INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 2, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: BUFORD ELLINGTON

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

PLACE: Governor Ellington's office in the State Capitol, Nashville, Tennessee

Tape 1 of 2

B: Sir, if I may read just a little background material. You were born in Mississippi and attended Millsaps College there for a while and left during the Depression to go work. You eventually ended up in Marshall County, Tennessee, farming and served a term in the Tennessee general assembly in the late forties. You were the manager of the Tennessee Farm Bureau Insurance Service in the forties and into early 1951; then in 1953 to 1958 you served as commissioner of agriculture for the state of Tennessee and served your first term as governor from 1959 to 1963. You were vice president of the L&N [Louisville and Nashville] Railroad after that, served a year as director of the Office of Emergency Planning in Washington under President Johnson. Now you are just finishing up your second term of office as governor since 1967 and you have about three more months, I guess.

E: About three months.

B: I know I've left out a lot, but that's the rough outline. When in this time did you first know anything about Lyndon Johnson?

E: Of course, I knew about Lyndon Johnson before I met Lyndon Johnson.

B: I'd be interested in his reputation before you met him.

E: Mostly I knew about him through Sam Rayburn. Sam Rayburn, as you know or probably know, was a native Tennessean, and he used to come back to Roane County up in East Tennessee occasionally. Back in those days I was with the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federations Insurance Services, and I traveled in that area quite extensively. I got to know Mr. Rayburn's family. In fact, we were very close. When Mr. Rayburn would come down, which he did quite often, to visit, at least once or twice a year, I got to know him, and through him I felt like I knew Lyndon Johnson. Actually, I couldn't tell you to save my neck--I don't remember the first time that I met Lyndon Johnson.

B: What were the conversations with Mr. Rayburn like? Did Mr. Rayburn say things like, "Here's a young man who's going to be a comer in politics?"

E: Mr. Rayburn was a very proud man of anything that he touched. Of his influence in Tennessee he never ceased not to brag or be boastful, but to let you know that he had a sense of pride. I think it was that same sense of pride that maybe he'd had a little bit to do in guiding Lyndon Johnson, because Johnson was, I think, and he would admit to you that he was in the beginning, more or less of a protege of Sam Rayburn's. Because Sam told him the things to do and steps to take that made him move forward. I don't think anybody would dispute that, even Lyndon Johnson. So Rayburn looked on him with pride, just like I would look on my son if he did well--and he is doing good, but I mean it was that kind of relationship, not

one of bossing or telling. I think Mr. Rayburn could see things in Lyndon Johnson that he had dreamed of doing, that maybe through his influence he'd help Lyndon to accomplish. I think it was that kind of a pride.

B: Even in those days maybe like thinking of higher office?

E: I don't think there was ever any question that Mr. Sam was always grooming Lyndon Johnson to go higher. I don't think there's any question about it. I think that came on through, even until the Democratic convention when he was put on the ticket in the second spot in Los Angeles, because it was Rayburn's hand always that was moving the cards.

B: What was Johnson himself like in those early days? You say you don't remember when you met him, but I gather you knew him there in the fifties when he was Senate leader.

E: I knew him back before he was leader in the Senate. I knew him in the latter days of his reign in the House, but, as I say, I only knew him through reputation or a casual meeting, not personally. It was after he got into the Senate that I was thrown with him at the Democratic conventions and things of that nature, party meetings. And [it was] through Senator Kerr of Oklahoma that we got to be real close friends and we started visiting in each other's homes and we started going to places together. That was several years after I had known of him and a long time before I ever dreamed of being governor of this state or anything else.

B: In those days did Mr. Johnson himself impress other people as much as he impressed Mr. Rayburn? Did Mr. Rayburn's predictions and confidence seem warranted?

E: For me personally--of course that's all I can speak for--I was always amazed with the enthusiasm the man had, the grasp he had for almost anything that came up, for his loyalty to his friends which always impressed me, and the fact that he never seemed to tire of doing the things that he believed in. Of course that was government, because his whole life was in government. On the other hand, you could turn around the same thing with his farming interest or anything that he was tied up in. He just went all out for whatever he was involved in.

B: When on an occasion as you described when you and he and Kerr, and I presume others, would get together, was the conversation all politics and government?

E: No. So many times when he'd come here to visit me or when I was out at his ranch or we were together with Senator Kerr and others politics would never be mentioned. The interest was cattle, or maybe the interest was farming. He was a great hunter. We liked to hunt. I don't know whether you'd call him a great hunter or not; he was a hell of a good shot at deer hunting and things. Maybe you'd go for a day and politics would never be mentioned. You were talking about other things. But still the whole basis of this man's life and what I'd call the thing that made this man tick was politics. I think that his farming interest, his cattle interest, his hunting and all of those things that he was interested in were recreation to him, and he liked to get away and get his mind away from politics for a while. It was rest.

B: What were he and Senator Kerr like together on an informal basis?

E: The biggest jokers that ever were, ribbing each other, joking each other, cutting at each other. They could cut very sharp. Their political philosophy was about the same all the way through. Their interests ran side by side. I know when Senator Kerr, way back in the early days of his career, had the great visions of conservation and water resources being conserved out through Oklahoma, which finally has been done and Senator Kerr made such a contribution to, they ran right along parallel with what Johnson dreamed of down in his area of Texas, and so forth. Of course, here in Tennessee what made it very funny, we already had those things going through TVA. So it would be a lot of kidding along this line, of competition.

B: Can you remember a specific example of some of the jokes or cuts between them?

E: No, not particularly. There were jokes. The cutting at each other used to be through the cattle. Johnson was a Hereford man, you know, he believed in the Hereford cattle. Kerr and myself had Angus cattle. Kerr used to kid Johnson and tell him that the Herefords were just like the Longhorns in Texas,[in] twenty-five more years they would be antiques, just completely forgotten, and the Angus would take over the country. To anybody else it wouldn't be funny, but to hear those guys cut at each other along that line. When you were out hunting, things like that, Johnson was a real good shot with a rifle or a shotgun, and Kerr wasn't too good a shot. Johnson would always down his deer or quail or whatever it might be

that we were hunting, wild turkey or whatever it might be. Kerr very seldom did, and Johnson liked to get back behind Kerr and cut the shot out from under him and then swear to Kerr, "You got him," see, when Kerr had missed. Just things like that. Actually just kid's play like boys, grown men that enjoyed being together. I think they really loved each other, that kind of a relationship.

B: Did he ever talk Tennessee politics to you in those days?

E: Definitely. He liked to talk politics of all the states. Back in the fifties a lot of us were wanting Lyndon Johnson to declare himself as a candidate for president, and he was opposed to it and he was serious about it. It was no come-on to try to get us to work for him harder. You know how people say, "Well, I'm not ready" or this, that, and the other. Well, he wasn't pushing himself, we were pushing him.

B: This was in 1956?

E: Yes. So a group of us across the country kept in touch with each other, and he liked to keep up with what was going on at the local level. I don't suppose any man ever knew more about what was going on at that time in the Democratic Party than Lyndon Johnson did in all the states in the Union. He knew them all. He knew the people.

B: Who were some of the people who were encouraging him to run for president in 1956?

E: In this area there were quite a number of us working together--Earle Clements, at that time a senator from Kentucky, most of the governors

of the South. At that time the split-off hadn't come so much between the right and the left and the moderate. It was just beginning to form, and most of the governors at that time except maybe one or two--I think Wallace was beginning to blossom out then as being in opposition to all of us of the middle-of-the-road variety--used to meet here at my house and talk about how we could go around getting Lyndon Johnson to become a candidate. We did that without Lyndon, and of course later on we met with him.

B: So you kind of think that he surely must have known those meetings were going on?

E: Oh, sure, he knew they were going on, no secret. But they were not meetings set up by him. They were meetings that we were promoting.

B: Did you ever put it to him squarely, just, "Will you run, and if not, why not?"

E: Oh, yes, we put it to him squarely. I don't think there was ever any doubt that he didn't intend to run at some particular time, but he felt, and I guess he was right about it, that he knew more about the timing than we did. Because when he became a candidate for the nomination in 1960, of course as we all look back now, it was only a few weeks before the convention that he allowed his name to go. We had been begging him at that time for a year, and had we been given the word I think we could have lined up a lot more votes and probably had a real good chance of nominating him. But he only gave us the word just a few days ahead of time.

B: Back in 1956, was Sam Rayburn active in trying to get Johnson to run for national office?

E: I don't say that Sam Rayburn was active out openly at any time. I think Mr. Sam's long suit was in the background in an advisory capacity. I never knew of Mr. Sam out openly advocating, but he was a great strategist. He was a great man for, what we country boys say, seeing around the corner and advising us. But he didn't actually get out himself and push these things. He was a great conference man, a great mediator. And in all of these traits, Johnson was an expert. God, he could sway people. You can't imagine the power he had!

