INTERVIEWEE: ORVILLE FREEMAN (TAPE #1)

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

DATE: February 14, 1969

B: This is the interview with Orville Freeman. Sir, you've been involved in one way or another in Democratic politics since the 1940's. Do you recall when you first met Lyndon Johnson?

F: No, I don't really recall. I knew him reasonably well before Los Angeles in 1960. I came to testify before Congress on a number of occasions and I was with him a dozen or two dozen times, usually in the company of Hubert Humphrey, prior to his being named as the vice presidential nominee.

B: In those years before 1960 had you formed any opinion about Lyndon Johnson as a man or a politician? What I'm getting at is that I think it's fair to call you a liberal Democrat, and in those days Mr. Johnson was not very much known as a liberal.

F: No, you're absolutely right. As a matter of fact, I thought of him as a strong and effective and an adroit Congressional leader, but very much a conservative. As a matter of fact, one time in 1958--after the election of 1958 I was recovering in Florida and sat down one morning and wrote a long handwritten letter in which I pointed out that there was a strong liberal majority in Congress, and now was the time to have some action.

B: To whom was that letter sent?

F: That letter was sent to the then Senate Majority Leader. I pointed out the areas in which action ought to be taken and some of the places where action had not been taken in the past. One of them, as I recall, was civil rights. A few days later I got back a stinging rejoinder which said

in no uncertain terms that it was the members of Congress under the leadership of the Majority Leader who had won that election, and that this was a program that they'd carried forward before, and it told me in no uncertain terms that just who the hell did I think I was, in effect. In later years the President mentioned that letter on one or two occasions, and it was ironic that about two or three months after I became Secretary of Agriculture early in 1961--I was working late at the Department of Agriculture one night and having a staff conference. The telephone rang and it was the then Vice President Lyndon Johnson, and he said to me very sternly that looking over the records he was not at all satisfied with the minority representation in the Department of Agriculture and that it was about time that I got busy and did something about it. So the wheel had gone full circle.

B: That exchange of letters you mention sounds like it might have been an outgrowth over the controversy about the Democratic Advisory Committee in those years.

F: Not directly, but I was on the Advisory Committee. This was a little bit before. I think the Advisory Committee didn't really get rolling effectively until about 1959, but that might have been related to it. No, this was personal. I felt strongly about a number of issues; I felt Congress hadn't done what they should, hadn't moved as fast as they should; I said in effect that I thought Lyndon Johnson was too conservative, and I wrote a fairly strong letter saying, "Let's have some action." I got back a very strong response, as I've already related.

B: Even things, say, like the 1957 Civil Rights Bill from your standpoint was simply not enough?

F: Well, it really didn't accomplish very much. It was a long, drawn-out maneuver and it never really crystallized. This in a sense, I think, was one of President Johnson's political problems; that sometimes the actions taken and the accomplishments made were not sharply enough delineated, at least to the extent that they reached people that were deeply interested. There were kind of two things involved here, in part sometimes a tendency to overstate what you'd done, which we all have in politics and have almost necessarily so because you get beaten so harshly with the things you don't do, or any mistakes you do make, that when you do get accomplishments there's an inclination to perhaps puff them and overstate them, just like there's an inclination when you're submitting programs to perhaps overclaim what they will do. This we all do.

I think part of the problem of communication with the liberals that President Johnson had, and I could see this dating way back, is he just simply had no time for the people who wanted to talk a good game but never get anything done. He really held them in great repugnance. And there is a lot of very articulate people that are emotionally motivated that make up that group. They have to be like the Vice President says on occasion--I'm talking about Vice President Humphrey now--like "Ivory Soap, ninety-nine and ninety-nine one hundredths pure," and then you've got to float in addition, you know with this crowd. And President Johnson found them highly repugnant, and so sometimes he would respond to them in a way or would fail to communicate with them even when he had really a very excellent, liberal record. Where I was concerned, I was kind of among that group. I held him always in high regard as a skillful political leader; I always liked him personally, but I really felt he was not a liberal.

Actually, it wasn't until I was going to Los Angeles and was on the airplane in 1960 and my staff had gotten a file together and he was then contending for the presidential nomination, and simply by way of background information I went through that file. And I was astounded with that record. And luckily I did, because when the announcement on the vice presidential thing was made and I walked out of then-presidential nominee Jack Kennedy's hotel room where he had informed me of this fact of his selection of Lyndon Johnson, I was deluged immediately by press and radio. And I was able to say then, and did say, very strongly that Lyndon Johnson had an excellent, liberal record, and that basically he was a populist in his political and economic and social orientation. But he had not through all those years communicated that to the liberals or to the people like me at all; that was a new awakening.

B: Back in the '50's, the late '50's, you were close to Hubert Humphrey who was also close to Mr. Johnson in the Senate. Did you and Mr. Humphrey ever talk about the Senate leadership and Mr. Johnson and this kind of problem?

F: No, not a great deal. Not a great deal during that period. I was Governor of Minnesota and he was a Senator, and we were usually either When we were together, which was not very often, we were usually either in purely social occasions or we were talking shop about things that we had to settle between ourselves.

B: Did the members of the Democratic Advisory group in the late '50's there ever get just absolutely frustrated with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn?

F: I don't recall any great frustrations. There was concern that--they resented--really the initiators of the tension, I think, were Johnson

and Rayburn, not the Democratic Advisory Committee. Actually, I wasn't too close--I served on it, but I was not one of the prime movers. But it was clear really that they were trying to build a party and build issues. And the leadership of the Congress was guided by the dictates of the situation up there, and they were both very prideful men who were literally carrying the ball, and part of this repugnance for the loud-talking liberals, I think, crept into this. But it was never, as I recall, a really sharply antagonistic relationship. It was more just a feeling that these guys just "really aren't liberals." I mean, "they're all right, but they're just not liberals and we're certainly not going to let them prevent us from making issue and making sharp issues--making liberal issues--even though they don't like it because they think it goes too far in the dictates of their political situation." And then, of course, underlying all of it was the feeling that always exists in Congress vis-a-vis the party or vis-a-vis the executive branch that we are the ones that count and Congress is an institution divisionally and its leadership is always extraordinarily sensitive to the matter of executive leadership.

I went through that with my committees again and again and again and again. They would say, "Let us come up with a program," and then we did that in 1963 and waited. And I had them all out to my house, all the members of the Agriculture Committee, and talked about a program, and waited to see what they would do because we'd sent so much up in '61 and '62 and they just didn't come up with anything. Generally speaking, Congress is not capable of coming up with a program, and they think they are and they want to and they resent getting a program, yet they wait for it. They fight executive leadership and yet they can't move without it.

And, of course, they always want to be able to go home and say, "No one told me what to do. I'm an independent."

B: The events leading up to the Democratic convention of 1960--were you as Governor of Minnesota contacted in any way about possible support for Mr. Johnson for the nomination?

F: Not really, because by the time Johnson had indicated his availability I was already pledged to Kennedy.

B: It's generally agreed, I think, that Mr. Johnson started awfully late in trying to get the nomination that year.

F: Well, he did most emphatically. You see, one of those actively involved in Humphrey's campaign was Jim Rowe who had been a close Johnson associate all the years, and Johnson had told Rowe quite emphatically that under no circumstances would he be a candidate for President. And it was at that point that Rowe went to work with Humphrey. So we didn't even consider Johnson in the picture at all, and of course I never felt that he had any chance to get enough votes in the convention, so we just never took it seriously.

B: Was there any thought at the time that Mr. Humphrey might have been a kind of stalking horse for a Johnson candidacy?

