Interviewee: Rep. L. H. Fountain

Interviewer: Dorothy Pierce McSweeny

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McS: This interview is with L. H. Fountain, Democrat from the Second District of North Carolina. Mr. Fountain, you were in private law practice in North Carolina and then a reading clerk in the North Carolina Senate from 1936 to 1941. After service in World War II you served in the North Carolina Senate from 1947 to 1952, at which time you were elected to Congress and have served continuously since that time.

F: That's right.

McS: You are on the Committee for Foreign Affairs and you are the fourth ranking Democrat. You're chairman of the Near East Sub-Committee. Also you are a member of the Government's Operations Committee and I believe fourth ranking Democrat on that committee.

F: That's right.

McS: I'd like to begin the interview with asking you if you recall your first acquaintance with Mr. Johnson, and how that came about, and what your first impressions were.

F: I'm afraid I can't tell you. As you pointed out I came here in 1953 during the Eisenhower Administration when the Republicans had charge of the Congress during the 83rd, I believe. I don't recall my first personal contact with the President, that is, person to person conversations with him, unless it was when he was going into North Carolina during his campaign for the Presidency after he succeeded President Kennedy. Now I had been in his company a number of times with the North Carolina delegation, I think. We had conferred with him in connection with some matters affecting North Carolina. Right now I don't

even recall what they were. But we were in his presence for a luncheon for about two hours when we discussed how to proceed in North Carolina, what some of the problems would be, and how he ought to go into North Carolina.

McS: This would be in 1960?

F: 1964, I believe. As I say, up until that time my contacts with him had been casual--just passing. I think he had spoken in North Carolina maybe even before this time on some occasion--the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner when I knew him--but I never was intimate with him or closely associated with him, even after that time.

McS: Mr. Fountain, during those Senatorial years are there any things that stand out in your mind as far as either issues or legislation that you particularly think of in terms of Mr. Johnson's handling of it in the Congress?

F: I think about the only thing I can comment upon with any degree of accuracy as to my own thinking is the fact that he had a reputation for being a very strong Minority Leader. He was able to get men in line, so to speak. He was a great compromiser in terms of getting what he wanted accomplished or meeting the goal, either of his own party or of the President in the White House. I also got the impression that he was a great man for giving support to the President, even though he might be a Republican, as I think he did in connection with much legislation advocated by President Eisenhower.

McS: What was the attitude in North Carolina towards Mr. Johnson before 1960?

F: Before he ran for President?

McS: Yes.

F: People had mixed emotions, I think. They weren't too sure what his

position was going to be on a number of issues. I'd say his image was reasonably good. Of course, there are always people who judge a man by virtue of his associations, and he had been associated with the Kennedy Administration. And, while Kennedy carried North Carolina, by the end of his Administration some of his programs had created opposition from North Carolina, not only against him but also against Vice President Johnson because of his being a part of the Administration.

But they still looked upon him as one of them and generally interested in the welfare of the people of the southern section of the country--and also as one who understood their problems.

McS: To talk in terms of politics, I'd like to back you up to 1956 now. Were you aware of any signs of Mr. Johnson as a serious candidate for nomination in that election year?

F: No, other than what I read in the newspapers. I had no information indicating that he was a serious candidate.

McS: How would you describe Mr. Johnson's relationship with Mr. Rayburn during this period?

F: I know that only by hearsay and casual observations, but the combined image of the two was that they had a very close relationship and that the President still consulted Mr. Rayburn and got his advice before making real important decisions--

McS: Had Mr. Johnson's position on the Civil Rights Bill of 1957 hurt him in say the Southern area and along with that North Carolina?

F: You mean when he came out in support of the Civil Rights legislation? Yes, it did.

McS: Did you play any part in the 1960 Convention in Los Angeles?

F: I was a delegate--now wait just a minute--I was there! I'm not sure whether I was a delegate or not. I don't recall. Yes, I was. When

you start going back, we all participate in so many things, not having been apprised of your questions in advance, it makes it rather difficult to remember. I think I was because I remember some of our people who never had been to Las Vegas went to Las Vegas. I wanted to go, but being a delegate I was fearful something would come up upon which I might have to vote. As it turned out, I think we had no roll calls and nothing of any consequence really took place other than the ballot which resulted in Mr. Johnson being selected as the Vice Presidential candidate. But I went there as a strong Johnson supporter.

McS: What was your opinion of the--well let me before I ask you about the ticket itself, were there any clues or forewarnings that Mr. Johnson might accept the vice presidency under Jack Kennedy?

F: No, in fact all of the conversation we heard down there until it got to the point where you could realize what was happening, was that he would not accept it. And I guess that was appropriate political strategy, particularly where one doesn't know he will--was not to even give any sign of weakness. But within a few hours after--no, I think it was before the President was nominated they had an understanding about this, wasn't it? Before Kennedy was nominated--I believe it was. But anyway, the rumors started moving around and you could see his supporters, and I was in the room with Mr. Rayburn, and there were a lost of consultations. I know Mr. Rayburn was very strongly opposed to Mr. Johnson's becoming a vice presidential candidate to begin with. Then finally as things went along, when it appeared pretty clear that Mr. Kennedy would get the nomination, the picture began to change, but slowly. The information I received, and I realize there are differences of opinion in history, and I don't know what the facts will actually turn out to be but the impression we got was that an all-out effyrt was made by the President and his cohorts to

get Mr. Johnson on the ticket, feeling that it would strengthen the ticket, particularly in my part of the country. Although I've since heard that maybe it was just an invitation and some of the Kennedy people thought or hoped it would be turned down, and he accepted. I don't know just what happened. These are some of the things that went around. But that was the very definite impression that we got there and that Mr. Johnson did not make a decision to accept until Mr. Rayburn, with whom he had close ties, had finally yielded.

