his political philosophy? How did you regard him?

C: That comes back to my characterization of Knowland and contrasting him with Lyndon Johnson. Knowland had a specific political philosophy. Lyndon Johnson was a strategist. He said, "Where are the votes?" Lyndon Johnson

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was a compromiser and a strategist and that prevailed over being a strong champion of some issue that he felt very dedicated to.

G: Did Knowland ever talk to you about Johnson or characterize him? Do you remember anything in particular?

C: No. Knowland was a perfect gentleman. He was not near as frank as I am.

G: How about Dirksen? Did you get much of a sense of their relationship?

C: They got along fine. They got along fine, and if you haven't interviewed Howard Baker, you should, who is the son-in-law of Dirksen. He remembers a few things about Dirksen's dealings with Lyndon. They were good friends and very much alike, although Dirksen had the combination of being a strong advocate but still a good compromiser. Knowland was a strong advocate, and compromising and getting the team together wasn't one of his special traits. Lyndon Johnson was the other extreme. He was the leader and the compromiser and [he wanted to] get people together and get it done.

G: During this period, Johnson developed a strategy called being the loyal opposition, of supporting the administration when he felt they were right and opposing them when he disagreed with them. What was the basis for this strategy, do you know? Did you get a sense of what he was [attempting to do]?

C: I think Lyndon was definitely patriotic. He wanted to do what was good for the country, plus I think he had his eye on the presidency.

G: Do you really?

C: I think that he wanted to be president and have an image of a broad-minded statesman.

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G: I think he once said during this era that his job was to keep Dick Russell from stepping across the aisle and embracing Bill Knowland. In other words, to keep the conservative Democrats from forming a political alliance in the Senate with the Republicans. Was this accurate? Is this what he was [doing]?

C: Well, I never heard him say that. Knowland had a good relationship with Dick Russell, but Styles Bridges I think had a stronger relationship with him. Usually on farm legislation, on fiscal policy, on spending and so on, the southerners, the old-time southerners, and the conservative Republicans have always had a coalition. Sometimes it was enough to win and sometimes almost enough to win.

G: Was Johnson, do you think, moving toward a more liberal stance as the sixties approached?

C: I don't think he had a strong policy in that regard. I think that he went for those things that would gain the most following. He championed the idea that he wanted a college education for every American, that they ought to be loaned enough money or given enough grants. Well, the loans are still uncollected, a lot of them. A lot of kids aren't college material, but nevertheless he would take something like that, and [it] had great appeal. It had a great appeal among adults who had wanted to go to college and were never able to, and it had a great appeal to people of low income and others who could see no other way of getting to college.

You haven't asked this, but I was the main spoke in the investigation of Bobby Baker, and of course that was an investigation of Lyndon Johnson. You may want to read the record of that sometime.

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G: Well, let me ask you in particular. Did you see a lot of Lyndon Johnson in this, behind Bobby Baker?

C: No. Everything would appear as though Lyndon didn't know the investigation was going on. He had the ability to direct things and not be anywhere near the scene. No, he didn't get caught interfering with that investigation at all.

G: I mean in terms of what you found. Could you see Lyndon Johnson's footprints as well as Bobby Baker's?

C: Oh, very much. There was an insurance agent that became a pal of Bobby Baker's. They were in business together, and they went partying together, and they took the girls out together. But when this thing blew up, he finally told his wife that he was involved and she said, "I'll stick with you if you tell the truth." So I always felt that this man told the truth under oath. He told about selling an insurance policy to Lyndon Johnson. It was after his heart attack. I think it was a policy that ultimately reached a hundred thousand dollars. In the course of selling that, an emissary came to the insurance agent and said, "The Senator can buy that back in Texas from an agent who takes advertising over his television station, and we think you should meet the same requirements." The man was anxious to sell a policy to the Vice President and so he complied. He actually bought the time on the Lyndon Johnson television station. I've seen the checks in payment for it. He couldn't use the time, so he sold it to a man that sold pots and pans by direct television advertising and I've heard his testimony. He also testified that he was to deliver a stereo or some such machine to the

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Johnson home. I heard his testimony. I heard the testimony of the individual who delivered it and installed it, had to go back because the installation didn't fit just right.

All of these stories would lead up to the name of Walter Jenkins. We could never get Walter Jenkins' testimony, contrary to the way that things went in the Watergate investigation. There was such control by the Democrats on the Rules Committee that we never did get the testimony of Walter Jenkins. These trails, whether it was insurance contracts or something else, would lead right up to Walter Jenkins. Finally I succeeded in getting a motion passed that Walter Jenkins should be called. On the day that he was to appear, two psychiatrists appeared and testified that if Walter Jenkins appeared, it would kill him. Not that it would ruin his health; it would kill him. I cross-examined them for the entire day, and they admitted that he had been vacationing in the islands. He was playing golf. He attended all the rounds the party had in connection with the inaugural. But they stood pat and totally stonewalled it right there. At the end of the testimony of the two psychiatrists, I moved that we call Walter Jenkins anyway. It was voted down on a party-line vote. I then moved that the record of that day be made public, and it was voted down. So it's forever been sealed. Yet there was nothing in appearance or anything that Lyndon or a direct emissary ever came near the committee.

