INTERVIEW I

DATE: AUGUST 4, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: FREDERICK G. DUTTON

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

PLACE: Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

B: Sir, let me mention some things here because I think they ought to be in the transcript.

D: Right.

B: You were the Organizing Director of the John F. Kennedy Oral History Project, and I assume you have made a tape for it.

D: Yes, I have already. I did not particularly touch on President Johnson.

B: Yes. We'll probably cover some of the same time from a different point of view. And you're also right now Executive Director of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial. May I ask, do you plan to have a historical project in connection with Robert Kennedy?

D: Yes. The National Archives--What's his name? John Stewart is actually organizing that, and there's a committee, Arthur Schlesinger, three or four other historians. I'm on it just for the continuity from the JFK project. They're planning to have about thirty-five interviews before the end of this year, primarily with members of the family, and then move out into broader. . . .

B: I see.

D: It'll eventually go in with the JFK.

B: I thought we'd just mention it as a clue to anyone using this material.

D: Right.

B: Now, one more preliminary just to give the transcript some basis. You were born in Colorado but moved to California, attended the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford Law School in the forties.

D: Right.

B: Law practice in San Mateo, active in politics in California. You had important positions in the Stevenson campaign there in '56 and in Pat Brown's gubernatorial campaign in '58.

D: I headed that one, yes.

B: And you served in the Brown Administration?

D: Right.

B: Now, when in this process did you first become acquainted with or have any knowledge of Mr. Johnson?

D: I came back to Washington either late '59 or very early 1960 with Brown. I was his Executive Secretary. Johnson, Mr. Rayburn and Bobby Baker were particularly interested in talking with us those times. Bobby, in fact, had a dinner party with a bunch of administrative assistants for the Hill one time when I came back on various state business. We had Mike Manatos who was then the administrative assistant to one of the senators--Senator O'Mahoney of Wyoming--and others. And they had a party, anyway, in my honor

at the Statler Hotel. Frankly, it was mainly a romancing to try to get me interested in helping Senator Johnson and his delegation in California.

B: This was aimed at the presidential nomination?

D: That's correct. Yes.

B: When did you say this was, sir?

D: Oh, I would guess this was in February, January or February of-- I'm not sure. It was between November of 1959 and February of 1960. Bobby had it, and there were about thirty to thirty-five people from the Hill present. I was green and from California and had only come to Washington about twice, and in the middle of the dinner Senator Johnson and Sam Rayburn showed up. I've got a picture at home of me between them, which is a choice thing to keep.

B: Yes, indeed. Pretty hot romancing for--?

D: Oh, yes, considering that I was new and green. I was the main political guy for Brown, so there was some value from their viewpoint. But it was pretty heady stuff.

B: What was your impression then of Mr. Johnson's chance for the nomination?

D: Well, I never thought from the very beginning that he had any chance in terms of California. [Its] Democratic Party [was] too liberal and so forth like that. I had not been--later on I worked for John F. Kennedy, but I didn't come around to him until, say, April or May of '60. At this stage I was wide open. My interest was primarily what was good for Brown. I was working for him. My

personal reaction was that, I thought that then (and this just isn't after the fact) Senator Johnson, obviously [was] a very able and a strong-willed man, was too hard a sell from a political viewpoint, too much pressing. I was too naive, green, I guess insecure, and let's say I was overwhelmed, but I was not overwhelmed sold. I was sort of overwhelmed wanting to say to pull back.

There were a couple of other just incidents during this general period which are relevant, too. Brown had been on "Meet the Press" in I would say August or September 1959. As governor of one of the two biggest states, of course he was widely looked on for who he was going to be for. What were California Democrats going to do in '60? Towards the end of the program, Mark Childs asked him a question: "What about Lyndon Johnson for President?" This is, I'll say, with five minutes to go at the end of the program, it was being done in LA at the Burbank studio, and Pat said, well, he greatly admired Senator Johnson, but just too conservative. Texas was the wrong base in terms of the racial problem, and besides, he was too much captive of the oil companies, which was tough. Brown basically, I think everyone knows, is a cautious, sort of equivocating politician to some extent, and for him to have said that was far more candid in the public way than he would ever have been except under the pressure of "Meet the Press."

The relevant part to this was that the program had not been over more than thirty seconds when one of the assistants in the studio said, "Governor Brown, Senator Johnson is on the phone."

And Johnson mishandled that in that Pat I think was winnable or even could be intimidated to some extent. But Johnson over the phone--I wasn't listening but I talked to Pat immediately afterwards--was so furious. The funny thing was he was less furious over Pat's comments on oil and civil rights and the rest than that he ended his comments by saying, well, he just didn't think Senator Johnson could win. Which, you know, is the worse thing to say about a politician.

