INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS W. FLETCHER (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWEE: DAVID G. MC COMB

March 5, 1969 and
March 18, 1969

M: This is an interview with Thomas W. Fletcher, who is the deputy mayor of the Washington, D.C. government. And the interview is in his office in the District Building in Washington. The date is March 5, 1969, and the time is 11:40 in the morning. My name is David McComb.

First of all, Mr. Fletcher, I'd like to know about the circumstances of your appointment as deputy mayor.

F: That was probably the most exciting period in my life. I'm sure nothing could be as exciting as that. I had come back to Washington in July of '67 to take the job as Deputy Assistant Secretary to Housing Assistance. And I went back to San Diego where I had been for twelve years to pick up my wife and children and drive them cross-country to bring them back to Washington. When we were going through the city of Rapid City, South Dakota, Thursday, the 24th of August, and we stopped at a signal on St. Joseph Street.

M: You must have been on vacation too.

F: Since we had to make the trip we decided to look at Mt. Rushmore and some of those things. And we were right by the post office where the car stopped at a signal, and a man stuck his head in the window of my car and said, "Aren't you Tom Fletcher?"

I said, "Yes." And he identified himself as an FBI agent.

He said, "You will please park your car," which I did very quickly.

I said, "What's the problem?"

He said, "None. You're wanted by the White House."

And I said, "Well, I'm sure that's relative to Turnkey." I did have some relations with the White House prior to this, because I had helped develop the Turnkey project for the government, and I thought it was just a question relative to that. The President had announced that program the week before I left.

So I made the call to the White House and it was Mr. Califano that wanted to talk to me. He said, "How quickly can you get back here?"

And I said, "I'll be there Monday."

He said, "You don't understand. Today." So I checked the commercial schedules, and it would be about eight hours; and he said, "No, that's not fast enough." And so an Air Force jet happened to be flying across country that was going to land at Rapid City anyway, he said, "You be on that jet and you report to the White House."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "I can't tell you." So I was able to find a place for my wife and kids to stay at a motel, and the FBI got my suit pressed for me, got on the airplane, landed at Andrews Air Force Base, arrived at the White House about 8 o'clock at night. Met Mr. Califano and spent about an hour with him, and then for the first time discovered that I was being considered to be deputy mayor of the District of Columbia.

When Mr. Califano was through with the interview, he made a phone call and said, "The boss wants to see you."

By the boss, you mean the President?"

He says, "Yes. He's not ready yet, you just wait." So about a quarter to eleven I was led into the Oval Office and met the President.

The first question the President asked me, he said, "Have you had dinner?"

I said, "No, sir."

"Let's go eat."

And as we walked down the hall into the mansion and up the elevator, he said, "How would you like to be the deputy mayor of Washington, D.C.?" As a matter of fact, he said, "How would you like to be the city manager of Washington, D.C.?" That's a very significant point I want to get back to in a minute.

And I said, "Yes."

So we went up and had dinner. Mrs. Johnson was there, Joe Califano, Jim Jones, and a secretary. And during the dinner, I was asked again many questions about my philosophy in city government. I had been the city manager of San Diego. And then we went from there into the President's bedroom where he did his night papers and so on, and I was there until 1 o'clock in the morning. I ended up sleeping in the White House. I had the pleasure of calling my wife and saying, "You won't believe where I'm calling from!"

Then had coffee with the President the next morning, and he indicated to me that he was going to give me a complete FBI check, not the standard FBI check concerning any problem in your background, but a quality type check in terms of my abilities and so on. And they said report back to the White House just as soon as I got back in town, which I did when I got here Monday.

I called Mr. Califano and he said, "Stand by."

And then on the following Sunday, the Sunday before Labor Day, I got a call to come to the White House, my wife and myself, and met Walter Washington and Benetta Washington for the first time. I knew of Walter, having been in public housing of course I knew Walter, but I hadn't been in there long enough to meet him.

We went upstairs to the President, and the President advised us that he had made the decision to nominate Walter as mayor and me as deputy mayor, and that would be made the following week, so that this nomination was made, and confirmed and so on. And as I said, this period of time was extremely exciting to me, but at the Sunday meeting, the President said, "Do you know a man by the name of Horace Busby?"

And I said, "No."

And he said, "Well, you'd better get acquainted with him because he had a hand in your being selected for this job." So whenever the President says, "You ought to meet him," that's an order. So the next thing I knew I had an appointment with Horace Busby, and met him for the first time. Then he told me this story. That on Tuesday of that week, the President called Mr. Busby and said, "I want you to find the top city manager in the country who is relatively young to be the deputy mayor. I want a city manager for that job." Horace Busby then called Pat Healy of the National League of Cities, John Guenther, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Mark Keane, the executive director of the International City Managers Association; and Mr. Burgess, I think his name is, who is the head of the League of Texas Cities, who in turn called Mark Keane, as I recall. And Horace said, "Give me a list of five names that you think are the top city managers in the country."

And then Horace Busby called the President back and said, "You won't believe this, Mr. President, but there's one man that is number one of all four lists, and he's working for you now, and his name is Tom Fletcher."

The President said, "Get him wherever he is," and that's when the call went out all over North America, "Find him!"

And the FBI officers, for example, in Rapid City, not knowing I was going to be flying to Washington, said: "I would suggest that you and your family

stay here for a couple of hours before you get back out on the freeway. You're going to be stopped in every little town you go through by the highway patrol. We have orders all over the country to find you," by the description of the car and license plate and so on.

So the significant thing here is that if you go back and read the Reorganization Plan Number 3 of 1967, it does not specify that the assistant to the commissioner, which is our legal title, is necessarily a professional. Although, as a matter of fact, in the testimony, in the record of the testimony for this thing, there was some reference of whether it will be a city manager, and they said no. But there was some indication that he would be the professional. And that's the reason that the assistant to the commissioner, the deputy mayor's job, does not have a term. The mayor is the four-year term, the same as the President's--on a coterminous term. But the deputy has an unlimited term, can serve at the pleasure of the President, and be removed at any time. The idea there being that he would provide continuity in government if there was a change in administration.