F: No, not at all. Humphrey was a candidate himself; he felt he would be the best presidential candidate; he felt that he would make a better President than Kennedy. I asked him that specific question one night when we discussed whether he should be, the question, "Do you think having been in the Senate and worked with this man and the others that you would be the best candidate and could do the best job?" and he said, "Yes." I said, "All right, run."

B: Did you take any part in advising Mr. Kennedy after he got the nomination about who the vice presidential selection should be?

F: No, because I was actively identified as one of those possibilities myself.

B: That was my next question. You were well aware that you possibly could have gotten it?

F: Very much so, and I was very interested in it because I knew that I was in serious political trouble in running for a fourth term as governor myself. I'd had three terms in six years, and I had six years of bitter struggle over the usual gubernatorial problem of spending and taxes. And I was a spender and a taxer. I had just about run out my string and I knew it. And so this seemed to me highly desirable.

I went to see President Kennedy in his suite at his invitation shortly after I got to Los Angeles to convention. And at that time we discussed the Minnesota delegation and then he asked me, he said, "Why is it that Minnesota is not with me? We're the same kind of people. We believe in the same kind of things." And he said, "It's hard for me to understand. Now, Chicago and some of the big city machines--they're not for me because of what I stand for, they're for me because I made them be for me. I went out and got the delegates so they didn't have any choice in the matter. But," he said, "it's different with you fellows, and you ought to be with me." I told him, "Well, our problem is two-fold frankly. First, there is still some feeling about the primary campaign in Wisconsin and West Virginia--it was a little rough and," I said, "there's also a Catholic problem in our delegation. But," I said, "you just hold fast and I think it will come around at the right time."

And then we talked a little bit about the vice presidential thing

and he indicated to me that I was in strong consideration in connection with it. As a matter of fact when I left his room and stood in the hall and I was talking to the press, he came out and put his arm around my shoulders and said that I was the kind of a person that would make a good vice president. So I was not obviously consulted about who it should be because I was almost an avowed contender.

B: Were you aware that there was a possibility that you were in competition with maybe Lyndon Johnson?

F: No. It didn't occur to me in my wildest imagination that Lyndon Johnson would be the vice presidential nominee.

B: Did it not occur to you that Kennedy would offer, or that Johnson would accept?

F: Well, I never thought about it. It was that far out. I didn't get that far along the road, because I suppose primarily I would feel Johnson wouldn't possibly accept. Why would anybody leave the strongest political position, the highest power position in Washington, in order to become a nonenity as vice president? It just didn't make sense, so I never even thought about it. And so when Kennedy did call me to his room and tell me that Johnson was the nominee, why, if he had hit me over the head with a telephone pole I couldn't have been more stunned.

B: That was your first knowledge of it? You hadn't heard rumors?

F: No. I hadn't even heard rumors at that point.

B: Did you ever come to any conclusion in your mind about why he did accept?

F: No. No, and I never asked him that. We talked about it a few times. As a matter of fact, he told me that Jack Kennedy had told him that if he, Lyndon Johnson, did not take it that he was going to ask me to take it. We talked about that one weekend up at Camp David, but I never asked him

why he did. I'm kind of sorry I didn't, as a matter of fact, but there were so many other things that we just never got back into that except incidentally.

B: Was it a pretty bitter disappointment for you, sir?

F: Oh, I wouldn't say bitter. I was disappointed.

B: But as you said earlier, you already prepared a dossier on Mr. Johnson, or your staff had, and you then, as I recall, at the convention went on to defend the selection.

F: I defended it immediately, right then and there when I walked out of Kennedy's room. And if I hadn't--I think I'd be a good enough sport, isn't the word, but you take your lumps and you support the choices and then you go out and do the best you can if they're people that you think are tolerable. I've had some occasions where I couldn't support people because I didn't think they were tolerable. I even voted for a Republican once in my life, and that's going a long way for me. But I was able to really quite enthusiastically because I was impressed. When I looked at the record--and I was impressed and amazed that the one who should have known more, should have been better informed, had categorized Lyndon Johnson in terms of his voting record and his political and economic philosophy wrongly. And when I read what he'd voted for, what he'd done, and what he'd sponsored over the years, I just revised my judgments.

This is the point I'm making: that I think one of the problems that President Johnson had, simply because over the years and the tough political climate of Texas, he had done liberal things--exactly what he did as President, I don't think there has been a more liberal President who did more in the social and economic and welfare areas did more for the

folks, as he liked to say, than he did. But the liberals never would realize this, and it's a two-way street. But he did it and he did it in a way of getting it done. And he so detested people that talk and never do anything and sometimes make it more difficult to get something done because they talk so darned much that he never could communicate with this group. And when he did it, they never quite appreciated what he did. This was true while he was President and this--my own--I've never thought about this before now, but this was the reason I expect why I thought he was something of a reactionary until I was finally compelled to review his record.

B: Did he do any campaigning in Minnesota in the '60 campaign?

F: Yes, he was out there for a couple of days.

B: How effective was his style of campaigning in Minnesota?

F: I think it was very good. We didn't have too good a day because we ran into bad weather. He was out in the western part of the state at what they call "Turkey Day" at Worthington, Minnesota, and it just happened to be a day where it rained and rained and rained. Then we went down to the southern part of the state and had an evening meeting, and I thought he went over very well. But he really wasn't there enough and didn't have enough exposure to make a good judgment.

B: Was the idea to bring him into Minnesota to help alleviate some of this residual anti-Catholicism you mentioned?

F: Well, that was part of the picture. It wasn't that sharply defined as things often aren't in a campaign. I was running for re-election in a very tough campaign myself. To get a vice presidential nominee in was obviously a good thing and would attract attention and get press. So we just wanted to get the big names and he was one of them, so we didn't have to go any further than that in our thinking.

B: Do you believe that, as it has been said, that Johnson on the ticket made the difference between being elected and not being elected?

F: Well, I think that anybody that takes a look at the results of that election can see very quickly that if Texas hadn't gone Democratic, Kennedy would not have won. Whether the campaign was pitched then to Texas and to the South in a way that if, say, I'd have been the vice Presidential nominee it would have been pitched much more strongly to the Midwest where presumably I could have brought some strength--no one knows. So that's a question that you can only speculate about. My guess is that probably the election would not have been won if Johnson hadn't gone on the ticket.

As you look back on it and realize how strongly Nixon did carry the Midwest and how strongly he did outside of Minnesota in this last election, why you can only conclude that the Midwest except under unusual circumstances votes Republican in presidential elections. Truman carried it strong in '48, but that was because Dewey just didn't sell and because they made some mistakes. One of them was in agriculture. They moved very aggressively--Truman did--to capitalize on it. He said something, I've forgotten precisely what--Dewey did--to the effect of converting storage from the public to the private sector, a lot of government grain storage. Well, that then threatened basic farm programs. Truman moved quickly and hit that hard and identified it, and it had a great impact in the rural areas. That one thing, I think, accounted for the overwhelming majority with which Truman carried the Midwest as opposed to Dewey. But that was a special circumstance and Nixon apparently goes fairly well in those areas. And whether we could have gotten enough votes is highly

problematical in retrospect.

B: Were you advising Mr. Kennedy on agricultural policy in the '60 campaign?

F: A little. But I was so occupied in my own campaign; I knew the people that were advising him, and what he was being advised was good in my lights. As a matter of fact, ironically Kennedy in 1956 at the convention in Chicago was then in the Clint Anderson school which was low price supports, and I was very strongly in the high price supports. Kennedy then completely changed his position subsequent to 1956, and he changed it, I think, because he became aware that the low price support system simply wasn't workable; that you had to have production control in order to do anything with American agriculture. And of course, politically, I think, he recognized too that in the Democratic Party, why, a low price support man just was not going to get some support he needed. So Kennedy became a high price support man, and he knew a good deal about agriculture and a good deal about agricultural economics, and was quite sensitive to it although he did very little to involve himself in agricultural affairs. He pretty well turned it over to me and then backed everything I did just a hundred percent.