And then a follow-up on that particular incident was when Pat and I came back to Washington, D.C. and I can't quite remember when this was. We went into his office up in the Senate, and Mary Margaret Wiley--that was her maiden name, yes--had her desk in the same room. One of the interesting things about the Senator's desk; it was, even though as everyone knows he's a very tall man, just very slightly elevated, I don't know why. Brown came in there, and here he was Governor and being romanced again. Johnson continued to romance him, but apparently he must have thought, because he always knew what he was doing, that Brown could be intimidated. Because in front of me and another California Democrat by the name of Don Bradley, he gave Brown just another tongue-lashing that went on for about five minutes. My reaction again, strictly as an outsider, was, "What the hell? How does he think he's really going to pull this one off?"

Another occasion during this same general period, where instead of using the stick he used the carrot. Pat and his wife and

Dick Tuck and I were invited out to Johnson's home out in Maryland on a Sunday morning. We got there about I'll say nine or nine-thirty, stayed I think until one o'clock, and had Sunday breakfast with the family. The girls came down in housecoats and very informal. My main reaction was it was the first time I ever saw Senator Johnson's conversational capacity. I would say he started talking at nine-thirty or ten o'clock, and if anybody else in the room got in more than ten words in a row or five minutes in all within the two and a half hours, it would have been amazing.

B: All this conversation on politics?

D: No. Quite a bit on politics, but Johnson, as you remember in that stage, or, I think, always he didn't like to ask people for votes and things like that. No, he was sort of a juggernaut talking about the world, the Senate, the country, American history. He was impressive. He was able as can be. But some of the personality difficulties that I think he had as President were, at least by my lights, evident then. [He was] too compulsive a talker, came on too strong, just didn't really want to get your respect or your affection so much as he just wanted to dominate you or overwhelm you.

B: In the meantime, was anyone else working on the California delegation?

D: Basically not. No, this was the problem. Now if you'll remember, in the primary situation in 1960, President, or Senator Johnson at that stage, made a mistake of not being willing to say he was an all-out candidate. It frustrated Baker and the rest of them out of their minds. And no one--Earle Clements, for example, who had been

Johnson's whip in the Senate and then had been beaten in '56, and as much as anybody was organizing the Johnson effort, even more than Baker. He came out [to California]. I had been a good friend of his in a casual way since '56 and knew him and Bobby a little bit. He was a courtly, diplomatic sort of--and I like him still--sweet-talking Southern politician, and he did it right. But he never could try to line anybody up because he couldn't give any assurance that his candidate was going to go. I still don't think California would have gone for Johnson.

I remember just before the 1960 Convention in Los Angeles there was a dinner for Johnson. He didn't show up at the last minute, which was another one of his faults. It was at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. I think, Ben Swig held it, although Swig was for Kennedy. George Killion, an old Johnson friend, President of the American President Lines at that stage actually, and India Edwards was there, and I forget who all. I went, I'd been invited, and they knew by that stage that I was for Kennedy. It was a very nice dinner, but here again Johnson was trying to work too much through (the same thing he did as President) the power brokers, the intermediaries, at a time when mass media politics, particularly in California, were coming on strong. Kennedy had been using public relations, popular magazines, glamour and so forth like that, and Johnson was still thinking that there were people in the Democratic Party who could deliver "X" number of votes. Now that's true, I guess, in the South and some other states, but they hadn't

done their homework on California. It wasn't true then, and it isn't true now and hasn't been true for a long time.

B: Did any of the Johnson men like Earle Clements ask you for your advice on this?

D: Yes. I talked to them, and they got it completely frankly, as I think both Baker and Earle would say. My guess at the time, and I guess it has tended to be confirmed since then, was that they couldn't sell their principal on it. I don't think it was anybody's fault. I think Johnson's strategy was obviously to maximize his role and prestige as Majority Leader in the Senate, and he thought that the country would come around to that. In fairness to the man, I think that he always thought that duty and service and public office for its own sake would be rewarded. He had a failure to recognize, I think, the extent to which psychological factors, public relations techniques, other considerations, were coming in.

I happen to believe that, even though I don't like the characterization "public relations," that we're atomizing political power. It's a desirable thing; television and education, affluence, so forth, are wiping out the intermediate power brokers. I think this is a desirable development, but it's something that I don't think Senator or President Johnson entirely comprehended. He'd been conditioned in an earlier period of our political life.

B. How did Governor Brown stand on the eve of the Los Angeles convention?

D: Well, in his way he was a whirling dervish. He had originally started out strongly for Kennedy. As he got under pressure, less, frankly, from the Johnson people, who were understanding and sophisticated political types, but more from the Stevenson people who then had gone to the grass roots, Pat started suddenly trying to hedge and pull back and so forth like that. And at the end, Unruh and I. . . . Here I was still Brown's Executive Secretary, and I was working my heart out or something else for Kennedy. Pat was equivocating, and Johnson I'm sure couldn't understand that.

