INTERVIEWEE: DIXON DONNELLEY

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE MULHOLLAN

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M: You are Dixon Donnelley, and you are currently Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, a position that you have held since 1966. Is that correct?

D: That's correct.

M: And prior to that, during the Johnson Administration, you were an assistant to the Secretary of Treasury from about 1963 on. Is that right?

D: From the beginning of the Kennedy Adminis tration.

M: From '61 until you--

D: Until I came back here.

M: Did you have any occasion prior to the Kennedy Administration to have any contact with Mr. Johnson back in your news career or in private career?

D: Only vaguely in my news career. However, in 1955 and 1956, I was on Capitol Hill associated with Senator Estes Kefauver and saw something of the then-Senator Johnson at that time. The first time I recall talking with Senator Johnson was during the fall of 1956 when Senator Kefauver and I were campaigning throughout Texas with Senator Johnson. Senator Johnson led us through the state, and in a city, I believe it was Dallas, we held a rally, and Senator Johnson read a letter from General Eisenhower, then President, to a prominent Texas Republican, and after the rally was over, I walked up to Senator Johnson and I said, "Senator, why in the dickens do you have to give the enemy such publicity? This is not in our interests." And he reacted very pleasantly, and I'm very happy to

say in view of the situation that has prevailed in the last seven or eight years that he has forgotten completely about it.

M: That's an interesting point. You were connected very closely with the Kefauver campaign, I believe.

D: Yes.

M: The general conventional wisdom is that the Kefauver campaign, I believe.

D: Yes.

M: The general conventional wisdom is that the Kefauver wing, so-called, of the Democratic party, and Mr. Johnson didn't get along too well.

D: Very accurate.

M: Did that influence the campaign importantly?

D: No, it didn't. It did influence our thinking of Senator Johnson, of course, and I will have to be completely honest to say that I was anything but a fan of President Johnson's until he actually inherited the White House. And then of course like everyone else I threw my sympathy and my support behind him and then watched him in his first hundred days when he did such a magnificent job and then as I worked for him directly, came to admire him more and more.

M: The 1960 campaign, then, the same division in the Democratic party, carried over insofar as you and presumably Senator Kefauver, other Kefauver people were concerned?

D: Yes, we weren't violently opposed to Senator Johnson, but we favored Kennedy.

M: And then you came into the Administration immediately with the Kennedy Administration.

D: That's right.

M: You were a news officer with the Treasury Department. Was that your responsibility primarily?

D: Well, let me back up a bit. I've been in government almost twenty years, on and off. And I first returned to the State Department in 1958 with the then-Under Secretary Douglas Dillon. I spent from 1958 until 1961 with him here in State. Then when he was tapped by President Kennedy to become Secretary of the Treasury, I went with him to Treasury.

M: That's what I mean. I didn't make the connection. I knew Douglas Dillon was both those things and didn't even consider it. So you were a personal assistant more than a news assistant. Is that right?

D: Yes, a special assistant. I was, at the Treasury, I was in charge of all information activities just as I am here. But it was a very close personal relationship.

M: I see. You were there, then, during the transition from the Kennedy Administration to the Johnson Administration?

D: Yes, I was.

M: Was there a noticeable change in Presidential policy regarding that department at that time?

D: Not Presidential policy but Presidential manner.

M: Can you explain that?

D: There was no change in policy, but quite frankly from the moment that President Johnson became President, you were very, very aware that there was a man in the White House who was extremely interested in everything you were doing in a very personal way. You could feel pressure from the White House. I don't mean this in specific instances. You were just awfully aware that great demands were being made on you, just as President Johnson made great demands on himself. And I think that I first became conscious of the President's interest in my particular field when, at a meeting of

public affairs advisers in the White House with Pierre Salinger, the President made a personal appearance. He explained that he expected a great deal from us, and quite frankly he didn't make too much of a hit at that meeting because at one point he used the expression, "Well, I could go to Dallas and get some high school seniors and they could do a much better job than some of you folks do." I happen to know that I was not included in this because I have been assured by his assistant that he considered that I was doing an excellent job. But I know that some of my colleagues left very chagrined. And quite frankly another meeting of that type was never held because the White House staff didn't want a recurrence of the "lecture".

M: But he didn't tell you to do anything differently in the way of news management generally?

D: No, we were never told that. However, not through the President personally but through his staff, for example, through Horace Busby in particular. I would receive word, "Well, Dick, we're moving down to the ranch this weekend and we would like some goodies to give out." Now, what Horace meant was that the White House didn't want to give the impression that because the President was out of town the government ground to a halt. And halt. And he wanted to have his various news secretaries in succession release news there which quite frankly was favorable to the Administration and also made news. I hadn't know it at the time, but I learned later that I apparently was the number one purveyor of useful news items or "goodies" as they were called. I made it a point to send only those things which were genuine and which would logically come out of the White House at that particular time. And you may have read that this system came "a cropper" because on one day at the ranch, Joseph Laitin then an assistant press

secretary at the White House, released nineteen separate items. This was too much for the press. And this helped to start a lot of the news management accusations.

M: The fact that there were more appearances of activity given out than could be justified by realities?

D: Right. Or the fact that perhaps half of those items could have more logically been given out by Interior or Agriculture rather than by the White House itself.

M: Right. During the years you were at Treasury, there were a number of issues that were major public news at the time. Obviously, the tax reduction bill and what the critics called debasing the coinage when the public began to hoard half dollars and quarters and things. Were there any of these issues that the President directly became interested in because of their news value, because of the publicity they were getting?

D: Not so much because of the publicity they were getting, but because of his interest in getting the legislation passed. You see, the first major tax bill was passed in 1962 under President Kennedy. Then the second major tax bill came along under President Johnson. And since he knows the Hill so well and is such an intense protagonist, he took a personal hand in promoting the legislation. However, I can't say that in my job in public affairs, I was ever conscious of any untoward interest on his part in these problems.

M: There was never a criticism from the White House about letting something get out of hand, for example, on the coinage business or any of this type thing?

D: No, not in that case. As I recall, the pressure from the White House in

my area, the one thing it concentrated on was the balance of payments program, and the White House inquiries, not relayed directly by the President but by other people was, "Well, why can't we get a better picture of what we are trying to do and why?"

M: In other words, the desire was for educational material being put out. That's a problem that no one understands anyway, no one in the public, I suspect.

Then in '66, when you came over here, what were the circumstances of your appointment to this position?

D: Well, you remember at the outset of our conversation, I said I thought I could give you some human interest stories about the President, so let me back up.

Over a period of many, many months, the period that I refer to as supplying goodies to the White House, I found that my staff and I were getting very generous treatment from the White House in the sense that Buz, as Horace Busby is called, and other staff members would either phone or else take the trouble to send notes; I can recall, for example, one note that I received from Buz which said, "Dear Dixon, I have just been with the President and I thought you would like to know that he is extremely pleased with the material that you and your staff are sending to him on a continuing basis." Well, this is a thoughtful thing to do. Since we were aware that the material we were sending was worthwhile, we were extremely pleased. As an afterthought, I would like to mention--

M: What kind of material had you been sending?