B: I don't want to duplicate what you've already done for the Kennedy Oral History Program; I assume that covers the circumstances of your being named Secretary of Agriculture and so on?

F: I assume it does. Frankly, it was so many years ago now that I've forgotten what's in it.

B: During those years of the Kennedy Presidency and the Johnson Vice Presidency, did Mr. Johnson have anything to do with the agricultural policy?

F: No. As a matter of fact, I tried to get him to help me with some things

a number of times and he really didn't do very much.

B: Did you get the impression that he was deliberately staying in the background?

F: I don't know. I don't have any clear impression. I think you'd say that he was wise enough to know that he had only about so much capital that he could use on the Hill, and he was saving it for matters that he thought were of greater importance. And I think that President Kennedy was using him as much as he could and was using him on matters that he felt had a higher priority.

B: During those years there was then and has been still a lot of speculation about rivalry between Mr. Johnson and the Kennedys generally, not so much John Kennedy, but the Kennedy group--the staff and that kind of thing. Did you see any of that?

F: No, I really didn't see any of it. And I certainly didn't see any of it from President Johnson. He was absolutely without any exception or equivocation loyal to President Kennedy. He never said anything in any way that could be interpreted even mildly critical, and I never on any occasion heard him say anything about any of the Kennedys or the Administration. I think he had committed himself to this, and he was completely honorable in regard to it, and I saw no deviation from it.

B: Do you believe he would have been the vice presidential nominee on the ticket in '64?

F: I personally don't believe he would have been. I don't think he would have wanted to have been. He had hinted very strongly to me on a number of occasions that he was thinking seriously of doing something else.

B: Did he indicate what it might be?

F: He had apparently some offers from some colleges that he was interested

in, that were asking him if he might be a president of a college. He never got into specifics, but this was something that he indicated that he was partial to. I couldn't really say this strongly, it might just have been something said in passing, but I had the feeling he was not happy as Vice President and was seriously considering not taking it again.

B: The unhappiness came just from the isolation, the inactivity of the position?

F: Yes, I think that was it.

B: Again, since you've done an interview like this for the Kennedy program, I don't think there's any need to rehearse the tragic events of the assassination itself, but do you recall when the then-President Johnson first got in touch with you after the assassination--the events of the transition period?

F: He had a Cabinet meeting the day after the assassination, as I recall. And following that Cabinet meeting, I went over on my own. As a matter of fact, I had met Ken Galbraith in the halls of the White House and he suggested that I should. So I went over to the Executive Office Building and we visited for several hours about what he should do, about what the problems were, and particularly about how soon he should speak to the country at large. He had a real question in his mind as to when he should. I urged him to do it very quickly, but he had the feeling that he ought not to act very overtly, at least until the funeral. He didn't want to do anything that in any way detracted from the complete focus of the country on the tragic circumstances and on the internment. So that was the extent of that.

B: Did that conversation get into personnel matters, the question of whether or not the Cabinet would stay on?

F: I don't remember distinctly. I think I've got this in my notes that I haven't had a chance to read over. I think it did. I know he asked me if I would stay. He said at the first Cabinet meeting that he wanted everybody to stay. He told everybody in the Administration, everybody in the White House, that he wanted them to stay, so there wasn't too much to discuss about that.

B: Did you have any doubts or qualms about staying on?

F: No. I didn't at that time. I think everybody was anxious to do everything they could to be helpful and when he asked you to stay, there were no if, ands, or buts about it. Everybody stayed, including President Kennedy's closest intimates, for a period of time.

B: Did there come a time after the immediate transition when you considered trying to resign from the Cabinet?

F: Well, there were a number of times the first year when I was quite unhappy. I felt that agriculture and the matters that I felt were of concern simply weren't getting very much attention, and I found it very difficult to get any feeling of where it was going. And the difference in administrative style was rather sharp. The first year, until I accomodated to Johnson's way of doing things, was a difficult year.

B: Can you explain what "differences in administrative style" means?

F: Well, both of these men were very competent administrators, but their style was different in the sense that Kennedy did delegate it rather widely. It was at least my experience--that could have been in part because the people with whom I worked were very close to him, personally, and knew his policies and his attitudes. But I could get a clear indication of what I could do and should do, and where it had to go to the President. And when you did go to President Kennedy with an issue, you got a clear and

sharp answer. You knew where you were.

You didn't know where you were very, very often with President Johnson. He would get a lot of different people and get a lot of material submitted, and you'd never hear. And there was nobody in the White House who could speak for President Johnson. He made in a sense all the decisions. With Kennedy, it was different; there were a number of people who could and did, and you could come into a focus for a decision fairly sharply; you know where you were. You didn't know where you were with Johnson. This made him more difficult, in that sense, to work with.

On the other hand, Johnson knew a great deal more about the government. He knew a great deal more about detail and about administration. He involved himself more deeply in it. I think he gave a lot more time to it. From that standpoint in terms of tougher, more effective really, the operation of government felt the strong hand of the President in administrative detail in economy in government and a lot of things more strongly with Johnson. So, you can take your choice. There's something to be said for both means of operating, although it takes Herculean energy and incredible retention of figures and facts and incidents to operate in Johnson's way in such a big government and still be able to do a good job. Not many men could do it. I personally think that the Kennedy style probably in terms of the President was better, but they were both extraordinarily able Presidents.

B: There were rumors at the time that President Johnson was unhappy with you too?

F: I had no indication of that from him. But there were often rumors all the time that he was unhappy with various people throughout the Administration,

and that was a part of it. There was an uncertainty that was involved and the result meant that it made it more difficult in the way to operate because as the saying goes, "he played his cards close and kept his options open." There was nobody, I'll include Mrs. Johnson, that knew what he was going to do about a number of things quite frequently.

B: In those circumstances did you have adequate access to the President?

F: Well, that's a phrase. Could I see the President any time I wanted to? Yes. Both Presidents. That was never any problem. But whether you really get him to sit down and talk about something when you had real access to what was concerning you, was another question. And I would say from that standpoint, again, that you just often didn't know. I had a very difficult period. I was trying to get, along in '64, some statements and messages, get affirmative programs on the Hill, and we had legislation that was of burning importance, and he didn't involve himself in it. And I couldn't find out why. And I never knew what was going to go in or what wasn't.

I since have concluded that he had some real doubts--I think he still has some doubts--about the agricultural program that I think are important. He did come through finally fairly well in 1965 when we passed a big farm bill in '65. It's one of the biggest in the history of the country that was crucial. But even then it wasn't until well along in the course of the Congressional session that he finally really came through. He did send up a strong message; he did make recommendations that I had asked him to make, but he didn't go for a four-year bill until we were half way along in the Congressional session. And he made some statements before he signed the bill that passed in 1968 that led me to believe that throughout all of this period he had some reservations about this program.

I think he was caught in part because a lot of his friends and associates in Texas, some of whom he dealt with on his own farm and ranch, were in agricultural parlance very conservative and he was not at all sure that this production control program which was very costly was worth the investment. It all ended out well; we passed the program and it has worked well, and agriculture today is in an enormously better position in every way than it was when we started. But it meant that I was operating with great uncertainties and very little assurance as to what his real position was throughout most of those years which made it difficult.

B: Was he also getting advice on agricultural policy from people like Mr. Humphrey, especially after Mr. Humphrey became Vice President?