Let me just say I was talking on the phone quite frequently then with Bob Kennedy. He was putting together the delegates for his brother, and he couldn't understand how he could call me in the Governor's Office across the hall from Pat. I was Executive Secretary and the chief political operator, and I was working like hell for Kennedy and Pat, in his public statements and by then even in his heart, was quite the opposite. Brown's Roman Catholic; I'm not. Pat in '59 had been for Kennedy, I think because he admired him and liked him,but I also think, and with no derogation, that he would like to see the first Roman Catholic President break that problem. But the closer he got to the Convention the less he was for Kennedy, and the more he was uncommitted.

B: It's been suggested that the Stevenson boom in the California delegation was a Johnson move, part of an effort to stop Kennedy on the first ballot.

D: That is partly true. I think the main bulk of the Stevenson vote was for Stevenson. It was the, what I would call, liberal wing of the Democratic Party thinking that Kennedy was too conservative. Which as I told Bob at the time, I thought that he was too. I just thought in terms of our internal problems, that he made more sense for us in California, and he was obviously an able person. He'd gone to the country and sort of stood the test of fire.

In response to your question, though, it's absolutely true, because I was working the floor, that there were some individuals who were for Johnson who switched their vote to Stevenson because they thought that that would show there was a Stevenson boom on and Stevenson possibly could tie up the delegation to preclude a first ballot nomination. One individual, for example, was the Chairman of the state Democratic Party at that time, he's now a Superior Court Judge in Los Angeles, by the name of Bill Munnell. Bill had originally been a Kennedy guy, gone to Las Vegas with Jess Unruh in November of '59, talked with Kennedy, and Kennedy thought he was for him. Then Munnell visited with President Johnson somewhere or other and suddenly became a strong Johnson supporter and ended up on the floor of the Convention voting for Stevenson. There were some people who were voting for Stevenson as a sort of a port in the storm, trying to avoid . . . . Symington was used the same way. That is true.

B: Are the Johnson men being better strategists now at the Convention

D: You mean in '68?

B: In '60.

D: Oh, in '60. No, I don't think so. They were still playing what I would consider manipulative politics in a period of public relations politics, and I use both phrases because I think you can fault both of them. But my fundamental criticism of President Johnson's Presidency was that he was an excellent inside politician or inside operator. He understood what I call a finite system magnificently. He never learned to deal, in my opinion, with an unlimited environment of variables, whether it was the American electorate or whether it was the international scene. He needed to have a chess board and work that. But he thought in terms of pre-Convention, or in the Convention, it was always something that was manipulatible. That was not true. California was the least state where that could be worked, and American politics are less and less so. JFK was one of the main ones that broke that down, but I don't think you can personalize the thing,because it's technological and other considerations that are doing that.

B: This is out of the chronology, but it occurs to me right now. Did you ever discuss just this thing with Mr. Johnson, say, in connection with the '64 election?

D: Yes. To jump to that. Just as background; I had been Assistant Secretary of State and was called over to the White House one day, I'll say in March or April of '64, by Bill Moyers. He said the President wanted me to resign as Assistant Secretary of State and

become Executive Director of the Platform Committee and then be director of research and planning for the Presidential campaign in '64. I think you'll find in the files unlimited papers, correspondence between me and the President and between me and Moyers on all this. I said it in diplomatic ways. After the '64 election, before he went off so hard on Vietnam, I was involved for a while trying to talk about the next four years and exactly this problem. Moyers I thought had come to understand it. Whether the President had or not, I wasn't that close to him. To go back chronologically . . .

B: Back to the chronology, I had one question in view of manipulative politics.

D: Right.

B: One would suspect that Johnson might have made an offer or a promise of a Vice Presidential position to Brown. Anything like that?

D: No. Absolutely nothing ever like that. That was in the papers; that Johnson would: one, unhinge California from Kennedy; two, would respond to the Catholic situation by offering Brown, a Catholic governor, the Vice Presidential thing. That was never discussed to the best of my knowledge. I'm positive I would know about it. I was so much in all that stuff. I think that, as is always done in those periods, there were all kinds of people being maneuvered and romanced, wooed in all kinds of ways. But no, there was nothing in the way of a promise or even hint. If Johnson ever did

anything like that he telegraphed the punch through the papers, which you know is not uncommon. But no, there was nothing anything like that.

B: Excuse me, were you getting ready to say something?

D: No. No. I was just going to go back. I really think that's the extent of any of my involvement in the '59-'60 period.