McS: Very interesting. What had been the strategy to get Mr. Johnson the nomination, do you recall?

F: Nothing unusual. I think he went there realizing that he had an uphill battle because of the tremendous amount of effort, financially and otherwise, which had been put forth by Kennedy supporters before he went there. And so while there, it was the usual strategy at a convention, in which he visited the various delegations. He visited our delegation from North Carolina because we went there uncommitted. I think there were several delegates who were committed to Jack Kennedy--Governor Sanford and a few others. I think they got a total of about six out of our total votes, but the majority went for Lyndon Johnson. But he still came before our group, and he spoke. In fact he did a very beautiful job I thought in debate between the two at some scheduled location, because when you start dealing with statistics and records in the Congress Jack Kennedy had been so busily engaged in so many things he didn't have too good a voting record at the time. He hadn't been on the job so long, that is in terms of actual Senate participation, and so the debate was really interesting. I felt Lyndon did a very good job. And yet I heard President Kennedy, then-Senator Kennedy in the debate, and I thought he, too, did a good job. He passed some of these things off with his usual kind of humor,

which I think lightened or diminished the impact of the accusation of inattendence in the Senate.

I heard a number of the debates, went to a number of places he met with other delegations. I think I visited with the California delegation, more or less to hear what was being said, and to hear the debate, because being a lawyer and being in politics myself I was interested. And it was extremely interesting. But one who listened to the debate there at the convention before the various delegations--and of course Kennedy I think hesitated for awhile about showing up at some of them, but he did--but those who listened to the debate, I don't think would ever anticipate that they would have been running mates in the presidential election in November which followed. Because they didn't hold back any punches. At least Johnson didn't. Kennedy had really no reason because he was in front and he was more or less on the defensive. Johnson had to be the aggressor, and that was what he was doing. He was seeking votes.

McS: Since you heard various ones of the debates, how did you personally feel they came out at the end of the debates?

F: Of course I was partisan at the time. I was pro-Johnson. I wasn't anti-Kennedy. I didn't agree with some of the things he advocated because they didn't represent the thinking of our people. I was more pro-Johnson and I was very much impressed. It was really the first time that I had had occasion to really hear Johnson on the firing line, and it was extemporaneous. He may have occasionally referred to a note, I don't know, but he was himself, he was natural, and he did a good job of debating. And so did Kennedy. I would say had they recorded some of those meetings before the various state delegations they would be of interest to go in the library you're talking about.

In fact they might be as interesting as were the Nixon-Kennedy debates during that campaign because they were really going from meeting to meeting, getting few hours of sleep, debating under pressure, and they went all out, I mean. As I say, they didn't hold back any punches, and it seems to me it really was a more aggressive debate than some of the presidential debates have been since. And this was within the party, intra-party.

McS: Was the issue of Civil Rights brought up in these debates?

F: No, it wasn't.

McS: What was your opinion of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket?

F: I thought it was a good ticket.

McS: Do you recall the campaign of either Mr. Johnson or Mrs. Johnson in North Carolina?

F: Yes, Mrs. Johnson came through North Carolina. It was right interesting how we all had to maneuver for our convenience. I was invited to get on the train I think in Ahoskie, North Carolina, which is in the congressional district of Congressman Jones. His predecessor is Congressman Herbert Bonner, who is now deceased. But realizing the problems, and wanting Mrs. Johnson to come into my own area and stop in my own congressional district, after all sorts of telephone calls and many, many contacts, we finally got those in charge to agree to stop in my hometown of Tarboro and pick me up there. I got on the train there and then we stopped in my congressional district in Rocky Mount. She spoke from the platform of the train there, and then we stopped in Wilson, also my congressional district. So in an effort to help the ticket I figured she would probably be as effective as he would be, maybe even more so, and we did get a good turnout. I thought she did a very beautiful job. And I believe we went on down into

Johnston County, which later became a part of my congressional district, now lost by virtue of redistricting. But I thought she handled herself well, and at various times different ones of us would confer with her and suggest areas of interest of local people, so that if she cared to she at least could express herself on some of those things in which local people were interested. So we had a little extemporaneous coordination on these trips. As a matter of fact I probably was with Lady Bird on that trip and saw more of her than I have seen of President Johnson during my entire stay here in Washington, except for the invitations to the White House--the banquets and things of that kind where you march down a receiving line and then engage in a casual chat at a reception.

McS: Is there anything particular that you recall about Mrs. Johnson's trip through North Carolina now, in thinking back on it?