F: Oh, yes, but in this instance I don't think Mr. Humphrey had much influence on him because Humphrey and I shared the same views on this, and I think he was dealing with Humphrey at arms length because he was getting some advice and counter-advice from other circles. So he wouldn't have particularly have gone to Humphrey because he'd know that Humphrey and I were pretty much together. I don't know of any way he really--he had some friends in Texas--Jay Taylor as an example, that's a banker and big cattleman who is a very good friend of his, and a number of others. He did bring in people from all points of view. The so-called "large" farmers and the more wealthy, the better operators, they were kind of Laissez-faire in their agricultural philosophy. And he had more exposure to them than he did to the other school that I would represent.

But I must say that over the years, particularly in 1967 when we got in a big flap about whether we had a cheap food policy--we were fighting inflation, and the argument was made that we were dumping grain and

trying to depress prices. This wasn't true although we took certain actions that were modest and I think proper to try and contain prices. And the political opposition jumped on that. I had a press conference once and made an unfortunate statement that was taken out of context. I had some communications with Bob McNamara in regard to what the Services were or were not buying that the Republicans got hold of--it was a simple, dramatic kind of thing that farmers are very sensitive about, and I came under a rather strong attack during this period.

When I did come under attack during this period, then he rallied and he supported me very, very strongly. But otherwise he didn't involve himself in this very much. Where I mostly was involved with him was on international affairs, and particularly with India. He asked me to head a Cabinet task force under the National Security Council on the development of the Indian program during that period.

B: I think we ought to take the international affairs all at once and deal with it. I have skipped one thing in the chronology that, if you don't mind, I think we ought to back up and cover, although you are probably just absolutely tired and disgusted with talking about it--Billie Sol Estes. During the Kennedy years when Mr. Johnson was Vice President--when that affair broke, did Mr. Johnson get involved in it in any way?

F: He didn't get involved in any way, but he was deeply concerned about it.

B: Did he contact you, or anyone in the department?

F: Yes. He contacted me repeatedly and others in the Department as well. He was well aware of the fact that the forces revolving around that case wanted nothing more than to get him involved in it, and because Billie Sol Estes was from Texas and was quite a name-dropper. So he was deeply

concerned about that, and we were in touch on it quite frequently.

B: When he got in touch with you, would he say just directly, "Don't get me involved in it," or how would it go?

F: No, it wasn't quite--he didn't come and say, "Please protect me. I'm in trouble and they're after me," but he followed it very carefully. And the things that were said that might have been twisted to in any way involve him, he was very conscious of. And he was concerned that there might be people in the Department who might, not purposely but inadvertently say or do something, so he was taking what steps he could on a factual basis as this developed to make it clear to the people who were testifying just what his position was and where he was. It wasn't in any way an approach that said distort anything, or withhold anything, or go any devious routes. It was rather saying, "I don't know this jerk; I've had nothing to do with him. There are a lot of people that are trying to get me in--so-and-so said such-and-such, and the truth of the matter is something else." And when McClellan and the rest of them up there--and [Senator Karl] Mundt would try and start down this road , why he was very concerned about it. So then he would sometimes call some of the people who were testifying and talk with them directly, or he would have one of his aides do it.

B: Was there any direct connection between Mr. Johnson and Billie Sol Estes?

F: No, I don't think there was any at all. As a matter of fact, the Billie Sol Estes case is very interesting and from my point of view, ended up very well. I mean, I think it in the long-run did me a lot more good than harm, but initially it was a very, very tough period. I was just fighting for my political life. They were going to make this the first big

scandal of the Kennedy Administration, and of course there was nothing there at all. When they finally got through, they didn't find that the federal government had been defrauded of one dime--nothing; Billie Sol Estes hadn't gotten anything. He went to jail for defrauding some private finance companies. So as often happens, after I was pillored from pillar to post for months, by a press that was just like a pack of wolves because they thought I was bleeding and they were going to get out some raw flesh--and in this kind of situation that's what the press is--they're just a pack of wolves. And they were ripping and tearing for months, but of course, when it turned up there wasn't anything, some accommodations were made and it worked out fairly well.

Ironically the very things that got most of the attention, which was the transfer of cotton acreage allotment, were subsequently--what Billie Sol Estes had been doing was sustained by the courts as legal. But that was long after the drama had gone out of the case. No one paid any attention to that, so it was just one of those things that happens in government.

B: Was there ever a time there where you felt that you might have to resign for the good of the Administration?

F: No, I wasn't considering resigning for the good of anything. I knew I was right, and I was fighting, and I wasn't about to back off for one instant. No, there was never a time I had any ideas about resigning; that was it. I wouldn't have resigned in a hundred years. I was sure there was nothing wrong here, and I wasn't about to back off.

B: Did you have Mr. Kennedy's support?

F: A hundred percent, yes. And Bobby Kennedy. It was early in the Administration

and he asked Bobby to help, and he did help a great deal. And some of his staff in Justice helped. He had a press conference in which this was the main topic, and he stood behind me just a hundred percent, so that helped to set it proportionately.

B: Back to Mr. Johnson's involvement, there was a case where one man in the department--Mr. Bagwell, I believe--in testifying mentioned a letter involving Mr. Johnson and Estes and got called up and chewed about it, wasn't there?

F: He called and talked with Bagwell. I don't remember the instance. Bagwell was one that he did call. And I don't even remember what the letter was at this point. I think that the committee had taken this letter or whatever it was and had put a light on it that brought Johnson into some question. And he did then call Bagwell at home about this. I don't know whether "chewed out" would be the right words, as I recall--I think he spoke fairly strongly because he thought that Bagwell had been very inept and had allowed this to be referred to in a way which need not have been done if he had been a more forthright and effective witness. And so he was just telling him what the facts really were and how this ought to be straightened out.

B: Were the people in the Department of Agriculture who were trying to take advantage of this situation to harm the Administration?

F: There was one man by the name of Battle Hales(?). He was kind of a neurotic. And he was responsible for a good bit of this. And I think probably in retrospect he might have been sincere. He thought that there was some hanky-panky going on here. But he was kind of a nut. I maybe made a mistake because I refused to see him, and my assistant Tom Hughes

dealt with him. He had seen some documents and things going in and out that he thought were suspicious; then he built this up in his mind as a great cause celebré . So he proceeded then to bring all kinds of information to the press and turned them loose on this, and he was probably more responsible than anyone else and subsequently when I was testifying, he went as far as to going up in the committee room and during an intermission he'd literally have a press conference contradicting what I had to say. He had a secretary who had a complete nervous breakdown. You'll remember the events of the time. And the doctor in the Department called in the police according to local procedures, and she was put in a mental institution. John Williams proceeded to charge me with kidnapping people who were about to disclose information as to all the horrendous events that took place in the Department of Agriculture. It was complete nonsense.

B: And actually Mr. Hales was not one of the men dismissed, was he?

F: No. He was not dismissed. We moved him out. I didn't dismiss him; I concluded really that he was misguided and misinformed and emotional, and that the easiest way to do this was just to move him out of Washington where he was just a sore thumb at that point. And it would have been difficult for him and difficult for me. We sent him down to New Orleans and he continued and as far as I know, he's still there.

B: That lingered on for a time. The reports of the committees were released, as I recall, just before the 1964 election. Was it your impression that that was deliberate political motivation?

F: Oh, I think so. It didn't make any difference. I didn't pay much attention. By the '64 election it was dead, and it was more a plus than it was a minus really. And it gave me an opportunity, really, to do some things

in the Department that otherwise I couldn't have done. For example, I established a post of Inspector General, and then I took all the audit and investigation away from all the big agencies and I put them in my office so that they were reporting to me instead of reporting through the man they were working for as to that agency's performance. And Congress would never have permitted me to do that, but under all the emotionalism of the Billie Sol Estes case, I was able to make this as a reform to correct alleged weaknesses and no one got in the way. As I say, Congress almost always stops anything that strengthens a Department executive's hand. Congress doesn't want a strong, able administrator, because then the individual members can't get the things they want as easily. This is the nature of the thing. They don't like that. So there were a number of reforms I instituted that I think are one of the reasons why in a department as big as this one, touching so many facets, that subsequently we never had anything even touching on the Billie Sol Estes thing because it gave me a chance to get a stronger grip on it.