And all of us in my profession are very grateful that the President thought in terms of a city manager for the job. I think it clearly indicates the President's knowledge of government, what it really needs to run, and to operate. And his concept of the way in which it ought to be done. So the reorganization plan, which was something that the President strongly fought for, was able to get through, that he produced a form of government that is a good modern form of government with a mayor and a council, even though they're appointed, not elected. But he also put the ingredient in which is essential, and that is a professional manager to be an administrator which the government never really had had before. So I think that's the basic story as I see it as far as the President is concerned.

M: Did he discuss with you his hopes for the city government?

F: Oh yes. He many many times discussed the hopes at the first meeting that I had on the 24th, discussed them again when we were with him on Sunday, and then at some regular intervals. For example, when the council was finally selected, the President called us all in to the Fish Room. He sat down with the mayor and the council nominees and myself and spent thirty minutes with us, telling us what his feeling was for the District of Columbia. He wanted this to be a model city. He said, "This has been my home for longer than any other place. This is my home. I have a strong feeling for the District of Columbia. I want this to be the greatest city in the country. I want this to be a model."

He constantly said this, time after time. When Walter Washington was sworn in for example, he again made a comment about it. He did it in general, and he did it in specifics. He talked of crime, for example, and constantly talked crime, and said we have to find ways. Housing he talked about. Many of the other areas that the President was interested in for his city, he talked about, and gave us constant charges on this. We worked of course very closely with Steve Pollak, who was the designee for the District at the time we came in. One of the things the President did, as a matter of fact, was to say, "I'm going to abolish this position--this special assistant to the President for the District." Charlie Horsky had been created for that job under President Kennedy. Steve Pollak was there for Johnson. Steve Pollak did leave very quickly after we were nominated and appointed.

M: What's the significance of that?

F: The significance is that he now has a mayor and a deputy mayor and a council who can do this. He no longer needed somebody in the White House who spent full time on District affairs. He now felt that he had created a government

that could pick up these things and provide the sorts of direction and services and decision-making that in the past the White House felt was not present in the form of government that we had.

M: Did he outline your relationship to the mayor--what it should be?

F: No. As a matter of fact, he did not in any precise term. I think he just assumed that if I were a good city manager, I would understand, and that that was part of the definition of what a city manager is.

M: Did this also apply to the district council?

F: No. As a matter of fact, he talked about the relationship between the mayor and the council, not my role. But I can remember the meeting in the Fish Room. He made the statement several times, he said, "I want basically two things. One, I want all of you to act as if you were elected. Get out on the streets and talk to people and so on. And second, I want the council to support the mayor. The mayor is going to be the leader of this city, and I want the council to get behind him and help him every single possible way that you can." So that he recognized the importance of the mayor, and charged the council with acting like they were elected, at the same time working very closely with the mayor.

M: Did you have anything to do with the selection of the district council?

F: I did not personally except, in one recommendation which they didn't follow. It would have been impossible for me to do so because I did not know the people and so on. Walter Washington of course did. Walter and the President talked at great lengths about various candidates, and worked together on this. The only time I got involved was, and this was discussed that Sunday, the name John Guenther happened to come up. And I'm a personal friend of John's and I jumped in on that point and said, "Gee, that guy's great!" And everyone thought he was great, and they were all ready to go on Guenther, and I don't know what happened--something happened, and they decided not to appoint him.

They even held John's trip to Poland up for a couple of days, anticipating he was going to be appointed. So I didn't get involved in any of the other selections.

M: The structure of the D. C. government--it seems a little bit unusual about the lines of responsibility and authority. Now, you're selected by the President; you're confirmed by the Senate. The mayor is also selected by the President and confirmed by the Senate. So is the D.C. council. Who are you responsible to?

F: Obviously from a legal point of view or statutory point of view, I'm responsible to the President because he is the man who nominates me. And when President Nixon came in, he had to indicate whether I should be retained or not. So there's no question about who I'm dealing with here as far as my appointment is concerned, but it is understood that being the assistant to the commissioner or deputy mayor, my relationship is with the Mayor, not to the President. And I operate that way. Sure, from a statutory point of view, I suppose you could have a problem some day with that where you would have a man that decided he would be independent of the mayor. But I just can't conceive that anyone would be nominated that way. If that were ever to happen, then there's only one course of action. You get rid of the deputy mayor fast, and you get a man in there who is going to be able to work and will be compatible to the mayor. The system would be destroyed if you didn't have that relationship.

M: Then in your relationship with the D.C. council, do you work through the mayor?

F: Oh yes, constantly. By working through the mayor, let me point out that obviously as time has gone on, the mayor and I have become intimately acquainted

with each other in our methods of operation. I follow his policies, his directions, but the amount of contact that I have with the mayor on a day-to-day basis for routine items gets less and less. My contact with him gets more and more, but that's because we have more and more policy questions and bigger areas to get involved with. But as soon as I get a direction from the mayor, I don't have to go back to him constantly and say, "May I do this." He permits me to go directly to the council with almost all of the budget items for example I work directly with the council on legislation. I work directly with the council with the full knowledge of the mayor, I keep him constantly advised and posted, and get his opinions on those areas that I don't think I have the direction from him that I need to get these answers.

M: How about with Congress? What's your relationship with Congress then? Say, the D.C. committees?

F: Here again, the mayor and I work together on that. Budget items--I work almost directly with the Congress through our own budget officer and so on. Legislation--some of the items the mayor worked on. We kind of divide some of the responsibilities up. In certain areas the mayor has a strong interest in; he has certain relationships up on the Hill that are very close. We kind of pair off on this to work together on this.

M: In general, is it difficult to work with the D.C. committees? Do you have a hard time getting your appropriations, for example?

F: I'm going to have to cut this off for about two minutes. Is that all right?

M: Sure.