D: The goodies. For example, a statement on improvement of the balance of payments, the appointment of a highly qualified man to a new position, that sort of thing. Now, one thing I would like to add in parentheses

is that throughout my experience in government, and I have found that I have to reiterate this many times under President Johnson, the ultimate arsenal in our weaponry is the President of the United States and the White House. And I used to continually argue to use the White House as a launching pad for statements and publicity only when it merited Presidential attention and didn't debase the office of the Presidency.

M: And use up its credit.

D: Yes. That's one of the things I tried to consistently argue for. Now, after this period of supplying the White House with the "goodies," as I called them, I began to get indications of some personal interest in me on the part of the President. Oh, someone would say--George Reedy would say, "The President thinks you are one of the best information men in government." This wasn't displeasing, of course.

M: Certainly not.

D: Then, I had arranged, when Douglas Dillon left the Treasury Department, to return to the State Department which had always been my first love, and the day after Dillon left, I was in my office at the Treasury talking over a speech for the incoming Secretary, Mr. [Henry H.] Fowler, with a speechwriter when the phone rang. And a voice said, "This is so-and-so of the State Department. I understand you expect to come over here to be sworn in this morning." I said, "I certainly do." He said, "Mr. Donnelley, don't bother to come." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because the President personally called the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration last night and said, "I understand you folks are trying to field Joe Fowler's guy Donnelley. Leave him alone." I said, "So?" He said, "We wouldn't touch you with a hundred-foot pole." Well, I was flattered and at the same time angry. I talked to Mr. Fowler about it. He said, "Dixon, this was not my idea. The President talked to me the other night and said,

'Joe, now you are going to take on a tough job, and you know this town pretty well. I want to tell you to get yourself a Goddamn good press man because otherwise they will make an awful fool of you in this town.'" And Secretary Fowler said, "Mr. President, I've got the best one in the business, but the State Department is taking him away." He said, "I'll fix that."

M: Pretty easy to fix when you are in that position, too.

D: So I stayed in my job at the Treasury and was very pleased to serve Mr. Fowler, with whom I have been associated for several years and with whom I have an extremely good personal rapport. And after I had been with Mr. Fowler five or six months, Bill Moyers who by then was press secretary asked to talk to me. And he said, "Dixon, I'm looking for someone to become number two here who will eventually succeed me, and how about you?" I said, "Bill, thank you very much for the compliment; I had never thought of it." May I say quite frankly that the prospect of that particular job wasn't very enticing.

M: That's a bad one.

D: So over a period of at least three months Bill Moyers would have a conversation with me, and then I wouldn't hear any more; then I would hear from news friends around town that the White House was making inquiries about me, then finally Bill Moyers called me in and said, "Dix, just been talking with the President and he and I have decided that you're it." I said, "Why?" "Well, we figure we need seven qualities." And among the qualities he ticked off were professional background, knowledge of Washington, a political sense, some knowledge of foreign affairs. The final quality was, the ability to get the confidence of the President. I said, "Bill, that last quality I think is the most important one, and I'm

not sure I really can." He said, "We think you can." And I said, "Well, all right. You know, I had intended to go back to the State Department." He said, "I know that, but I won't be here forever, and if you come over here and work for me, you'll inherit my job."

M: What's the date roughly on this?

D: This would be just be just before Christmas 1965.

M: There was no public speculation about Moyers leaving at that time, was there?

D: No. There was private speculation among newsmen who knew that he wanted eventually to leave the job. I found, by the way, that in the meantime other people were being considered. For example, Ray Sherer, of NBC; Bob Fleming of ABC; Carroll Kilpatrick of the Washington Post. Just before Christmas, Carroll, an old friend, called me and said, "Dixon, I've got it on awfully high authority that you will be going over to the White House in the press office and eventually will succeed Bill Moyers." I said, "Carroll, I would consider it a personal favor if you wouldn't print that." He said, "All right, I won't."

In the meantime for understandable reasons Christmas was a rather hectic period in my family, especially because after Christmas Moyers asked if I wouldn't mind talking to other members of the White House staff. I knew that I was being looked over, and I talked to Jack Valenti, to Douglass Cater, I talked to George Reedy, and then I heard nothing. And I finally went to Fowler and I said, "Quite frankly, Joe, I'm getting awfully tired of this uncertainty, this blowing hot and cold. I think I would be very, very happy to stay right here." He said, "Gee, that's wonderful." A couple of days later, Moyers asked me to drop in and see him again. And he said, "Look, I think this is it. We will probably be

ready to move pretty soon." I said, "Bill, I just happened to learn that James Greenfield, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, is leaving. Now, you once told me that your first love was the Peace Corps." He said, "That's right." I said, "Well, my first love is the foreign service and the State Department. What about the State Department?" He said, "Well, I don't know."

So I went home and carefully composed a letter to Bill which I wrote frankly for the President's eyes if he saw it. I don't recall the text, but it was something to the effect that naturally I would serve anywhere at the pleasure of the President. It would be a tremendous honor to work at the White House, but perhaps in view of my background and experience I might be more useful to the President in the State Department. Bill Moyers phones me and said he had read the letter and implied that he had shown it to the President, but didn't say so, and said, "You will be hearing from me." By now, we were into late February.

M: This had gone on for several months by this time?

D: Yes. Rather nerve-racking experience.

M: Yes. I expect so.

D: By late February I was told by Moyers, "Well, I really think it's really set this time." Came March and the annual Radio-TV correspondents dinner was held at the Sheraton. I was at the dinner together with Ray Sherer, Bob Fleming, and two of the other people who were mentioned as candidates, and we all felt a little strange about this, even though we all knew each other; and during the intermission, I went to the men's room. In the men's room, I saw Pierre Salinger, who by then had long since left the White House, and Pierre said, "Well, Dix, it's all set. I know the job you are going to get." I said, "Which one?" He said, "Oh, you are going to get

the job you want--State Department. Bob Fleming's going to the White House." I said, "Wonderful," since Bob and I were friends.

The next day I was home with a nasty case of the flu, and Moyers phoned. He said, "Dix, how fast can you get down here?" I said, "I've got a bad case of the flu." He said, "Can you be down at my office by two o'clock?" I said, "Yes." I arrived, and this is the way things happen in the Johnson Administration. I found myself with Bob Fleming in his [Bill's] outer office at which point he told one of the girls, "Take these two up to the conference room upstairs." Bob and I went upstairs, and thank God we were friends because we sat there and otherwise we would have been sniffing at each other like strange dogs. So we tried to make conversation and think about what was going on, and just sat and sat and made jokes about, "Let's play poker." Finally, the same little girl came up and said, "You two, come on." And we followed her into what I now know was the anteroom of Marvin Watson's office. We stood there feeling foolish and not knowing what the hell was going on while one of his girls grinned at us and went back to her typing. Suddenly,the door opened; this was the door into the President's office. Laitin, I believe, said, "Hey, come on in here." So Fleming and I stumbled into this room with all of the TV lights on, and the President said, "And here they are." Well, he had obviously just announced our appointments.

M: But you still didn't know for what, officially.

