INTERVIEW III

DATE: February 14, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN A. GRONOUSKI

INTERVIEWER: Paige E. Mulhollan

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

M: The subjects that haven't been talked about that I think are important--the conversation with the Red Chinese which occurred I think almost from the very first day you got to Warsaw. They were in progress?

G: It was around the fifteenth; it was about fifteen days after I got there.

M: Then how long did they continue before they were terminated? There was a break when we quit meeting with them. When did that occur?

G: In January of 1968 we had our last meeting prior to the one we're having now--the longest stretch. They were never terminated per se; they were just postponed.

M: Was there any movement there at all during this period of time that is of consequence, do you think?

G: Well, I think there's only one instance that is worth dealing on at all, and that came in June of 1966 or 1967, but it's something that broke in the newspapers so it's easy to check. But the only real interest in it is the process by which it got in the talks; it came directly from the President really overruling most of the State Department. So this is one that I think probably ought to be put in. Otherwise it has been pretty routine, the Chinese talks. There is only one event that is of any unusual--

M: And this is the one the President himself took a part in.

G: I came back in May, I think it was 1966, May of 1966. Does that sound reasonable? It was 1966.]

M: When I edit, I can check it probably from the ***New York Times*** index.

G: Yes. It's an article by [John Warren] Finney of the ***New York Times*** and then another one, a column by [James] Reston. Albert Gore is the sinner, I think, but we'll get into that. But that I think I might say is the only one. The Chinese talks were pretty routine and nothing in particular unusual about them until May of 1966. At that time I came home for consultation, and one of the things I was interested in was the Chinese talks which were coming up in June. It so happened that at the time of the explosion of the second, I believe, atomic device in China, Chou En-lai, the premier or prime minister or what ever you want to call him, had observed quite gratuitously that it was necessary for the Chinese to continue exploding these devices and experimenting because the United States had refused to enter into a "no first use" agreement with China. And he said this publicly, under release by the New China Press Agency.

Now, this struck me and several others, a fellow named Art Barber, who was then working in the Defense Department, and a fellow named David Dean, who was my consultant at the time in the State Department. I guess the three of us particularly had talked about this off and on during my stay back here in the States. And I finally came to the conclusion that it was pretty important to follow up on this statement along lines of suggesting to the Chinese in the June meetings that we had taken cognizance of Chou En-lai's statement and it occurred to us that with their linking of their explosion of this

bomb with the failure of arriving at a "no first use" agreement, that perhaps there was an area here that was open for some discussion, including the Test Ban Treaty which of course would have precluded the explosion of this bomb, and that we were in effect curious as to whether the Chinese were interested in pursuing this kind of a dialogue.

At any rate, we took this up in the department, and it was discussed with Bill Bundy and his staff, and Bill was quite enthusiastic about doing something about this subject at the talks, phrasing it very carefully so that we were not committing ourselves, but in essence putting it on the table in a manner that would ask the Chinese, "Well, now, is this something you're interested in pursuing?" We took it up with Tommy [Llewelyn] Thompson, who was then under secretary for political affairs. Tommy sort of put it in the icebox and we took it up a second time with him as a matter of fact. I don't know that I ever got to discuss it with Dean Rusk; Bill Bundy may have.

But at any rate through David Dean who was at that time responsible for writing up the basic statement that we used as openers in the Chinese talks, it became very clear to me through our conversation with David that the thing had just about been killed. Well, then I went over to see the President, not for this purpose, but I had an appointment with the President, and among other things I discussed this whole question that was currently under discussion at the State Department, and told him that I felt very strongly that we ought to explore this avenue with the Chinese. [I said that] while we may not want to combine the Test Ban Treaty ultimately with a "no first use" agreement, nonetheless there may be some room for maneuver here and we might actually come to some kind of an agreement with the Chinese if we opened up this avenue of discussion and enticed them into joining us.

At any rate I had hardly gotten back to the department when I heard from David Dean, I guess, that everybody was scurrying around; the President had called over and said that he wanted this *in* the talks.

M: That took it out of the icebox pretty quickly, I expect.

G: And it caused a little ruffled feathers. The President also asked me--I had made a trip around Eastern Europe in connection with the notion he had instilled in me that I ought to get a look at what was going on not only in Poland but in Eastern Europe, and recommend whatever policy things I chose to recommend in terms of all of Eastern Europe. I had taken a trip for a dual purpose, one in response to this role and secondly just simply as a new ambassador in the area I thought I ought to get around and learn something about what was going on in these other countries. And I was briefed by all the embassies and so on.

During that conversation, during which the China matter came up, the President also asked me what I thought of the ambassadors--U.S. representatives in that area. And always truthful to my boss, I said I wasn't very high on the guy in Hungary; it was a terrible thing to say because he died a short time later, but I wasn't and I told him. I responded to his question.

Well, that got back immediately, too. And I had an appointment with George Ball the next morning, had a long-standing appointment. George and I had always been pretty good friends, and all of a sudden I got a very cool treatment from George Ball. George was very upset and so expressed it that I didn't discuss this with him prior to discussing it with the President. Of course I said I think it was unfortunate that I hadn't raised it with him, but

my defense was I think a legitimate one--that when the President asked me a question, I answered it honestly, and I wouldn't work for the President if I wasn't in that position.