F: Yes and no. It depends on who you're talking about and depends on what the issue is. In some areas it's easier to work with them, and in other areas it's not. It depends, as I said, on the subject matter and the people that you're

talking with. I think we're developing a good relationship up there. I thing we have to recognize the authority of Congress. Let me say, one of these things that I think we inherited here was a rather substantial fear on the part of most of the District government employees and the department heads and so on, a fear of Congress. And I don't think the fear was warranted. I don't think Congress was as bad as they said it was. I really think it was a creation of the District government itself that created that fear and created that concern. I think in many areas they just hadn't done a good job of selling themselves, or their programs, or their policies, when they're talking to particularly the staff members of Congress. It's coming through pretty loud and clear to me that if we had done a better job--the District government had done a better job--of selling programs, and selling ideas, and budget items, they would have gotten a lot further ahead as far as Congress is concerned. And I have been told that last year we got more legislation through than at any previous time in a year within the District government. Part of this directly related to President Johnson. He put in a strong message on the District government to the Congress last year; he backed us right down the line. One of the things that President Johnson had with the Monday morning meeting with Barefoot Sanders and Mike Manatos on legislation. And he invited us to be full members of that. For a number of months I was the one who attended, and then I had Bob Knight, a member of the corporation counsel's office, to attend. But they asked us, "What can we do to help you? What legislation do you have up there this week? What can the other legislative liaison people in all the federal agencies do to help you?"

The President called in shortly after Walter and I were sworn in, called a regular Cabinet meeting, mentioned us by name, and gave as orders to

the Cabinet Officers, "You must work with the District government, work closely." And from that point on, our relationship was directly with the cabinet officer, many times, dealing directly with him to help. Many of the Cabinet Officers just leaned over backwards to help us on direct orders of the President.

(end of first session)

M: This is the second session with Mr. Thomas W. Fletcher, the Deputy Mayor of the D.C. government. I am once again in his office, and the date is March 18, 1969, and it is 4:20 in the afternoon. My name is David McComb.

To continue with the questions about the D.C. government and structure, are there any peculiar difficulties which arise from the fact that you are serving an unrepresented constituency?

F: Oh yes. This I think is one of the underlying problems that we have in District government. We don't have an election, we don't have home rule that too often we overlook, particularly those people who speak in favor of home rule. I think too much thought is given to [the thought that] all we have to do is have an elected Mayor and Council. That is not home rule. That is a piece of it, but if that's all that we get--an elected Mayor and a Council--that may lead to more frustration than it leads to success. Because if the Mayor and Council aren't given the authority that goes with their election to make the decisions necessary to run a city of this kind, what good is it to elect them! As I said, it may do more damage. So to me home rule means, not only that we can elect our Representatives, but we also can elect Representatives to Congress, but that Congress delegate to us the authority to set our budget, to make decisions, to pass laws, that the people of this District have the right of initiative and referendum, and have the right of recall. Now that to me is home rule, not just the election of a Mayor and Council.

M: Yes. It's not only for the benefit of the people, but Congress has got to cooperate.

F: That's exactly right. Congress has got to understand that what the people of the District want is to be able to make their own decisions as it relates to their local problems. Now we all recognize that there's a peculiar federal interest in the District of Columbia that must be protected by Congress at all times. But many of the things we do, 85-90 percent of what we do, has absolutely no federal interest, and yet a hundred percent of what we do is controlled by Congress.

M: What is that 10 percent that would be peculiarly federal interest then?

F: Applying to protection. For example, police protection for the federal enterprises, the federal establishments in terms of the open spaces, federal property, the sorts of things that deal with the federal government that we should not have the right, for example, to tell the federal government where a building ought to go or whether a building ought to be closed down, the hours of the operation of that building. Those are federal interests.

M: How about skyline--height of buildings?

F: I'm not sure if that is necessarily a federal interest. I think it is a joint interest as far as the District and the federal interests are concerned. That gets into the economy of the District. We have a very peculiar economy. There's no major city in the country with our type of economy in which the major industry does not pay taxes. All of the major industries in every other city pay taxes--property tax, income tax, and so on, corporate taxes. We do not. Now one of the things that holds down the economy of the District, of course, is the floor-area ratio to the height of buildings and that sort of thing. All you had to do was to go across the Potomac River and see what happens in Virginia, and the economic impact of that sort of thing.

Now at the same time, beautification of the District is a federal interest. And it's also a local interest. But I think there's a meeting of the minds here where we can resolve that question.

M: Are there any peculiar difficulties that arise from the fact that something like 71-percent of the population is black--Negro?

F: Sure. We, I guess, are probably the unique city in the country in those terms--I think there's one other city now that's very close to having a majority of it's population black in terms of major cities. But it shouldn't be a particular problem, not in terms of the color of their skin. Now the problem is that we have a disproportionate share of disadvantaged people in which the welfare problem, the health problem, the educational problem, and so on, are acute because of that problem. So it is a cause and effect. It's a problem, not because they're black, but it's a problem because of the fact they are black that they are in many cases disadvantaged.

M: What you indicate then is the problem is the disadvantaged people, not a racial question as such?

F: That's right, exactly.

M: What's going to happen then? Is this going to continue in the future?

F: It will always be here. That problem will be with us. I think, for many years to come. Here again, we're not unique. There are many disadvantaged in many other cities, and I think that other cities are going to start catching up. Their problems are going to grow as our problems have grown here in the District. The answer to it of course is to reduce their being disadvantaged in every way we can in terms of jobs, in terms of training, education, opportunities. We're making moves in that direction, we're not making anyhere near enough. The problem of course is primarily financial with the amount of money that's required. And here we must look to the federal government, not only in Washington, D.C., but everycity in this country, must look to the

federal government to provide the additional funding necessary to meet that challenge.

M: This brings up the budget question. In getting appropriations from Congress, do you have any unusual difficulties, say, in comparison to what you found in San Diego?