D: Officially. And then, of course, there were congratulations, and the President said, "Now, you two stay behind." You see that little photo. This was taken by Oki, the White House photographer. This is the President on the right, I'm in the middle, Fleming on the left. The President spent about half an hour talking to us and telling us what

he expected of us, and why we were in our jobs. And he said to me, for example, "Now, Dixon, I don't like some of the things that have been going on in that department. You're my man. You get over there and you take care of them." I said, "Yes, sir." He also said, "Now, you see that white phone on my desk?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Now, you've got one on your desk, too. You just pick up that phone and you call me." Well, just between us, I've yet to make that one call. I figured I had one to make.

M: Haven't really needed it that bad yet?

D: Right. And after the conversation, the President said, "Dixon, you know something about Latin America. Come on along with me." So I went to another room, the Fish Room, as it turned out, and there was a large group of Mexican deputies, members of the Congress, and the President went around the room shaking hands, so I followed suit. Since I had been stationed in Mexico in our embassy, by happy coincidence I knew two or three of them, so we gave each other very violent welcomes. The President said, "Oh, you know him? Very good, very good." I said, "Yes, sir." Then I left, had a few drinks with my friends and family, and packed up and within a matter of days was here. Now, I realize that since you want anecdotes and I'm getting out of turn, because I've overlooked a couple that might be worthwhile.

M: Don't overlook any of them. I've got a lot of time.

D: We can splice this into the transcript later. Back in my Treasury days, at the time that I had been sending these goodies and before I was under consideration by the White House or knew that I was, the secretary to the Treasury, Secretary Fowler--called me and said, "He's coming over." I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "Look out the window."

I looked out the window, there was the President walking around the grounds with the reporters and photographers trailing behind, dog on a leash, and I said, "Well, fine, calm down." So I alerted the Secret Service and our own newsroom. And sure enough he came tramping along the corridor. He went into an office occupied briefly by the former President Johnson which Secretary Fowler had told him about, and it's now fairly much a replica of what it was like then.

I walked into the room, and Mr. Fowler said, "Well, Mr. President, I certainly don't have to introduce this fellow, do I?" And the President gave me the familiar grip and a hand on the shoulder and said, "No, you certainly don't. Doing a good job, you hear, boy?" I said, "Yes, sir." George Reedy and I wanted to get ahead of the group and the corridors were jammed, so I said, "Come on. I know a side way." And we walked down an inside corridor right into my office. And I should explain that my office in the Treasury, it's such an old building, was extremely large, and because it was so large I had the walls painted dark blue, turned out the overhead lights, had a red rug on the floor, and some lamps. So that at first glance it looked very attractive, and it was very restful. George and I had been in my office about a half minute, when you know who walked in. He said, "Is this your office?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Why, you've got a better office than the President of the United States!" I said, "Well, sir, it's only a coat of paint." He said, "That's all right. You see that coffee table there?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, I've got one just like it in my office. I want that table in my office full of pieces of paper from you to me, good paper for me to give to the newspapermen. Now, if you've got bad news you go to Joe Fowler here." I said, "Yes, sir." I've forgotten that anecdote.

M: That's a pretty revealing one.

D: Let me continue while I have it in mind. The day that I was leaving the Treasury a big party was given in my honor and I was standing in the reception line shaking hands with all the people and one of my assistants came along and said, "Dix, Dix!" I said, "What do you want?" He said, "Telephone!" I said, "I can't leave this line." He said, "It's the President!" I said, "Are you kidding?" He said, "No, I'm not kidding." So I went to the pay booth where I was being called--I don't know how to this day. I said, "Hello." "Now, Dixon." I said, "Yes, sir." "You tell them to stop what they are doing over there, you hear? I don't like it." I was desperately trying to find what it was all about. I said, "Yes, sir. What? Would you mind?" He said, "You tell that McCloskey I didn't like his statement." I immediately knew he was speaking about the State Department. I said, "I certainly will." He said, "You tell them to cut it out now." I said, "Yes, sir." So I called poor Bob McCloskey and found that by mistake he had been told to put out a statement on a cultural agreement with the Soviet Union which the President decided at the last minute he didn't like. That night Marianne Means, the columnist, and her husband, Emmett Reardon, had dinner with the President, and she told me the next day that she had witnessed this and he laughed and laughed and laughed and said, "Now, you tell Dixon I thought he was over at the State Department and I'm not mad at him yet."

M: Not yet.

D: And another anecdote is the day--the President occasionally picks up the telephone and calls people.

M: I was going to ask about that.

D: And once I went to the Cosmos Club with now Assistant Secretary John Leddy

of the State Department. As I had to because we are not free any more than the President is, we have to be in touch twenty-four hours a day, I left word that I would be at the Cosmos Club. And nothing happened until finally one of my assistants came tearing in and said, "Jesus Christ, Dix, the President is trying to get you." I said, "Why didn't they refer the call here?" He said, "We had a summertime replacement secretary on, and she got the call and said she didn't know where the hell you were." I never did hear from the President. I can imagine what his reaction was like.

M: Did you get back in touch with him then?

D: I tried to and found that he had gotten the information somewhere else.

M: Is that frequent? You know, the press stories are that he's a madman on the telephone calling people at all levels of government.

D: Oh, yes. He does. As a matter of fact, just reminiscing, I've been in the studios of Meet the Press, for example, with Mr. Dillon , or Face the Nation with Mr. Fowler, or Issues and Answers with Secretary Rusk, and after the show went off the air, someone would say, "Mr. Secretary, there is a telephone call for you. It's the White House." And it has been the President commenting on the show, if he liked it.

M: So he's paying attention to the media all the time and doing something about it immediately.

D: He certainly is. And I've been told, of course, as you've heard from innumerable news friends in all media that they were frequently getting a phone call from him either praising them or chewing them out.

Now, another anecdote out of my personal experience about him is the day that I mousetrapped unintentionally a very innocent man newly arrived from Minnesota, Under Secretary of the Treasury Frederick Deming.

M: One of our people is interviewing Deming this afternoon.

D: He's a protege of Hubert Humphrey. Deming had been on the job, oh, I think a week, brand new to Washington, and I happened to look at the news tickers and saw that DeGaulle was having his semi-annual press conference. Gold was very much in the news, and we knew that DeGaulle would have some nasty remark to make about the United States and gold. Then, George Reedy phoned and said the President was going to have one of his quicky press conferences. I said, "My God, George, does anybody know that he's supposed to go on about ten minutes after DeGaulle?" George said, "No, we didn't know that." I said, "Well, we'll try to find out what happens and rush a statement to you." We kept a line open to our Treasury attache in Paris who passed the word along from the radio what DeGaulle had to say about gold. We got it down fast on paper, and I went into Deming's office. He was meeting with about fifteen people, and I said, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but this is a crash thing. DeGaulle has just said this, the President is waiting for a comment, how about it?" He said, "Well, what do we do?" I said, "We've got to get one written fast." So, all the experts took out their long legal pads and began to write in longhand, and I said, "I'm sorry, this is no good." I called in one of his girls. I dictated something fast. I said, "Now, you people clean it up," which they did. And Deming said, "Now, what do we do?" I said, "Well, we had better get the statement back." At that point the phone rang. Deming's secretary came in and said, "It's the President!" And he said, "Yes, Mr. President. No, Mr. President. Yes, Mr. President. Oh, we know about it, Mr. President. Yes, we know you are having a press conference, Mr. President. Yes, sir. We've got a statement almost ready." He put it down and said, "That was the President!" I said, "I know."