B: One other area there. What was your reaction when the Vice Presidential position was offered to Johnson?

D: Surprise. I thought it was, in a very casual and passing way, a mistake in that Johnson was difficult for California to carry. I think I was completely wrong. I think that it was, in retrospect, essential for Kennedy to get elected. Johnson made a great contribution to the ticket in '60, and in a purely political way.

B: Did the offer or the acceptance surprise you?

D: Both did. I was not involved at all. I had dinner with Bob Kennedy alone in his room at the Biltmore Hotel the night before that happened, and I had no inkling. I was totally surprised. I was totally outside that, couldn't contribute anything to it here.

B: There's been a good deal of speculation that although John Kennedy was firm on making the offer of the Vice Presidential position to Johnson, that Robert Kennedy might not have been so keen on it.

D: I've read that, heard that. Frankly, [I] couldn't contribute anything on it. In that period I knew Bob Kennedy fairly well, modestly. He never discussed it. I knew him very, very well in later years, probably as well as anybody the last four months of his life, and we just never discussed that one way or another. So

I've got nothing that I can contribute. After the Convention, the next morning, President Kennedy called me over to his Biltmore suite and asked me to go to work in the campaign, leave Brown, which I was excited [about] and wanted to do. Of course, the offer and the acceptance of the nomination by Johnson had passed over quickly in the euphoria of the situation. I came back East and was Deputy National Chairman of the Citizens for Kennedy and Johnson nationally, but didn't have anything to do with--the Vice President's campaign of course was run entirely by them. It was spun off. I have nothing to contribute to that period one way or another.

B: You weren't involved in any kind of liaison or coordination with the Johnson campaign?

D: No. Byron White and I were in charge of setting up citizen's organizations across the country to try to broaden the base beyond the Democratic Party, and my total tie-in was with Bob Kennedy every day. I used to see Bobby Baker infrequently in a purely casual way, but just nothing substantive. I have nothing to contribute one way or another on that.

B: Among the people you were working with, was Johnson ever thought of or considered at all?

D: Yes. As far as we were concerned, this Citizens for Kennedy and Johnson operation, which is the one outside the National Committee, he was invaluable. Our primary function was to broaden the base, to pull in conservatives and independents and things like that.

And Johnson from his background, was quite useful with that independent vote, business vote, moderately conservative vote.

B: Johnson's sources helped on the financing too?

D: I understand they did. I just wasn't involved in that. Steve Smith handled that, both in the National Committee and in our operation. I don't know anything about it.

B: After the election were you in on the process of forming the new Administration, selecting personnel?

D: Yes.

B: You ended up on the White House staff.

D: Right. Yes. I did some recruiting, didn't have anything to do with Johnson in that period. What Kennedy did essentially in that period, to be very brief: He set up two separate groups to recruit people so he would have two channels of information. One were those in the political side, Kenny O'Donnell, Sorensen, O'Brien, Ralph Dungan, myself and others. And then separate from that in an entirely different building he set up Sarge Shriver and people who had not been that really active in politics before, to go out and, let's say, get people from the academic community, the business community, non-political types.

Then we each fed in names and prospects, and that system gave Kennedy a choice between more than one selection. He didn't have to rely just on political channels feeding him up one or two people, all of whom were politically acceptable. And in effect, it worked very well. I personally think it's the best model that's

been developed, because, let's say, the political types were competing with the non-political types and vice versa to see whether or not they could get their guy. I think it raised the caliber. It kept the politicans from just taking hacks or loyalists, and it kept the others from going out in an abstract way and not building an Administration with some political muscle in it.

B: Did Johnson have anything to do with this process?

D: Not to the best of my knowledge. I just wouldn't know. By that stage of course he and Kennedy were working directly with each other, and Harry McPherson I remember vaguely around a little bit at that stage. Bobby Baker was around. My work didn't tie in directly with them. Let me just say that my next real contact with Johnson was on the White House staff; I was secretary of the Cabinet in charge of liaison with the major departments, and made a minor goof with him. Nobody got burned by it, but it could have been a difficulty for the first Cabinet meeting, which is really, purely a symbolic exercise.

One of the ironies of the organization of a new administration is you begin to crank up and learn your responsibilities, but we didn't go into the White House until the morning of the Inauguration, really, to get locked in to where our offices were. The result is great confusion. All the files have been cleared out by the outgoing administration. It's just a bare, stark scene at best. Kennedy wanted his first Cabinet meeting, he wanted the Cabinet sworn in the next day. There were all kinds of ceremonial

receptions and breakfasts and that kind of nonsense, and we almost missed including the Vice President on the first Cabinet. He got his invitation somewhat after the rest of them. I think he knew about it, and he was very gracious, but we could have started out on the wrong foot. It was purely my fault. One of those mechanical things in the flaps at the moment was what it was.