F: Nothing significant other than the total picture. The total image was very good. She has a tremendous smile, a very winning smile; and she didn't seem to be tense, as you might expect. Maybe she'd already been conditioned by the time she got in North Carolina. But I thought she did a beautiful job. She was extremely pleasant, and of course she's a beautiful woman. I think her personality and her manner added to her physical beauty and hence made her extremely attractive. I think she did good because we were in trouble in North Carolina. We just did carry the ticket for Senator Kennedy. In fact, had it not been for the votes in my congressional district and one or two adjoining congressional districts, North Carolina would not have gone for the ticket.

McS: What was the main problem in North Carolina?

F: As I recall, it was Civil Rights legislation, school desegregation policy--the same problem that we have now except it was beginning then--

the use of federal funds to pressure local school districts to proceed more expeditiously than local people felt they were prepared--both races--to do, or could do and successfully maintain and continue a quality public school system.

And there were some other issues that were thrown into it. I guess the biggest issue to begin with was his [Kennedy's] religion. We do have a lot of protestants in North Carolina and more Baptists I guess than any other denomination. There was a strong concern, a very deep conscientious concern, among many people about his religious affiliation. But I think he himself by getting into the issue, really making an issue of it, and expressing himself, in the final analysis--except for a few ministersh here and there, and of course they may have had their following--I think he convinced at least enough people that regardless of his religious affiliation, he would not be influenced in the office on anything of any major consequence by that religion and could be completely objective insofar as his religious affiliation was concerned. But I would say that this was still the big issue, and that is the thing which cost him votes more so than the other things because, while he had voted on these matters, they hadn't been paramounted so much during the course of the campaign. And even civil rights, I don't believe he himself had been the initiator of too many things. It was after he became president he became more controversial really from that standpoint. So I guess I shouldn't put oo much emphasis upon civil rights at that point, although people knew how he felt. I expect wealth, and problems of the family with which people were familiar and they had read about, and religion, were some of the things that the opposition concentrated on and endeavored to influence voters with. And I must confess it did. But in the final analysis I

think we were able to get to enough people, those of us who were protestants who waded into the issue, to get enough votes for him to carry North Carolina.

McS: How was Mr. Johnson received in North Carolina?

F: You mean when he was Vice President?

McS: Well, didn't he come in person?

F: When he was running for Vice President?

McS: Yes.

F: He was received very well. In fact he is really the reason, I think in the final analysis, why North Carolina probably went for Mr. Kennedy. Of course he's only one of many factors, but had he not been on the ticket I seriously question whether or not Mr. Kennedy would have carried North Carolina. And yet had he not been on the ticket, there might have been some other things to compensate for it--that would have been done--and he still might have carried North Carolina, I don't know. But I do know that helped.

McS: Did you see much of Mr. Johnson during his vice presidency?

F: Only at social functions here and there, in the Capitol, on occasions when our delegation would visit with him--and there weren't too many, maybe three or four. I remember in particular the luncheon to which I referred when we met with him and mapped out the strategy for his going into North Carolina. This was, I think, in preparation for the Kennedy campaign. I believe it was. I said about some time back--that's why I say it's awfully hard to remember--I believe it was in preparation for the Kennedy campaign for the first time. Then we also met with him, I'm pretty sure, when he himself went into North Carolina and discussed with him the advisability of concentrating his attention in those areas of most concern to our people and not deliberately becoming

involved in some of the more controversial issues. We had realized that, on those occasions when he might be confronted with questions, he'd have to say what he thought. But we thought that there was no reason to do as maybe Senator Goldwater did, just simply go into a state and deliberately wade into a highly controversial issue, which could accomplish no end--because people knew how you felt. It was just a question of where your emphasis was put in an area where people were an agricultural state and more concerned about that than anything else. So our idea was to give emphasis to that and to let them know of his concern for the welfare of farmers in North Carolina. I think it does have the largest number of small farmers in the nation; Texas has a large number of farms, I believe.

McS: Was this luncheon you were speaking of--

F: This was over on the Senate side in one of the rooms there. I'm not sure which one it was.

McS: And it was campaign strategy for 1960? How would you describe that meeting? Was Mr. Johnson just listening to the advice?

F: No, we had a luncheon and he was very aggressive in saying what he wanted to do. He said-no need to go down there if we can't get a good crowd. I'm sitting here thinking out loud as I talk, trying to determine whether or not this was during his own election for the presidency, or when Kennedy was running for President. You know, I'm inclined to believe now, the more I think about it, that it was when he was runnning for the presidency that we had this particular luncheon because I just don't recall--

McS: Nixon or Goldwater--

F: I don't recall us having that kind of full-fledged meeting when he was running for Vice President. I think he realized what the difficulties

were, and he wanted the necessary preparation to be taken. He had some of his own men over there, and I think he sent some of his own people into North Carolina to coordinate. I don't believe he would have been doing that as Senator running for Vice President. The more I think about it, the more I'm satisfied it was when he was running for President. Of course, I've had to use a lot of words in getting to that position, but that's one of those things that happens.