In the meantime, I had been in touch with George Reedy. We finished the statement, got it cleaned up, and Deming said, "Now what do we do?" I said, "Well, let's get it back fast to George Reedy." So I got on the phone and said, "George, you've never met Fred Deming?" He said, "No." "Well," I said, "Mr. Deming, Mr. Reedy, and I'll put you on the phone together." Deming dictated our little statement to Reedy. He hung up the phone, and I said, "Well, it's going to be on live. Let's go into the Secretary of the Treasury's office and watch on TV." I've forgotten the time it was supposed to start, let's say eleven. We switched on NBC, I distinctly remember. Bob Garolsky and Ray Sherer were two of the commentators. Came eleven, nothing happened. And Garolsky said, "Well, Ray, I wonder what is holding up the President. He must be a little late. Probably something pretty important. Do you think so, Ray?" Trying to use up time, Ray said, "Yes, it must be something important. What do you think it could be--Berlin?" The phone rang, and the Secretary said, "Mr. Deming, it's the President." So he picked it up and said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, sir. Yes, sir, we've got it; yes, sir, we gave it to George Reedy. What? Huh? Oh? Yes, yes, sir." He hung up, and he said, "That was the President!" I said, "I know." "I told him we gave the statement to George Reedy. He said, 'Fred, when I call you and ask you something, don't you give it to George Reedy. Don't you phone your wife in Minnesota and give it to her. You call me!'"

M: And meanwhile, NBC was still waiting. And everybody else too.

D: I tell this story not out of any sense of maliciousness because I'm a great admirer of the President, but because I think it shows him as a human being.

M: Sure, and concern, too, about what's going on. What about his reputation for secrecy? He's supposed to be so intent on keeping everything under his vest until the last moment especially appointments and things of this

nature. Has this handicapped you in your job, say, over here?

D: It hasn't handicapped me, no. Except that, quite frankly, when I've known of an appointment coming up, in order to protect the man involved, I've done my very best to keep it secret because it's undeniably true that the President has gotten angry and changed appointments when they became public.

M: This has actually occurred?

D: It has actually occurred. But it has not handicapped my job. This is the President's way of operating. As he is fond of saying, he likes to keep his options. I don't blame him, quite frankly. If my wife asks me what time I'm going to be home tonight, I'll say, "By midnight," not eleven-ten on the nose.

M: This has not made you operate blind and left you out on a limb?

D: No, it hasn't. Any secrecy that has caused problems for my staff and me has happened here, because our liaison with the White House is excellent and our sources of information are very good.

M: I was going to ask about that. What kind of relations have you maintained with the White House press apparatus?

D: Couldn't have been better. Excellent under Salinger, under Moyers, under Reedy; and under Christian we began something new because since Christian had no foreign experience I inaugurated something which we found to be of tremendous use. As a matter of fact, I recommended it to Walt Rostow yesterday to be continued in the new Administration. Every morning at about ten o'clock, we have a conference call between the White House, the Defense Department, and the State Department. Each of us would have gone over the newspapers and the news tickers and the radio transcripts to see what is likely to come up in our area where we can give advice to the White

House or to the other agency. It works out extremely well. We then, in turn, receive what we call a read-out from the White House press briefing. We, in turn, will supply the White House and Defense with a read-out on what our spokesmen have to say. Then, just before the afternoon briefing at the White House which is roughly four, there will probably be another conference call. We'll discuss what might come up and we receive a read-out. In the meantime, we're in touch with each other on an hourly basis and if necessary all night long.

M: So you don't get at cross purposes.

D: No; quite frankly, what we are trying to do is to avoid all the news management and credibility gap hokum because they were mostly--the so-called credibility problem was due mostly to the fact that one agency might say one thing and another would say another. Usually, through ignorance of the whole picture.

M: Just a lack of coordination.

D: That's right. And this does not mean, by the way, that we are trying to manage the news in the sense of, "Well, you have to say this and we'll never say anything more." We just try to keep each other informed. We may not be aware, for example, that a statement we ought to make about the Philippines could very seriously interfere with a problem which the military is having there. We don't normally have that knowledge.

M: Right. But you do because of your coordination now on a regular basis.

D: That's right. And we have all come to know each other quite well on a personal basis. This is important. It's amazing how things happen in this town, where you presume someone else knows something and he doesn't. For witness, recently, by total accident we found out on a particular Sunday, Secretary Rusk was going to be on Face the Nation, Clark Clifford

on Meet the Press, and Walt Rostow on Issues and Answers. And I called the White House and I called the Defense Department, and I said, "For God's sake, we've got to break this up. We should have coordinated it in advance. We can't let this happen because we'll really be blasted as having monopolized all the major talk shows on Sunday. It was a complete accident.

M: Everybody thought the other one knew.

D: Yes, we just thought so. So as a result of that, that white phone is in a lot more use than it had been previously.

M: I think I remember that day.

D: I pulled Rusk off.

M: Right. And he was cancelled and went back a week later, two weeks later, or something like that.

D: That's right. It was just a little too Goddamned much, especially quite frankly speaking professionally because Rusk and Clifford would have been back to back in the sense of being on at the same time.

M: And without being able to hear what the other one was going to say.

D: Yes.

M: This could have caused problems. What about the responsibility of the press here? You say that the credibility gap is largely a matter of simple coordination. The press knows that, and yet they have made a good deal more of it than that.

D: Of course they have. It has been observed many, many times that the press is constantly at war with the President, no matter who he is. And you may remember Dean Acheson saying that the function of the Secretary of State differs completely from that of a reporter, that we are natural adversaries. We find that for the most part that the press is responsible,

but the press dearly loves finding government with its pants down.

M: But there's not any, you think, intentional unfairness?

D: On occasion, there is , yes, in isolated cases. Generally speaking, the Washington press corps is a pretty responsible corps. The men who cover this building, for example, are knowledgeable, they have to be, they are generally quite reliable. They can drive you crazy; as a matter of fact, according to Bill Moyers, when I was coming to take this job, he said, "I warn you, Dix, you talk to them individually and they are fine. But you talk to them as a group and they are like a pack of wolves; they will tear you to pieces."

M There has been some suggestion, made various times, that some of the so-called opinion-makers which included members of the press and various media who are distinctly Kennedy people have set out more or less intentionally to make it difficult for Johnson and for the other agencies in the Johnson Administration. Do you think that is accurate?

D: No, I don't think it is completely accurate. I don't think they set out intentionally. I don't think that Joe Kraft, for example, or Walter Lippman diliberately set out to trap and kill Johnson, to embarrass the Administration. I think it's just their natural prejudice in favor of Kennedy and instinctively against the country bumpkin with the big sombrero and the Texas drawl, just coming through.

M: But there is no conspiracy?

D: I just can't see that there is. I know too many of these people.

M: Is the same thing true with Secretary Rusk? You said, I think, that they are at war with all secretaries of state, but I think they have been perhaps more critical of Rusk than some of his predecessors.

D: And totally undeserved. This, of course, has been brought about by the

Viet Nam war.

M: The situation and not the man?

D: Yes, the situation and not the man.

M: Is Rusk's image that is frequently mentioned, the low-key type--is this at his insistence?