B: What did Johnson do in the Cabinet meetings, which I understand Kennedy held infrequently anyway?

D: Yes.

B: Did he volunteer advice and information?

D: Basically not. He couldn't have conducted himself more circumspectly, I think couldn't have conducted himself better under the circumstances. The Vice Presidency is obviously a difficult role, as has been said so often. What his role with the President personally when they were alone was, I have no idea. I gather from various things at the time, hearing both of them, Moyers, O'Donnell and others, that it was quite good. In terms of the actual Cabinet meetings, Johnson attended, he would speak when spoken to, he would speak briefly and seriously and to the point.

But let's say that the contrast between Johnson in the Cabinet Room, and Johnson as I saw him that first time in his house that Sunday morning, all the difference in the world. The man obviously could discipline himself and had a sense of time and place when he would focus on the thing. I think Johnson, my guess and this is just a guess, was better in power up situations than power down

situations. When he [was] with, let's say, more influential people or people he wanted things out of, heads of large corporations, other senators, or the President when he was Vice President, he was a totally disciplined man, my guess is. When there was what I call power down, when he was the main principal in the situation, I'd overgeneralize that he tended to be less disciplined, more compulsive, more hand-wringing, more emotive, and things like that.

B: Which means in fact that when he becomes President, virtually everybody is--

D: Is power down.

B: --power down.

D: That's right. Yes. I think that he was in his Congressional and Senate and Vice Presidential years held in by his own sense of power, his own internal structuring. He had that to a lesser extent as President. And what he didn't realize, I guess, is that he didn't appreciate the extent to which really the working press should have been a power up situation with him.

B: While you were on the staff you made up the agenda for the Cabinet meetings?

D: Right.

B: Did Johnson ever suggest any topics of conversation?

D: I'm not positive of that. My recollection is, yes. To begin with, to go back half a second, as the textbooks say, and it's absolutely right, the White House staff is a highly personalized operation for a particular personality who's President. There's a sense of

intense loyalty, protectiveness, over-protectiveness, and so forth. And the result is that a White House staff--at least the Kennedy staff, and I would generalize more broadly; not the Eisenhower staff, but the Johnson staff and I gather the Nixon staff--relates so much to the man who is President that the rest of the governmental officialdom, Cabinet members, Vice President, so forth like that, become characters to deal with but to be wary of, to protect your principal.

(interruption)

In any event, on this particular period: We almost didn't, this is an overstatement I guess, entirely feel free to go to the Vice-President. He had his staff; the President had his staff. The two staffs were separate entities, and we would deal with the other staff members, not with the other principal. The result is that I really have no insight into him in that period. I think that in the Cabinet meetings, through the staffing, I got requests, particularly through a man by the name of Ed Welsh who was the Executive Director of the Space Council, to have the Space Program on several times. I know the Vice-President was interested in the economy in that period. I know for a fact, I remember one particular Cabinet meeting when he was particularly helpful and lucid on Congressional relations. I forget what the particular program was that was under discussion, but he held forth more at length that time. But he still was a man who was trying to show that he was not going to push or intrude or run into some of the problems

that past Vice Presidents had who had a President with less experience or seniority within the governmental structure.

B: There's been a lot of talk about--

(Interruption--telephone rings)

B: What I was getting ready to ask you [is,] there's been a lot of talk about the attitude of the Kennedy staff toward Johnson while he was Vice President.

D: Yes.

B: Not so much apparently their overt attitude toward him, but their conservation and jokes among themselves.

D: I've heard and read that. I can only say I was not privy to that. I don't know of it at all. Here again, I had not been part of the Kennedy group working for the nomination before Los Angeles very much. I was surprised when I was asked to be on the White House staff as one of those who was brought in, quite frankly, with Ralph Dungan, as somewhat of a buffer between the Irish Mafia, the O'Donnells and the O'Briens on one hand, and the Sorensens and Mike Feldmans and that group on the other. I was told by Bob Kennedy that. I said earlier here I had been the Executive Secretary, as I mentioned earlier, to the Governor of California. I was sort of interested in getting out of a staff function, wanted to do something like go to the Defense Department, or State. But when I went into the White House I tried to maintain some detachment and so forth. And the result is that if there was that--there could be, I don't know--I wasn't privy to it.

B: The implication being that it might be partly leftover resentment from the pre-nomination period?

D: Well, I would doubt that. If there was, and again I am speculating, I think it would be more, oh, one loyalist or one culture group talking about another culture group. Massachusetts Irish (I say from California) with their funny accent talking about Texas. (You know ,there really isn't any, Californians, we've got our dialect, sort of a mongrel one.) But I don't think that it was resentment. Also, in fairness to, let's say, Johnson and his group on the one hand and Kennedy and the Irish Mafia on the other, both sets of them were damn good politicians. The last thing a good politician wants to do is to continue to fight last year's war or campaign. There's always a new thing to move on to.