There was an interesting thing happened. My minority counsel on the committee was questioning this insurance agent behind closed doors

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when Jack Kennedy was shot. He got the word, but he never told the witness. The insurance agent went ahead and told the whole story, not realizing he was involving the President of the United States, he thought it was the Vice President. Senator John Williams of Delaware can supply a lot of things about that situation.

G: Do you think it was the assassination that changed the nature of this investigation, though, and really slowed it down, because people were reluctant to testify?

C: No. No. It was ironclad political control.

G: Let me ask you about the one hundred thousand dollars that Baker had. Did you have any information as to where he got that money?

C: In those days there were more political campaign contributions made in cash. The reporting requirements weren't very strict and it wasn't frowned upon. Some people were giving maybe to both sides and they didn't want it known so they used cash. The person who received a contribution, if he got it in cash and hadn't reported it in his report didn't want to talk about it. Consequently, and I'm weighing my words very carefully at this point, the go-between who carried the black bag between contributor and candidate, if he skimmed off a little at the top, neither party ever dared complain about it, and the chances are they'd never know it, because they never went and talked to each other. Bobby Baker was the errand boy for the Democrats quite a lot.

G: Was Senator [Robert] Kerr involved in this at all?

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- C: Senator Kerr was quite a friend of Bobby Baker. He admired him and spoke well of him. Now, Bobby Baker was an able fellow and he was a likeable fellow. The Republicans liked Bobby Baker. He was an accommodating and competent Senate employee. So, many who didn't approve of what he did would still say they liked him, and they found him always accommodating and helpful as a Senate employee.
- G: I've gotten the impression that the hundred thousand dollars was campaign money and that it may have come from Senator Kerr or some of his sources. Did you ever discover that?
- C: Well, I'm not making any charges. That's the reason I said that I was weighing my words very carefully. When great amounts of campaign money are handled in cash, and if the messenger decides that he's justly entitled to a bit, neither the donor nor the recipient is going to get up in public and squeal. In fact, he may never know it.

You see, as I recall, Bobby Baker came to the Senate as a page boy. His first property statement--and you're asking me about things that haven't crossed my mind in many years--showed he had a net worth of about eight thousand dollars, or twelve, and that included the equity in his home. He filed a property statement when he was promoting his hotel over on the Ocean City beach, claiming he was worth 2.1 million. Well, Bobby was quite a promoter and he wasn't worth 2.1 million, but I think he was probably worth 40 per cent of that. That's a pretty good accomplishment for a page boy. That is, he started out as a page boy but he became--

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G: Majority, yes.

C: Secretary to the majority.

G: You know, one theory is that Johnson was not so much involved with this and that even Baker, while LBJ was majority leader, was kept too busy to engage in this sort of activity.

(Interruption)

C: Bobby Baker didn't need much coaching. Now, another--and I'm not trying to paint a bad picture of the former President, but you've stated you wanted everything.

G: Sure.

C: I would suggest that you look up in the old issues of the Washington Star. They assigned two reporters to investigate the worth and the holdings of Lyndon Johnson. They finished their work and wrote a series of articles. To show you the understanding of Johnson and his friends in the political world and publicity world, it was never answered. They just let it run until it died out. Pretty soon it disappeared from the memory of man.

G: Isn't that something.

Well, I've taken a lot of your time. Is there anything else that you'd like to add to this?

C: No, and I would have felt that I was covering up if I didn't tell you my association with that Bobby Baker thing and these other things, because they are a part of Lyndon Johnson's career.

G: Senator, I'd like to have a chance at a later date to go into more of the vice presidential period and also your association with him while he was president.



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C: Well, I think as vice president he was most restless. When Senator Case died, I flew out for the funeral. The Vice President went along. Now, oftentimes that's true. Case was a good senator and had considerable prominence, but he didn't have the nationwide prominence of a Humphrey. But I visited with Lyndon Johnson on the way out and on the way back--we were on the same plane--and I sensed a restlessness,[that he had] nothing to do and he wanted to get in the action. Instead of that, he was neither the president nor a member of the Senate. You see, a vice president is prohibited from speaking in the Senate. And the president is the president and the vice president is a stand-by, plus whatever the president assigns to him.

G: Did he talk about what he might do after--

C: There was a strong feeling among many that the Kennedys, particularly Bobby Kennedy, mistrusted Lyndon Johnson and that they didn't bring him into the action. Maybe disliked would be a better word, but at any rate they didn't see eye to eye. Some vice presidents know every move the president makes and are consulted on vital issues and so on. Johnson and Kennedy appeared not to be close, and Lyndon was restless and wanted more of the action. That was the impression I got during his vice president years.

G: During that plane ride did he talk to you about what his plans would be? Did he, do you think, intend to serve again if the President asked him, or maybe retire?

C: Well, the Kennedy Administration hadn't gone very far then. You see, Kennedy hadn't served too long when he was killed. So we didn't get into

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future politics at all. But because of my role in the Bobby Baker investigation, Lyndon was very active in my 1966 campaign.