D: Yes, it happens to be accurate, too. You don't have to be instructed by a man how he wants you to work for him; uou sense it. And Rusk is low-key. He doesn't lose his temper except on a very rare occasion, and he's basically a modest man; however, he's quite a self-confident man.

M: How frequently does Congress influence or interfere in your operations here?

D: In those of my particular bureau?

M: Right.

D: Not interfere. I can recall only two direct inquiries, one by Senator Aiken asking why we were wasting money, the taxpayers' money propagandizing the American public, and I found that what he was talking about was the transcript of press conference of the Secretary. So I called Senator Aiken back, and I said, "Senator, I'm a little mystified." He said, "Well, I don't see the opposition viewpoint there." I said, "Well, Senator, this is a transcript of a press conference." "Well, let it go." Then Congressman Moss, of course, who has a special interest in information, has on occasion made inquiries.

M: What about the appropriations for the Bureau of Public Affairs? Now, Mr. Rooney doesn't much like the Bureau, I take it.

D: No. Well, let me put it this way. Mr. Rooney and I are good personal friends. I've known him for several years. However, Mr. Rooney has us as his special target and I can recall the first time I appeared before him

for my own budget hearing. We know each other as John and Dixon normally. But on the witness stand, he said, "Now, Mr. Secretary, you know what I think of your job, don't you?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "I think it ought to be abolished." I said, "Yes, sir." "You are dismissed." One of my colleagues was given a rough time. He began to pound on the desk, and Rooney said, "You're coming back here tomorrow and you are going to bring your boss with you!" I got my appropriation; his got cut.

M: Yours hasn't been cut appreciably by Congress?

D: No.

M: So he hasn't interfered with your activities?

D: No. I, by the way, have tried to keep a sensible budget. I haven't asked for tremendous increases. The only increases I have asked for have been a little bit in personnel, I received that, and a little bit in printing costs.

M: Were you involved among the others who were implicated in the Rooney campaign contributions?

D: I certainly was. I contributed $100 to his campaign for a very simple reason. A mutual friend, a newspaperman who introduced us years ago, called me and said, "John's in terrible trouble because he has got a very inept campaign." So I contributed.

M: This was not directed from any place. It was just a matter of friendship?

D: Rooney didn't ask me for it; no one from his office asked me for it. And no one in the State Department asked me for it.

M: When this was disclosed, did you get any flack from above about this?

D: No, I got a query from the Washington Post and they asked me why and I told them honestly, "He's a friend of mine, and we are both interested in foreign affairs." I was quoted. No one ever said a word to me further.

I later mentioned it to Secretary Rusk. He said, "You weren't solicited, were you?" I said, "Hell, no." I told the story.

M: Your best known office over here, I don't know whether it is the biggest or not, is the office of news.

D: Yes, it's not the biggest. It's the best known, of course.

M: And you mentioned Mr. McCloskey's activities awhile ago. How much decision rests with your bureau as to what information will be given in the daily briefings and how much is limited by, say, the geographical bureau? What's the relationship there?

D: Well, let's put it this way. It depends upon the urgency of the matter. We make the basic decision. If we see that certain information must be given out or should not be given our, or should be given out in a certain way--

M: You mean we being your bureau?

D: The bureau. And we won't go to the geographical bureau and say, look, you can't do this, or you've got to do this, or something of the sort. And we always have as a court of last resort the Under Secretary and the Secretary. We find by the way that the Under Secretary is inclined to give out, it is Mr. Katzenbach, a good bit more information than Mr. Rusk is.

M: So you go there first?

D: That's right. But we would never pull a fast one in a sense, because we know what's going to happen to a particular piece of news from experience, we know the repercussions, whether they are going to bang around the world, and we would never think of pulling a fast one and putting out something that we know has to be cleared without clearing it.

M: Is there frequently disagreement that has to be kicked up to the seventh floor?

D: No, no, there isn't. I can't recall any real hassles. It occasionally happens between other bureaus, but not with us. Presumably we know our business, and we do.

M: What about the occasional major flaps or perhaps mistakes that get made; the famous one in recent times, I suppose, is Mr. McCloskey's, "We are neutral in thought, word, and deed" in the 1967 Israeli war?

D: For history's sake, I'd like to, in defense of Mr. McCloskey, I would like to tell you how that came about.

M: Fine.

D: There's an amusing personal angle here. My wife and I were having a terrible time sleeping, so without my knowing it she turned the bell off on our telephone. Bam! the Middle East crisis broke!

M: That would be the night.

D: Mr. McCloskey tried to reach me, couldn't get any answer, so he came here at probably 1:00 a.m. By 3:00 a.m., all of the top brass in the department were here except Dixon Donnelley, and Mr. McCloskey overheard Rusk, Katzenbach, Rostow talking about the problem--

M: Eugene Rostow?

D: Eugene Rostow, the Under Secretary. And McCloskey overheard Eugene Rostow saying, "Yes, well, I suppose what we have to say is that we are neutral in thought, word, and deed." McCloskey didn't clear that with anyone since he had overheard this being used at a high level. He used it the next day in his briefing. I am inclined to think, I've never asked Eugene Rostow what he actually said, but since McCloskey is a Catholic, I'm inclined to think that he perhaps added the thought, word, and deed--that's a Catholic expression. And of course the next day Rusk, having told us he was going to do it, just had to knock McCloskey down and disavow him.

M: Do you get White House feedback on things such as this?

D: Oh, yes.

M: Is this when the white phone rings?

D: Oh, yes, oh, yes, all the phones in the Secretary's office were ringing. (What the Goddamn hell--."

M: In other words, the opinion over there of the mistake was well known. What about ones where you get into difficulty where it seems merely that you can't really explain what you are trying to do. I'm thinking at this time of the trouble you had defining what you meant by "bombing the center of Hanoi," for example? Why isn't it possible to make something like that clearcut?

D: This we tried to, we tried desperately to. But the military would simply not come up with an accurate explanation. And you may recall the principal problem there was a really silly question of, what is the center of Hanoi?

M: Where the city limits are and that sort of thing?

D: Right. And Defense wouldn't come through doing the job they frankly should have. So McCloskey overconscientiously made the mistake of doing military briefings here and that's how he got into trouble.

M: And he just couldn't get it straightened out?

D: He just couldn't get himself out of the quagmire.

M: The same thing is somewhat true of some of the peace-feeler stories that have been exposed here rather recently in the Loory, (Stuart H.) and Kraslow (David) book, [THE SECRET SEARCH FOR PEACE IN VIET NAM]

D: Well, in that connection the problem is that the peace feeler stories were too often put out by self-appointed peace negotiators, not by us and there are an awful lot of things that have appeared in print including the Loory and Kraslow book simply never happened or didn't happen that way.

M: Well, for example, most of their books are about the so-called Marigold

feeler. Why isn't it possible for your bureau to put out a genuine account of that when Poland is doing it and England is doing it, and Kraslow and Loory are doing it? Wouldn't it be better to put out the story from here, and why hasn't that been done?

D: Well, I frankly don't see any reason why we should keep going. We've moved to another phase. This is hindsight. Now our purpose is to achieve peace at the Paris talks.

M: So you feel in a case like that to try to keep on clearing it up would perpetuate it?