F: Oh yes. There's a night and day difference in the budget process. In the District of Columbia, we go through a normal budget process any city goes through. The department heads submit their budget requests to the budget office, they're analyzed; the mayor becomes involved as the chief executive, he submits the budget to the council; there are public hearings, technical briefings; the council then adopts the budget. Every other city in the country at that moment, the budget has been adopted and is in operation. In Washington D.C., that's just the beginning. From there, it goes to the Bureau of the Budget; from there to the President; from the President to Congress. It then goes through extensive hearings in the House Appropriation Subcommittee; and when that's through, we go to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee to go through it again. Two years ago the testimony on the Senate side alone took 5,000 pages of printed testimony. So that we take the same budget and we go through three separate briefings on it, three separate analyses, each one different, each one with somewhat different concepts of the needs of the District and the size of appropriation. And then of course usually the House and the Senate do not agree entirely, and then it goes to conference. Whenever we want to make an amendment to the budget, we've got to go through the same process all over again. We don't have the authority to make our own amendments, we have to go back to Congress. Now again, we understand Congress' interest in the District, but we feel that many of the

items on the budget are strictly local in nature, and we should really be permitted to make our decisions relevant to that budget.

M: Does the handling of the budget and budgetary matters take up a great deal of your time?

F: A great deal of the time.

M: Could you estimate a percentage?

F: It would be difficult to estimate a percentage, but I would say probably close to 10 to 15 percent of my entire time spread over a year would be devoted just to the budget process. For example, we are now operating under the '69 budget; we are getting ready to justify to Congress the '70 budget; and we're working now on the '71 budget. So we've got three separate budgets that we're working on all at the same time. The '71 budget, for example, which would not go into effect until July of 1970 takes us eighteen months from the time we start to get to that point, which is about twice as long as it takes in any other city.

M: Are there any particular items in the budget that give you trouble--say, housing?

F: No, not in terms of any particular items. It's the whole budget process.

M: The whole thing.

F: Yes. The problem you get into when you deal with Congress and the appropriation committees is that occasionally, Congress will have a particular interest in a particular very small item; and sometimes it's difficult to convince Congress that that is really not of major importance and they really ought to approve it. And you get into that sort of thing and spend hours on things that are of small importance, whereas they really ought to be spending time on the major items.

M: Would it be possible in such a circumstance to introduce so-called change budget that you used in San Diego?

F: Yes, As a matter of fact, we are developing--

M: For the record, you might define change budget.

F: The change budget is taking the base budget you had for the previous year and only budgeting how you're going to change that budget. In three regards: One, you increase the budget with the change; you decrease the budget; or you do it in a different way--without any dollar sign change, but you simply take the money and put it in a different way. So what you're concentrating on is a change, not the base budget. Actually, particularly in the case of the House hearing, it's pretty much a change budget. The House hearings are related almost exclusively to how we're changing the budget. They don't too often go back to the base budget. At least the Senate hearings that I went through last year, there's a little more tendency I think to get involved in some of the basic material. But it's still fairly well concentrated on change. The important thing I think for our budget process though, in relation to the San Diego budget, is that we're not anywhere near what I call a program budget, which I think is far more important. We developed a program budget in San Diego, and then moved into the change budget. Now, here we have almost a change budget but without a program.

M: You mean by a program--

F: Now they're looking at each line item. They're looking at so many stenographers, so many typewriters, so many trucks, on and on and on ad infinitum, without really concentrating on what they're supposed to be doing with that money. What we really want to do is the end result--what's our goals. We really ought to be budgeting, you see, goals, not dollars. We ought to say we'll reduce tuberculosis by such-and-such a percent; we will provide better housing for x-thousands of people; we will provide recreation; we will reduce tension; we will do those

things which are really the purpose of a budget which is the goals--the programs. And then have a measurement system to see whether or not we've achieved those goals. That to me is the ultimate in budgeting, is you budget the goals which are the programs. And the dollar sign is simply after the fact.

M: Have you made progress toward a program budget?

F: We've just started. This year is the first year we've done anything at all. We've just begun, and I don't think you'll see much effect in this '71 budget. I would predict that you won't see a really major change in this area for three or four years. It took over six or seven years in San Diego to develop that kind of a program.

M: Is the problem in selling the idea?

F: The problem is in terms of establishing the goals, establishing the way primarily to measure a system. There's no sense in setting goals unless you can measure how good that goal is, and whether or not you can achieve that goal. It's a very long process. A case in point. What's the goal that you set for a department of corrections? Many people would say how many people escape. I don't think that's the measurement at all. I don't think that the goal of the department of corrections ought to be that you reduce escapes. Now somebody else more informed will say that you measure the goals of a department of corrections by the amount of recidivism--the number of people released that go back into incarceration. That's part of it. But that's not really the measurement. The real measurement is what about the people who did not go back in, who were not re-arrested, but are they full participating members of society. Now that to me is the real goal in the department of corrections! How many people did we restore to be useful members of society. Maybe in many cases not restore them, they may never have been useful members of the society, but we've been able to make them useful members of society.

For example, if we had a million dollars to spend, and we could spend it on security--to increase the security, raise the height of the wall and put more guards on the towers, or we could spend a million dollars for rehabilitative services. Now if we spent the money on security, we'd have no escapes, let's say. If we spent the million dollars on rehabilitation, we might have ten escapes. Say at the end of a year you released a hundred prisoners in the case where all you were doing was being a security custodial service, fifty of them were re-arrested. In the case where you had more rehabilitation and of the hundred that you released, ten of them had escaped, say, another ten were re-arrested. That means we've only twenty out of the hundred that have been a burden to society, in the case where you did not put the money into security. In the case where you put it into security, 50 percent were a burden to society. So I think we've got to change our concept. But it doesn't do any good to put it into a budget unless you can do it. So that's the reason it takes a long time. It isn't putting it down on a piece of paper. You've got to take a guard service, for example, and convert that guard service into instead of guards and custodians, you make them correctional officers, you make them rehabilitative officers.

M: Where did this idea of program budget come from? Did you bring this with you?

F: Well, no, the whole concept of program budgeting goes back many years. Actually the Hoover Commission started it back in the late '40's. A number of the federal agencies picked it up. PPBS was the federal project.