McS: That's all right. You started to talk about the meeting. You said he was pretty aggressive--

F: He had pretty definite ideas about how he wanted to come into North Carolina. The main thing was to get a good crowd, and he wanted to do those things which were necessary to get a good crowd. Then, of course, he asked us what our feelings were concerning this presence there, and we were forthright in stating that if we wanted to do any good he should concentrate his attention, not evade anything necessarily, but concentrate his attention on the farm problem which was our basic concern and the matter which most concerns North Carolinians. That's what he did, and he did a beautiful job. It was more or less extemporaneous job when he was most effective. He was always more effective when he spoke extemporaneously.

This was when he spoke at our Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner--when he was Vice President. Then he also--some of the things are coming back to me--he came into North Carolina on another occasion and extended an invitation to many of us and through the State Democratic party to invite the most conservative people we could invite to a dinner at the Country Club at Raleigh, which is the capital city. He said, "I don't care whether they're Democrats or Republicans. Just bring me, each one of you get one or two conservative people, people who are concerned about my views and my part, the positions I've taken in the Senate and how I

feel about a balanced budget and fiscal policy and things of that kind." And he did. He had maps and diagrams. Here again he was completely extemporaneous, and he made a tremendous impression upon these people who frankly--many of them were not very warm supporters of the President. As a matter of fact, many of them probably were anti. Many of them were thinking of voting for Goldwater. But I'm satisfied that on that occasion when he discussed the budget, where our money was going, where it was coming from, he gave such a realistic presentation. Then of course he was open in his expression, and he answered questions. I thought he did a better job on that one occasion than he ever did while he was President of the United States. But of course when he became President, his hands were tied. He had to be so careful what he said, as most of them do.

McS: Let me go on forward a little bit, into the Lyndon Johnson years here, and just ask you if in the transition period or soon after the assassination did you have any conversations with Mr. Johnson--or the delegation, I should add?

F: As a delegation, I don't think we did. You see, one of the reasons I didn't have too much contact before then was Harold Cooley from Nashville, N.C., was dean of the delegation. Of course he was defeated a few years back. But soon after he was inaugurated--I don't think I had a special invitation. I think it was a regular invitation to members of Congress and their wives to the White House. I had a brief chat with him following the receiving line activities, only a brief chat, in which I expressed my sorrow that things had happened as they had, regretted the assassination of the President, of course, and that he had to succeed to the Presidency in this way but was delighted that he was in the White House and hoped that he would have a successful remainder

of the administration of Kennedy--because I knew he went in under tremendous strains. It was not an easy way to go into a White House, and I knew what kind of problems he would have. I was really trying to give him the kind of encouragement I think a man needed under those circumstances. But that was about the limit of the conversation, other than standing around and listening to his chatting with other people.

McS: Mr. Fountain, the Congress under Kennedy had various unflattering labels as far as being either unproductive or uncooperative. And yet, of course, in 1965 and '66 there was tremendous passage of legislation, some of which had originally come under the Kennedy Administration. Do you think that the Kennedy legislation would have passed if he would have continued?

F: I expect it would. I wouldn't want to attempt to pinpoint any legislation which would not have because I'd be purely speculating. But I wouldn't be candid if I did not say that I doubt that as much of his legislation would have passed. I doubt that he would have advocated as many additional programs as did President Johnson.

Mr. Kennedy was a liberal with a conservative heritage, so to speak--background. Liberal because I think as President a lot of things he sought needed to be done, and he thought the government ought to do many of them. But, as President, after having observed President Johnson during his term in office I think the Kennedy regime was more conservative.

McS: That's interesting. Speaking of this legislation, of course there are several great programs, titled things like the Great Society, the War on Poverty, and Civil Rights. These were probably the three big areas, I wonder if, instead of being specific, if you recall contact

from the White House or from Mr. Johnson on any one of these particular areas of legislation?

F: War on Poverty--the poverty legislation and what else?

McS: Civil Rights or the Great Society? Which would include your education bills.

F: Yes. You're wise in saying not to be specific because I'm not sure on what occasion about which--you're talking about during the Johnson Administration. Yes, I did have--you know Henry Hall Wilson, from North Carolina, was the House liaison between the President and members of the House during the Kennedy Administration and also for a good part of the Johnson Administration until he was employed as comptroller or head of this big trade center in which I think the Kennedy's and/or Shriver have an interest in Chicago. [Trade Mart] He called me right often to discuss some of these things with me and asked me what I thought, or how I felt, or would I be able to go along.

But I never had either from the Kennedy Administration or from the Johnson Administration what some people--what I would call or what others might call--pressure. I think maybe they did a pretty good job--I'm not saying they didn't use it in places. I'm sure they did, because I ran into it. But I think both President Kennedy and President Johnson had a pretty good knowledge of each member of the House. I know President Johnson called me L. H. From the time he was in the White House he knew me by initials. Of course he had heard me called that in company on a number of occasions, but I think when he became President he made an extra effort to remember people by their names. Whenever I saw him he called me by my initials, which I thought was unusual because, actually, I didn't have too much contact with him. I give that as an example to indicate. President Kennedy would always

remember me by saying, "How's everything in North Carolina?" I'm not sure he realized I was called by initials. He was an extremely pleasant person. But I was contacted. We had many serious objections to the so-called Poverty Program. We were fearful that it had been put together in a hodge-podge way and that too little thought had been given to many of the problems which would emerge. I think history will show that that attitude was true. We were very much concerned about taking the taxpayers money and turning it over to private groups, realizing that in an area like ours you would have a battle for funds. And with such a big minority population in the state you would have fights even between them as to who's going to run an organization designed to help alleviate the poverty situation wherever it was--and, of course, we to some extent have it, as we have it everywhere. But we were concerned about that.