B: Did you go to the 1956 convention?

E: Yes.

B: Johnson ended up being Texas' favorite son for the nominee. Was there any chance at all of him actually beating Stevenson out of the candidacy?

E: No, and I think everyone knew that. The Tennessee delegation at this particular convention in Chicago was seated just behind the Texas delegation, and so we were all very closely related there and we talked a lot together. Back in those days it was a little different than it was in Chicago the last time. There was some semblance of order and understanding, and so forth. I don't think at any time, even though a favorite son, [Johnson could have been nominated]. Just like the last time I was the favorite son from Tennessee--the reason being that the delegation and your people back home weren't

satisfied with anything they saw coming up, so therefore they take a favorite son position. That was the case with Texas at that time.

B: I've heard it said that the Texas delegation and Johnson himself were active in trying to get the vice presidential nomination for John Kennedy in 1956.

E: I think that is correct.

B: In a contest with Tennessee's Kefauver.

E: Tennessee's Kefauver. You know, Tennessee was all torn up and they wouldn't go. They had Albert Gore at that time, he was running for vice president; Frank Clement was the governor at that time, and he was running for vice president; Estes Kefauver was running for vice president. Frank Clement controlled the delegation, so it was the devil!

B: That's what I was getting at. Just in what you read in the papers at the time, it looked like Tennessee was just all [split].

E: Oh, it was split all to pieces.

B: Did that leave any bitterness behind?

E: Yes, there was bitterness for a long, long time.

B: How did Johnson in those years get along with Tennessee's Senators Gore and Kefauver?

E: I think Lyndon got along fairly well with Senator Gore until he became president. There seemed to be a jealousy develop on Gore's side at that time, and Gore began to take stabs at the President. Very frankly, I'll have to say this, I always thought that Johnson as a senator and as president was always most gracious, most kind,

and did everything in the world he could to help Tennessee in any problem. But Gore for some reason or other felt like he had been the bridesmaid too long and not the bride. He could see himself pushed aside by Johnson, which can build up in any man.

B: As I recall, Gore was mentioned as a vice presidential candidate in 1960.

E: That is correct. Kefauver and Johnson got along real good. I never knew of any jealousy or any bitterness among their friends over the vice presidency or the presidency. I have never known of any.

B: You wouldn't think that Lyndon Johnson and Estes Kefauver were really the same type person.

E: They were altogether different, and yet a man's personal life and that of his life in the Senate have to be two different things. You can get along with a man personally. Many, many times I get along very fine with some of my fellow governors, yet I can't agree with them on their policy. I think this was about the way it was with Johnson and Kefauver. I don't think they agreed on policy there in the Senate on many things. I think they disagreed more than they agreed, but personally I never heard of any conflict between them.

B: Right after that 1956 convention there was the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1957, in which Majority Leader Johnson played an important role. What was the reaction in the South among the folks?

E: I don't think the reaction at that time was too great. I think where the reaction really started--of course it began to build a little bit

because the South as a whole was anti-integration, if you want to call it that. And I was one of them, because I didn't feel like the South could overnight turn around and completely overhaul its whole social structure and its whole educational programs. I didn't feel like this could be done overnight, and it wasn't done overnight. But I think as it went along then the South began to turn on Johnson more after he became president and after he passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Because actually he did more and passed more legislation in the field of civil rights than all the others put together, before or since, in my opinion.

B: Back in the late fifties, about the time of 1956 or 1957, did you ever talk to Lyndon Johnson about the issue of civil rights?

E: Very, very often. I made many, many trips for him, just on this particular matter.

B: In the fifties, you mean?

E: In the fifties.

B: What would be the nature of those trips?

E: To try to find out what was going to happen, what was going on. It was very unusual, his dedication to the civil rights program.

B: It was back in the fifties?

E: Back in the fifties. He's told me the story many, many times [of how] this all came about. I know not too long ago I was out there, and one night we sat up in back of his house in a jeep, just the two of us, at midnight. And [his dedication came] because of a young Mexican way back when he was younger, the burial it seemed like

of a young Mexican who had served in the service or something. I've forgotten the story now, but he's told me that story of how he became convinced that we weren't fair to the minority groups. Even we had this dividing line in death, that we tried to separate people and all this kind of stuff.

So Lyndon Johnson was dedicated to equal rights. I don't say that he was dedicated to socially bringing everybody together on an equal basis, but his dedication was to bring people together [so] that all of them would have an equal opportunity in life.

B: Did he convince you of this, sir?

E: He convinced me.

B: I gather that your opinion and his in the fifties were not exactly [the same].

E: Not at all. I ran for governor in 1958 and was elected on an anti-civil rights stand here in Tennessee, because I just couldn't bring it to my mind that anybody had any business telling us what we had to do in our state. Yet in less than two years I was traveling the country for this man, trying to help him in his fight to bring it about. Everybody knows it; it's a matter of record.

B: What kind of trip would you make for him? Information gathering trips?

E: Information gathering trips, of course, but mainly to talk to say, a governor here or a man in politics, a political leader here, to see if the Democratic Party could come together and work together and if there was room in the Democratic Party for all factions, for

minority groups and all this, that and the other, if it could be held together. And it was done.

B: Would this be aiming toward the 1960 presidential campaign?

E: We were aiming toward the future. I don't think the sixties were ever aimed at because, as I say, he didn't pull the bridle off until a few weeks before the convention and give us an opportunity to do anything.

B: On these trips like that would you go out at Johnson's request at a specific incident? For example, about that time what happened in Little Rock with Governor [Orval] Faubus. By any chance would you serve as a link between Majority Leader Johnson and Governor Faubus?

E: I've done so many times in most states. A lot of times I did it without Johnson's request and [would] get him information. A lot of times these little committees of us around the country that have long since kind of broken up, we were keeping in touch with each other, and we'd get this information for their benefit.

B: These committees would not be exclusively southerners?

E: Oh no, no, absolutely not. Because we knew, and I think everybody knew, that the southerners couldn't elect a president.

B: I was going to ask you if in these years and back earlier when you were talking about 1956, encouraging Lyndon Johnson to run, you ever faced the question of whether or not a southerner could be elected?

E: You always faced that. You would face it today.

B: There are those who say that in those years toward the late fifties

Lyndon Johnson sort of deliberately presented himself as a westerner more than a southerner.

E: I don't say that he did present himself as a westerner, but I think if I had been in his place I would have. Because some of the people that he did the most for were the first to turn on him when he was in the White House.

B: Like who?

E: Oh, you can take most of your southern states. My gosh, when we were needing so much help under the Eisenhower Administration here in the Tennessee Valley, and Dixon-Yates was just ready to take over the TVA--this is no heresay, it's a matter of history--who came down here and rode the valley with us? Who'd get on a boat and go up and down these TVA lakes to those power plants? Lyndon Johnson and Bob Kerr. They worked for these states. God, they stood by them! They got them appropriations, flood control, everything else. Yet some of these--I like to call them peckerwoods--that Johnson did the most for were the first to turn on him. I think that some of it was some jealousy there because he was a southerner and he was able to move forward where they couldn't. And I think that some of it was the fact of his determination, that started out with this Mexican youngster, of equal opportunities for all men. What else could it be? I never could find out anything else that it could be.

B: Who do you have in mind there, specifically, sir?

E: Well, we'll talk about my state. Albert Gore--Albert Gore gave him as much trouble in the Congress as anybody, he and Fulbright. I was

there when they took the lead in the Bay of Tonkin's resolution; yet I was still around when they started just cutting the President's throat on every side. I was there when Johnson and Kerr and all of them were fighting for water conservation, and I was there when these same men tried to cut his throat in these appropriations. I mention those because they're here at home. You can find them elsewhere. Very, very few of the congressman and senators in the South and, if you want to call it, the Southwest really stayed with the man that did the most for their country, for their section.

B: Does that apply to governors, too?

E: Yes, sir. I think more of the governors than maybe the senators.

B: When you think of governors, you think of people like George Wallace and Lester Maddox.

E: Of course, Lester Maddox hadn't been around long enough then to do too much. Carl Sanders was governor. Carl Sanders supported the President, Lyndon Johnson. He supported him.

B: I might add that the reason I was asking for names is because when you say something in general like that you run the danger of tarring people you don't intend to.

E: That's right.

B: You would probably think that Carl Sanders and maybe Terry Sanford were exceptions to the rule.

E: Carl Sanders and Terry Sanford were exceptions, great exceptions. I'm talking about men like John McKeithen in Louisiana, who just hit the President from every side. At that time [a man who] later came

around to support the President was Paul Johnson in Mississippi. At first he did everything in the world, he attacked the President in every way, but later turned around and was one of the great supporters of the President.