G: I bet he was.

(Laughter)

C: They had a good many special events out there. They were loading a bargeload of wheat at Omaha, and it was supposed to be a certain millionth bushel of wheat sent to feed India, or something or other. The President came out for the ceremony. Well, it wasn't well managed and well handled, but the President of the United States appeared out there. Instead of having thousands, they had a few hundreds at this barge ceremony. That wasn't his fault. He was over anxious to go and it wasn't well planned. He didn't appear in Nebraska very much, but every member of the cabinet did, and Lady Bird was out a time or two.

G: One more question about the Bobby Baker thing in here on the Kennedy Administration. Did you ever get the impression that the Kennedy Administration, or in particular Bobby Kennedy, had an interest in trying to embarrass LBJ at this point with the Baker incident?

C: Well, of course, it turned out, you know, that Bobby did challenge him. You see, Bobby announced for the presidency and made that campaign. That's what he was doing when he was killed. I think it was after that that Johnson withdrew.

G: Yes, but I mean back in 1963 when Johnson was still vice president and the Baker investigation was going on.

C: There was nothing that would indicate an open split or feeling against each other, but they just weren't buddies. Johnson wasn't in on high

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strategy and important events, like those who knew Lyndon Johnson would notice.

G: Well, that's fascinating.

Is there anything else you'd like to add this session?

C: No, I always got along with Lyndon Johnson in spite of the investigations and so on. After he became president I was at the White House at a reception one night, and the cattle prices had gone to pieces and, oh, we had a terrible livestock depression in my state. Of course, it hit Texas. Lyndon put his arm around me and he says, "Carl, I'm going to approve of a meat import bill." I said, "What do you have in mind?" "Well," he said, "We ought to freeze it where it is." I says, "Mr. President, that's not enough. We need to cut back." And it happened that it was my bill that the Finance Committee reported out. It got watered down in conference considerably.

Lyndon Johnson was smart. Lyndon was smart politically. He knew what the important things in our economy were. One of his first speeches as president was at a time where we were under stress following the assassination. As usual, after the speech senators and congressmen were interviewed by the press, "What do you think of the speech?" They asked my friend Senator Karl Mundt of South Dakota. He says, "It's the first presidential speech I ever heard that didn't mention agriculture." In less than two hours, Lyndon Johnson called him up, not to scold him. I think Lyndon was embarrassed over the oversight. Of course it was at a time and place where most people wouldn't have noticed it. It wasn't supposed to be a speech that covered every facet

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of our economy. But Lyndon was embarrassed that he had made that oversight. He was very political.

G: Did he seek your advice on any legislative matters while he was president that you particularly recall?

C: No. No.

G: Try to get you to vote for certain measures?

C: Well, Lyndon had a way of putting his arm around you and asking you what you thought about something, but [to] be called in and say, "What do you think we ought to do here?" that never happened to me.

G: I gather that he would work with Dirksen and Dirksen would work with you. Was that the way the influence on the Republican side [worked]?

C: Well, I wouldn't say that I was that close to the leadership, particularly in those days, but he and Dirksen had a very good arrangement. No, if Lyndon Johnson wanted to talk to me, I went and talked to him. We didn't need a go-between. But, you see, we're talking about fourteen years ago. I was just a junior senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. C: That's very humble of you, dear.

(Laughter)

C: Well, what I mean, it's natural for a president to confer not only with the chairman of the committee, but on occasion he would confer with a ranking minority member. I wasn't such at that time and so I wasn't in the category that would be called to so-called leadership meetings at the White House, which I've been attending for a few years now.

G: Well, Senator, I certainly do appreciate it. You've given me a lot of good material here.

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C: I think Lyndon Johnson was a very interesting character. You would have thought that the skilled majority leader that he was that he would be very skilled getting his stuff through Congress, but it didn't carry over. Now, he was better than Kennedy on that, but of course everybody thinks the president can make a speech and urge Congress to do certain things and it will happen, but it doesn't. Maybe my observation is prompted by the fact that just nothing unusual happened is all.

G: I wonder why this was. I wonder why he didn't transfer more of these skills there.

C: I don't know. Lyndon had to be the center of activity. When some strike got settled and the decision reached the White House, he was going to announce it there. He was so much in charge of the whole scene he beat the press to the studio. (Laughter) That was what made him so restless as vice president. Lyndon was a man that was in charge, and as vice president you're just a stand-in for the president unless the president wants to assign you something to do. You have no authority to interfere in the Senate. I think he liked it and liked to be around and liked his friends, but I think he was very restless.

G: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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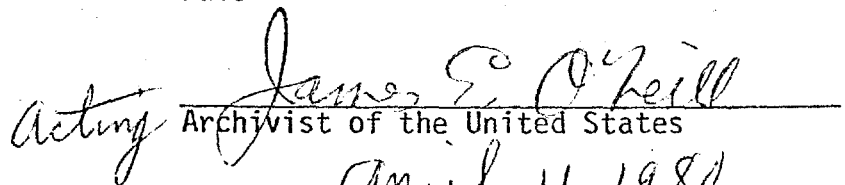
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