I would say just in terms of the usefulness, possible usefulness of an interview like this, I don't think the existing literature is [as] sufficiently sensitive or subtle about White House staffs as they are [about] the coterie of a feudal lord. It's said that the Presidency is personalized, and that the White House staff is a personal operation. But after you've made that comment, I don't think that people then have talked enough about the psychological dynamics. The White House staff is quite comparable to the Secret Service, only the Secret Service does its operation in the physical protective way, and the White House staff does in a political, sociological, public relations way. And it's built into that institution; I don't think it's going to come unstuck.

I'll be curious as the Presidency continues to grow as an institution, the White House staff takes on more functions, becomes more institutionalized, as Nixon has with his economic council and domestic councils, as well as the National Security Council. I would guess that there will spring up within the new institutionalizing an inner group which remains protective, super-protective again. This almost goes to the wariness, the extent to which politics is a groping through a dark jungle really.

B: In November of '61, you left the White House staff to move over to State as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations.

D: Right.

B: Did this mean any contact with Johnson?

D: Somewhat more, yes.

B: In the Congress?

D: Yes, somewhat more. I was moved over to the State Department when President Kennedy was--well, first of all, Rusk was not happy with his Congressional relations, the reasons are irrelevant here. Kennedy asked me about going over, and I first declined. Finally, when they had that big shake-up in the State Department a couple of weeks later, and he asked me to do it for at least a year or so; I did it then. As far as I was concerned, at that stage my role changed. I was still supposed to be an eyes and ears for Kennedy within the State Department, but I was more a semi-principal in a junior way. And I felt that I had responsibilities and services to Johnson. I could learn a great deal which I did not know about the

Congress. I had not worked it before. He was the master up there.

So frankly I sought him out and sought direct contact with his staff. I had a luncheon, for example, in the State Department, which is great on fancy luncheons and so forth, and pulled in a bunch of people and made sure that Bill Moyers was included in that group. I had not known Bill well, but I was looking for bridges to the Vice President, strictly in terms of doing my job better, handling it. When the Vice President went on his trips abroad, for example the time he went to Pakistan, and so forth, our office handled all VIP travel abroad. That was one of the functions of it. So we naturally got into the make-up of his itinerary, the advancing of it and all the other nonsense.

B: What did the State Department think about Johnson's somewhat exuberant travelling style?

D: Well, great snickering and criticism of it. But I had come from the White House staff and from a political rather than a Foreign Service background, so I was not "in" there either. They looked upon me as somewhat of a junior politician. But, no, there was considerable snickering. The cables and everything that came back to the best of my recollection were, "He did a superb job," "He was good abroad," and so forth. Here again, I think I'd say he was overly exuberant in terms of the public relations effect. But I can't fault him at all in how he handled all that. I think he did an excellent job.

B: Did other people in State make any attempt to curtail trips like

that then for the Vice President?

D: Absolutely not. One of State's faults is it's afraid to speak out when it thinks somebody shouldn't do something. I mean, State rolls with the punch whether it's a takeover by a foriegn dictatorship or a domestic politician making a fool of himself. They'd be much better off in my opinion if they'd speak out.

Another time that I was with the Vice President was in, I believe it was July, 1961. He represented the President at the National Governor's Conference, which was held that year in Hawaii, and I was designated to go along. This was still back when I was in the White House staff as liaison between the Vice President and President on that trip. We flew out in one of the White House planes. In L.A. the Vice President dedicated the new LA. Airport, and then we went out. Johnson was interesting in that particular period to me in that here he was going back out among a bunch of domestic politicians, the Governors of fifty states.

(Interruption--telephone)

D: This was an interesting episode as far as I was concerned in that Vice President Johnson [was a] superb politician and so forth. When we got out there to Hawaii, he made the main speech. It was a good speech. I thought in terms of the cocktail party and the receptions and so forth he handled

himself very well, astutely, and so forth. But otherwise he kept to his room almost entirely. It surprised me. I raise it only to raise a question. What I'm still curious about, and I don't have the answer to this: Was he most comfortable and effective as a legislative politician? I said a while back that I didn't think he ever developed as a 'national' politician even as President. (Interruption--telephone)

D: What I'm not sure of is, he wasn't a public relations politician, in my opinion, and just for this one, brief, inadequate insight, I didn't feel that he was turned on, interested, focused as a domestic politician with the Governors. It was comparable almost to the situation before 1960 at the Los Angeles Democratic National Convention. Here again, he really was not out sort of working the hustings. What I don't know is, did he think important or interesting mainly senators and lobbyists, whether public interest or business or other lobbyists in the Senate scene or the Congressional scene? Was he essentially a Congressional politician, and not only not a public relations politician, but also (outside of Texas) not a grass roots or powerbroker politician, even at the level of governors?