B: Is that what you meant when you said earlier that in the long run the whole affair rebounded to your advantage?

F: Yes. I think it did public relations-wise, because it attracted a lot of attention when it was proven that there wasn't anything there and that really I had been pretty roughly dealt with by the press and by the rest. Then people just kind of accommodated to this. I think my own reputation both as an administrator and the rest were strengthened rather than weakened and that administratively I was able to do some things that helped strengthen the Department.

B: In the midst of all that mess, did you ever meet Billie Sol Estes?

F: I never met Billie Sol Estes. I might have met him one time when he came to the department very early in 1961 and had a conference with somebody. It was on a Saturday morning. I think he'd been in Charlie Murphy's office and I've got a recollection that I was leaving to go somewhere and he was in the hallway, but I'm not even sure of that. But that's the only time I ever met him.

B: To get back into general politics, in 1964 was there ever any suggestion that you might be the vice presidential nominee?

F: No suggestion. I would have been receptive. But the maneuvering that went on in connection with that politically which I was not privy to--I guess Johnson knew that this was something I might have been interested in. I actually got the word as to his--that Cabinet officers would not be considered which he announced publicly. Bob McNamara and I were playing squash at the Pentagon, and I had a phone call from--I've forgotten--one of the President's aides who just said that the President wanted me to know that he was announcing that he would not consider any Cabinet officer as a vice presidential nominee, so I assume that he was aware that I would have been receptive to such a possibility.

B: Had you made your availability known to him?

F: Not directly.

B: How does one go about doing that kind of thing?

F: Well, in this instance when the President's making the choice, I guess it depends upon the President, your relations with him, and how you think you can best communicate. I don't remember. That was now more than four years ago. I suppose I considered just going in and just telling him I would like it and decided not to. He was aware that I had been around

in '60 and that this would be a possibility, so I don't think I did anything. I just assumed he would know that and that there was nothing more that you could or should do.

B: That announcement that the Cabinet would not be considered was interpreted in the press at the time as a rather elaborate way to not name Robert Kennedy as vice president. Was that the general opinion among those of you in the Administration?

F: I don't know what the general opinion was because I never discussed it with any other Cabinet officer. I don't really know. I think that's pretty well what I concluded--that this was a way to do it and without personalizing it. And really, when you think about it, there wasn't any other reason for doing it that way.

B: Had you seen anything of the relationship between Robert Kennedy and Mr. Johnson in that time?

F: Oh, yes. You could tell very quickly and immediately at the Cabinet meetings that there was just hostility between the two. There was no doubt about that.

B: Did this come out in tone of voice or--?

F: Yes, and mannerisms. At the first Cabinet meeting after the assassination when Bobby Kennedy came in five minutes late, his general demeanor as he came into the room and as he sat down was--well, it was quite clear that he could hardly countenance Lyndon Johnson sitting in his brother's seat.

B: Did that kind of thing permeate the Departments, such as yours?

F: No.

B: That is, the Kennedy appointees--not yourself, but at the other levels?

F: I don't think so.

B: Did they have that same attitude?

F: No. I don't know of any that did. It might have been true in other places such as in Justice maybe, but I don't know of it. I doubt if there was very much of that.

B: Did you campaign actively in '64?

F: Yes.

B: In the Midwest mostly?

F: In the Midwest and in the South. Actually, I was more effective in the South because agriculture is more dominant in the economy of the South than it is even in the Midwest today. And some of the big cash crops and the farm programs have stronger significance, at least they think they do, in the South than in the Midwest--more organized groups with whom you can work and organize. And for some strange reason and coming in as a liberal, I worked well with Southerners; I had quite a number of Southerners in the department and had no--philosophically, I was pretty much in accord with them on agriculture, much more so than in some places in the Midwest. So I spent a good deal of time campaigning in the South and generally all over the country. I went to I don't know how many states, but I campaigned steadily for several months.

B: Was that campaign as easy as it seemed to be reading the newspapers, that is, running against Barry Goldwater?

F: No. No campaign is easy. You never know what's going to happen. When you win by a big percentage, then you look back and figure, "Why, I was foolish to spend so much money and take so much effort." On the other hand, political campaigns are filled with the wreckage of candidates who

assumed they were going to have no trouble. So anybody who is a professional at this business--he just runs hard no matter what the opposition might be and you never know what's going to happen.

B: As I recall, Goldwater did not have a very clear position on agriculture.

F: Well, he had said enough foolish things both about agriculture and about public power that it was no problem to draw the line very sharply that he was against--Goldwater ended up being against everything. It was a very inept campaign, and the result was that you had any number of Goldwater statements or things that you could take after. So from that standpoint, it was an easy campaign. But in terms of action and activity, why it was like any other campaign. You'd go sixteen or eighteen hours a day and just keep on going.

B: I'd like to trace the complicated political events in the spring of '68. Have we time now?

F: Why don't we just close on that?

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INTERVIEW NUMBER TWO:

B: I suppose it began with the question that spring of whether or not the Cabinet members had the President's permission to come out for Democratic candidates after his withdrawal.

F: It was all rather fuzzy. I had been gone and a Cabinet meeting was held. And it was reported to me that the President had said that we were free to go and get involved in the campaign. He had said something along that line, but others did not interpret it quite as broadly as the Under Secretary in Agriculture John Schnittker did, as reported to me.

B: He was your representative at the Cabinet meeting?

F: He was my representative at the Cabinet meeting. So I pretty well felt that this was clear, and "we'll just go." So I made a strong statement coming out for the Vice President.

B: Had you been contacted by the Kennedy people?

F: No. Bobby Kennedy tried to reach me, and I was in Florida at the time, just before he made his announcement. Otherwise, they did not. Well, I shouldn't say they did not; they did a little bit indirectly through Mike Feldman. But it was pretty clear that for a long time I had been closely associated with the Vice President, and I think that they felt that there would be little to gain in approaching me and I think perhaps they were very thoughtful in not doing so. So I went ahead and made this strong statement. And the President initally welcomed it. He thought it was a good statement, he had no problems.

B: He told you this directly?

F: Yes. Well, I heard it first indirectly. And certainly there was no flack. I did not go to him and tell him that I was going to do it ahead of time, first because it was my general understanding that this was within the ground rules, and second because he ought not to be involved in it and if the press asked him about it he could say, "Freeman didn't discuss it with me," and then he didn't get himself projected in it which he shouldn't have done and didn't do. Then a sequence of events took place. Prior to my statement which had been strong and clear and I had a press conference, Bill Wirtz had already come out for Humphrey. But it hadn't created too much of a folderol. Then John Schnittker who was my Under Secretary came out for Kennedy.

B: Did you and he discuss that before he announced?

F: Not really--he just did it. In effect he told me that he was going to do it.

B: Did you try to dissuade him?

F: Yes--not really. He was going to have a press conference, and I told him I thought he shouldn't do that.

B: You mean--should not have the press conference?

F: The press conference, that that was too much of a confrontation. I had had one and for him to have one, I decided that was just going too far. I didn't feel that I could direct him not to come out for Kennedy, in part because I thought that--he thought--in all fairness to him--he thought the President had said, "you are free", and this was his feeling. Well, that being the case I was not in any position--I think it was an unfortunate thing, I know it did John Schnittker a lot of harm within the Department where most of the people were for Humphrey, and it put him in a bad position where he looked disloyal because they knew I was strongly for Humphrey. In the long run it really didn't make any difference, but it was, I think, kind of unfortunate.