M: Right. He's entitled to the advice that he asks for.

G: But at any rate from then on in my relationships with Ball were not as good. And I know the China thing brought joy to the heart of several people, but to others I'm sure it didn't--those who had put it in the icebox. But that's one advantage of having an ambassador who is not a career person. I didn't really give a damn; if I made my policy point, I didn't care whether I ruffled some feathers or not.

M: You didn't have to stay in the State Department.

G: I didn't have to plan on my promotions in the future and my assignments in the future.

M: What about the Chinese--just a subjective view? During the period you were there, do you think? . . ?

G: Well, I think I ought to conclude this quickly. We did raise this point. The Chinese during the talks in June questioned us very carefully. For the first time they showed real interest in something we had said. Then in the informal meetings that the staff had the day after the China talks, which are traditional, for I think about an hour our counsel, I think it was David Dean, unless it was a year later and then it was Krisberg [?]--but I believe it was David Dean-- the counsel was questioned at great length as to just what I meant by that. And we were quite enthusiastic when we reported back to the department that we had aroused a great deal of interest and perhaps something might actually come of this.

Then for reasons which I do not know, all of a sudden about a day or two later comes a big story out of Geneva where Albert Gore, Senator Gore, was attending an

international conference, I guess relating to his Disarmament role in the Congress. He spoke to a ***New York Times*** reporter, John Finney I believe it was, and divulged this secret proposal that I had made at the Chinese talks. And a couple of days later Reston had a think piece on it in the New ***York Times***, and this of course just exploded the whole thing. And a few days later there was a repudiation of the idea in the New China News Agency. And the initiative was dead.

M: Did the President react to that, incidentally?

G: Never to my knowledge. And I never talked to the President about it, unfortunately, because there was a lot of scuttlebutt about what happened. In the first place Gore had a right to know, because this would have moved us into a highly controversial disarmament area. And Gore of course was and is on the Disarmament Subcommittee.

M: Not now. He was then, but he has changed since then.

G: At any rate Gore had a right to know. However, some of the State Department thought the President undercut his own initiative on purpose, and I frankly can't remember where this came from. I vehemently argued this point at the time, but thought that Gore had been authorized to say it and that we shouldn't blame Gore. I was just mad as a wet hen at Senator Gore at the time, but that he had been authorized to say it for the reason--this is the way this logic went--that the President wanted the world to know in the heart of the Vietnam business that he was trying initiatives with the Chinese.

There are others who suggested that someone in the State Department who had taken a dim view of this had encouraged Mr. Gore to divulge it. There are others who simply thought that Mr. Gore, an astute politician, thought that this was a very real piece of

political change for him to cash. But I do not know. This is an interesting question that's unresolved. I've never really asked Gore; I probably should have, I know him pretty well. But somehow I never got together with him.

M: I will.

G: But it would be well worth tracking that down. But I do not know what it did, because I do not know what would have come out of all of this. I do know that if anything might have come out of it this effectively barred it from happening. You never know what would have been, but this certainly was an inappropriate thing to do at an inappropriate time, and I was very depressed over this.

Other than this, the China talks ran every three or four months rather routinely. We made a whole series of initiatives during the China talks from the first one that I participated in on December 15 of 1965 right through till the last one I participated in, in January of 1968. We continuously tried to, as I used to say to the Chinese, take that first step that needs to be taken if one is to walk a thousand miles, a la Jack Kennedy. [We] proposed over and over again that we exchange newsmen, that we exchange scholars, that we don't exchange if that's their wish, that they send theirs to us or invite ours to their country; we don't have to reciprocate. We offered them medicine; we suggested that our doctors were interested in some of their herbs, and they might be interested in some of our research on antibiotics or what have you, and perhaps we could exchange these things. We pointed out that the Agricultural Department was interested in some of the strains of their grain or rice or whatever it was, I can't remember. We kept wanting to let them know that we wanted to see something of their stuff. Because we felt that as long as we just said,

"We want to give you something." they would be less receptive. And that their pride at least would be enhanced if we said, "There are some things you are doing that we are interested in."

At any rate, none of these worked. At a time of a plague of some sort over there where twenty or thirty thousand people lost their lives, we offered them secretly to give medicines. [It] didn't work. But all through the meetings this theme ran through plus the explanation of our Vietnam position, very carefully assuring them that there was no attempt or no interest on our part to extend this to China or to any way threaten the Chinese, and so on. Pretty routine stuff, as I say, the only exceptions being what I thought might have been the June of l966 breakthrough and the attempt to get something going in a little way.

The talks--in January of 1968 we had agreed on a May 29, 1968 meeting date, which was just about the date I left Poland. I left a few days early--my ambassadorship--to come back to the States. I left of course because the Chinese had asked for a postponement until some time early in November of the May 29 talk, and we had no alternative but to agree to it ultimately even though we resisted it. Subsequently after I left of course the November talks were postponed until February 20, 1969. That's where we are now. So we had the longest break probably, I should think, this is the longest break in the talks between January of l968 and February of 1969--the longest break in the history of the talks.