There were four or five amendments which we had suggested. I think they had agreed to some. I remember we met in Mr. Rayburn's office with a number of leaders. There were some 25 or 30 there and that entire meeting was designed to convince the North Carolina delegation, as a matter of fact.

We seriously objected to Adam Yarmolinsky as head of the Poverty Program, not because of any personal objection. But we knew something about his own background, and we did not question his own loyalty and patriotism as an American citizen, but we simply felt that in a program of that kind, with 200 million other Americans, every caution ought to be exercised to be sure that we had a person who was not controversial, who would not become controversial, and who would not use the program as it has been used by many people for many ulterior motives since it was passed. Some of those amendments were adopted in the House, and

they were kicked out in the Senate, and as a result when it got back to the House, I think most all of us voted against the conference report.

But most of us, initially, after a number of specific commitments were made, not only about the legislation, but about the administration of it, voted for the legislation. But I don't think any of us have voted for it since, except as it might have been included in an omnibus authorization or appropriation bill, which had so many other things that you simply had to vote for the legislation even though it might have included some things which you were against.

They did get rid of Mr. Yarmolinsky. He was transferred, and I think the press did the North Carolina delegation a great injustice in that process. But we were forthright. We were open with the leadership. We stated how we felt, and they took this time because it was close. It came out real close. But the Senate knocked some things out, and we saw pretty quickly that it wasn't going to be run like we'd been told it would be run even though those who told us may have had the best of intentions at the time. It just sometimes turns out that people can't produce, can't do what they say they'll do. The bill was later amended and has been improved since that time. But we still have some of the defects in it. But I think--

McS: What would you consider, or how would you describe, perhaps it would be better to ask you, what the Johnson strategy was to get some of this legislation through?

F: Those people whom he knew real well, especially the boys from Texas, it's my information in talking to some of them that he called them directly. If a member of Congress were interested in a project in Texas, I understand he'd mention that and bring it to his attention and maybe leave the inference that it might not get through if he did not

get some cooperation on this particular piece of legislation. That tactic was never used on me. I never had any problem either with the Kennedy Administration or the Johnson Administration in that way. In fact, I must confess that notwithstanding my opposition to legislation which both of the Presidents favored, I still got good cooperation from the administrative agencies, the executive agencies, in connection with programs, funds, projects, and so forth within my district and in North Carolina.

McS: How did you feel about Mr. Freeman's agricultural policy during this time?

F: I didn't always agree with Mr. Freeman's approach, but I thought as a whole, looking at the total administration, that Mr. Freeman did an excellent job. I think he probably is one of the most effective Secretaries of Agriculture we've had.

Now, since that time he's come out with some things which made it difficult for him when he went into North Carolina to campaign for Mr. Humphrey. He had said some things, the details of which I won't take time to go into now, which made it extremely difficult for him in North Carolina. But it was still primarily Mr. Hemphrey himself who happened to be running for office at a time when the thinking in North Carolina was much more conservative than it had been.

McS: I'd like to ask you a few questions on the foreign affairs--your activity in the Foreign Affairs Committee during this period. You were a supporter of the war, I realize, from your voting record. Were there occasions where you were contacted regarding any position on foreign affairs policy by the White House, for foreign aid bills?

F: During the Kennedy Administration, I had an interesting experience, and I'll make it brief. When he was asking for a four-year extension

of the foreign aid authorization--and of course for a number of years I had not voted for the legislation at all, not because I didn't think it was serving a useful purpose but because it had so many things in it I couldn't support--my only way of protest was to vote against it--had it been close and might have failed, I might have looked at it differently; but anyway, there were about 6 or 7 of us, and evidently 3 or 4 of us who they thought were in doubt, or they knew were in doubt, that were invited to the White House with the President. And he was seated in the chair and I was on the sofa and I think Representative Zablocki and Wayne Hayes and I don't recall who else, but he was trying to get a consensus there as to what he might be able to get down here. We talked in terms of a compromise of the extension of the foreign aid, and he was asking for four years, hoping he might end up by getting two or three. He was seeking strategy understanding, presumably, but I figured some of us were invited there more-or-less to be influenced. But, anyway, each one started expressing himself and those who were for the extension--and there weren't too many for a four-year extension; I don't think anybody was really--but even those who favored an extension for two or three years raised questions about it. But they expressed themselves around, and I was at this end right across from him. When the others got through, he looked at me as if--what have you got to say. And I said "Mr. President, you are asking me to vote to take away from the Congress the purse strings of a highly controversial program in my section of the country for a period of four years, when I haven't even been voting for the foreign aid program." He said, "God damnit, you haven't even been voting for it!" I'll never forget it. And he said it with a smile and extremely pleasant, but we discussed it and he seemed to have respect for the opinions

of those of us who may not agree with him.

McS: This was Kennedy?