M: It's the same sort of idea then--

F: It's the same basic sort of idea. And I think one of the areas that we are bringing into the District government, I think is a different concept of what we mean by programs. We're talking goals, not programs, but the important

thing is a system of measurement to determine how well we've achieved those goals. And most cities and most agencies that I have looked at that have program budgets don't really have an effective measurement system to know whether or not they've achieved it. I think here again too often we start something, and then we're not willing to stop it. We're not willing to change it. I think the greatest tragedy of bureaucracy is to do very efficiently that which you never should have done at all.

M: Do you get support from the federal government on this, or is this internal?

F: The Bureau of the Budget would support us. No question that the Bureau of the Budget would support us. Part of the problem here again is a process with Congress. It's going to take quite awhile, I think, to get the congressional committees to accept that kind of a budget, and I think what we're really going to have to do for a period of time, and maybe forever, for all I know, is to develop what I call translators. We would start submitting program budgets, but at the same time, back it up with the old budget so that when they say, "Look, I'm used to seeing stenographers and typewriters and automobiles and so on," fine, there it is! "There's what you used to see. But what we're showing you here is the way that ties together." So it'll take a long time, I think, to get that concept changed. They've got to have faith in us that we know what we're doing as far as budgeting is concerned, and so do the people.

M: Where does the initiative for ordinances or legislation begin in the D.C. government?

F: To some extent it's a mutual responsibility throughout the District government. The vast majority of it comes from the departments themselves, very similar to the budget process. Every year in the fall we send out a call to all the departments to recommend to us legislative items. Those are screened by the

Corporation Council, then this office works in them. The council is involved, they work on them, they initiate some concepts, we do, the executive office. We develop a legislative program. It is worked through the Bureau of the Budget, then we submit it to the Hill and work with it up there.

M: So initiative comes from all directions then? From below, from above in the D.C. council.

F: Yes, and also a lot of the legislation doesn't come from us at all. It is submitted by Congressmen and Senators, then we respond to that legislation. Now some of it comes from the White House. This is one of the areas that is of course unique to me, coming from San Diego. When we submit our tentative program to the Bureau of the Budget, some of the items are what they call of "Presidential interest." And the President submits to Congress his D.C. message. President Nixon has not done that yet this year other than the crime program, but this is something that President Johnson did every year--he submitted what he called a message on the nation's capital which contained many legislative items. Home Rule was almost always the first paragraph.

M: Have you done anything like your "Cloud 9" program in San Diego where you brought your administrative heads in for thinking sessions, and separating them from departments?

F: Not yet, and I'm not sure when we will. There are two basic problems to developing a Cloud 9. The first ingredient is that to make a Cloud 9 concept work, is that you have to develop very, very competent deputy department heads--assistant department heads. The whole concept of Cloud 9 is, if you've got good deputy or assistant departmental heads, let them run the department, take your department head away from the department, put them together with all of the other department heads, and let them do strong administrative planning, so

that they're removed from the minutiae of the day-to-day activity of the department. It can just as well and probably far better be done by the assistant. So the first thing you have to do is develop the role of the deputy to the point that they are capable of running that department. Second, you have a physical problem. In San Diego we had a fairly limited number of department heads. Here we have forty. If we were to put all forty department heads on one floor, it would be physically impossible. So we're in the process of doing a reorganization which will reduce the number of department heads to a manageable number, say, nine or ten. And then I think you can develop a Cloud 9.

What we're doing in the meantime--the Mayor has just established a Cabinet, for which he has selected a limited number of the key department heads and staff, and will bring them into a meeting every Wednesday afternoon on a cabinet basis. Although it does not have the essential ingredient of Cloud 9 in which they work together day-in and day-out, hour in and hour out, at least once a week we bring them all together.

M: The D.C. council would be too broad-based, too general, to serve in that capacity?

F: The D.C. City Council?

M: Yes.

F: Oh, no, that's not their role at all. They're legislative, they're not administrative.

M: I see. And the Cloud 9 program would be strictly for administrative policy.

F: Absolutely.

M: I see. Now the D.C. Council has apparently taken on a certain independence and developed their own staff. Is this healthy from your point of view or not?

F: I think so. Here again, there's a strong difference between San Diego and Washington, D.C. In San Diego you had the city manager form of government in

which the city manager was the chief administrator of the city working directly with the council. The council appointed the manager and it could fire the manager. There I strongly fought against any major increase in staff for the council, because I felt that was my job to provide that staffing and that assistance to the council.

M: So when they needed help, you'd give them the personnel.

F: I would give them the personnel; I'd get them the help. Now, in Washington, D.C., there is no city manager. I'm as close to a city manager as you can get, but I work just for the Mayor, not for the council. So therefore, I am not under the city council; and the council feels, and I think properly so, they should be staffed as far as their administrative needs and their legal needs and so on would require. So I have no way near the same feeling here that I did in San Diego. Of course, it does develop problems, but I've yet to find any government that doesn't present problems. The problems are just different is all.

M: There was some thought apparently when this new D.C. government was set up that it was sort of a half-way step toward home rule, and that the government in the future would be restructured once again. Do you follow this reasoning?

F: No, I don't follow that reasoning. I think it has a half-way step, yes, but not in terms of the structure of the government. I think it's a half-way step between the three-man commissioner and a wholly elected mayor and city council. The only way I think we could think in terms of any change in structure would be to go to the city manager form of government. Having been a city manager, and still am, there is a very serious question in my mind whether or not a city of this size and this complexity could really go to a full city manager form of government. I'm inclined to think that the system you have here where the mayor is chief administrator and has under him a deputy who is the professional

in city government, that probably is the best answer. I'm not sure whether you could change that government to such an extent that it would work under the true city manager form of government. I'm a strong supporter of the city manager form of government, and wherever it's feasible I think it should be put into effect. I'm not really sure though whether in the nation's capital could really work.

M: In regard to urban problems, it would seem that many large American cities suffer from the same kinds of problems--transportation, police, pollution, this sort of thing. Is Washington, D.C., unique in any way in the intensity or the type of urban problem that it has?