M: But there's no specific cause for this, no action that took place?

G: There was no cause for it, and one could not say the talks were broken off because the Chinese followed the procedures of asking for a postponement, which was legitimate. Of

course we resisted very much the long hiatus between meetings, but we had no alternative. Ultimately we had no alternative but to accept.

M: Certainly not. You can't talk by yourself.

G: You can't show up by yourself. The only other question that came up in January of 1968--the Chinese Ambassador had not been there since the previous June; he has not returned as of today, by the way, for the February 20 talks. We agreed finally to meet with the chargé then, and I met with the chargé, which I think was probably the first time that that happened. I was a little curious about doing that sort of thing, because we didn't want to give the Chinese an opportunity to de-emphasize the talks by shifting it from ambassadorial talks to chargé, but we felt that it was more important to have the talks in January than to stand on that kind of ceremony.

The only other thing of interest that happened during my period in connection with the Chinese talks--right from the first meeting I tried to develop some informality which hadn't been done before, I don't believe. The first meeting, after the meeting I asked them, I suggested that at the next meeting that I bring a bottle of vodka or something, or he bring some tea, and that we meet in the anteroom after the meeting for a little informal session. He said no.

At the next meeting I told them that I didn't know much about China, and he probably didn't know much about the United States, and I happened to have a free week ahead of me of evenings. [I said], "Let's just the people that meet in this room come over to my house and have dinner some night next week and just sit around and talk about everything *but* what we talk about in these meetings--where we send our kids to school,

how we vacation, the menial things of life in our countries, the everyday occurrences, so that we get a little better feeling about each other and know each other better and know our countries better." He responded to this in a manner which to me was quite encouraging. But at the time that I asked him to have dinner, he said surprisingly to the staff and myself, "I'll let you know tomorrow," which means he must have cleared it with Peking, he must have wanted to do it, which is extraordinary. But the next day we got a call saying unfortunately he was tied up for the seven nights of the week.

M: Meaning that Peking didn't go along with his interest.

G: Then when I did get back to talk to the President at one point subsequent to the first few meetings, I mentioned to the President that I probably was violating the rules in so doing, but I wanted him to know that I did it. Because after all, we weren't supposed to be having these outside contacts. I expressed to the President my strong feeling that not only in Warsaw, but around the world we should be encouraging diplomatic personnel to talk with the Chinese informally. After all, we have had meetings with them since 1955, and we're in a little different relationship with them than with other countries with whom we do not have diplomatic relations.

Of course he approved very much my attempts to develop this kind of a relationship, and a short time subsequent to this a State Department regulation did come out world-wide authorizing diplomatic personnel to talk informally with the Chinese. This might have been coincidence, but at any rate it made me feel that maybe we had a little bit of impact on that. Rather important I think that we do have these conversations.

But anyway that pretty much sums up anything novel in the Chinese talks. I don't believe--they did not at any time raise anything that I would regard as other than routine. The Taiwan thing, our barbaric actions in Vietnam, our attempts to intimidate the Chinese--the real threat that existed.

I might say that I concluded--I could never convince Dean Rusk of this--but I concluded, and my own judgment was, that there was a genuine fear on the part of the Chinese of the United States, and I so reported. I talked to Dean Rusk about this at some length; Dean thought that I was misreading it; I think he was wrong and I was right. And I think this is important, because if they really fear us it's a little different than if they're just playing public relations games with us. And I would act on the assumption, if I were running foreign policy, that there was a very substantial element of real concern over the encirclement of China by the United States over in Asia. As I say, Dean was never very much impressed with my argument, though I talked to him on a couple of occasions trying to convince him of it.

M: Do you want to shift to Mr. Johnson's policy of building bridges, which he thought a lot of?

G: The building-bridges policy was enunciated by Johnson while at the Marshall dedication out at VPI [Virginia Polytechnic Institute}. It was enunciated by Johnson on numerous occasions, of course, enunciated at that time that I was sworn in, and the message that I conveyed to the Poles when I arrived there, and on numerous other occasions. And I felt very much committed. I believe I talked last time about the President and I discussing my appointment. But in our private discussions which I had with the President both at his office and down on the Ranch, he emphasized so strongly the desire to get this whole policy

of building bridges a reality and meaningful substance into it that there was no question in my mind of his sincerity in the program. Although it has been doubted by some, I don't have any doubt in my mind. I do have criticism: one of the things that I was very much concerned with was that the specific programs that would have created substance in the building-bridges program didn't get as much leadership from the President as I had hoped they would get. I think this is one of the prices we paid for Vietnam. My argument was--and I made this to the President orally--that he would be better off in selling Vietnam to the American people if he sold it in the context of a broad policy which included a real fight for the elements of [a] building-bridges program. He didn't see it my way apparently. At least he didn't act in that direction. But I felt that if at the same time he was fighting for troops in Vietnam to stop the aggression of a communist group from North Vietnam, he was also fighting for an East-West trade bill.