I remember one night when they had a race riot in Natchez, Mississippi. I was working with Katzenbach and the White House staff trying to get things settled down there, and I called Paul--Governor Johnson--and his attitude had completely changed. He said, "Listen, you tell the President that I don't believe in race riots any more than he does. I believe that every man should have his equal rights, and the responsibility is ours to take care of this thing. We'll see to it law and order prevails." Well, that was something new coming out of Mississippi, but he did it.

B: That would have been in 1965 or 1966?

E: 1965 or 1966, 1965 I guess it was. But that was a complete change. He did it. I mean, he took care of it. Federal officials didn't have to worry about it at all.

Ned Breathitt was an exception. He stood by the President. He was governor of Kentucky at that time. Bert Combs part of the time was the governor up there. I'll have to say this: always the governors of South Carolina, even though it has been unpopular as the devil over there, have stood up and were able to be counted in this particular fight on civil rights.

B: Is there a personal connection there? Can Lyndon Johnson get people like that, people like, say, the governors of South Carolina--as

you say, they have a great deal to lose locally--in his office and convince them, as apparently he has convinced you?

E: I think that Lyndon Johnson had the knack that very few men have. Instead of making political friends, he made personal friends, and to me there's a little bit of a difference there. I don't know, the further I went with the man the closer I'd feel to him. I never felt like I was a political friend of Lyndon Johnson. I still don't. I feel like that I'm his personal friend. I feel like he has a personal interest in me, not just a political interest, and to me that's the difference in the two.

B: Did he encourage you to run for office the first time in 1958?

E: No. He never encouraged me to run in 1958. He didn't encourage me to run in 1966. I was at the White House when I made the decision to come back and run this time. I went over one evening and told him. Actually, I never enjoyed the White House. I saw too many people that were cutting him up. A President is overly protected. All Presidents are, I think. I just got tired of it, and I wanted to get away. I wanted to come back. I had two things. Number one, I felt like I could render another service here in Tennessee; and, number two, it gave me an opportunity to get away from the White House. I just never did particularly like it.

B: Did he try to discourage you? Particularly there in 1966?

E: Not too much. Actually, I didn't give him a chance because I didn't ask him for advice. I told him what decisions I had made. He's the kind of man who respected your decision. I've heard all

of this "who shot John," and I know some of these guys who like to make a fast buck and write a book and this kind of crap about the President's attitude toward the people around him and all this stuff. I don't think anybody was around him much more than I was in the period that I was there, night and day; and hell, this stuff about him bawling out people and riding roughshod, he couldn't have done it without me knowing a little about it. It just didn't go on.

Now if you didn't work, brother, you had no business there. If you didn't know what you were doing, you didn't have any business there. And if you didn't tell him the truth--now if you failed to tell him something that's one thing, but if you told him something that you knew was wrong strictly to shield or to cover up or keep him from knowing and he found out about it later, then he could get pretty rough.

B: It sounds like you're describing actual cases.

E: I could name a lot of cases.

B: On occasions like that, did he really tear into folks?

E: Not tear into them, but you either straightened up or you got out. Then always, I don't know why it is and I've known the White House I wouldn't say intimately, I wouldn't say just everybody around, but I've known a lot of people around the White House since the Truman days, both under Eisenhower and even today, and there has always been a game played around the White House that I couldn't stand here in the state capitol of little groups taking sides with each other.

I can catch it here in the state capitol in Texas or Tennessee or Arkansas. But the White House is so big and the president is so involved he has got to depend on somebody else more. I have to depend on a lot of people here. But these cliques can form around the White House to where this little group is anti to this group, and the first thing you know you've got several establishments around. It's just not good.

B: Can you give specific examples of Lyndon Johnson's White House of such groupings?

E: Oh, yes, I'll give you the worst, and then if you want some of the lesser ones, why--a young fellow that was brought in there--and he was not of the Johnson political faith, but he was brought in because of supposedly a lot of ability--was a young man named Joe Califano, who was a presidential assistant [and] who was always stirring up trouble between this one and that one. He'd get one off in a corner and tell him what somebody said or this, that and the other. I think this went on up to almost the very last before the President ever knew about it.

B: This would go on among the other staff?

E: Among the other staff. I'm talking about the top level staff. Of course, I don't know what went on among those down at the secretarial staff and office staff, but I mean the top people who had to feed the President information. There were differences of opinion between Marvin Watson and Califano and [Lee C.] White, the attorney at that time; yet there was a great staff there. But there were one or two that would try to stir up dissension that could have in many cases really hurt the President.

To give you an example. I remember one time we were trying to dispose of some surplus aluminum that the government had, millions of tons if I remember right, or thousands of tons. We had worked out an agreement with the aluminum companies for them to pick it up over a period of years at the prevailing price of whatever aluminum was at that time so you wouldn't throw it all on the market at one time and upset the market. A lot of people would say that's dealing behind the screen. Well, it's not dealing because you've got to protect the market. Most everybody has got an interest out there, too.

B: In fact, weren't you trying to hold the price at that time?

E: Trying to hold the price up without tearing it down, because you throw all this stuff on there, my gosh, it would tear it all to pieces.

So McNamara decided that he could use it all in Defense. At that time it was under OEP, this aluminum was, and of course Mr. McNamara was a very smart man. He was the man that built the Edsel. He had all the answers. (Laughter) He was going to use all this aluminum. Those of us that were dealing with it from day-to-day knew darned well he couldn't use it, because a lot of it was of such grade that you couldn't use it in the way that he was talking about. It just couldn't be done. Finally, to make a long story short, Mr. McNamara and them did have their way because he had a lot of influence at that particular time. It later caught up with him. Finally they disposed of the aluminum, but I believe the government

took four or five years longer at a lesser price than had been worked out prior to that just by private things but McNamara stepped in.

Well, Califano was McNamara's boy in the White House. He came from McNamara's office. Mr. Reynolds of Reynolds Aluminum was in the Far East, and Mr. Califano got hold of Mr. Reynolds and told him the President wanted to see him immediately on this aluminum situation. The man was over there on business. The president of Reynolds Aluminum Company rushed back to New York and called Califano to see when the President wanted to see him and where. Califano's only answer was, "Well, we don't need you now."

B: Oh boy!

E: The President never knew anything about it until months after that, months and months.

B: Mr. Reynolds must have blamed the President.

E: Mr. Reynolds blamed the President for it. Not too long ago I talked with Mr. Reynolds about it. The President never knew anything about this whole deal--nothing!

That's what I mean about a staff member can cut the President's throat, big shoting, without the President knowing anything about it.

B: Were there others in the White House staff in your time there who were doing the same thing?

E: Sure.

B: Like who, sir?

E: None to this great deal, but there were those who liked to leave the impression that "I have great influence." Great influence.

B: It's a big game in Washington.

E: Big game. When actually they didn't have any influence. Some of those that tried to play that big game had no influence at all, you might say.

B: That kind of thing can go on without the President knowing about it?

E: It can go for years and the President not know anything about it.

B: You said earlier he's overly protected. Is he just too busy or are there literally people around him who won't tell him?

E: No, and I'll say this about him and I'm the same way, you'd be the same way; that sometimes if I would tell him, and I have told him--I told him when I was there, it's hard for you to believe. If some one of my staff would come in here this morning and tell me about another member of my staff, I might cut him off short and say, "You go ahead and run your business and let him alone." Fortunately I don't have it here, but there was a lot of it going on there.

We had a young Negro attorney there on the staff named Alexander.

B: Cliff Alexander.

E: Cliff Alexander. One of the finest young men I ever knew that they'd take snipes at, but they never did get to him. The President knew him, and the President liked him.

B: "They" would take snipes at him? You mean the other staff members?

E: Some of the staff members, yes. He was a good man. But that was just two or three, and when you've got a staff as large as that is--but

these two or three to the public can really cut you, boy.

B: You say two or three. You've mentioned Califano. Again, it's kind of a case where you're liable to end up condemning the good guys if we don't mention the others you mean.

E: There were so many there that were so good. George Reedy was the most loyal guy that ever was. Christian was the same, a very loyal guy. Jack Valenti was the most loyal little peckerwood, as long as he was there. Jack and I left at the same time. Good gosh, he would just do anything to try to help the President.

B: Did you know Harry McPherson? Harry did a lot of work in the South on civil rights.

E: You just can't beat Harry McPherson. Harry was one of the greatest guys. Harry was much younger, of course, than I am. Most of these fellows were a lot younger than I am, but Harry was so devoted to his job, to the government, to the President. Harry was the kind of a fellow that would lay it out there no matter how it read. He didn't cover anything.

Lee White was a fellow that a lot of us thought didn't do what he should have to help the President. He was an attorney there at the White House for a while. He left before it was over.

B: When you're in that position, like those men and like yourself, is it hard to say no to the President or to tell the President he's wrong, particularly when the President is Lyndon Johnson?