B: The timing of that looks like Mr. Schnittker might have expected some flack on it. As I recall, he arranged so that the announcement and his departure from Washington on a trip were almost simultaneous.

F: I think that was pure happenchance. I really think that initially he was--for one thing he had been up and called up and had done some consulting with Bobby Kennedy about agriculture. I don't know if there was some conversation and he agreed then that he would help them; I think he was just on a personal basis more sympathetic to Kennedy than to Johnson. The Kennedy style was just more in accord. I don't know. But John Schnittker was a determined and strong-minded man who I respected very

highly, who had done a good job as the Under Secretary, and when he said that he was for Kennedy, particularly in the light of what the President had said or we thought he had said, I didn't feel like I could say to him, "You can't be for Kennedy and stay around here." In the first place, he wasn't my appointee--he was my designee--and Johnson hadn't known from Adam's all-fox that I had brought John Schnittker up from a staff economist, the low ranks of the department, to the second highest position in the department in a period of about five years. So, in any event, I didn't think there would be any great flack about it, but this is when the President reacted, about that same--

B: Then Mr. Baker in your department--John Baker--announced--

F: Yes, I guess Baker had come out to say that he was for Humphrey. But the one that really brought it into focus was then Wilburn Cohen who came out with a very strong statement for Humphrey, which meant then that the Administration was kind of lining up publicly. This is something that President Johnson did not want, and that's when he in effect issued a directive that we had to stay out of this. And that made me very unhappy.

B: Did he call you directly?

F: I don't remember exactly. I think someone called me. Yes--it developed by a little pieces, as I recall. I think maybe Califano called me--somebody called me about this and said that the President didn't want involvement, and I said, "What do you mean, doesn't want involvement? I'm already involved," And he had made this statement at the Cabinet meeting and we had proceeded accordingly and this was no time to back off from it. I said, "I've said what I'm going to do and going to do it." I got very angry about it.

Well, then I've forgotten how it all worked out--then the question became--He put out an order that none of the Cabinet members should attend the Humphrey announcement; it was a Saturday noon luncheon, and I had planned to be there and I wanted to be there. And I was most unhappy about this. So then at that point I think I asked to see him. And then I went over and he and I had a conference about it in which he was very reasonable and very low-key and said, "Well, this is an impossible situation. We can't have this Administration all lined up publicly and involved for different candidates--primary struggle all over the place, and look reasonable to the American public and continue to do our work and carry forward our obligations. This just doesn't work." And he said, "Furthermore, this is not going to do Humphrey any good because if this does go on and you line up, it will be overwhelmingly for Humphrey within this Administration today, and that's not going to help him. In this period it's going to hurt him. So," he said, "on both counts there's just not much we can do except get out of it."

B: Did you ask him if everyone had just gotten the wrong impression at the Cabinet meeting, or if he had changed his mind?

F: Yes. No, I think it was a wrong impression. I've forgotten the exact language. He just denied that he had ever said anything like that and Schnittker insisted that he had. So there was just somehow or the other--I must say that I think probably Schnittker was wrong because I never really followed it too deeply with the other Cabinet officers, but at least it was not as clear in their minds, I would say, as it apparently was in Schnittkers. So I think it was just one of those misunderstandings. But he said very clearly he had never--I said to him, "Well, I assumed when

I made this statement--I would never have made a statement like this without clearing it with you before." After all, he was the President--he was the chief political officer. You play on the team and you wouldn't make a major political statement like that unless you felt that it was acceptable. Well, he said he had never made such a statement; he had never intended such happenings. I think really that he had mentioned this and that everyone should follow his own conscience or some such thing, and had not really himself thought what might happen. I think probably Schnittker's coming out had more to do with it than anyone else, you see. Otherwise, it wouldn't have made too much difference.

B: I was going to ask if there was any implication in all of this that it was okay with Mr. Johnson for people to come out for a candidate as long as it was Hubert Humphrey.

F: Not per se, but I think when it became clear there were some people who would come out for Kennedy and they might come out for McCarthy, then you'd find the Administration split across the front which would make Johnson himself look rather silly and would weaken the Administration and it would result in all kinds of complications. At that point, he just drew the line.

B: And as you said, it apparently did cause some complications within the Department of Agriculture for the Secretary and Under Secretary to be on different--

F: Well, it didn't help matters. I don't think it did a great deal of harm, but it meant that Schnittker's effectiveness was rather sharply diminished almost immediately.

B: Did you then after all this just retire from the pre-convention activities?

F: In terms of anything public. I didn't make any speeches, or at least I wouldn't go out and say, "I'm for Humphrey," but I was participating behind the scenes in the planning and working for and with him. I just did--nothing was ever said.

B: Were you at the convention in Chicago?

F: Oh, yes.

B: Did you see anything of the disorders in the streets?

F: Oh, yes. Right underneath my hotel window.

B: This is an irrelevant kind of question, I guess, but do you agree with the Walker report?

F: No. I would say on this one that I am probably on the side of the mayor. I don't know what would have happened there if strong efforts hadn't been made prior to that convention and clear indications that it was not going to get out of control. I think there would have been an influx of many, many more people than came in. There is no doubt in my mind but what those people would have tried and would have, if they could have, completely disrupted that convention. Just to say that all you would have had to do was give them a park to meet in and they would have all been happy and gotten their spleen out of their system, I think is a very superficial analysis. I don't know if the police over-reacted or not. I guess they did in a number of instances. But they were put to the test in terms of abuse and vitriol and the rest.

I witnessed day after day intemperate and wild language and foolish things, and muddying up the hotel, and all kinds of vulgarities that--. The press was mostly to blame for this. The press just started out to give Daley and the city of Chicago a working-over simply because they didn't

get everything they wanted--mostly television. I think the use of television was abortive; I think almost without exception the television commentators went out of their way to attack Daley and the Democratic Party and to make this look like it was a shambles. It was disgraceful abuse of media. And in my judgment I think they got together and conspired to do it beforehand, if not overtly, at least the word was kind of down, "We'll give this guy a working-over. If he doesn't do what we want, well, we'll show him who's who in this country." And so I felt considerable sympathy towards the mayor in connection with it. As I say, I think we might not have even been able to carry out a democratic convention. And the convention itself was the most democratic convention by all odds as any I've participated in, and I've been an active participant in the last five. Just like most of the ambassadors that went down and compared the Republican and the Democratic convention--they were appalled with the Republican convention, it was nothing but a staged sideshow; and they were just incredible about the vigorous give-and-take. A number of them said that our government would fall if we had prominent public figures disagreeing with each other publicly on national television and emotionally on these issues. From that standpoint it was a great convention.

B: Things like the debate on the platform?

F: Sure. It was a great convention. And what was done to seek delegates and to change rules, and a great deal was done. So really inside it was a fine convention, but you had some of these wild men who tried to disrupt it inside--some of them that were delegates with bad manners and refusal to follow the sensible procedures. But on the outside, I would say that I think there might not have been a convention if Daley hadn't used

considerable force and threatened it, and it kept a lot of people out of there. So, I'm not very sympathetic with the Walker approach on this--that if you just used a gloved hand everything would have been hunky-dory. Look what's going on around these colleges around the country today. You applied your hand, but after awhile they're destroying property, attacking people, and going to all kinds of extremes. And this a group that are anarchists, philosophically anarchists. You don't reason with anarchists because their purpose is to destroy. They don't want the things they say they're for; if they get them, they want something else. What they want to do is bring down the institution. And there comes a point with these people where they respond to only one thing, and that's the use of measured force. And when you use measured force, you're going to sometimes have these extremes.