M: Is this what you mean when you said perhaps less leadership than you hoped, that fact that they didn't push that bill?

G: They didn't push that bill. There were other things that they might have done. It was very late before the President lifted the restriction on Export-Import bank credits to Eastern Europe. It was October of l966, I believe. He might have done that earlier. When he did it and Congress the next spring took it away, he didn't fight very hard to keep him from taking it away from him.

He was right on all of these issues; his statements were good; his position was good; he expressed his position. But there's more to getting legislation through than that, as President Johnson very well knew and knows.

He was also overwhelmingly concerned with Vietnam obviously, and many who were supporting him in Vietnam were not very happy about building bridges, and he was in a very difficult position. He might have had a harder time selling his Vietnam program to key people in Congress if he was also pushing very hard what was essentially a basically liberal program toward Eastern Europe. He would have had an easier time selling it to the country; he apparently settled on selling it to the key people in Congress. But what I'm suggesting is that he might have had a little more sympathy in the country on his Vietnam policy if he had articulated and had fought for harder, even if he lost, some of the programs toward Eastern Europe. This is a value judgment; he might not have gotten the programs through anyway, and he probably wouldn't have convinced the liberals that he was right in Vietnam.

M: I don't think the East-West trade bill ever even got to the committee hearings stage.

G: No. The East-West trade bill died a-borning, really. Dean Rusk introduced it, and that was just about it. It was introduced and that was all.

What I really think, what I really felt at the time and was concerned about at the time, is that we had what I thought and think now was a very mature and comprehensive approach to American foreign policy, with the President's position on Vietnam, with the President's position on the Alliance for Progress kinds of programs, with his position in Eastern Europe, with his position that he expressed so well in his speech in October l966 on Central European questions and the German question. I thought that the basic policy was the kind of foreign policy that America needed at this period of time, and his Third World programs, all of these things fitted together into a very, very comprehensive, effective, I

thought, foreign policy stance for America. I felt that he might have sold that overall package if he had talked more and fought more for elements of that overall package rather than for concentrating so much on the Vietnam area. That's a value judgment.

But I hasten to add that I have said in public speeches since then, as well as privately, that I thought that during the Johnson period American foreign policy matured and that basically the speech that he made in October of 1966 in New York to the news-paper editors should go down in history as one of the great foreign policy statements by an American president. And this had to do with Europe. People say he had no interest in Europe.

Well, what I'm suggesting is that the essence was there, the policy was there. What I was concerned about is what many people criticized the President [for], and that is an overemphasis in Vietnam. I was concerned about it primarily because I thought that he hurt his policy; he hurt his position vis-a-vis Vietnam by concentrating so heavily on Vietnam; that he could have improved his status among many important people by insisting that they recognize that he was fighting for other elements of a program that had to be listed among the liberal programs of any group or agencies.

In Poland I of course was very much alert to any possibilities of [a] building-bridges program, but I concentrated on one particular program that I felt offered extraordinary opportunities to us and to the Poles. And any time you develop a program with a communist country you have to see interest on both sides. The Poles will never buy it otherwise, or any other communist country. But I thought a massive English language program in Poland would be very well received in Poland and would be of inestimable

value to us both in terms of widening the range of people that could come to the United States and study, who could listen to our Voice of America broadcasts, who could read our literature and our newspapers and our magazines, all of which were getting in, in varying numbers. We could do this with monies that were coming due year after year under our PL-480 program, which we had about half a billion dollars salted away in Poland. And so over a fifteen-month period culminating ultimately in April of 1967, I negotiated both with the Poles and with the American government to sell a program whereby we would allot ten million dollars over a ten-year period of these counterpart funds for the purpose of teaching teachers of English language in Poland.

M: Teaching Polish--

G: Teaching Polish teachers, high school teachers particularly. And that involved in its basic form the strengthening of college departments, the setting up of six months' institutes, six weeks institutes,' and so on, scholarships in Polish schools for people to come to the States and study for a year or two, an American specialist in linguistics to go to Poland and work for a couple of years, and so on.

The whole scheme was adopted pretty much as I initially thought of it, and I do take credit for this basic program in concept as well as in selling it. My thought was to have the universities in the Midwest from whence I spring--the University of Wisconsin is my school--but there is a consortium of universities in the Midwest, mainly the Big Ten and the University of Chicago, who go into these kinds of things collectively. My basic scheme was to have this consortium of universities and in effect a consortium of Polish universities under the Ministry of Education jointly administer--form, plan, organize, and administer--

this program. And this is what was ultimately signed by the Poles and myself--myself signing for the U.S. government and Poland in April of 1967, a ten million-dollar program which would primarily be aimed at teaching the teachers of the English language in Poland so that the quality of high school and college teaching of the English language would be far superior to what it was.

M: This has no impact on the balance of payments because the counterpart funds. . . .