E: No, it wasn't hard for me. It was hard for some. I guess the difference in age had something to do with it, because most of them,

as I said a while ago, were twenty or thirty years younger than the President. I'm a little bit older than the President. I never had any difficulty. Now a lot of times he didn't agree with me, don't misunderstand, and we had some real arguments and disagreements. Of course, when decisions were made I went with the decision. I was loyal to that decision even though in the beginning I might not agree. But it's awfully hard for a younger man to disagree with an older man, if you show proper respect, much less to disagree with the president of the United States.

But I must say this: the President gave everybody an opportunity to express his own views. I really believe that. I never saw an occasion that he didn't give us an opportunity to express our views. He would pick out, say, ten or twelve, maybe not that many, eight or ten male members of the staff around the White House once a week or twice a week--or maybe he'd skip two or three weeks--if he was there, and you'd go down the Potomac and have dinner on the boat, come back up. It would give you a chance to let your hair down, and he'd let his hair down. You could say anything you wanted to say.

B: What kinds of things would you talk about in sessions like this?

E: Anything that crossed your mind. Just like if you and I were driving to Memphis this morning, anything that happened to come up. If somebody happened to see a bottle floating in the water and you wanted to talk about pollution, that was it. But anything that was on your mind--it wasn't restricted and nobody was restricted as to what he said or what he thought.

B: Did he continue doing that, so far as you know, on through?

E: As long as I was there and I suppose until he left there.

B: To go back to something you said earlier, you said that the President was unaware of Joe Califano's activities until the last. Did the President eventually come to suspect or distrust Califano?

E: He has never told me that because the President doesn't come out and say things to me, and I don't know of anybody else [to whom] he has ever expressed [himself] as far as his staff is concerned. But through statements that lead you to believe--and the fact that when McNamara left, the chain of command kind of changed. Others began to be listened to a little more around the White House.

B: You mean that Joe Califano exercised a good deal of power in the White House so long as he was still regarded as McNamara's man?

E: Oh, what are you talking about!

B: And when McNamara left there it was the major element of support that Califano no longer had?

E: That's correct. Of course, I was gone at that time. Every time I'd go back to Washington, as long as the President was there, I'd go back to the White House and visit around among the staff and the President. (Interruption)

B: The tape has been off just a minute here while we were having a small coffee break.

To back up a little bit, some things we just mentioned briefly before, the politics back in the late fifties and leading to the 1960

campaign: did I understand that looking forward to the 1960 campaign a group of you, I suppose the same group that had been working before 1956, started thinking about Lyndon Johnson as the nominee?

E: Yes, we started meeting around. At that time we still had no go ahead signal from Lyndon Johnson. He had been slowed up himself because he had had this heart attack in the middle fifties. We thought that probably that was one reason. But I think when you look back and reflect that there never was any doubt in our minds, and I don't believe in his mind, that he wanted to try to take a shot at being president. So it was a matter of timing more than anything else, in which he and he alone could make the final decision on.

I had gone to the National Governor's Conference in Montana. On my way out there I got a call, I'm not sure, but I think from John Connally--Price Daniel was the governor of Texas at that time--telling us to check around at the National Governor's Conference. He thought that Lyndon Johnson was going to pitch his hat in the ring if we thought best and was ready to go. So we got out there and we took some polls on Kennedy and Johnson at the Governor's Conference, and Johnson came out on top. Of course, we relayed that back.

B: In addition to taking polls, did you try to get any firm commitments or actual delegates?

E: We got firm commitments. Some of them didn't stick. Two or three of them didn't stick, but most of them did stick after we got to

Los Angeles. Before the conference adjourned they called me in and asked me to come on to Los Angeles instead of coming back here and then going to the Los Angeles convention. So I went directly from the governor's conference, which was some two weeks before the convention, on into Los Angeles to help open up some headquarters out there.

B: It may be just hindsight, but a lot of folks have said that not only did Lyndon Johnson just declare too late but that he just did it all wrong, that convention politics is the politics of the primaries and the early polls and that instead Johnson was too late and even then emphasized senators and governors. Earlier than these times that we're talking about, did anybody sit down with Lyndon Johnson and say, "Look, if you're serious about this, you've got to announce early and you ought to enter primaries?"

E: No, not necessarily. There was some talk about it. Even if we had all been for it, he wouldn't have done it at that time because he definitely was not a candidate at that time.

Those that think the polls have all to do with it are kind of nuts, I mean going into the primaries. The polls didn't win even in this last convention. If you'll watch and study, your senators do not control the state Democratic party machinery. They never do. There may be an exception, but I don't know of any right now. The governors and the local people that finance the party machinery in the state control the delegations to these conventions. It doesn't make any difference how they're selected. If they're

selected by vote of the people in an election, their candidates still win because they're financing it, they're out there working for it. If they're chosen by a convention, the state leadership and the governor win.

B: That's what I was getting at. Some folks have said that Johnson put too much emphasis on the senators in that kind of politics.

E: He probably did, but I would doubt it. Johnson is an exception. At that time he was a power in Texas. But I think the reason of it was he always managed to be a friend of the governor that was in power, because the governor controlled it.

I noticed the other day, and I know for a fact that he hasn't always been a great friend of Smith's, the present governor of Texas--

B: Preston Smith.

E: Yes. I noticed the other day he made a statement of what a great man Preston was and how Preston had united the party and all this, that and the other. I don't say that Johnson is riding the bandwagon of Smith, but Johnson was smart enough to stay with the man on the local level that controls the situation.

John Connally, in my opinion, did more for Lyndon Johnson politically than most anybody other than Sam Rayburn during the big days. He and John differed. Good gosh almighty, I've been with them when they'd almost scrap over things, but still they were real close personal friends. John did all the work on the local level.

B: I can just hear those two scrapping about say, civil rights.

and the type fellow that goes over in Tennessee.

B: Were you in on the decision for Johnson to accept the vice presidential nomination?

E: Yes, I was there. The fact of the business, I guess I was about the third one to get in the room that morning. I krow the Senator called me. We had been up practically all night the night before. I was staying at a different hotel, and I didn't get in until three or four o'clock in the morning. This was early that morning then that I was getting a shower and my wife told me that Lyndon Johnson was on the line and wanted me. I got on and he said, "Come over here real quick." I had an idea what the situation was. He had said all along that he wouldn't be interested in it. That's always true, all of them say it.

B: I was just going to ask. Surely the folks had speculated on the possibility of it being offered.

E: Oh sure, they'd speculated. But I got over there then in just a very few minutes. At that time Bobby Baker was there. When I went down the hall, of course the halls were jammed and packed and everything, and the police got me down there. Just as I got to the door coming one way, Sam Rayburn was coming down the hall the other way. In a few minutes I remember Bob Kerr got there and John Stennis from Mississippi was brought in. Then a lot of boys like John Connally and those of us that had been out on the firing line and Earle Clements; in other words, I guess twelve or fifteen [were] in there. Then Kennedy came down to the room.

B: Robert?

E: No, Jack Kennedy. He talked and was, as he could well be as you know, a most gracious man.

B: He was speaking to the whole group?

E: No, he was talking to the President but in our presence. He talked to the President privately then before he left. He talked there, and all of the group sitting around there, because they were all close personal friends of Lyndon Johnson and a lot of them were close personal friends of Jack Kennedy.

B: Had Mr. Johnson decided at this time to accept?

E: No, he hadn't decided yet. He didn't decide until, oh, I think if I remember, around two o'clock in the afternoon.

B: What did Mr. Kennedy say?

E: It was the same old come-on that anybody would use, and I think Jack Kennedy was sincere in it. It was uniting the party and getting the strongest ticket; he approached it on that basis. Here's another thing that the average man, a man who has never made a political race, can't always understand, and I'll have to admit it doesn't look good sometimes. They think that when you get out and run against a man that you can't be personal friends, but you can be. I think Johnson admired Kennedy, and I think Kennedy admired Johnson. I think there was a sense of admiration there for each other's ability. Just like the men that I ran against both times in the gubernatorial race, a lot of people think I ought to hate them. Well, I don't do that. When the election is over, it's over, and I think that's the kind of atmosphere that prevailed there that day.

It was a matter of whether or not Johnson could carry his following with him, whether they would understand, whether Jack Kennedy's followers would understand him bringing Johnson in. It's not so much making a decision of do you do these things, it's can you do it and make people understand and go along with you in the decision.

B: There was a difference of opinion among the Johnson supporters?

E: Oh, what are you talking about! I remember very well Bob Kerr. When he walked in the door, Bob said, "I know what's up, and I'll go get my long rifle. It ain't going to happen!"

B: What was your first reaction?

E: I was against it, strongly against it.

B: On the grounds that what Mr. Johnson should do was just haul off and wait for the top spot?