F: In two ways. One, it is unique in its visibility. With the possible exception of New York, there is no city as visible in the nation or the world as Washington, D.C. As the mayor says, whenever two bumpers hit, it's heard around the world in Washington, D.C.--so that any civil strife, any unique problems, crime, for example, is a national issue. It is not just a local issue. We're known as the--have been called the "crime capital of the nation." As a matter of fact, we have a serious crime problem, but your chance of being murdered is twice as high in Houston; your chance of being raped is twice as high in Los Angeles; your chances of having an armed robbery is twice as high in Baltimore. But we are the nation's capital. So that whenever something happens here, everyone is aware of it. You've got the elite of the press corps here at all times; you've got Representatives in Congress from all over the nation who are obviously concerned with what goes on in the nation's capital. So the first uniqueness of the District, as far as our problem, is the very high level of visibility.

The second is the problem of the difficulty of solving the problems in that it is so cumbersome. Other cities have the capability of taking a problem

(or they should be able to have the capability) and making a decision and going ahead with it. Whereas here, in many of the areas we don't have that authority to make the decisions and correct the situation as quickly as other cities have, because of having to go through Congress and so on.

M: And this is a product of the peculiarity of the governmental structure?

F: That's right.

M: Now, Washington, D.C., has attracted a number of peculiar events due to the fact that it is the nation's capital, such as marches, such as Resurrection City. What do you do about that? What do you do to prepare for, say, a march as the Poor People's march last spring?

F: A number of things are done. First, let me make this comment about the whole concept of what goes on in the nation's capital. Sure, we attract to Washington, D.C., many activities that practically no other city would ever attract, because we are the nation's capital. But as bad as that is and as difficult as that is, the fact that it has happened for so many years and goes on all the time, I think the nation's capital is far more sophisticated than most cities in being able to take care of it and being able to absorb that operation.

I can remember within the first month or so that we were here, there was the Jeannette Rankin march of mothers on Capitol Hill. I'd heard of Jeannette Rankin through the years. I didn't even know she was still alive, and there she is with 5,000 mothers marching on the Capitol, and no one paid much attention to her. If that had happened in San Diego, they'd have gone into complete stroke. [laughter] Here it was, "That's fine. Let her march," and so on. So I think we are far more sophisticated here in being able to take these within our stride, and far more capable because we've had so much of it. The way in which we take care of it is to bring to bear all the elements that are involved,

have a good intelligence system, know what's going on; have close relationship with the federal agencies--the Department of Interior as far as the use of park property; the Department of Justice; the White House; our police department and so on. And I think particularly within the last year we've developed a pretty good system of operation. The inaugural affair this year, I think was the proof that we were able to take care of a very dangerous situation.

M: You mean with the hippy march?

F: With the hippy march, the counter-inaugural. We had almost 10,000 people in town for that. And there was very little trouble, and it was handled I think quite well. It was done because we were fairly well trained; we know what we're doing here now; we're able to make quick, fast decisions in that regard. And I think that our experience proves that we know how to take care of one of these situations.

M: Did you get any special instructions from the White House in regard to the counter-inaugural?

F: No, not particularly. They were certainly interested, both the outgoing and the incoming administrations. Matt Nimetz was the man that we worked with out of Joe Califano's office in the Johnson administration; and Pat Moynihan and Dick Blumenthal [Richard D.] from the incoming administration. We keptboth advised constantly; the mayor and I operated a command center that was developed because of the April 1968 disturbance. We have a hot line right to the White House in that command center, and they were kept constantly posted on what was happening, what was going on.

Our experience with the White House under President Johnson, and so far under President Nixon, has been--they've indicated interest, but no desire to control or make the decisions for us.

M: What happened during the riots in April?

F: Direct relationship with the White House on that. The 5th was the key day. King was assassinated on the 4th. We had a problem the night of the 4th, but it seemed to quiet down in the early hours of the morning. None of us were prepared for the outbreak at noon on the 5th. We were getting geared for night-time breakout, and it broke at about fifteen minutes to 12:00 that day. The President and the Mayor were on their way to the Cathedral for a memorial service for King; our Public Safety Director was over in the Department of Defense getting ready for that night; we were out of communication with most of the decision-makers; and just all hell broke loose here beginning about that time.

The President was quickly brought into it. The decisions that were made were made that afternoon. Cy Vnace--the President asked the Mayor whether he needed some help, and asked whether we could use Cy Vance who had been used in the Detroit riots. And we said, "Yes!" immediately. And Mr. Vance arrived about 6 o'clock that night, and aided us immediately in our coordination of the military and the police department and so on.

I think one of the highlights of that period, speaking of the White House--many things happened during those few days which I'll never forget, but one I'll never forget. We did not have a command center at that time. So about 3:30 or 4 o'clock, the Mayor and I moved down to what is called Room 10 here in the District Building, which is the snow removal center. It has radios and lots of phones and so on. So it was at that time the only place you could call an emergency center. But it was jammed with people. People were shouting and yelling and we were trying to look at the map and phone calls were coming in from all sides and directions. All of a sudden somebody walked up to me and said, "President Johnson is on the phone for you, Mr. Fletcher."

And I said, "You've got to be kidding!"

And they said, "No." And I picked the phone up, and there was President Johnson!

And he said, "What in the hell is happening!" And I was able to bring him up to date as to what was happening and where people were and some of the decisions. He said, "Keep us advised," and so on, which we did. We kept very close contact through Joe Califano from that time on. And their concern was informational primarily, although we did receive a number of calls from Califano which I'm sure came directly from the President, urging strength and urging quick, fast decisions. I think the White House felt much better when Cy Vance was there, in effect, really was representing the President in our midst.

We always had the feeling at that time, and from that time on, that the White House interest was primarily to help us, not to guide us nor to tell us what to do. They, I think, had confidence in us that we could handle the situation, but they wanted to be sure that the Department of Justice was intimately connected with us and always has been. And again, I would look to them now more as the representative of the President than anyone out of the White House.

M: What did Cyrus Vance do when he got here?

F: The first thing he really did was to calm us down, which is probably one of the greatest contributions that he made. Here was a knowledgeable man who had gone through this and who had had experience. There wasn't a one of us--you see, there had never been a riot in Washington, D.C. And here was a man who had gone through this sort of experience, and he was able to assure us that this could be handled and so on. The second--and I can't say which is the most important--the other main thing that he did was to establish a relationship with the military and Department of Justice as back-up to the police department.