B: You might have part of the answer to that. What was his reaction when, as Assistant Secretary of State, you asked him for help with Congress?

D: Oh, he was very good. Here again, we're back in a congressional context. He was very helpful.

B: What I meant was did he seem to enjoy being asked and telling you

about it?

D: Yes. Oh, yes. He couldn't have been better. He couldn't have been more constructive and helpful and generous and to the point. He was excellent. And it is an interesting series of exercises. Because Larry O'Brien was in charge for the White House of all of the domestic programs, and one of the reasons I was spun off from the White House to the State Department was to handle all the foreign policy stuff. In effect, Larry from the White House handled domestic, and I handled foreign. Well, there were really no votes on the foreign stuff. For example, I had the annual foreign aid bill, and that's like trying to sell leprosy on the Hill, and various other things, treaties, ambassadorial appointments, a wide range of things. Essentially the things that you're not going to get muscle out of. You'd say that the Vice President, wanting to maintain his popularity, wanting to maintain good contacts, could have just worked the domestic stuff. But he was just as forthcoming and just as constructive, I felt, on the foreign side, on the leprosy, as he was on the sugar.

B: One more question and I'll let you go.

D: Unless you're through we can go on another ten minutes, because the rush is only . . . .

B: Well, all right. We'll probably request another comeback. But what I wanted to ask: while you were at State there in these years, '61 on to '64 I believe--

D: Yes, that's right.

B: --was much thought given by people like yourself to the situation in Vietnam?

D: An honest answer to that is absolutely not. No. I was again in Congressional relations rather than in a primary policy role. No, I think that a primary fault of the Kennedy period and a lesson for the future for perspective policy purposes is that Vietnam was the result to a large early extent of neglect, were inattentive to it. I've always felt, may be oversimplification, that the fatal step within the Kennedy period was in April of 1961, where Walt Rostow, who was then a Kennedy staff person, and General Taylor, Max Taylor went out to Vietnam. There was that great picture of them on that tennis court which some historian is going to use in a satirical way sometime. They came back, and that was where the new 1960s commitment and so forth was made. There was inattention at that stage, for example.

Now in the fall of '61--early '62 Laos was the great crunch going on. In a junior way, but [there was] much more attention to that. Harriman was working trying to bring out the Laotian compromise. The CIA had engineered that coup in '59, and this was a considerable reversal of policy. One, was Laos too weak to hold together a different settlement than the domination by, I forget, anyway the right wing general out there? Let's say from my very limited role in the domestic side, what were the liabilities for the incumbent Democratic Administration of moving off a hard-line settlement to what might be called a squashy settlement? How would Congress, how would the Senate take that? How vulnerable were we

to trying to do that? So I would say there was a lot more focusing on Laos than there was on Vietnam. Vietnam we backed into.

B: This would apply to Congress, too? For example, when you're presenting nasty things like the foreign aid budget to Congress, you're not getting reaction from them in these years about this?

D: Yes, there was some discussion. Historians can go back and look at the record. There was discussion, but I think it a fair thing to say in the psychological context of the time that it was not overriding. In '61 you had the Bay of Pigs, you had the Berlin crisis, you had the National Security buildup, you had the Laotian problem. Vietnam was very secondary in terms of the briefings, what Senators were interested in and listened to and so forth like that. It was not what I would call on the front of the burner.

B: Have you still got time to go on?

D: Sure. What I'll do is, we'll quit at twenty-five after.

B: Okay. I'm leaving out a number of things on the assumption that your Kennedy tape covers them.

D: Yes.

B: Like the reorganization of State. So, to move on in time, the assassination of President Kennedy, as it pertains to Mr. Johnson.

D: Right.

B: At the time you began to realize what has happened, was there any fear for the Kennedy programs? That is, did you fear that now President Johnson might change political direction?

D: No. I don't think so. That was obviously a difficult period of

crosscurrents. I've read some of the Kennedy staff who complained and criticized. By then I was totally in the State Department. I used to see those people. They were good friends; they are now. The O'Donnells and so forth of course tended to turn off. My own psychology was that: one, I had a public responsibility, a public role, position, ongoing work. He was President. I didn't feel any, frankly, negatives or envies or hostilities at all. I should remind that I had not been in the original inner Kennedy circle, so I'm probably not a good test on that. But no.