E: I thought he should wait for the top spot. I was wrong, I'll grant you. But I thought he should wait for the top spot. Another thing, too--I didn't think the people would understand in the camps, and they didn't. They didn't understand. There was always, and still is today, some bitterness there.

Tape 2 of 2

B: What changed your mind about Lyndon Johnson accepting the vice presidential nomination?

E: I guess it really was a consensus of the crowd around there that we were doing what was in the best interest of the party and what was in the best interest of the country. We put the country first

and the party second. I don't think anybody in the room at that time particularly thought that we were doing what was in the best interest of our candidate or the best interest of the people that were supporting us. But I think the decision was made on "How can the Democrats win?"

B: Did Sam Rayburn play a part in this?

E: Oh, yes.

B: His change of mind must have influenced a lot of people.

E: You take men of the stature of Sam Rayburn and Bob Kerr and John Stennis--I think John Stennis is one of the greatest men this country has produced in a long, long time, one of the great men whose influence breaks over party lines and [whose] interest in the country goes beyond the party line deal--I think people of that type influence a lot of people sometimes like myself and others that they don't realize. They don't do it to sway us, but we have respect for them because they've been there, they've been on the firing line. I've always had somebody that I thought had mighty good judgment, and I'd think, "Now how would he act under these circumstances?"

B: Did Senator Kerr get mollified to the idea?

E: Oh yes, he came around, but he was one of the [last].

B: It must not have been very easy.

E: If I remember, he was about the last to come around. But we came out of it in full unity. As far as I know, up until this day, all

of them that are still living are all very good friends--all of them.

B: You went on then to play an active part in the campaign. You worked with the Citizens for Johnson group.

E: Yes, I worked with them, and I traveled with the President some during that campaign. The first thing I did was to work as hard as the devil here at home. But I made the complete swing with the President on his southern trip, throughout the South, and he got a good reception. But at that time this resentment about his activity in behalf of civil rights was beginning to grow. It was beginning to be fanned a lot.

B: In the South was that the issue as opposed to Jack Kennedy's religion?

E: They used both. In this state the religion was the issue more than anything else. [In] Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia it was race, but here they used religion more.

B: What's Lyndon Johnson like on the campaign trail?

E: He's a terrific campaigner. He likes to campaign. He likes to get out, as he calls it, and squeeze the flesh and let the mobs run over him. He gets a kick out of it. He's a good showman. I think most fellows in politics have to be pretty good showmen.

B: He campaigned here in Tennessee.

E: Yes, he made three or four stops here.

B: Tennessee went Republican.

E: Yes. On the other hand, when he ran himself in 1964 he carried it by one hundred and twenty-six thousand or one hundred and twenty-eight thousand.

B: In 1960 a lot of people credit Lyndon Johnson with carrying the rest of the South.

E: There's no question about it.

B: Was Johnson's campaign in 1960 coordinated fairly well with Kennedy's campaign? Anything more than the usual amount of confusion and difficulty between them?

E: I think that it was coordinated about as well as it could be. There was always a lot of friction and a lot of disagreement between the Johnson staff and the Kennedy staff.

B: Even back this long?

E: All the way back. All the way back. The Kennedy staff looked on the Johnson staff as a bunch of country yokels. The political savvy of the Johnson staff was entirely different from the highly educated techniques of the Kennedy operation. It was different. I wouldn't say which was the best because both proved successful. They were just two different ways of doing things.

B: Was there ever any moment there in that campaign when you think Lyndon Johnson might have regretted his decision to accept the vice presidential nomination?

E: I suppose there has never been a man when he gets in the thick of a fight like this that doesn't sometimes think, "Why did I do this?" and I think [with] Lyndon Johnson there was a time when he wondered why in the world he took it on. He took a lot of abuse. He took a lot of abuse from some of the Kennedy staff. Not from Jack Kennedy, I think Jack Kennedy was very loyal to him. I'm sure

there was a time when he wondered. Good gosh, I've wondered this week even why I ever came back here and ran for governor again. But you get over those things pretty fast and you go ahead.

B: You kind of pause and think that maybe Lyndon Johnson taking abuse from the Kennedy staff is an exercise in self control.

E: That's right. That's the reason I said a while ago, when they talk about him going off and having these fits and this, that and the other, this guy knew when to do things. He knew when to do things and how to do things. I'm pretty sure there were times when he'd like to have had a pretty good spanking and slapping session, but he could control himself.

B: Did you see much of him during the years when he was vice president?

E: I actually saw more of him during the years when he was vice president than I did any other time except when I was at the White House. When he was vice president I felt a little bit freer to take his time. We'd get back down to the Ranch and do a little hunting occasionally.

I never will forget one night, he hadn't been elected vice president but just a short time, we went back down there, Bobby Baker, Lyndon Johnson--the new vice president--and myself. This was just a short time after the election. The Vice President flew in from Washington and Lady Bird wasn't there. She was to come in the next day or something, I've forgotten. But Bobby flew out to Dallas, I went by Dallas and picked Bobby up, and we went on down to the Ranch. There were just the three of us there that night.

We used to come in the back door through the kitchen. The little old runway out there then wasn't what it is now. The cook had some fried chicken. She was cooking away, and we all picked up a piece as we went through.

Something was said about a good steak. The President said, "Well, let's run over to the [Wesley] West ranch and get us a steak. Buford, your plane's still here." I said, "No, it has gone back to Austin." And his was gone. It's only about twenty-five or thirty miles over there, and I said, "Well, let's drive." We get out there, [and] of course we didn't want anybody with us. We wanted the three of us; we wanted to talk. At that time, why, Bobby Baker was the right hand. Bobby made a great contribution to the President. It's a pity he got involved the way he did. But the President pitched Bobby the keys and said, "Bobby, you drive." Bobby said, "I don't know the way, Buford knows the way." And he pitches them to me. To make a long story short, I threw them to Lyndon and I said, "I've always wanted a vice president as a chauffeur." Believe it or not--of course we were followed by Secret Service--he drove.

We came on back rather late that night, and we got to talking and just passed right by the ranch house, right by the President's home. We were eight or ten miles beyond the house.

B: He's still driving?

E: He's still driving, all three talking, didn't even notice when we'd passed the house we were so wrapped up in what we were talking about.

So I don't know, to me he's just one of the greatest guys I ever knew. I always have to admit, though, I looked on him as a man. One of the hardest things that I had to do was to get to where I could say "Mr. President." I'd do it. I never failed, but I'd catch it just like that sometimes. I was always afraid that I'd be in a crowd and slip and call him by his first name, which of course I dared not do. He wouldn't care, I'm quite sure he would have enjoyed it. I thank God now that I've lived long enough and our friendship has endured long enough that we're back now to where we're on a first-name basis and we can talk together over the telephone every few days and things like that.

B: Did he seem restive while he was vice president?

E: Yes. He is a very active man. Hell, I don't see how [Dale] Malechek runs the farm, his farm manager out there. Hell, he has got to have his nose in it. We were out there not long ago and they had a breakdown in the water pump, the pumps on the farm pumping the irrigation to the farm and the water for the livestock. He was down there, had to have his nose in it.

B: He tried to fix the water pump?

E: Sure, trying to fix it. I told him if he'd gotten out of Malechek's way he could have had it running half again as quick. Malechek's been out there ten or twelve years, and I said to him privately, "Malechek, don't you wish a hell of a lot of times that he was back in the White House and would let you run this ranch?" He said, "It sure is a lot easier when he's up there."

B: Everybody has been amazed at how quiet Mr. Johnson has been since he left the presidency. He's beginning to speak out now, but just recently.

E: I think two things there. Number one, he sold these television programs to CBS where he was kind of under an agreement not to speak out for a given length of time. Another thing, he had some writing that he wanted to finish. I think because of that he had an excuse or a reason, actually it's a real reason, not to speak out. But I think it's the wisest thing he ever did, because I think if he had come out of the White House and started popping off and having all the answers people would have said, "Why in the hell didn't you put them into effect while you were up there." I think it's the greatest thing that ever happened to him.

B: Did he get in touch with you fairly soon after the assassination of President Kennedy?

E: I talked to him the following day. Then I guess about his first trip after he got back to Washington, I've forgotten what the date was that he went back to the Ranch after he was president, he called me and asked me to come to Washington and go out to the Ranch with him. This was his first trip back home after he became president. We got up here in the morning and found out that our airport was closed, terrible weather between here and Washington, and there was just no way for me to get to Washington. So I called him and told him what my situation was, but I further told him that the weather to the west of us was opening up and that I could get west but couldn't get east.

At that time I was with the L&N railroad as vice president. So it was decided then that I'd fly to the Ranch and meet him there. We had set a time when to meet, I believe three o'clock in the afternoon or something like that. I had a small private plane, and I had some headwinds and I was about twenty minutes getting in. Again, even after all these years, I was a little bit concerned. Here I am going out here now, and he's really the president. How do I act? What is the situation? What's the change? I knew what the protocol was, but personally what's the difference?