G: It does have impact because a share of those funds were to come from current repayment schedules, so it did have an impact on the balance of payments. Money that the Poles would have otherwise have paid us in repayment, and this of course was the carrot that finally persuaded the Poles to let us come in with a program that would have tremendous impact on their country at a time when Vietnam and everything else was going on. I might say that while I was authorized to go ahead and pursue this, nobody gave me a nickel's worth of chance of selling the Poles on this. Of course after it was signed and sealed, then everybody thought it was one of those ordinary things that should have been wrapped up in a week.

So it did have a balance of payments impact, but you're talking about a few hundred thousand dollars a year, rather than anything significant. Although when you talk to the Treasury, that becomes important.

At any rate it took a great deal of work. I worked daily on this for fifteen months because not only did I have innumerable conferences and negotiation sessions with the Poles, but I also had innumerable conferences and negotiating sessions with the Americans. The State Department basically bought it--John Leddy bought it immediately in principle.

The Agriculture Department was very difficult. These funds were generated by Agriculture, by [Harold D.] Cooley who was then chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, and Cooley had a very real interest in these funds because they were generated by agricultural products. And the Agriculture Department under that great liberal [Orville] Freeman was very sticky in the whole problem, they didn't want to give up this money. Now Freeman--I don't know how much of it got up to Orv, but it was certainly his people who threw roadblock after roadblock.

M: It's an interesting case when an Agriculture Department gets involved in a foreign policy question here of some importance and can influence it.

G: And Treasury of course made it very difficult, but primarily because of the balance of payments question. Then we had people in the department dragging their feet at critical times, but basically at the top we had no problem in the department. The department was pretty much carrying the ball for me in the interdepartmental fights here.

At any rate it became an agreement between the United States and Polish governments in April of 1967, but subsequent to that time it has really become a dead letter because any use of these funds requires congressional appropriation.

M: So just an agreement wasn't enough to actually activate it?

G: It would not activate it without an appropriation. And John Rooney single-handedly destroyed that.

M: That's not the first program that has had that happen to it.

G: After it happened we got very little cooperation from [Idar] Rimestad's office, a real dragging of feet, and I think Mich [Michel] Cieplinski who was never very cooperative

with John Gronouski because I was another Pole that came into government--I believe this is a fact. Mich Cieplinski, who had very great influence with Rooney, he's assistant to Rimestad.

M: Under secretary for administration.

G: Yes. He's really Rooney's boy in the State Department.

M: For some reason Rimestad's office is the liaison with Rooney rather than the Congressional Relations office, a rather strange state of affairs.

G: That's right. Well, that's because Rimestad's office is the one that provides Rooney with these nice trips and what have you.

But at any rate Rimestad obviously dragged his feet on this whole thing. I think it was because of Cieplinski. I had talked to Rooney before I went back to Poland in the spring of 1967, and Rooney said the thing hadn't come over to him, but it looked pretty good to him. I knew Rooney pretty well; I didn't talk to him subsequently because I was advised not to, things were moving along well. I wasn't here, of course, but I was going to write to him from Poland. But I didn't. And the thing collapsed.

Probably if the story is ever written, my suspicion is--and I don't have this as a factual matter--that Mich Cieplinski probably had as much to do as anyone to destroy this pro gram which I think was tragic because it would have had an extraordinary impact. It could be revived, of course, but I doubt it at this point because there's nobody there. If I were there I would be still fighting for it, but I don't think anybody else will be fighting as hard as I did for it. You have to also have somebody fighting for it that has some connection with the President.

The thing was just not getting off the ground at all until December of l966, when I came back on the Vietnam discussions on the twenty-second of December 1966. And as I left I said to Nick Katzenbach, "Now, goddammit, I'm going to go back and settle the Vietnam War for you; you get over to the President and get his signature on this English language program." And he said, "I will," and two or three days later I got the approval.

M: Had to hit him with a big club.

G: I didn't settle the Vietnam War for him, and while he did his part, it foundered later. We did more reverse bridge building while I was there than bridge building, as much as we tried to bridge build. We moved on this program, got it approved, got it signed, and then dropped out, which has a net overall negative effect.

Another program which was extraordinarily valuable is one which not only was operative in Poland, but also in five or six other countries, counterpart fund countries, including Yugoslavia. The program was overall about ten million dollars, but in Poland it amounted to about a million and a half dollars a year. Those in Poland who wanted our books, wanted rights to our plays, wanted rights to television shows, movies, newspapers, magazines, those who wanted to import either the rights of the magazines and newspapers and books and things of this sort of course didn't have the dollars to buy them. So we created what we called the media-guarantee program, information and media guarantee program. This was going for some years before I got there, and it was highly successful; whereby in effect--and I'll follow this through with a book--if somebody wants to buy a book he would go to the bookstore and order the book. [He would] pay for it in zlotys--American book; the Polish book agent would buy the book from MacMillan, let's

say, in New York, for which MacMillan would get the zloty account, which MacMillan would convert to dollars at the State Department; the State Department would deduct from my budget in Poland and send me the zlotys instead. Do you follow the process? We didn't need zlotys, by the way, we had half a billion dollars worth. So our getting the zlotys back was rather unimportant.