D: Oh, yes. Abraham Lincoln once said a very wise thing. He said, "The only time you should fight with a newspaper is when you own another newspaper." And this is a doctrine that I live by.

M: How do exposes of this type get written? Are they newspapermen leaking news?

D: No. Kraslow and Loory did a very, very thorough job. They talked to hundreds of people everywhere and pieced things together. So a lot of it is fairly accurate. I haven't read it, but I have heard this--that a lot of it is fairly accurate.

M: But they are not abusing the privileges they had as newsmen in this case, using things that the Bureau has given them on background--?

D: No, they are not. As a matter of fact, in line with this, you may or may not remember that roughly a year ago the Rand Corporation assigned a group of bright graduate students to put together a picture of our defensive posture and capabilities solely out of the public prints. They did, and when the Pentagon saw it, it was classified.

M: Because they--

D: It was intelligence work or good reporting.

M: Right. Piece it together. How often does a newspaper leak cause serious governmental difficulty? I'm thinking now of the famous leak on the Post Dispatch, I believe, the Fanfani Italian peace initiative channel which was blown by this story.

D: This is fairly rare. I would say once a month would be more often than it actually happens. I can recall, for example, a story that we had to disavow in very strong terms with a statement in the Secretary's name. This was five or six months ago when a reporter from the Washington Post had a story out of South Korea reporting that we had ships standing ready to evacuate the Pueblo crew, that we were about to pay a ransom. It was absolute hokum, and it had to be knocked down because it simply wasn't true, would have made us look bad in the eyes of the rest of the world, and it also would have deeply distressed the families when nothing happened.

M: Right. Is this just sloppy reporting usually?

D: Sloppy reporting or poor sources. For example, the night that denial of ours appeared, I happened to be at a party with the foreign editor of the Washington Post who, incidentally, is a brother-in-law of Secretary Rusk, and I said, "I'm sorry we had to do that to you." He said, "Well, I just stood by my reporter because he's a good reporter." I said, "I'm sorry his sources are no damned good."

M: That's an interesting point. You mentioned the foreign editor being the brother-in-law of Secretary Rusk. There seems to be a close connection with a lot of people who are official and people who are not official in various places. What about the charge that I think the New Left particularly likes to make that there is an establishment press or a government press in the United States, the Times, Post, the Star, the

Los Angeles Times?

From the viewpoint of the New Left, they are perfectly right because they are lumping the establishment into one hole--business, education, media, government. It's what we would normally call our general, bourgeois, middle-class series of institutions. You can call it the establishment.

M: But there's no official press?

D: No, none whatsoever.

M: When you want a story told, there is not a certain small number--?

D: By no means. It's always a temptation that government officials fall for too frequently, to plant a story with the New York Times by way of getting the most attention. I try to dissuade this, but it's human to try to do it.

M: Another facet of your activity over here, getting away from the news office now, is involved in getting the Department story told to the public. Of course, the preeminent issue in the Johnson period has been the Viet Nam war, and why do you think this has been unsellable to the large segments of the intellectual community and the press?

D: It's an unpopular war. The easiest sterotype you see or others saw from the very beginning was a little five-foot skinny fellow weighing a hundred pounds up against a six-foot-three, two-hundred pound American with the latest possible weapons. There was also the stereotype put out by the Communists that these people were fighting for their freedom, when actually wer were trying to protect the freedom of non-Communist Vietnamese. The war was unpopular. We used weapons that appeared to be unfair to the eyes of many against the weapons used by the Viet Cong. Just, incidentally, by the way, I have yet to hear any of our intellectual friends complain about the Viet Cong throwing hand grenades in movie theaters

full of women and children, and this happens.

M: Why hasn't this been a sellable reality? Why have so many people been unable to comprehend the administration--

D: Well, for one thing, and I'm going to quote Dean Rusk here, because we haven't attempted to declare a state of war and bring about a wartime psychology. We've done this deliberately in order not to excite the American people too much. Bear in mind, all other wars have had savings bond drives and rallies and all the rest of it.

M: Are there steps that you could have taken to sell the war--that's a simplistic phrase, but are there steps like that you could have taken and for some reason not taken either because of Presidential order or because of departmental policy?

D: Well, the steps I just mentioned.

M: I'm talking about news steps primarily. Example, Joe Alsop talks about all the captured documents to which he apparently has access. To my knowledge, there has been no massive use of these documents by official sources to sell policy.

D: No, because they would be suspect if they came through official sources. We have made them available.

M: I see. In other words, he's not using a channel here that's closed to others?

D: No, the same materials are available to others, but it's an unpopular story. Another problem, by the way, is the way the war has been reported. You certainly have heard the phrase that this is the first time war has been brought right into your living room.

M: Right.

D: And of course, TV inevitably pictures the dramatic, and the dramatic too

many times has involved violence. Now, since the American networks do not have camera teams with the Viet Cong, we don't see the Viet Cong setting fire to a thatched roof, and inevitably you see displaced refugees. Rather than recognizing that these displaced refugees are being cared for by us, the displacement is what strikes the people. And then there is another point, and that's the fact that the press corps in Saigon too often consists of youngsters who have no experience, certainly in war reporting, and no experience in anything involving that much violence.

M: They are overimpressed by what they see and overly react in the kind of stories they write?

D: That's right.

M: How effective are the techniques which you have used, the regional conferences and the literature that you put out, in influencing public opinion on the policies as important as Viet Nam? For example, I remember going to a regional conference in my home state where we were shown the film, Why Viet Nam?

D: Poor film, by the way.

M: I thought so.

D: It's a Defense Department film. Parenthetically, we don't have the money to produce films.

M: Oh, you don't?

D: So we do not have a real film program.

M: I see. Well, how does a film like that get out? That could make you some enemies, I suppose.

D: Well, the Defense Department did it, and our people mistakenly used it. We stopped from using it, but they had nothing else to show. No, I can't be entirely sure--we have reason to believe that our conferences

have been fairly successful--fairly. Our literature, fairly. I can't claim complete success by any means. We have tried.

M: You do measure in various ways in this Bureau public opinion on foreign policy matters?

D: We have no public opinion polls.

M: You don't?

D: No, we don't subscribe to them because of Congressional criticism.

M: I see. So, there is no--you have no way--

D: The only thing we do is we have one man here who cases the newspapers and magazines for us and gives us a weekly report of public opinion. But it's not accurate, scientifically compiled one.

M: I see. You do have the availability of knowing what kind of letters come into the White House?

D: Oh, yes. And letters that come in here. You see, I, for example, I personally answer about 100,000 pieces of mail a year with a facsimile signature, and you can imagine the kind of bloopers that happen in that fashion.

M: You mean--

D: We have automatic typewriters. We have a staff of five to handle them, and since it would require a staff of about 150 Ph.D.'s to hand-tailor the letters and we don't have them, we try to set up stock language, hopefully, that will answer. And, for example, I recently got a phone call from someone who said, "This is Professor Seymour Hayfitz" or something of that sort, "from Harvard." And I said, "Yes." He said, "Now, about this silly letter you sent me in response to mine." I said, "Look, I don't have to take that." He said, "Oh, yes you do!" And I hung up on him. And I rarely do that.