And his contact of course with the Department of Defense being very intimate and very close, he was able to bring full support to us from the military. And I would say that was the second thing he did for us.

M: Is this a very delicate point, where you bring in military to back up the police?

F: Extremely delicate. And this is one of the areas of great concern to the President. One of the things when he talked to me on the phone that evening--he wanted to be sure that when the decision was made, it was made with the concurrence of everybody that troops in fact were needed. And that was a joint decision that was made by the Mayor--Cy Vance was not in at that time. The decision was made to actually commit the troops a little after 5 o'clock, I'm not sure of the exact time. The troops were started moving much earlier than that, but the actual commitment of them was made a little after 5:00. That commitment takes the direct order of the President of the United States. Moving does not. You can start moving them without the order of the President.

But that decision was made by the Mayor, by Pat Murphy, our Public Safety Director, and General Collins, I believe was his name, who was the general for the area for this sort of thing. So it was a joint decision that was made in terms of a recommendation to the President. All three signed that document, and the President then signed the order committing the troops. So that in that case, the role of the President was the actual final order to commit them, but it was obvious at that time, as it was in many of the other problems that we had from that time on, that he was reluctant to order troops into being committed for the obvious reason. But he was not in any way reluctant to permit us to work with the military in terms of moving the troops up. I can't give you the exact number, but between that April disturbance and this last fall I'm sure we put the troops on alert a dozen times. Many times that alert actually meant moving them up closer to Washington, D.C.

M: Now you say he would be reluctant to commit the troops for an obvious reason, that reason being the publicity--

F: That's a bad word to use, "publicity." The public reaction to the necessity for the use of the military in putting down a civilian's strife situation--any President would be reluctant to have to use the military. That's insurrection; that's all sorts of things which--that's revolution! I'm sure that every President and every governor has great reluctance to do that.

M: What did you do to coordinate the efforts of the police and the military?

F: In terms of the April disturbance, that was done pretty much through Cy Vance, with the Mayor and myself sitting there constantly. We practically never left the area for about four or five days. As a matter of fact, when we moved from Room 10 that night, we moved right into Chief Layton's office--our police chief's office--and operated out of his office for the next week.

M: What have you learned from that riot?

F: We learned many things from that riot. One of the things that I did--the riot started on Friday--on Sunday I called the President of Brookings and asked him if he would assign some of his top people to de-brief every decision-maker while they were still making decisions. He was very willing to do this and he assigned I think ultimately fifteen of his top people who talked and met with every single official and private citizen that had anything to do with that disturbance. The purpose was to find out what we did wrong! My feeling is we didn't want to find heroes, but we wanted to find out what happened and what decisions were made and how could those decisions have been made better, and what were the problems. That report came out--it was never published, never will be published, as a matter of fact, only two copies of it were ever made. But the direct result of that study and other de-briefings that we did was to

profit by the experience of the April disturbance and make sure that we devised a system to do a better job. And the key of that was communications--many other things, but the key was communications. We didn't know what was going on. We had great difficulty in finding out what actually was happening. People couldn't get to us, we couldn't get to them; we had no way to talk to our department heads. Actually in the chief's office we had only one telephone available to us. So we've developed since that time with the aid of IDA and the Signal Corps and the telephone company and others probably the finest command center in any city in the country, operated under civil defense. It is separate from the police department, but they're integrally connected to it. But we now have a system where we get total information from the police department, fire department, military intelligence--the entire military operation. Our field services from human relations, civilian operations--we are able to communicate right back out to them; we have a complete radio capability, transmitters, receivers in automobiles, handy-talkies. So we've developed a system.

And again, I think the inaugural points out the way which that system operates. It operated very, very well. We knew instantly what was going on. Sometimes we knew it faster than even the police knew what was happening, and we were able to keep our hands on it. One of the things that we've done with that command center--it is not set to second-guess the police department. The police department is the prime operation of any of those areas, and we should not and cannot insert ourselves between the commanding officer of the police department and the job to be done. Our job is to support him, to help him, to do all the other sorts of things which have to be done to take care of a situation like this.

M: What about the prevention of riots? Did you learn anything about that?

F: There are two ways you prevent a riot: one way you prevent a riot is with the force that you use to put it down at the time it starts. Now that is in effect a way to prevent a riot. Riots have a tendency to escalate. This is what happened in April. It started in a very small way. It started with the breaking of a window in a sandwich shop up near 14th and U. And unless it is quickly contained, it will become then a full riot. So one of the answers is literally to use force, and that's one of the ways that you take care of it.

M: Can you overreact in using this?

F: Oh, you sure can overreact, and that's one of the dangers.

M: It's the degree of force.

F: It's the degree of force that you use. It's the amount of force necessary for that situation at that time, and that's very dangerous; and in some of the cases last year, I'm sure we did overreact.

M: That also is a delicate decision?

F: Very delicate decision. How much tear gas should you use and how much force should you use and so on. Now another way of preventing a riot is a good intelligence system which tells you ahead of time something is going to happen unless you do something about it. There you do it by negotiation. You do it by taking care of what caused the tension in the first place. So a good intelligence system will tell you ahead of time that something is going to happen.

The third way of course is to eliminate the cause of the riot in the first place, which is the reason the tensions have been built up and this sort of thing. You do this by providing a very good recreational program to keep people active and interested, as they are not just hanging around on street corners. You eliminate unemployment. You've got good jobs and all the environmental questions which lead to the tension and the unhappiness and make people want to riot.

M: How about new legislation, such as gun registration?

F: We're solidly committed in the District to gun registration. The problem of gun registration has been of course, we can only do so much of it within our limited power. That we are now doing to the maximum of our authority. Additional authority to really do gun registration is in Congress for two reasons: one, there are certain powers that they have not delegated to us, but more important, it doesn't really do much good if you can control them in the District if you can't control them in the neighborhood--in the region, Maryland and Virginia. So that the real answer to gun regulation is it must be nationally controlled--it cannot be regional to be really effective.