F: This was President Kennedy. Now during the Johnson Administration, I don't recall having any personal contacts with President Johnson, except during these White House briefings. Now we had many of those in which I was invited as a member and he was forthright in his discussion of things. I do remember--some of these things come back as you go along--I remember one meeting in which he was talking about the foreign aid program. There was a big crowd there--well, not a big crowd, not so large; he had the leadership there--about 25 or 30. It was not one of these where he invited a whole Congress, or just the Democratic members, or just those in doubt. He had some of us in doubt, including Omar Burleson and others. I remember after he had given his explanation of his position, and how he hoped we would see fit to go along on, maybe in this case, a two or three years extension of the foreign aid program and then support it, too, and support the amount he was requesting because he said it was the least. He said if we cut it anymore--and that of course has been the strategy of each of the presidents--if you cut it any more, the program will be endangered. But he said, "now you take a fellow like Omar Burleson over there,"--and of course Omar is from Texas--"he has occasional opposition, but he gets about 85 percent of the vote so he has great difficulty in voting for the foreign aid program. And there's Fountain, he doesn't have any oppostion at all! And his problem is even greater. He just can't afford to vote for the foreign aid programs." He was being to some extent sarcastic, but pleasant sarcasm. He did it with a smile. He was pointing out, I think, or trying to point out, that regardless of the feelings of our constitutiency or even our own thinking about

it, that politically if we were concerned, we should have no concern. He was sort of emphasizing that during the course, and he'd pick up a few examples here and there and point out members. I think he was hopeful that maybe this would encourage us to go along.

McS: Was there an ideological split on the committee in the House as it publicly became known--

F: Foreign Affairs?

McS: Foreign Affairs in the Senate?

F: No, funny thing about the Foreign Affairs Committee--both the Republican and Democratic leadership on the Foreign Affairs Committee, down through the years have supported the Foreign Aid Program. Many of us have had concern about some aspects of it, about getting it reduced, about reducing the number of countries, we were spreading it too thin and getting ourselves obligated and committed, and we felt we ought to concentrate where there was need, and we ought to make ever effort to be sure we were helping people and not just governments. So we had a lot of differences, but between the two political parties I don't think you had too much in the leadership on either side--not since I've been there.

McS: What about the problem of the emergence of Hawks or Doves as far as the Viet Nam War is concerned?

F: I would say most of the members of the House of Foreign Affairs Committee were Hawks, if you're going to use those terms.

Now you mentioned something about my having supported--and I realize this is going in the University of Texas and doesn't relate to me--but I had grave misgivings about our going into View Nam to the extent we did. I did support that resolution. I thought we had to do something, but I didn't anticipate that we would get into this thing to the all-out

extent we have. And I think maybe we made a mistake. Part of that maybe hindsight, but I had that premonition at the time that we were going to get involved too much here if we didn't watch. And as time has passed, I think we did. But I still supported it because I think we have no alternative. When we went into the Far East last year, some of us on the Foreign Affairs Committee, if there was anyone message we got from Foreign Ministers from those countries--and I remember the Foreign Minister of Singapore in particular--we sat and listened to him about 3 hours--fluently discussed foreign policy and the United States involvement in Viet Nam. And he emphasized, he said "maybe you shouldn't have gotten into this war to the extent you have. We here didn't see it quite as you have seen it. We think it was more a nationalistic proposition, internal struggle, but you're in it. And you're the only nation that we can depend upon in so many ways. But if you get out of this war in any way that is construed by Asians as a defeat for America, then we're gone. We'll go down the drain. As a matter of fact, we'll have no alternative. Even when the Communist parties run for election you'll be surprised at the Anti-Communists who will join the Communist, because it'll just be a question of joining or something serious happening to you. Because if Asia gets the impression that America is no longer interested in this part of the world--and that will happen--by either defeat or voluntary withdrawal that does not involve an honorable termination of hostilities, then you will sort-of leave us out in the cold. It will be said, 'Well they were here, but they lost faith; they'd didn't have the courage to go through, and they quit. And how can we depend on them again, we might as well go ahead and live with our people and compromise our problems as best we can.'" That was the essence of the message we got

everywhere we went.

McS: Was there more emphasis brought to bear or interest in the House Foreign Affairs, with the problems developing with Mr. Fulbright in desagreement with Mr. Johnson's foreign policy on Viet Nam?

F: Was there more emphasis?

McS: brought to bear or more interest brought to bear on the position of the House Foreign Affairs Committee with the great schism that was developing between Mr. Fulbright and Mr. Johnson over foreign policy on Viet Nam.

F: I don't know. There probably was, but I don't know enough about it behind the scenes to discuss it. I've always felt that the House Foreign Affairs Committee had never been as active as it ought to be leadership-wise in expressing itself on matters of foreign policy. I'm not one of those that thinks the Congress or either of the committees, the Senate or the House, ought to conduct foreign policy. But as representatives of the people duly elected and going back frequently, members of the House are, I've often felt that the President ought to have the benefit of the thinking of members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, at least a consensus to whatever extent we could get it, if not the views of individual members.