The day of the assassination I was in my office in the State Department, first heard about it on the radio, [and was] of course deeply shocked and depressed. I spent the rest of the afternoon in George Ball's office. Rusk was out flying to Japan at the time. Ball, myself, I forget, one or two others, Mac Bundy came over at one stage. We were talking all kinds of mechanical things. There was the Andrews Air Base situation, the welcome back, what was happening out there; getting the Cabinet plane out over Japan back; alerting the bases, the posts overseas. So that really not; I can't say that I could focus on that [Johnson and the Kennedy programs]. As you move along subsequent to that, I think President Johnson could not have conducted himself more magnificently during that period, notwithstanding some of the criticisms and complaints. I think both publicly, and as far as I know privately, I've got no faults. I think his role with the Congress domestically could not have been better.

I thought and I think that in 1964, as to how he conducted his campaign, he had one of the great opportunities in America to turn towards detente. He lost an opportunity to go down as one of the really great men in history. If [only] he had taken his peace campaign, which he waged deliberately, whatever his private cables were [and followed through on it]. By then I was over at the National Committee working, not in State Department cables, although I had helped recruit some of the speech writing staff. Bill Jorden, who is down in Texas now with him, I got out of Harriman's office. And, oh, Chet Cooper from the CIA who was working then, who since I gather has become critical of the President's Vietnam policy, and others who are actually doing the speech writing over in the EOB under Dick Goodwin and some of the others. I was working primarily with Moyers at that stage. I just think that the Russians were as ripe then as they are now, and that's a mixed bag at best.

Four approaches. Johnson was a powerful President. He had won an overwhelming mandate. Kennedy had always been terribly cautious about turning around the cold war and things like that. He was overly impressed, in my opinion, with his narrow mandate in '60. He didn't say, "Well, I'm President now, whether big or little. One vote's as good as a mile." Johnson could have come in and I think really broken through psychological policy barriers that he failed to do. The tragedy of Vietnam is not just what's happened since then, but I personally think the lost opportunities.

Just speaking from this particular date, I have no particular confidence that Nixon can or will pull it off to a significant extent off of his Republican Party base. Southern states, border states, more conservative Northern electorate. Johnson was working off a massive Democratic base plus an independent one. It was a historic, strategic opportunity that I'm afraid went down the drain.

B: Is what you're saying that in '64 Johnson had a chance to work on a detente with Russia, and through that also help the problems in Vietnam?

D: Yes. Yes, [that is] what I always thought, and there is memoranda in the file on this which I sent over. Again, I had no idea of the extent to which he was either concerned or aware of what was happening in Vietnam, the change of climate there, because I was cut off from the cables for the most part. For example, I worked one Sunday with Dick Goodwin in the Executive Office Building on the Manchester, New Hampshire speech, which is one of the main really peacenik speeches, let's say, of the campaign. We had no idea, no forewarning, no anything that you shouldn't just go hell-bent down that. We believed that it was popular, I make no pretense about that, in a purely political sense. But we believed deeply in it. We thought that there was a convergence of our public views, to go back to the Kennedy period, purely as a point of reference, with the American University speech, and that good policy and good politics were in harmony.

B: Especially running against . . . .

D: Against that particular individual. I think that President Johnson, and here this goes back to his failure to understand the nuances of public opinion enough, if he was going to take the tack that he did afterwards, should not have led the public down that road. He should not have exaggerated Goldwater's belligerence and so forth. It was good politics. I'm not against that, but I think that a politician, a president, a public figure, has to relate his short-term and long-term strategies. And, let's say, just as a minor character in the act, I certainly wasn't doing that in charge of research and planning at the National Committee for the campaign. I was either preparing, blocking out, or putting final approval with Moyers, which really meant with the President personally, on all the literature that went out on that. I was working, but didn't have final clearance at all, on the speeches, and we just weren't tying in to anything that came after.

I remember that Bay of Tonkin thing. Bill Fulbright, who is a good friend of mine, sent down a couple of speeches for me to look at that he was going to give. We were going down the road we believed in. I frankly think, for the good of the country and the President personally and everyone, that we should have been more tentative, more equivocal in that period

if we were going to have to make the roll over that I understand now, was being very privately discussed in October.

B: Of course it's hard to be tentative and equivocal in a campaign.

D: Well, yes. Except we knew we were winning overwhelmingly. And we thought then to build up the biggest possible victory because it helped the Congressional races, and, frankly, because it would give the President more freedom to manuever afterwards.

B: Do you know definitely that acceleration of the Vietnamese War was under consideration?

D: Absolutely not. No, no. All I know is, let's say, newspaper articles and speculation then that the cables and things coming in from Vietnam told of a rapidly deteriorating situation from late September through October and things like that. No, I had no idea of that.

B: Sir, I believe this is a stopping place.

D: Okay.

B: And you can make that luncheon engagement.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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