M: Right. But it enabled the book to get sold which otherwise--

G: The book got sold, and each year the same amount of money was available because for every twenty-four zlotys that they used to buy books, a dollar would come off of my budget and go into this fund again. So it was a sustained fund over years. This resulted in ***New York Times, New York Herald Tribune***--

(Interruption)

G: Where are we?

M: On the book--

G: Well, at any rate--

M: This was cancelled then?

G: At any rate I heard that the thing was going to be cancelled, got notice that it was going to be cancelled because of the Congressional Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee, I believe. Senator [Karl] Mundt was the originator of this bill, surprisingly, but he was one of them who had lost interest in it and was just about ready to drop it.

Now the USIA was administering this program and had done a rather silly thing over the last three or four years. The program had been under attack in the Senate over this

period, and the Senate was not appropriated the operating funds for the program. The program was self-sustaining in that the capital amount that's used--ten million dollars--was replenished, was a revolving fund. But the interest that had to be paid on this revolving fund and things of this sort had to be appropriated. And the last three or four years the Congress had not appropriated this money, as an indication of its displeasure with this program, and suggested that it be terminated. And the USIA had never really come to grips with this; they just kept the program going and absorbed the losses. And the chips were down this year because the Congress--I think it probably was the Senate Appropriations Committee or whoever it was--the Congress had said to [Leonard] Marks, the USIA man, "Look, we're not going to give you money to staff the silly program, so let's bring it to an end." Then with this Marks decided to bring it to an end, to terminate the program. And it was about all he could do.

It was, however, taken up by the Foreign Relations Committee with the idea of reintroducing it and passing it. The program was terminated, but the idea was to pass it anew. This again was in the spring of 1967.

This is primarily why I came home. I had come home, I think, in February or March of l967, partly to try to get this program going because I thought it probably as vital a program as we had had in Poland. It made available an immense amount--of the plays in Poland, about half of the plays in Warsaw were American plays and about a third to a half of the movies in Poland were American movies. Famous American TV shows were the number-one rated shows in Poland. Books and magazines were being used in colleges. You could pick up a ***New York Times*** at the reading desk of any of the major hotels. It had

a tremendous impact for a relatively low cost, and so I was terribly upset when this was going down the drain right in the midst of an era of bridge building.

So that's one of the reasons I came back home that spring of 1967. I went over and appeared before the Foreign Relations Committee. Most of the committee members were there including Mr. [J. William] Fulbright, Senator Fulbright. A good share of my time was spent detailing--and this is the meeting I referred to previously--my impressions of the December 1966 negotiations with the Poles on the Vietnam question. But then we got into a discussion of the media guarantee program, and I expressed my very strong feelings on it; I answered questions that were raised by Fulbright and others. When I left, Fulbright came up to me and made two little unreported and offhand remarks. He said, "By golly, maybe we ought to make you ambassador to Vietnam," which surprised me because I had not agreed with his position on Vietnam; and secondly he said, "I'm glad we had this opportunity to talk about the media guarantee program, because now I can answer some of the questions raised by my colleagues."

I learned that afternoon that they had voted fourteen to three in support of the media guarantee program in the committee, Fulbright being one of the three that voted against it. Joe Clark was named as the floor leader; Joe Clark always loses ten votes when he leads something on the floor; I think Fulbright named him for good reason. At any rate it lost forty-eight to thirty-seven, I believe, with very inept leadership and of course with the weight of the committee report apparently not--the committee was overwhelmingly for it, but that weight apparently was not felt--Fulbright's weight was felt harder. I wasn't there during the debate so I'm not sure, but I talked to several congressman later and senators

who came to Poland--Birch Bayh, [Walter F.] Mondale--I believe they both voted against it, if my recollection is correct. Both of them were very embarrassed that they had; they didn't realize what they had been voting on.

M: I just talked to Bayh yesterday. I wish I had asked him about it.

G: But at any rate, the program went down the drain. I was still very interested in it. A few months later I had talked to a good many congressman by then, and senators, and I realized that had a good job been done over in Congress, over in the Senate, to explain the bills, we certainly wouldn't have lost a Mondale vote, and so on. I know Mondale voted against it, and he didn't realize what he was doing. He was willing to introduce it if we could get a bill developed after that, once he learned what the hell he had done. This is a minor bill, and Joe Clark for some reason did a lousy job of supporting it, and so on. Nobody really gave it the kind [of support needed]. The State Department, the USIA obviously didn't do a very effective job, because if they had I think they could have saved it.

But at any rate I wrote to Marks some time later with a proposal to revive the thing. I said, "I really think I can count the fifty-one senators myself, personally I can pick them up to vote for this bill, but I don't want to start it, it's your bill. I'll start getting together with the congressmen I know just as soon as you give me the okay." I never got that letter answered. And Marks obviously wasn't about to revive it, and I couldn't do it without him. It was a USIA program. So that's the sorry part of that.

Beyond that, the budget cutting hurt very much. Again, at a meeting we had in 1966 in Bonn of all the ambassadors, I said at that time, "You know, if I would tell you that the Poles did what we did, destroyed the media guarantee program, rejected the English

language program ultimately"--well, I had several things--"cut our cultural exchange program by 60 per cent, I think--"

M: Right. Forty-six million dollars to thirty-one million dollars or something like that.