But I think the conflict between Senator Fulbright and the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee was more or less one of procedure. I think he wanted to separate military--Senator Fulbright--from economic aid, and our committee has had jurisdiction over it. Chairman Morgan, I think, has been bitterly opposed to taking that out from under the jurisdiction of the House Foreign Affairs Committee for some time. And that had been the position of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I think we have supported him on that. But I don't think

there's been any bitterness in that fight. Of course, now, Senator Fulbright is one of those who's questionable when it comes to the foreign aid program. I think he lets somebody else lead the battle I believe on the Committee--in the Senate during the last time, although he probably supported it.

McS: Do you think the Congress, or I should be more specific, the House Foreign Affairs Committee was adequately briefed on Viet Nam developments in increasing our commitment there?

F: I don't think we were ever adequately briefed, and it's not altogether the fault of anyone, either the Executive or the Legislative, because of limitations of time. There just isn't time to do the things that need to be done in connection with these all-important problems. For instance, we're at war now, and it's a big war, and there are many problems in connection with it. And while I realize we need relaxation it's hard for me to see how members of the Cabinet can spend as much time at social functions and other places as they do and still give adequate time of meditation and thought to the problems which confront us so they can really think out in a mature sort of way decisions that ought to be made.

I don't think we were adequately briefed about certain phases, and maybe they didn't know. Maybe the President didn't know that so many limitations were going to be placed upon our military. Had I ever anticipated that the restrictions would have been so numerous as to where we could bomb and where we couldn't bomb and that those decisions would be made from here once we had become involved, I would never have voted for the resolution. Because I think we could have already won this war a long time ago.

Now when I say "won it," I mean basically. Guerrillas can fight

on and on, but we could have won it in such a way I think that neither China or Russia would have come in. China would not have been prepared, and still isn't adequately prepared. And Russia isn't going to come in except as a last resort ever. They're going to use other nations to do their dirty work, and I think history has shown that since World War II.

McS: Were your briefings on Viet Nam direction or the conduct of the View Nam War, were they informative or consultative?

F: They were informative. We had an opportunity to question. Of course it was after we became involved that we were advised about a lot of these restrictions. We seriously questioned them, and there were very few members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee who thought we should be as restricted as we were. Of course that was a top level decision that was made. We were not briefed to the point of saying, "this is a war which we don't propose to win. This is a war that will be completely defensive; we will simply do what we can to keep South Korea (sic) [Viet Nam] from being over-run and to help them maintain their independence." I don't think we went into a lot of details about it, but I think most of us felt that going in it we were going to try to win it--not just the political victory, but a military victory also. But when the doves increased throughout the country and the pressures became greater, then the President, against his better judgment I think, and his own wishes, was forced into a position of retreating and finally saying we're not seeking a military victory but only a political decision that will enable the pelple of South Viet Nam to vote their own convictions and form their own government.

McS: Was Mr. Johnson willing to listen to opposing views?

F: Oh yes, he did that. He listened to opposing views, but he had to

spend most of his time talking to the people who were supposed to be experts in the Executive who had access to the information, because we members of Congress who are preoccupied with so many things representing our districts didn't have access to all of these facts. And whether we agreed or not, we still felt that the decision ultimately was his, and he had to make them. He had to rely upon the people who were best informed, and members of Congress weren't, because we sometimes got the information after it had been in the press. Quite often we'd have a briefing, in executive session, in which someone would point out the fact that one of the newspapers or magazines had already carried what we were being told. Or the next day or a few days thereafter, that sort of thing was carried in the newspapers.

McS: Mr. Fountain, you're chairman of the Near East Sub-Committee of the Foreign Affairs. Let me just ask you, as concerned with that area, if you think other areas of the world have been neglected because of our commitment in Viet Nam?

F: Oh, I'm quite sure that's true. Here again, you only express your opinion. I think Viet Nam has deprived us of both time, talent, money, and other things which we could have been using in the Middle East in an effort to help alleviate this situation. Whether we'd still be in the same shape or not, I don't know. But at least I think we could have spent more time thinking about it, planning and conferring and encouraging. I do think the Near East--some refer to as Middle East--is still potentially the most explosive area in the world. As of this moment, if we don't find some way to get these people together and have them sit down and discuss their problems, either face-to-face as Israel has insisted, or through someone else, and do all of the other things we might do in terms of encouraging the Arabs and Israelis to get

together and realize that in the long run it's in the best interest of all of them not to be fighting. I expect that another war is in the making, which will be much bigger and more damaging and with more potential opportunities for a third World War than anything we'd had yet.

McS: My way of summation--I know we're going a little beyond time--let me just ask you if you've ever had the experience of what has come to be called the credibility gap with Mr. Johnson, or another area was his persuasive treatment, being called "The Lyndon Johnson Treatment?"

F: No, not personally. I never felt in any of the meeting which I attended that the President was withholding anything. And I'm not so sure that the President himself was guilty of what has been referred to as a "credibility gap," except as maybe he should have been in terms of some things. I think we are entirely too open in this country. I think we need to know things, but I don't think we need to publish them in our newspapers. My experience has been that when certain members of Congress, in both the House and the Senate, have access to information you might as well publish it in the newspaper. I think this idea of saying where your troops are, and where they're going to move, and when they're going to move, and how many you have--it just doesn't make sense to me, and we do it all the time. It's inconceivable to me that we permit that sort of thing, but we do. So I think we need a little more security in some of these things. But when it comes to policy, what the President does behind the scenes I think probably he did not--and maybe because he didn't know--he really hadn't been told by appropriate people, either in the State Department or the Defense, just what the situation was. But I never got the impression that he was withholding information. As I said, with some of these

people, maybe he did, but knowing how things operate and knowing how often we have executive sessions, and the next day you see something in the newspaper--and that doesn't happen often, I realize, with every committee. It's only occasional with us--when I say knowing how many times, I mean with all of the committees, because you hear it from members who serve on other committees. I can easily see how the President may have maybe been less than candid or not completely open in his conversation with some members of the press and some members of Congress.