We go over Dallas, and the pilot that flew me all the time I was governor was flying me that day. So we asked for instructions going into the LBJ Ranch, and they told us we couldn't get in. Of course we were being monitored from the Ranch, and so the word came back right quick that we were cleared to come on in. Before we hit the ground the President was popping off about me being late.

B: On the radio?

E: Yes. He had gone on over to the lake. We were going to go out and try to get a deer that afternoon, what we'd planned to do over the telephone, but he'd gone on over to the lake and left a helicopter there to bring me over. Lady Bird met me, and there was no change in her, I could tell right quick. We just left the plane and didn't even go to the room, got on the helicopter and lit out to catch up with him. One of the men with me carrying me over to him just made the remark, "Governor, we're awfully happy you're here.

This trip's almost as much for you as it is for him. He wanted you here. The family all says that you're one of the few guys that when he gets with he'll relax and come unwound and let himself down. So that was the reason we wanted you out here." It was about eight minutes across, and we didn't tarry very long.

We decided we'd ride up on the Ranch there a little bit on the back side and see if we could spot a deer. Actually, we got to talking and didn't try to kill a deer. We saw a lot of them. But the Secret Service, four carloads of them, just kept pushing up right behind us. I'd been on this flight in a little old private plane; for me out there it was about a four hour's flight, and then across to him. I hadn't had a chance to stop, no rest facilities or anything else. It was back the way it used to be. We didn't have a driver in the car; Moursund, his lawyer friend there and partner in a lot of things, was with us, the three of us. So I said something about a rest stop. I said, "Now, Mr. President, I've gone about as long as I can go. I've got to have one of these old-fashioned rest stops here."

We stopped the car on a bluff and got out and walked down, and these Secret Service boys pushed right up against us. We all three had these high-powered rifles. That was the first thing that kind of relaxed the situation as far as I was concerned. We got back and started to get in the car, and the President called all the Secret Service men up and he said, "Now, gentlemen"--or "men," I've forgotten how he approached it, but in a very nice way--"I know you all have a job to do. I'm not going to argue with you about

how you do it or anything else. But I want to tell you one little thing: I'm with two of the best personal friends I ever had, we've hunted these hills on this ranch many a time together. We may take a shot after a while, but whether we do or whether we don't, I'd appreciate it if you all would stay back. You can stay in sight of us. We're not going to try to get away from you or anything like that, or pull anything. But we're all carrying rifles that you see here and I just want to remind you of one thing, these guns that we've got will shoot a hell of a lot further than those you all have got. I would insist that you stay back a little."

So that kind of broke the nervous tension that existed on my part. It went on then, and it was about like it had always been through the years.

B: Did he offer you a job immediately? Did he try to get you to come to Washington with him? You were no longer governor then and free.

E: We talked. It was available. Very frankly, I didn't know of anything that I could make a better contribution to him and for him and to this government than what I was doing. I would go anywhere for him he wanted me to. The railroads knew that any time he asked me to do something that we had an understanding that I was going to do it. It wasn't costing the government anything. I traveled thirty-four states in this country for him during that period without any cost to the government.

B: This was before you went up there?

E: Before I went up there permanently.

B: Were these mostly political trips?

E: No, this was on trying to work out some agreements of compliance on the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I went to see thirty-four governors of thirty-four different states that were having problems. They weren't all southern either, all the way from Boston across to the state of Washington. But he talked to me about several things, and it was there. But I felt like I could do more as a private citizen, the way I was going.

B: How did the attempts to work out compliance go?

E: Very satisfactorily. We had good meetings in every state and were invited to come in, except Alabama. The response we got from Alabama was--Luther Hodges and I were doing the trips together--George Wallace replied, "I'd be glad for you to come down and argue the case." We weren't arguing any case. We were going down and sitting down with the governors. We did it in all the other states that asked for us, on how federal and state governments can work together to bring about compliance without trouble. That's what we were trying to do, and it was very satisfactory.

B: Did you play a part in the 1964 campaign?

E: Very active in the 1964 campaign. I traveled with Mrs. Johnson more than I did with him.

B: I was just going to ask, as a railroad man were you instrumental in helping set up the Lady Bird Special?

E: I did and stayed with it all the way through, every minute of it. She was quite a trooper.

B: You must have been one of the few men on that train.

E: No, [there was] a good many, a good many men on it. John Ben Shepperd from Texas and myself more or less did a lot of the maneuverings. We didn't manage it of course, it was set up among the other parties, but we did a lot of the legwork. John Ben's from Texas and a former attorney general of Texas.

B: By 1964 traveling through the South must have involved some pretty high-class legwork with southern governors and other southern political leaders after the Civil Rights Bill of 1964.

E: Yes, it was rough. The first thing that happened on the trip after we left Washington on that particular swing on the Lady Bird Special was at Columbia, South Carolina. Mrs. Johnson ran into her first boos and everything there of the trip. She handled it real well though. What she would say at the next stop had all been planned and worked out before we left. You can't do these things after you start. She showed no sign of being upset when she was on the stump when she was speaking, and everything but that little particular thing upset her. After she got back on the car, two or three of us in, she cried a few minutes. Then she braced up and realized that it was still a campaign, she'd seen these things happen before, and went on through the rest of it all the way into New Orleans, through all the southern states down through there. She got a few placards and a few boos here and there, but as a whole it was a most

successful trip. The fact of the business [is] she and the girls, and at least one of the girls was with her at all times and sometimes both of them were, did a hell of a good job of campaigning on that trip.

B: That's the one that ended up with Lyndon Johnson meeting her in New Orleans and making a civil rights speech in New Orleans.

E: Lyndon Johnson came here to Nashville, spoke here, picked my wife up here, and they met us in New Orleans and that was the end of the trip there.

B: Was there ever any debate on making that kind of speech in New Orleans? It was a pro-civil rights speech.

E: No, it wasn't a debate. It was a matter I think of letting the world know that he'd say anything in any one part of the nation that he'd say in the other part. You know, that's a thing that a lot of politicians now on the state level still don't understand. We've got people right here in the state. Our state of Tennessee is six hundred miles long , and we still have a lot of people who think they can say something in Johnson City that won't be heard in Memphis. Well, that old day has passed. I know, because I was a part of it. The New Orleans speech was just to let them know that he stood the same and he was the same no matter which part of the country he was in. We had a whale of a crowd that night.

B: Speaking in Tennessee, he had a great ready-made issue since his opponent in that campaign was accused of wanting to sell TVA.

E: That's right.

B: Which couldn't have gone over too well around here. When did you finally decide then to take the job in Washington? After the election, in 1965, you came up as director of the Office of Emergency Planning. How come?

E: Actually, shortly prior to December we were out at the Ranch, John Connally and some of us, with the President. The whole thing started off about needing a liaison between the White House and the various state houses, the governors of the country. There had never been anybody at that time assigned strictly as a liaison between the White House and the governors of the various states. We started talking on that end of it. Then the further we talked and the more we got into it, the Office of Emergency Planning, as far as federal disasters and all of those things are concerned, is directly related to the state governments. They work through the state governments; the federal agencies and state agencies all work together.

He had some of the professional people in government who have been there for many years make a study of how some of these things could be combined and called me to come up there about heading up this particular type program, which was all old stuff but yet a conglomeration of odds and ends thrown together. He asked me if I would come up there and head it up for a while. That was the way it came about, more in the beginning to try to hold some contacts between federal and state, between the White House and the governors' offices than anywhere else.

B: Did you find that hard to do?

E: It was easily done and most pleasant. For some reason we're having trouble with it now. But to give you an example: The National Governor's Conference was in Minneapolis, Minnesota that year. I went out there. We hadn't even thought of such a thing, but I got out there and there was a lot of rumbling going on, you know, a lot of fellows saying this, that and the other. Very fortunately I have always maintained some very good relationships between the Republican governors and myself. We get along fine, most of us--there are some exceptions. The first day or two out there we saw that there was some trouble brewing. I talked to the President about it.

B: Is the trouble opposition to Johnson policies?

E: Policies and programs and things, just felt that maybe HEW or this group or that group--HEW is always your problem area--were stepping over the bounds in states. This wasn't the South, this was all across the country. I saw that it wasn't political, it was purely a lack of contact, a lack of communication, so to speak.