G: --or some very substantial amount--"you'd say that the Cold War is being reinitiated by the Poles. But that's exactly what we're doing, and we call it building bridges." Well, what I'm suggesting is that somehow the substance of building bridges never seemed to make it during this period.

M: That's important. I'm very glad that you got on that, I think that's very important.

G: And it very much disturbed me. It's one of the real costs of the Vietnam War. We had to very sharply reduce the number of meter grants [?] we gave to send people to the States.

Now during this period we did make some gains. Just before I went to Poland I talked to Shep [Shepard] Stone of the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation had had their own program with Poland that got snuffed out around l963 or l964 primarily because of a clash between Shep Stone and Adammichov [?] who was running it from the Polish side. Other reasons, but they disagreed on the terms and so on. And this was a program where something like sixty Poles a year would come to America under Ford Foundation grants to study, and it was an extraordinary program. We had a meeting, a cocktail party, for Ford Foundation grantees, and my God, we got people from all over Poland in important leadership positions who were very friendly to the United States. This is over the last ten years. It proved itself beyond a question just at that one cocktail party really, the warmth these people expressed. You can't buy that sort of thing. These people lived here and got to know people and maintained contacts with professors and with their colleagues and so on,

that never would have happened. So it was a fantastic program, and I was terribly upset that it had collapsed a couple of years before I came there. I talked to Shop [?], I talked to Vignevich [?], I talked to Beretski [?], who was their cultural chief over there, and finally got the program reactivated. It currently is going at around fifty or sixty a year, so that this was a plus in the whole building bridges--

B: But it was not governmental--

G: But it was not governmental, although it would never have been reactivated but for the President's ambassador who took an interest in it.

M: The administration didn't have anything to do with that particularly-- I mean the Johnson Administration, this was your personal--

G: Yes, but I was Johnson's man over there. That's one of the reasons he sent me over, because he thought I'd have some ideas. I'd have to tie this in with Johnson; I mean, there's a relationship. And it grew out of the conversations prior to going to Poland that I had in preparation for going to Poland.

But at any rate--this was privately funded, of course, but this is a plus that happened while I was there; we did get that going. But with the drying up of funds for cultural exchanges, with the drying of funds for personnel grants, with the demise of the English language program that was so promising at one point, with the demise of the media guarantee program, with even the sharp cutback in funds to permit my staff to travel, fewer books coming over to the USIA library, all kinds of cutbacks, the attitude that this whole pattern of happenings led itself to was one of retrenchment rather than one of bridge building.

M: The whole thing is bigger than any of its parts.

G: Even though the articulation of the program was so brilliant and beautiful, the reality of the program--the meat, the substance--was pretty thin indeed. And it is a tragic part of the whole period because we had a president who thoroughly understood the value of this and had an opportunity I think more than he even believed to carry some of it out, although I don't know. He's a better politician than I am perhaps. And it may very well have been that the tack I proposed would have been disastrous, I don't know.

M: That is a real good introduction of the only other topic I think that's very important, he as a good politician. And yet when you came back to the United States permanently this year, you found by what seems by all accounts a fairly thoroughly demoralized, non-active Democratic National Committee.

G: There was no committee. And I think it relates to something I said either on tape or off earlier; that I felt that Lyndon Johnson--I feel now as I look back on it, and I felt as I went along and thought about this question--that Lyndon Johnson when he became president, and perhaps even when he became vice president, but certainly it came out when he became president, had had that thing happen to him that perhaps always happens to people who become president: He thought much bigger than party. And he went beyond that and practically submerged the party out of sight in his calculations. I think this was a serious error of his administration. I think that he was probably, and I'm just guessing, irritated by people bringing up--even the one or two times I brought up political considerations, he sort of brushed them aside, in the postal matters. I think this irritated him. I think he felt

that this was too big a thing he was involved in to let people even talk about political factors.

Now I don't know; there may have been people that he talked politics all night to. All I'm saying is that the net effect of what he did seems to me to have pushed aside the political party aspect of what was going on.

M: Your thesis is certainly borne out by what apparently happened to the DNC.

G: And you saw the total demise of the DNC. Part of this may have been because of a fear that many of the party regulars were pro-Kennedy. Because, don't forget, this campaign didn't bring this out, but Kennedys were basically organizational men; they were not attacking the organization. And it was the Dick Daleys and the Joe Barrs and the--who's our friend from Philadelphia, the mayor of Philadelphia? -- these were the people that gave the nomination to Jack Kennedy. The organizational structure was a Kennedy structure by the time Johnson became in office. The state chairman of Wisconsin was a Kennedy man; the state chairman of Iowa was a Kennedy man.

M: The national chairman was.