I had a visit about this time with the Vice Prime Minister of India, Desai (?), who was the Minister, I guess they call it, of Internal Affairs who had to handle riots and this kind of thing repeatedly in India. And he just said--I was talking to him and suggesting that you could train officers and forces to use what I called "measured force," not too much, not abusive, but enough to contain this kind of physical extreme. He said, "It's impossible. You're going to always find on this, people being what they are, that they'll take about just so much of this kind of abuse from people that are trying to taunt them into action and you're going to have some excesses. You just can't avoid it." And that may be true. Maybe they went further than they should have in Chicago, and maybe Daley encouraged them more than necessary; maybe some of them were uncalled for. But what I saw firsthand, the restraint of the

enforcement forces was quite extraordinary, and I know that I would have the devil of a time to stand around and take that day after day, hour after hour, from people like this that are attacking me physically and doing all kinds of things. So I think history will probably write that this was maybe a turn; that we're going to see the use of greater and greater force in the country to deal with these people, and we're going to have to. Otherwise, they're going to destroy the institutions upon which the nation rests.

B: What part did you play in the Humphrey-Muskie campaign?

F: I played a fairly integral part in it. I was in charge of what we called policy and scheduling, really. The press releases, the speeches, position papers, and the scheduling were all under my supervision.

B: You played a major part indeed. What happened in that campaign? It seemed to get off to an awfully slow start and really not pick up steam until just right toward the last.

F: Well, first, it was poorly organized and slow getting organized. And a sharp focus of responsibility and some hard-headed effective organization was very slow coming.

B: Is it true that under President Johnson the Democratic National Committee had just sort of fallen into disuse?

F: Yes, I think that's true. There really wasn't any national committee functioning. Of course, the national committee has a pretty hard time to function when there's a lot of prominent Democrats running for President at the same time anyway. But it is true that President Johnson pulled out a good many resources and he himself had not given much attention to the Democratic National Committee. He never had been very close

to the national committee; that went back many years. And he did not build it up or use it very effectively. For awhile after the 1964 election, he did. There was a big program under way, working with Congress and the organization and the rest; it began to cost a lot of money and he cut it back very, very sharply and the national committee didn't amount to very much after that.

So, in the first place there wasn't really a good organization in place. In the second place, the organization--it was difficult for Humphrey to build any organization for clear lines during the pre-convention period because you had so many sensitivities in dealing with local political leaders who could control delegates. You've got two things: one's winning the nomination, and the other is winning an election; and they did take quite different strategy. So by the time he got to Chicago, there really wasn't any organization. It's my personal judgment a great deal more could and should have been done at that time, and a great deal more organization could and should have been done in Chicago than was done; and that we could have gotten a much quicker start if a number of things, that as a matter of fact I urged on him at that time, had been done. But they weren't.

B: Is there a reason why they weren't?

F: Well, a variety of reasons. The political problems were still so sensitive in regard to Viet Nam, McCarthy, and all the rest of this that it was really difficult to get a starting point. Up until the last minute it was not clear that Larry O'Brien would stay on. And of course even though in retrospect it was quite clear that Humphrey had the commanding lead in the convention from the very beginning, nonetheless you're never sure.

There were some times at convention when maybe Ted Kennedy was coming in and maybe the Southern guys and Connally were breaking off, but it was a difficult convention with a lot of touchy issues and it's hard to do any organization at that time, although that's what I had gone down there to do myself. But it didn't come into focus.

So then Larry O'Brien was named and then it was the problem of getting started. Well, then, Humphrey himself was immediately involved in public demands for his time and attention. And he was wrestling and trying to find the bridges that he could build, particularly on the Viet Nam issue. There were really two big issues. One, we resolved fairly satisfactory--rather, he did, which was Viet Nam. And this is what, of course, chewed up about six weeks of time when already we were far behind because of a late convention. That chewed up about six weeks and the press made it miserable, because every time he turned around they charged him with changing his mind. Every time he would mention anything even obliquely about Viet Nam, they'd shoot off into something else.

B: Were you in touch with Mr. Johnson in any way?

F: Yes, I was kind of liaison in many ways between him and President Johnson. I had, I suppose, closer and at least more direct working relationship with President Johnson during that period than I had almost had before. And President Johnson felt very strongly that Humphrey should have been much more forthright; that he was not making points by trying to bridge this gap with the anti-Viet Nam crowd.

B: You mean that Mr. Johnson thought that Humphrey should be his "own man" more even if it meant appearing to be at variance with the Johnson policy?

F: No--This "own man" business is a lot of nonsense. That's just another

piece of semantics. The question is--where should he be on Viet Nam? What should his position be? And how far should he go? And Johnson felt that he ought to take pretty much the position the Administration had; there was nothing to be gained politically to trying to equivocate with these anti-Vietnamese crowds--that this basically could only get you in more trouble; that it would look like you were backing and filling and trying to get votes and equivocating. And so he felt it was tactically wrong for Humphrey to begin to indicate that he was backing off on this a bit and try and bridge the gap to the anti-Vietnamese school of thought. So that was not a question of being your "own man" or that I can dictate to you what to do, or that you're being personally disloyal or any of that. It was rather a question of what is tactically sound to do, with some sensitivities because Johnson of course was deeply involved in the Viet Nam thing and was understandably sensitive about it.

Also Johnson felt that Humphrey could and should have come out earlier and stronger for the Administration accomplishments on the domestic front, which he did as the campaign wore on--and identify himself increasingly clearer in that regard. I think Johnson felt that the sound and fury of Chicago and of the McCarthy wing was getting more attention than it really merited from Humphrey; and that if he had taken a firmer and stronger and clearer position from the very beginning in terms of the Administration accomplishments, he'd have been in a better position. I think that's correct myself. I so advised Humphrey, and he did do that as he went along. But for a long, long time there was nobody as a spokesman for what this Administration had done, which was an incredible record of domestic accomplishments. And that case has not even been made

yet! The President couldn't make it; he was ineffective to try to do it at that point, and Humphrey didn't do it very well at that point. And it might have gotten him on a strong affirmative position much earlier in the election, but he didn't--that was his judgment, although in the long run he did.

Well, Humphrey did bridge the gap on the Viet Nam thing. And I think he was very resourceful and skillful finally in doing it. When he made that speech at Salt Lake City, that part of it kind of died down and a lot of the anit-Viet Nam group came back into the Humphrey fold and began to get active.

B: What about that time before that when Humphrey made a speech on Viet Nam followed immediately by a Johnson speech, which was interpreted at least as a contradiction of Humphrey?

F: I don't think they had any relationship, I think Johnson's speech had been set a long time before, I think it had been written, I think the language was in it--I think the two things were completely independent. I had no reason to believe at any time that Johnson did anything to try and check or countercheck, or to discipline Humphrey, so to speak.

B: Did you face directly the question of whether or not Mr. Johnson himself should be used in the campaign?

F: Oh, yes, very strongly and repeatedly. And urged the President to get into the campaign and to do more in the campaign, which Humphrey wanted him to do. There were, however, some people around Humphrey who did not want him. They felt that the furtherest he could get away from Johnson the better off he would be, but he didn't feel that way himself nor did he act that way; but a lot of his people did. I was one that felt that

Johnson should get out and met with him about it and urged him to do it and helped schedule him. I wanted him to go much more in the border states than he finally did go. And of course to go very strongly in Texas, which he did, and successfully. This was a little dichotomy here because, as I say, Johnson was a little sensitive that there were people in the Humphrey camp that didn't want his involvement. And I spent considerable time trying to put those fires out because I felt he should be involved and could be helpful.

B: Who were they, sir?