I called the President and talked to him about it. First, I relayed him some messages as to what I was finding out there among the fellows. Then I talked with him, and in the conversation I said something about, "Why don't you fly out here? I think I know these fellows well enough and they respect me enough, and we can get you a very prominent time on the program. Why don't you fly out here?" He said, "Well, I don't want you to ask them to have me out there," or something like that. Maybe he had been invited and turned it down, I've forgotten the details. But during the

conversation he said, "Why don't you bring them all back to the White House for dinner tomorrow night?" I said, "What?" You know, the President is the kind of fellow that thinks you can just move like that! I said, "My God, if they wanted to come, how could we handle it all?" He said, "If you can get it done, it'll be a great lick. You feel around. We can handle it on this end if you can handle it out there." I said, "Mr. President, we're talking about putting forty-five or fifty governors on one airplane. These big companies won't let all their staff fly on one airplane. Hell fire, every lieutenant governor in the United States will be praying for that thing to go down!"

But anyway, it struck him as a good idea. The more I thought about it, it struck me as a good idea. So I went to two or three of the leadership of the governors in both parties and asked them what they would think about it if I invited them to go. They said, "Hell, we'd like to go. We'll just arrange the schedule." I wouldn't let them bring it up until I knew it would go over, but we brought it up. There were either forty-five or forty-seven, I've forgotten which, one or the other, governors who flew to the White House, had dinner, and flew back. The President, as soon as I called back, sent Air Force One right on out there. They all went up there and had dinner and came back, and I think it was one of the greatest licks that Johnson ever made.

B: Did he speak to them at that dinner?

E: Oh, man, what are you talking about! (Laughter) At that time Fulbright and some of them had begun to take their digs.

B: This would have been in 1965, I imagine.

E: 1965, that's when it was. They were beginning to take their digs at the President on this Vietnam situation. I hadn't been out of office too long. I knew all of the fellows real well and had been in close touch with them all these years. I thought, "Here we're going back to the White House. These guys are shooting at the President about the Vietnamese situation." So I got a resolution prepared and got some of my friends to present it.

B: Your friends among the governors?

E: My friends among the governors. Well, they were all my friends. I don't think I had any enemies. I might have had a few, I don't know. That resolution carried with only one dissenting vote.

B: Excuse me, sir. That must be another case where you would not have had that resolution presented if you didn't know it was going to pass.

E: I knew what the situation was, and I knew that these guys individually thought a lot of Lyndon Johnson because I had dealt with them. Mark Hatfield was the only one that voted against it. Now later on George Romney said he abstained from voting. I don't know about that, but when the thing came up Hatfield was the only one who voted against it.

So here we go back on Air Force One to the White House, all

arranged in less than twenty-four hours, for a dinner, around forty-seven governors, with a resolution to present to the President endorsing his position in Vietnam. Hell, it couldn't have been a greater lick!

B: Was the resolution, incidentally, your idea solely? The President didn't suggest it?

E: Don't think I didn't talk to him about it! Sure I thought about it and thought it was a good idea, but I wouldn't dare bring it up without letting the President know what I was doing.

B: You brought it up first?

E: Sure. The President had never been a governor. He didn't know what the governors' reactions would be. I had been. I knew these men. The point is, I'm trying to tell you why I think that at that particular time he thought it important that I come on to the White House and stay a while.

B: This is the kind of thing you wonder about, why it wasn't done earlier.

E: Yes.

B: It's a necessary thing.

E: I didn't want to go. I had no great desire. I still care nothing about Washington. Very frankly, I think I could have been senator several times.

B: I was going to ask you, because in 1963 and 1964 when Kefauver had died and there was the appointment in the special election--

E: I have never had any interest in it. I do not like Washington to live in. At that time my children were not married; it was completely out of my way; my wife despises it. I just never had any interest to go there.

B: I know that when you were in the job you were involved in a whole lot of crises of one kind and another. There are a lot of them on the written record, the aluminum thing you mentioned and the water crisis. That was when the East almost ran out of water that summer and you got involved.

E: We had that one, and we had a follow-up on the Alaskan earthquake when we had millions and millions to spend up there. We had the great flood of the West, Oregon and down into Northern California and down through there, at that time. We had Betsy that hit us and came across Florida and into New Orleans and across. We had the famous blackout, which was the most comical thing. I was the most cussed man for about twenty-four hours that you ever heard, and yet it turned out that I was right all the way through.

What happened in this case, I had left the office to go out to the apartment. On my way out to the apartment they called me on the radio and told me that the blackout was on. This was about six-thirty in the afternoon, some time in that area. It took me about five minutes to get from there home. I rushed in. I had three or four different telephones in the apartment, and they were all ringing. My wife didn't know what had happened or anything else or what was going on. I immediately contacted my people in New York

and Boston and everywhere. We were operating full blast down at the OEO Building. By the time I got back to the White House I guess thirty or thirty-five minutes had elapsed from the time of the blackout. One of my government men had pinpointed this situation, and he got his information from one of the electrical men.

B: You mean you knew that quickly so you could immediately [act]? There were all those rumors about sabotage and everything else.

E: That's right. But the man that gave our man this information backed up and wouldn't confirm it, so it made a liar out of me and out of my man and everybody else. But my man, when I got to the White House in about thirty-five minutes, had confirmed it, right at the spot where it finally was proven to be--and an overload. Since we couldn't confirm it and the electrical people wouldn't confirm it, there [was] this poor guy up in Boston that had pinpointed it, called our office and told us where it was, told us where he got the information, with these other guys drying up like a clam because they were afraid they were going to be sued by some hospital or some industry or something else. Their lawyers told them to shut up.

We go all night with Roger Mudd and CBS and all of them just blasting the hell out of us and calling us fakes and liars and everything else, had people walking these lines up there. But my man in Boston, the government records there now will show, had pinpointed it from the very beginning. But it took a day or two to clear it up, and then it went right back to where it was.

B: What was the President's reaction to all of that while it was going on?

E: The President was in Johnson City; he was at the Ranch. I had an open line to the Ranch at all times. It was pretty shaky, because all I had was one man's word and all he had was one electrical official's word.

B: Did the President accept your word?

E: He accepted my word.

B: I guess we ought to mention here that one man. Do you recall his name?

E: I've forgotten what his name was, but it's on the written record of the regional office at Boston. I've forgotten what the man's name was, but he is the one man that immediately knew who to contact. They told him there was had happened, and then they backed off. Incidentally, one of the New York papers, and it's a matter of record there again, wrote an editorial apologizing for jumping on us about it. Mr. Mudd never did apologize.

B: Was anything done after that to prevent that from happening again?

E: Oh, yes. Certain preventions and things, but it's still not foolproof. Today it is not. A shortage of power now could trigger the same thing over again.

B: During that year you sat with the National Security Council, too, didn't you?

E: That's correct.

B: Were you involved in the decision in 1965 to begin the major escalation of Vietnam?

E: I sat with them--I guess I was absent once or twice during the whole period--always unless I was out of the city.

B: Was there any serious disagreement at the time? Was there anybody in 1965 who said, "This is the wrong thing to do?"

E: No, no, absolutely not. In those early days and just prior to my going to the White House, believe it or not, the pressure from the Senate that later gave the President so much hell, from the same men the pressure was just the opposite. I was there and I attended the meetings. As I said, I was doing a lot of traveling then for the President as a civilian, not an employee of the White House but as a civilian and as a friend. I was in a lot of the meetings when the President and the staff of the Pentagon and of the State Department gave briefings to the members of the Senate and the House. They were always fully informed. But it began to get popular to be against.

B: You mentioned earlier the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. There has since been the accusation roughly to the effect that nothing really happened in the Tonkin Gulf. Was there ever any doubt at the time?

E: There wasn't any doubt in my mind in it. People don't play games like this. I think those people like my own senator, I'm talking about Albert Gore and Fulbright, McGovern--I could name you a lot of them, all of the dovish crowd--do this country a great disservice in

thinking that the top echelon of the military people play games like this. They don't do it. I may personally dislike someone. I never did like McNamara, you gathered that from my beginning, and my reason for it is McNamara thought he knew it all. I think the maddest I ever saw him was one time when I told him, "Yes, you've got all the information. You know everything. You made the Edsel." Hell, he blew up. That was personal. But I don't think McNamara would intentionally do anything--

B: Plus Lyndon Johnson must have trusted him.

E: Sure. I don't think the man would do anything that would hurt this country. On the other hand, I think it's a dern disgrace that people will accuse each other of doing things to downgrade the country when they know dern well they're not doing it.

B: This doesn't take much inside information. It must have hurt the President as that kind of thing built up. It would be after you had come back to Tennessee as governor, I guess, when it really got started.

E: That's correct. It did hurt.

B: In one of those times when he let his hair down with you, did he ever talk about it?

E: Oh, many, many times. It hurt, and it hurt bad. Here's a man who's honest. Just like you pick up little things and you crucify people with them in political life. Now I know there are bad apples; there are bad apples in almost every barrel, but the majority of the people in government are people that want to do the right thing and

will do the right thing. Again, just like today, I get mad when they condemn all the youth in the country. Hell, it's just not so. We've got the finest bunch of young people we ever heard of. But you've got a small per cent that's getting all the publicity, and that small per cent's the bad. Sure, it hurt the President, it hurt him deeply. I think that's the reason today that the Democratic Party nationally is in the fix it's in. Who would you turn to today? Who could any man turn to today and say, "This man speaks for the national Democratic Party."? There's no such thing any more. Lyndon Johnson was the last man. Nobody wants to take the beating that that man had to take.