M: What about the White House mail? Has the President indicated an interest

in what kind of mail you are getting?

D: Oh, yes, very much so. As a matter of fact, he has personally ordered that letters that I sign for him, when appropriate, read, "The President has asked me to tell you."

M: I see. And what about the wording of the answer? That's done over here?

D: Yes. Over here. And in the case of key wording it is cleared with the correspondence officer at the White House, who, just incidentally, is usually a foreign service officer.

M: I see. So he does have some check on it?

D: Yes.

M: Do you take any of the mail that comes in to him, to the President?

D: Not from here. What happens is that it goes there, they will cull out what they think he wants to see, and send the rest to us.

M: I see. What is ultimately done with that--the mail that comes over here to you?

D: Well, it is answered.

M: Is it kept?

D: I frankly don't know. I suppose that we have to dispose of it for lack of storage space.

M: I'm sure from the standpoint of records--

D: They must be destroyed.

M: Because it's so phenomenal in volume.

D: I've instructed my people that any citizens who takes the trouble to write his government a letter and put a stamp on it damn well deserves a reply unless it's obviously a licentious, vicious crackpot.

M: Is there a lot of that?

D: Quite a bit of it.

M: To the President?

D: Oh, yes, to the President, to Rusk, to me. As a matter of fact, I don't know how they get my home address in California, it must be through a telephone book, but I receive vicious mail at home about the Viet Nam war.

M: Based on your job?

D: Not personal.

M: You are also in charge of the historical office in the State Department, which, of course, is my field of professional interest. Recently, at a professional meeting, there was a long discussion about the unfortunate lag of time in making records available. Is that a matter of appropriations that keeps the foreign affairs series from being caught up, for example?

D: It's that, but I must also tell you quite candidly it's sometimes a matter of policy. For example, our historians are very mad at me because I held up a China volume. I don't think we can possibly put out an honest China volume while Chiang Kai Shek is alive. And another case, a European volume is being held up because of correspondence involving bases in the Azores.

M: Is there really a lot of material that is critical enough that it is worth keeping away from scholarship for twenty years, I think that's current policy, twenty years?

D: Yes. Now you used the phrase "keeping away from scholarship," that sounds like a vested interest.

M: No, I didn't mean that at all.

D: No, we think that in fairness to the people who do business with us, we have to protect them for a certain period. For example, Dean Rusk will frequently make the statement, "I want any foreign minister to know that he can do business with me without reading about it in three years."

M: But at the same time that denies historians, for example, any chance to

have any impact on policy through what work they are doing.

D: Why not work directly with the State Department? Take part in policy, not after the fact. That would be after the fact if you are trying to influence based on old documents.

M: Do your historians have impact on policy?

D: Yes. Their studies frequently will guide us in a certain way.

M: Yes. They are utilized by decision makers at the time?

D: Yes. For example, they will look for precedents many times.

M: To justify a decision or to guide a decision?

D: Both.

M: Both. Well, this answers part of the criticism that was raised in this meeting I referred to, which was a very stimulating one. It had a government speaker from the Defense Department, which was the wrong place to have him from, rather than here--.

D: No. Dr. Franklin, our chief historian, keeps us constantly aware of the lag. We are quite conscious of it. But there is a genuine problem created by a lack of appropriations, enough personnel to do it. There is also, in a rare case, what I mentioned, a need to not release particular information at a particular time.

M: I know there are a lot of other activities in the Bureau of Public Affairs, many of which are pretty well recorded in writing. Do you have any more type of anecdotes or vignettes that you think would be appropriate here? Don't let me stop you.

D: No. Are you thinking in terms of the President?

M: Yes, particularly the President. But anything else of importance in the department's operation would be fine, too.

D: Yes. Well, no, let's continue about the President. And I don't think he

would shoot me if he could hear these anecdotes I'm telling about him.

M: He thinks that if the truth is told entirely that it will work to his benefit.

D: Oh, I think so, too. Having started out as a non-Johnson fan, I sure have become a very, very firm admirer of his. And I say that in all sincerity. Even if this would be classified for twenty years. The President's liking for what you call secrecy, meaning keeping his options in his phraseology, and for last-minute decisions has caused us in this bureau frankly quite a bit of trouble. Whenever we have a large conference here, and we run the conferences, we like to give him an opportunity to come and address it or meet with its members if he thinks it's going to be attractive. And we've gone through a horrible experience many, many times when we have written, say, three months in advance and as the days near we've got to complete our program, we still get no answer from the White House. And too many times we get words either hours before or a day before. And the worst experience we've had was when we had an extremely large conference, I believe of editors and broadcasters, in our auditorium. At about six-thirty the night before the conference, one of the White House staff phoned me and said, "The President is coming over tomorrow probably. I'm sending a man over." So that meant that I had to get six people and together with some workmen they worked all night tearing out rows of seats in order to put up TV platforms, because naturally the President was going to be covered, making this sort of arrangements, and we had to empty the auditorium and then refill it, the security problems, all the rest of it, and I learned my lesson. So after that, I never again invited him to attend the conference itself, but to attend the reception on the eighth floor because that way if you got

only three minutes of advance warning, and this has happened, and you could handle it and take it in stride.

M: No TV coverage?

D: Yes, you can get TV coverage. But the problem--no rows of seats to be ripped out. And I always arranged to have a podium and a microphone set up just in case and it has happened to us time and again that he has arrived unexpectedly and the--one of the most recent examples was at a conference of educators. Throughout the afternoon, it had been on again, off again, I was in constant touch with the White House, and I would be told, "No, he doesn't like the speech, no, he doesn't want to come. No, he's got to go up to the Hill," and I kept telling my people, "Just be prepared, hold on for it." Finally, I called Secretary Rusk and said, "Look, we are not sure whether the President is going to come or not. Why don't we invite the Vice President?" He said, "All right." So we invited the Vice President. The Vice President arrived. We still didn't know if the President was coming, so I saw the Vice President and we went through the usual, "Well, Mr. Vice President," "Well, there, Dixon, how are you?" "Oh, just fine, thank you, sir." (under my breath--"Will you help us out? We think he's on his way in about ten minutes. Could you take over for me, please?") "Yes, sir, certainly will." So good old Humphrey in his wonderful way stood up for fifteen or twenty minutes and extemporized about the teaching profession. Then I got a signal he was coming, and I said (under my breath), "Okay, Mr. Vice President," and of course in he strolled.

M: Just like it had been planned for days?

D: Right.

M: Who writes the statements that are made on instances such as that?

D: By the President?

M: Yes.

D: On occasion a draft will be prepared here. And then it would be taken over by Doug Cater or one of the professional speechwriters at the White House.

M: But you don't have a major part in preparing his statements normally?

D: Usually not. Usually not, no.

M: I see.

D: Now, that was not true at the Treasury. And the reason for it is, of course, that Treasury subject matters are so complicated.

M: There they are prepared more or less--

D: Yes, because it's so difficult that the average White House staff writer can't handle it.

M: What about your personal experiences in regard to the transition time? Has it been as smooth as the press has let it seem?

D: Oh, yes, incredibly so. And I was involved in a previous one, from the Eisenhower to the Kennedy Administration, which was quite hectic.

M: In the same department.