McS: Do you think the power and prestige of Congress declined any under Mr. Johnson?

F: Yes, I do. And I think it did primarily because the President had so many programs and recommended so many things and the Congress was so preoccupied in passing judgment on these that the Congress didn't really have the time and couldn't take the time to be as independent as it ought to be. And when I say that, I don't think it should be the kind of independence that says "I'm from Missouri, show me." I think it should be a cooperative independence with the White House. But I think in many areas they should remain at arms length. I'm not one of those who thinks that because the man in the White House happens to be a Democrat that I as a Democrat ought to accept everything he recommends, or because of his political party and the party may be suffering from it. I think when I'm elected I run on the Democratic ticket, but when I get to Washington my position is I represent the American people, the people of my district whether they're Republicans or Democrats or black or white, and it's my job to do what I think is in the best interest of everybody.

McS: Do you think Mr. Johnson could have carried North Carolina this past

election?

F: Had he been running?

McS: Had he been running?

F: I doubt it. But you know, it's funny thing. We didn't think he could carry it when he did. We were doubtful about it. We had problems. But we went to work and he carried it by a tremendous vote. I realize this is speculative, but he would have had great trouble. But I'm thinking about his opponent, President Nixon. President Nixon had trouble. But I'd say a good portion of the Nixon vote in North Carolina this past time--what happens next time will depend upon what happens during the administration--was an anti-Johnson vote. Much of the vote which Humphrey lost was because of anti-Johnson; much of the vote which Mr. Wallace got in North Carolina, and Wallace was high man in my congressional district, incidentally. But Humphrey was, amazingly, second. We have a big Negro population which voted straight Democratic ticket in my congressional district, and Humphrey got a big Negro vote because they just simply felt that Mr. Humphrey was more sympathetic with problems they faced and more interested in their welfare, to state the plain truth about it, than was Mr. Nixon.

But Mr. Johnson with a real effective campaign might have won, but his programs and policies had gotten him into the position where, had he been running, those of us who were running on the Democratic ticket for Congress may well have had to disassociate ourselves from him for purely political reasons. I mean--that doesn't mean that we wouldn't also have differed with him, but we would have had great difficulty ourselves in being re-elected, had we come out wholeheartedly for Johnson's re-election.

McS: Mr. Fountain, how do you think history will evaluate Mr. Johnson and his administration, his strengths and his weaknesses?

F: I don't know. I think it's rather too soon to express a mature opinion about it. I think it's hard to be fair at this point. Of course I'm not sure historians are ever fair when they write something after it has happened--a long time after it's happened. But I do think they ought to be able to be more objective.

I think when history is finally written that Lyndon Johnson will be looked upon as an effective President who made, like other Presidents, mistakes in those areas which reflected themselves in strong opposition because they affected the emotions of people. But I think Lyndon Johnson, and I have differed with him on many issues and been very much concerned about some of the things done by executive agencies, but I realize the President really is a victim of system and doesn't have too much control over what happens in some of these agencies. He just doesn't have time as a President. You can see what's happening now. But I think that Lyndon Johnson tried hard to be a good President. I think he tried to overcome many of the objections which people had, and I can't help but feel that when the final story's written he will probably go down as a good President. I think only time will tell--when we see more of the things that happened behind the scenes and read more from people who were closer to Johnson than many of us were--will tell whether you'd call him a great president, a strong president. If you want to think about well-done and rare or medium steaks--medium good, medium strong--I don't know. I don't know how--

But I couldn't help but feel that he was conscious when he went in the White House of the problem he faced in trying to fill the shoes of marytred president, in the first place. I think he over-did this idea of trying to put through Kennedy programs. And, of course, I think he was seeking support of Kennedy associates, Kennedy family.

I think he was overwhelmed by this sort of thing, and I think he was sincerely determined in his way to advocate almost anything which would right wrongs which maybe he had thought were right, but which he now thought as President, in view of what had transpired, were wrongs. I think he therefore was not as realistic as he ought to have been and advocated too fast and furious some of the things that he did.

But in the final analysis, he was so ansious to be a good President and to be a great President that he, to some extent, became artificial. In planning some of the things that were planned, had he been normal and natural and Lyndon Johnson who was in the Senate and appeared to be forthright at all times, more personable and less formal in some of his speeches, I think he would have had a better image when he went out of the White House, regardless of the Viet Nam War. But the Viet Nam War and the pressure from the doves and the people who were simply against the war is the thing that finally brought his downfall. And it looks like it may soon be Mr. Nixon's war.

McS: Thank you very much, Mr. Fountain.

F: You're welcome.

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By L. H. Fountain

to the

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