M: Did your experience in those April riots help you in dealing with Resurrection City?

F: Oh, yes! By far. It helped us, again, in the command center, the communication system, a better way in which we could operate to provide services to them. There's no question about it that it gave us a much better way of doing it. We were blooded by the April disturbance, and my position from the beginning on that was, let's make sure that if we're going to get any benefit out of that riot, the only benefit that I know of we could get was to profit by that experience to make sure that it never happened again, or if it did, that it didn't happen as bad.

M: What about contact with community leaders?

F: We've developed fairly good contact with community leaders. It depends on what you mean by community leaders.

M: Is this hard to define?

F: Oh, yes. It's hard to define in a number of ways. The subject matter will determine many times which leader you're talking about. You've got business

leaders, you've got commercial leaders, you've got minority leaders, you have leaders of housing and welfare. So there are different groups of leadership. And what you have to do there is to develop the leadership so that you know who they are, that you develop a mutual trust and respect for each other.

And then another area, one of the things that we really ought to do and have not really done much of, or as effectively as we should, is start to develop more leadership within the community--get more people to take a strong interest in their community so that they can become a leader. Now that's a very dangerous, mythical thing to do because there's always a tendency on the part of the general public to be a little leery of a leader who in their opinion has been created for them by government. Leadership really has to come from within the community itself. The community has to push forward the leader. It's very difficult for the government to reach down and pull somebody up and say, "You're a leader." Because if they don't have anything to lead, they're not a leader.

M: What did you do about contacting leaders in Resurrection City? These were mostly outsiders, weren't they?

F: Yes, there, a very effective relationship was developed between two local attorneys who represented SCLC, and we maintained excellent liaison with the two local attorneys who were Washington, D.C., people. We also had a number of SCLC leaders here in the District. Walter Fauntroy, for example, was one of the prominent SCLC national leaders. And so we developed good contacts there, and we developed fairly good contacts with the leadership.

One of the problems with Resurrection City was leadership seemed to move back and forth. One day it would be this man who would be the leader, and the next day it would be somebody else. So there seemed to be a flux or change in the actual leadership of SCLC, particularly within the Resurrection City

area. Now the national leader was still Reverend Abernathy. But on a day-to-day basis there seemed to be changes going on back and forth.

M: What did you do to keep Resurrection City calm?

F: We didn't always keep it calm. Again, one of the things that we did--one of the things that I established here in this office started out with just some of our own department heads, but it quickly grew into a meeting that was held every morning with the exception of Sunday. Six days a week we met here around this table at 8 o'clock--the representatives of our own people, the Police department, and so on, the Department of Justice, the White House, the Secretary of the Army man was here--a man from both the Secretary and the Army, and the National Capital Park Service. And we sat here every morning, "What happened yesterday? What happened last night? What's going on now? What do we think is going to happen today? What should we do if that happens? What should our strategy be here? How are you going to take care of that situation? What's the problem of sanitation and sewage and water, food, and so on?" And by sitting around this table, every single participant sitting here was able to do a much better job.

M: Were there any anxious moments when you dismantled Resurrection City?

F: That was the longest day of my life. It was done on Monday. On the previous Friday, a meeting was held in Ramsey Clark's office with all the military and police personnel and leaders and so on. And Ramsey Clark made a statement. He said, "The way in which Resurrection City is closed down will probably determine what will happen throughout the nation for the rest of the summer," which is a pretty strong load to bear as far as the District government is concerned, because, he said, "it is in your hands, Gentlemen. You will run it, and you will take care of it."

M: Was this statement warranted?

F: Yes. No question about it. The statement was warranted. If we had gone in there and had had shootings and deaths and head cracking and so on, I think it would have--Resurrection City never became a national issue. It became a national issue only to the extent of people being aware. But they never developed a great sympathy throughout the nation. But if we had destroyed, if we had moved in with brutality, there's no question but what this would have set a pattern for this nation throughout the balance of that summer. And we were fully aware of it. The closing of that down was done very, very carefully; it was done with full participation of the Department of Justice and the Department of Interior. A great deal of the negotiations were done by the Department of Justice and the Department of Interior directly with the SCLC leadership. They didn't want a tragedy any more than we did. It was done very well. It was handled remarkably well in my opinion, but it was constantly set on the basis that that thing could have exploded at the earliest moment.

The key element in that was a decision made by the SCLC leadership to remove people from Resurrection City, as many as they could, out of Resurrection City onto the Hill to be arrested, but not to be arrested in Resurrection City. And they were arrested up in front of the Capitol. And the people remaining in Resurrection City were ordered to leave and they did. There were some arrests there, but the principal leadership moved out of the area. We were able to get transportation for many of them to get back to their homes, and we arranged transportation through the Travelers Aid Society at a cost of about $12,000. But I think we were fortunate in the way it was done. I think we had good leadership from the federal government and from the District government to be able to take care of probably, next to the April disturbance, one of the most dangerous times that the city has ever gone through.

M: Was there any fear from the people who remained in the city as they were being dismantled?

F: Oh, yes, great fear! The business community--community leaders throughout the city were in deep fear of what was going to happen. Again, they were more concerned, I think, with what might happen in the District than they were with what might happen to the people in Resurrection City. I know, for example, a group left Resurrection City--one of the small minority of militants there--moved up into the 14th Street area to see if they could get support from the militants of the 14th Street area, "Will you come down and help us." And the answer was, "No, we're not going to come down and help you." Because the local residents realized, I think even the strong militants, realized the consequences of that kind of action. So we had probably, as I said next to the April disturbance, the most dangerous potential that we have ever had. Of course we did have a mini-riot that night. I call it "mini-riot" because it started hard. If we had not been prepared, if we had been in the same condition as we were in April, that could have developed into a riot almost as bad as the April one. But we were prepared, we had troops here, we had them on the street, we had good intelligence, we knew what was happening and were able to move very fast and very quickly and stop what could have been again, a disaster for the District that night.

M: Thank you.

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By Thomas W. Fletcher

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Thomas W. Fletcher, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed Thomas W Fletcher

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