D: Yes.

M: So you got a really good view?

D: Yes. This has been quite smooth. As a matter of fact, the so-called new team has been pretty much out of sight and very, very discreet. No weight has been thrown around. This provides a problem for us. We don't really know what is going to happen.

M: Have the new occupants of all the assistant secretary levels pretty well been named?

D: No. None have been named.

M: Oh, none have.

D: A couple have been asked to stay on, but none have been named.

M: Doesn't that pose a problem of what to do?

D: It certainly does, because I was prepared to take my paintings and my books out of here Sunday night, and I was told, "No, don't do it yet. Wait until your resignation is accepted."

M: So you don't know yet in your case?

D: No.

M: That's almost saying the transition is smooth because it is nonexistent in a case like this. Is there anything else you would like to add? Don't let me stop you.

D: Well, there is no sense in my rattling on about the State Department. I am trying to concentrate this on the President. I'd like to add one other anecdote. May I add, by the way, that I'm far from being alone in this. I think Lady Bird is one of the greatest public women we have ever had. She is absolutely marvelous.

M: Not alone, you are almost unanimous.

D: She is a marvelous person. And I can tell you something that might be of interest to future writers. In my days at the Treasury, one of my staff said, "Say, this is a terribly hot August day. The President's wife is downstairs on the steps." I said, "Oh?" So I went down, she was there, just with the Secret Service man and John Secondari, an ABC producer. I said, "Hello, Mrs. Johnson." She said, "Hello." I said, "May I help you?" She said, "No, thank you very much." She was standing there, it was a horribly hot windy day. What she was rehearsing for was the ABC show she did on "Washington the Beautiful," I think it was called. And I've rarely seen anyone work harder. She said, "All right, Mr.

Secondari, do you want me to turn toward the Capitol, and say, 'and in this direction,' then I say the following. Then I turn around this much, look at the White House, and then at the cameras. Is that correct?" She worked like the dickens at it.

Oh, some other anecdotes, sort of about the President--which, since they are so personal and are human may be of help. Soon after I took this job, I had a very serious bout of illness, so much so, quite frankly, that I wasn't sure whether I could continue in the job, and this preys on one's mind, of course. And Rusk, like the gentleman that he is, sent word to me, "Just relax, get well, and come back." When I got back to the office, I was pretty shaky, and there was a White House reception coming up, and I thought, "Well, since the President knows that I've been out sick and there had been stories in the paper about me being replaced because I'm so sick, I'm going to go over and show the flag." And I stood in line feeling very, very shaky, got up to the President who hadn't seen me in I don't know how long, we were never intimates, and he took my hand in both of his big paws and said, "How are you Dixon? How are you? I know you've been terribly sick." I said, "I'm just fine, Mr. President." "That's wonderful. Glad to have you back." I don't think this was feigned. I don't think this was put-on. On another occasion after I had completely recovered, at another White House reception, my wife was with me. As we went up the receiving line, the President held her hands in his and said, "Now, listen here little lady, I don't want you to be mean to your husband, you hear?" She said, "What do you mean, Mr. President?" He said, "Well, I know he comes home pretty late and works weekends, and some wives bawl their husbands out. Now, don't you bawl him out, you hear?" "He's working for me." She said, "No, Mr. President, I certainly won't."

Then another anecdote. I went to Central America with the President this past July, and we returned to San Antonio. I told George Christian that I had never been to the ranch, and I darn well would like to go to the ranch. So George picked up the phone and called the President, and the President said, "Sure, get a chopper and come on out." George and I were the only visitors that day, and we did it in fine White House style. We got a chopper, flew out to the ranch, and soon as we arrived, the President threw down the papers he had been working on, and took us into a brand new Lincoln Continental, white. He said, "Come on, let's see the place." He drove us for three and a half hours over the ranch. He obviously loved it. And he would stop and he'd say, "Dixon see those flowers off of that field?" I would say, "Yes, sir." He would say, "Ever seen anything more beautiful than that?" I would say, "No, sir." He would say, "Let's go see them closer." And then, bam, bam, bam, on the rocks we would go up and see the flowers.

M: Blue bells of Texas.

D: And then Lyn-a got into the car with us and I was surprised to see the relationship because we were looking for a herd of deer, which you probably know he has. I think they are Indian deer, I'm not quite sure. And she would say, "Sir, two o'clock." Air Force style. There they were. We had an absolutely marvelous time. And when I was leaving, I said, "You know, Mr. President, I don't normally do this, but I would like to get something for my daughter." He said, "What's that?" Well, when I arrived, I had been wearing the only hat I own, a little little baseball cap, because I suffered terribly from sunburn. He said, "What's that?" I said, "It's the only hat I own." He said, "Oh." So as we left I ran back to the car and said, "Mr. President, would you autograph this for my daughter?"

(pulls out something from drawer)

M: So there it is--Lyndon B. Johnson on the bill of a baseball-golfing hat there.

D: And I said to George Christian, "George, I hope he didn't mind me doing that." George said, "Naw, he loved it."

M: I expect so. What about the newsmen at the ranch? Does the ranch impress the news correspondents adversely or favorably?

D: Well, let's put it this way. The ranch impresses them, but San Antonio and Austin are, after Palm Beach, quite a contrast in the same way that to the average Eastern establishment newsman, Johnson is quite a contrast after Kennedy. And I know that the majority of them quite frankly hate going down to San Antonio and Austin. However, those who have been to the ranch, and not all of them have been, are extremely impressed with it.

M: Not all of them have been?

D: No.

M: How does the decision get made as to who?

D: They go in pools occasionally. And, also, by the way, I should have mentioned that the reason I asked to go to the ranch is that Hugh Sidey who writes the Presidential column for Life once said to me, "Dixon, you'll never understand the man you work for unless you've seen him in Johnson country. This is true. I even went to the trouble of going to the Johnson birthplace.

M: Now, of course, Sidey writes a book based pretty much on the President as a man which the President apparently doesn't think is very accurate. How does that happen?

D: Well, I haven't read Hugh's book. I've found that, generally speaking, his

pieces in Life were sympathetic.

M: I thought quite sympathetic.

D: Quite sympathetic. As a matter of fact, while we were driving around the ranch on the day I mentioned, Johnson turned to Christian and said, "George, how do you think that trip came out?" And George said, "Oh, very well." And Johnson said, "Well, let's read Life next week and see whether Sidey got mad because we didn't ask him whether we could do it."

M: Does the President pick out favorites in the press corps because of what they write or because of whether he likes them or not? This type of thing?

D: Oh, I think it would be fair to say that he probably does pick out favorites. Not only because of what they write but because of personalities. For example, he's always been--always had special favorites--Marianne Means, Bill White, Carroll Kilpatrick. There are other names I could mention, I don't recall offhand.

M: Has he maintained close favoritism of this type for anybody who has been critical?

D: No, I don't believe so. People do fall out of favor.

M: None of those three, of course, are noted for being critical of the President.

D: No, people do fall out of favor.

M: You've been most helpful. I think it is an extremely helpful interview. If there is anything else you want to add, say so.

D: No, I think that does it. I've given you all the cream of the anecdotes I have about Johnson.

M: That's exactly what we are interested in getting.

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By Dixon Donnelley

to the

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