B: Do you think this might have had something to do with his decision not to run for reelection?

E: There's no question in my mind about it.

B: The personal aspect of it?

E.: No question in my mind about it. After all, a president, a governor, a university president or a university professor have all got their feelings. You can't get around from the human aspect of this life. You just can't do it.

B: Did you have any hints beforehand, before he made that announcement that he wasn't going to run? You're smiling. (Laughter)

E: I didn't expect him to run, and I didn't want him to run. Because I felt that, first, these very people that we're talking about that he had done so much for had turned on him and let him down. Why should he kill himself trying to protect them?

B: Did you and he actually talk about this possibility?

E: I don't know of anything we didn't talk about.

B: In other words, he discussed the possibility of not running with you before he announced it?

E: We discussed possibilities way back, way back.

B: Like back before 1964?

E: Sure, back before he ran the first time, I mean in 1964. When he was vice president he talked about "Why should I want to be president."

B: You mean he suspected that he might end up that way even without Vietnam?

E: With his strong will and his strong desire for certain things, any man has to look ahead that far.

B: You know, Vietnam aside, you got the impression that Mr. Johnson resented what's called the eastern establishment and what you mentioned earlier, like the Kennedy folks who looked upon Johnson and his supporters as country boys. Was that an element in this, too?

E: I wouldn't say the eastern establishment or the Kennedy supporters. I personally think in all the time I was around them, and I was around them right smart, that Bobby Kennedy was the only one who took any political shots or personal shots at Johnson. I don't know of anything that Jack Kennedy ever did to downgrade Lyndon Johnson. I have to say that. I never saw anything, I never heard of anything. I never heard the President say this about Jack Kennedy. Of course, at that time Jack Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy so overshadowed Teddy Kennedy that you didn't hear anything about Teddy Kennedy back then. He wasn't involved, so to speak, in the decision making as far as

the public view of the Kennedy group. But I think it was more the people around Kennedy than it was Kennedy that at all times would have liked to have pushed Johnson aside.

B: To go back to another thing, when do you suppose did President Johnson make the decision not to run again in 1968?

E: I think it was a gradual decision. I think it started way back in 1965 or 1966, a gradual buildup. As far as I know there was only one newsman, and that was Bill Lawrence of ABC, that made the prediction that he wouldn't run, and the President didn't deny it when it was made. In fact I heard him kid Bill about it before a final decision was made.

B: Did Mrs. Johnson have a big effect on that decision?

E: I say this in all kindness to the President because I don't think Lady Bird would ever try to dominate the President or boss the President, but I think that the President had such respect for Lady Bird [that on] any major decision I think he talked it over. He made the decisions, don't misunderstand me, but I don't know of a couple anywhere where the man talked with his wife more about upcoming decisions than Lyndon Johnson did with Lady Bird.

B: There are those who say that at those times when Lyndon Johnson was inclined to go to excess there was Lady Bird to kind of calm him down, hold him back.

E: I've got news for you, she is a great lady and a smart lady and a down-to-earth lady. I think around Washington when I was there, and

around the country when I traveled with her, I've never seen a first lady that was more respected than Lady Bird Johnson.

B: For all the debate about Lyndon Johnson, I think there's a pretty near unanimous opinion on that.

E: Absolutely. She's a wonderful woman.

B: This is a shift in gears here slightly. Do you still think of Abe Fortas as a Tennessean?

E: Yes.

B: He has been gone from Memphis so long, I wonder if you think of him that way.

E: Yes, we still refer to him as a Tennessean, and I still like Abe Fortas. I'm not too sure that Abe did anything beyond what's being done politically in Washington and all other phases of government. It just happened to be a political thing that they wanted to get rid of Abe. He was a friend of Johnson's. At that time they had a way of getting to Johnson by going after Abe. But look what's up there now, and nothing is being done on some things. Here's [Chief Justice Warren E.] Burger, whom I admire very much, that came on the Court, who admits that he has been getting a fee for serving on boards.

B: Did you help President Johnson on appointments, like Mr. Fortas, to the Supreme Court and all?

E: I wouldn't say I helped him on apointments. We talked about appointments. There was a little group of us set up of Jake Jacobsen, an old Texas boy who was a good friend of the President

who was on the staff part of the time and then he was back in Texas part of the time; Marvin Watson; and a few of us who met every week at the President's request. Actually we looked for people to submit to the President.

B: That must be the hardest part, finding [people].

E: Finding capable people. That's true in private industry, now, much less government.

B: The reason I ask is, you had high praise a while back for John Stennis, and there have been recurring rumors that Stennis was considered for a higher post, maybe even a judicial appointment.

E: Stennis never was interested in leaving that Senate. You know, I'm a native Mississippian, and I know John Stennis so well. I guess that's one of the reasons I admire him so much. I think John Stennis has always felt like the spot he was in and on the powerful committees that he was on that he could serve and do more there than he could most anywhere else. Now I don't say that John Stennis, back when he was a little younger, wouldn't be interested in going on the Supreme Court. I don't know. But I'll say this for him, I think he'd have made a good one, no matter where he went. I think he would have been fair to everybody, no matter where they're from.

B: You've said that you've seen a lot of Mr. Johnson after he's left the presidency. Is he any different? More relaxed? Better health?

E: Completely relaxed. In fact, I talk to him quite often. I call him and he calls me. We've been trying to get together in the last month or two, but about the time that he had this last little flare-up with his heart I had a little flare-up with mine. I don't know whether each one's affecting the other one, I hope not. I'm leaving for Mayo next Tuesday. But he's completely relaxed, or he was the last time I was out there. In fact he wants to come up here this fall, and we want to run back out there again. We've been trying to work out a time we could get together.

B: Does he have any regrets? Is there anything that he would do over again?

E: Not at all.

B: How about anything left undone?

E: Plenty left undone, and that will be true with any man that is ever in public life. As you look back, there will always be plenty that you wish you could have done, no matter what you've done. Here's a man that passed more legislation while he was president and did more while he was senator than any man in the world, any man that ever lived, I guess, in this country. And yet there's still more that he would have liked to have done. But I don't find any regrets. I don't find any remorse. I don't find any bitterness. That's unusual. I don't find him bitter. You might detect it in two or three individuals, I don't know. I couldn't even name those. I just don't find it there. He has dismissed it all.

B: Does he seem fairly confident that in the long run he probably will

be proved more right than wrong?

E: Let me say it this way: he is completely confident that everything he did was right at the time. I think he's completely convinced of it.

B: Does he still talk about politics?

E: Oh, yes, he enjoys it. Private, he won't talk publicly. I called him to come up here to make a speech at our state convention back last spring, and he told me about his commitment on CBS and of course I understood. He's still very interested. He's a little disillusioned at what's trying to evolve as the leadership of the party now.

B: Is he doing anything? You see sort of rumors that there are an awful lot of people going in and out of the Johnson Ranch. Is he actively trying to bring the party together, to create some leadership?

E: I think definitely he would like to be of help, yet I don't think he wants to be the man responsible for it.

B: I suppose in many places Lyndon Johnson in public would still be what Washington calls counterproductive.

E: That's right.

B: I gather you don't think that in Tennessee though if you were going to invite him to your state convention.

B: I got news just this week, in fact yesterday the Tennessee Bar Association called on me to try to get him here to speak to the Tennessee Bar Association. He's still very popular here, and they

don't blame him for the problems that some of the other states are having as far as this school integration is concerned. We finally woke up here that this thing had to take place. Now how do we do it best to keep down as much disturbance is the problem. You've got to remember, everybody throws all of this stuff at Lyndon Johnson. These decisions made by the Supreme Court were under the Republican administration. That's where it started. I think Johnson and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did more to set up a way of doing it without disturbances than anything. But people don't look at it this way. They look at the last fellow to hit. They still blame Johnson for all the busing. There wasn't any forced busing under Johnson. There is forced busing under Nixon, but they still blame Johnson for it.

B: How's Mrs. Johnson these days? She must be really awfully happy.

E: Just great. I sent her a nice Tennessee walking mare not too long ago.

B: I'll bet she appreciated that.

E: Well, the President has one that I gave him, so we decided that she needed one. So I sent her one, and I think she's enjoying it very much. She had a back ailment back years ago, and she has to have a pretty smooth ride.

B: I've ridden Tennessee walkers myself.

E: Is that right?

B: Governor, I've run out of questions.

E: Great, let's go play golf.

B: I figured you'd be happy.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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