F: They were people around Humphrey--in terms of personalities, oh, gosh--I think his personal staff by and large--John Stewart was one, one of the speech writers, for example. I think Bill Welch pretty well felt this way. I'm not so sure about Bill Cannell. I think that the man who traveled with him--his name slips me now--all the time that handled a lot of the logistics felt that way. And then there were a lot of other people in the voluntary committees and the rest, and a lot of people that do a lot of talking. There's one thing about politics--there's all kinds of people and they do a lot of talking. They can't resist the temptation to say, "I was there and I know what they said. I'm really on the inside." Sometimes it wasn't what they said at all. So this was a problem, and President Johnson is sensitive and was sensitive about it, quite understandably at this period. But there was no real friction on this. And I don't think he ever did anything to try and countercheck Humphrey at all. He was, I think, irritated from time to time because he felt Humphrey did not come out as strongly and forthrightly in regard to the Administration accomplishments; he was not quite as tough and clear on the Viet Nam

question as he might have been after he had spoken very strongly about it before. As Johnson said to me one time, "He went a lot further before than he had to, and now he won't go at all. That's what hurts him, because people say that he doesn't know where he is and he's on both sides of all issues, and therefore he's a weak man." At the same time the polls were showing that the general image of Humphrey in terms of leadership was weak. That was one big dilemma.

The other, which I think he finally got over faily well, and Humphrey is a consummate politician and his instincts on this may very well have been right--I personally was more of the Johnson school in connection with what was the best politics. But we threshed this out and Humphrey did what he thought was right, which he always does, and he's a very skillful politician and that worked out. The other one that we couldn't bridge was to identify in any way with the lower-middle income group. As one fellow said to me, "The people that make ten thousand dollars a year or less, or between five and ten dollars, are struggling to educate their children, paying their taxes, that are working in places where there's a "Help Wanted" sign up and no one will come to work, and at the same time they see relief and aid to dependent children costs skyrocketing and they're paying the taxes for it--they hear everybody in public weeping about the black population and the poor people all over the place--and no one is concerned with them; that his group of people by and large consider Humphrey more black than white." And I think they did.

B: This was the group to whom Wallace appealed?

F: This was the group to whom Wallace appealed and in the long run, he didn't get as many of their votes as some people thought he would, but he got a

lot of them. And Humphrey's labor vote was sharply less than Johnson's was or that Kennedy's was. If Humphrey had gotten the labor vote that Kennedy had gotten in 1960, he would have been elected easily.

B: Ironic, isn't it, that it hasn't been too very long ago that Hubert Humphrey was the radicals' radical?

F: That's right. But in this case--well, maybe in this case, he was still the radicals' radical. You see, these people were willing to accept the civil rights position of the Democratic Party as long as they were concerned about their jobs. When they then were no longer really worried and employment was good and the economy was strong, and ostensibly the country had learned how to avoid depression, why then they could indulge themselves in the luxury of their own racial antipathies and their own economic competition. So they just felt that Humphrey was more black than white and that he didn't really care about them. But as soon as you tried to make any appeal to them or as soon as you tried to bridge that gap, and as soon as you got into the question of law enforcement and order, why you immediately got yourself involved in the emotionalism of the black community and all that's related to it.

And we wrote speech after speech and planned program after program, trying to hit a balance where we could bridge that gap and we never succeeded. He made a speech that I worked on endless hours, and a lot of other people did--oh, I think it originated out of what--New York?--some time about the middle of October, in which what we had written in an effort to bridge that gap--talking very strongly about law enforcement in terms of how important it was to the black community and trying to hypothesize a model community and fit the different parts in it, in such

fashion that it would show concern for this group. And the only way to reach them and show concern would be to have fairly strong language; otherwise, it was bland and you won't reach them. It was pretty well set already. Well, he didn't make that speech. He took it and worked it over and toned it down and made another black speech. But this is what he believed and he was consistent with his own heart and his own values throughout all of this campaign. He started out--he made his first B'nai B'rith speech that he wasn't scheduled to make, and he went off and made it on his own very early in the campaign, and he was pretty consistent to it throughout. Those of us who had studied the polls and advised him thought it was a mistake, in which he just brought out and declared that our society is split; that it's going to be split unless something is done about it, and he was doing something about it, and he was doing something about the minority groups both economically and in terms of civil rights and all the rest.

This gets into the problem of the ghetto and the city, but it's basically pretty heavily tinged with black. And that was what he believed and that's what he felt and that's what he did and that's what he said. He was true to himself throughout the whole campaign in that respect. Feeling that way, if he'd done any other way, he probably would have done worse anyhow. But those of us, as I say, that analyzed this, trying to set aside our own personal standards and feelings and emotions and values, and studied the polls and the history of politics just right down to the nitty-gritty of what does it take and what forces are going and how are you going to reach them and how does this really work, and hope that he would do some things he never did do to identify with that group that we

didn't get.

B: The campaign did seem to pick up toward the last.

F: Well, I think it picked up because they were finally getting to Nixon; that Nixon had a bland and a kind of a flat campaign. It was a gadget campaign that was carefully designed--it was designed to say nothing; it was designed on the assumption that it's time for a change and the time is ripe and just stay out of trouble. Go around, be seen, and go through the motions; put on a credible appearance and the less you say, the better. His refusal to debate with Humphrey--we got him on that after awhile. People began to not like that. The fact that the press began to say that he had staged television programs; that he wasn't really coming out on issues. The country got a little weary with that.

And then the fact that Humphrey was so far down and everybody was feeling sorry for him, and he resolutely kept fighting, that they began to admire Humphrey like they admired Truman. He [Truman] was the battler against great odds. Here was Dewey that won't say anything, he has got all this money and is going around in a super-organized campaign, and the press would write about the super organization. Early that used to bother me. It looked like Nixon would be a great President and Humphrey was just stumbling around, couldn't raise money, didn't know what to say--talked out of both sides of his mouth. Easly in October or late September, it was awful. But Humphrey had the courage and determination that he just kept out there going--enormous energy. He just went. And after awhile, people began to appreciate the fact that this guy's a fighter and Nixon is kind of a fat cat, and they began to change.

B: Apparently the financing began to get improved toward the last there too?

F: Yes. That was another thing. And, of course, one of the things that cut off the money was bad polls early, and the critical press, and the general attitude. It was very much like the Truman thing. People just didn't come up with the money until later on and they began to. Of course, we worked out that system of the national committee where people loaned money, or people went on loans and guaranteed them. So in the last couple of weeks, we had a good bit of money and there was a lot of media.

B: Did you think you had it won on election day?

F: Yes, I did. I didn't think really for weeks that we had a chance, and I began to feel the last week--the polls began to move very fast the last week. We were watching them very closely; we were taking telephone polls. And I went with him on the last trip out to California. He had such a good reception in Los Angeles. That last telethon show was a smashing success. So when we flew out of Los Angeles about three in the morning, Los Angeles time, beck to Minnesota to vote on election day, I really felt that we were going to make it.

B: Did Mr. Humphrey think so too?

F: I don't really know. We talked in the plane going back. I think he felt at that point he had a fifty-fifty chance. But in any event I think he felt, and I did, that there was nothing to apologize for; that we had ended up at least with a creditable effort. And of course the election was close enough. So, considering where we started really, in effect, and if there ever was a country that was looking for change or was frustrated--there was a pattern of events that were difficult to overcome--with an incumbent President, with an unpopular holding war, with no one to speak for an Administration record, with all of these things with eight

years of Democrats behind you now, the country does look for a change. The difficulties were almost insurmountable, and the fact that we came as close as we did I think is quite extraordinary.

B: I've taken a good deal of your time now.

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ORVILLE L. FREEMAN

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Jane C. Freeman — April 17, 2005
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