G: And the national chairman was a Kennedy man. There may have been part of this, too. I felt that Johnson couldn't trust the national committee, that it was a Kennedy national committee, and Bobby was still around nipping at his heels. He had to create his own framework of support, whatever that be, and could not work through the party. That might have been it. I'm speculating because I don't know. I wasn't that close to Johnson, you see. I mean, I didn't have--I was not a member--

M: You were close to the campaign this year though. You saw what effect—

G: There is no question that there was no party; he destroyed the party or at least it atrophied under his administration. Here's a party in power for eight years, and my recollection is that when Humphrey took over the party after the nomination, he not only had his prenomination debt but he had some debt of the party that he had to pick up.

M: Time and money was not adequate.

G: After eight years that party was such that it didn't have any money in the bank. This is ridiculous.

M: Incredible.

G: It's incredible. It should have had five or ten million dollars ready to go, at least. And it was incredible. Well, it didn't get the leadership from the President to do so. All the services that people were so brightly developing in the early sixties, programs whereby--

(Interruption)

What I'm really saying is that I don't know from personal discussions with President Johnson what he felt about these issues, but rather from what I saw happen. It's pretty clear that he left the national committee in pretty much an ineffective state at the time that I came into this campaign in May of 1968--without funds, without decent organization, without any significant organization nationally, without effective leadership at the top, because John Bailey wasn't even a very effective figurehead by this time. And with no real apparent interest in the political organization, at least in terms of what was reflected by action. Programs that had originally been started in the early sixties to help congressmen had gone to disuse; programs whereby the tapes were made and sent back to local stations and press

releases were written--and a lot of ideas of this sort were developing in the early sixties--just never really developed.

I might say that the national committee ever since Kennedy came in had a very strange existence, because Bobby Kennedy pretty much took over leadership of the national committee from John Bailey right from the beginning. And John Bailey is a very strange case in this whole picture. I never could figure out why John stayed, because I knew the national committee better in the early sixties than I knew it when I was in Poland, of course, and John wasn't making decisions. Bobby Kennedy was, in l96l, l962, l963, during that period when Jack Kennedy was president.

Then after Johnson came in, there were several people. Of course Cliff Carter for one was running the committee, and Marv Watson at the end was running it into the ground. I don't think Marv had any conception of what American politics were all about, by the way. He was an extraordinarily poor choice for this role I think by the President--a bright guy, tough, able, but in terms of national politics completely a neophyte--suspicious of everybody but those who were close in for twenty-five years with Lyndon, unable to work with them.

M: East Texas just didn't translate--

G: It just didn't translate into U.S.A. Johnson would have been much better off if he had really given Bailey the job, because Bailey would have been loyal to him. He's an old pro. But he never did, anymore than Jack Kennedy did, as I said. Bailey, a very wealthy man, a very important man in Connecticut--today very important in Connecticut-- somehow was willing to serve without salary in a position without authority, and I can't understand it. But

apparently simply the fact that he was on the platform with the greats was enough for him, I don't know.

M: What about the campaign? Did Johnson do what the Humphrey people wanted him to do--less or more or--?

G: I might say that the thing that triggered my coming home was the fact that I was scheduled, with approval through the State Department, for May 18, 1968, to give a JJ dinner speech in my home state of Wisconsin. This was scheduled two months before May 18. About five days prior to that date, just about when I was getting ready to come home to make the speech--at my own expense, not at government expense--I got a wire from Dean Rusk saying that it just came to his attention that I was going to make this speech, and in terms of the President's March 31 statement, this was not appropriate; that is, the statement that he was getting out of politics. This was broadened about then to include him and all his appointees. A good many of his appointees, cabinet people, had come out for Hubert, and all of a sudden this was closed off and I got caught in this period.

I was very upset about this and didn't accept it immediately. I sent as strong a wire as I could conjure up without trying to ruin my case by being nasty to Dean, saying in the most persuasive way I knew how that I very much wanted to maintain this commitment and that, "If the reasons I've outlined don't convince you, I ask you to take this directly to the President." About two days later I got back a wire from Dean Rusk saying he had taken it directly to the President, and the President did indeed not want me to make a speech.

M: So he did definitely want his people out, then?

G: Of course this didn't do me any good in my home state of Wisconsin. But at any rate ultimately [John J.] Gilligan of Ohio, candidate for Senate, replaced me--one who was very antiJohnson.

M: I was going to say, that sure made little sense. You were a supporter; Gilligan was a great opponent.

G: And my speech which I had already prepared was going to be in support of Johnson's foreign policy, so it didn't make any sense at all.

But at any rate I decided then, with my wife, that--prior to that time I had planned to stay on and occasionally come home and make some high-level foreign policy speeches that would be helpful to the administration's cause, but before nonpolitical audiences, and stay on the job in Warsaw. But being thus effectively cut off by this ruling I just decided that I couldn't sit out what I regarded as a very important election--important both because I felt that it would not be desirable to have--I thought the choice between Hubert Humphrey and Bobby Kennedy was clearly in Hubert Humphrey's favor, and I wanted to support Hubert.

And secondly because I didn't feel that I could live with myself if I sat out the whole political campaign and Nixon became president. Well, I didn't sit out the campaign and Nixon became president, so I'm not sure I made the right decision.

M: At least you didn't sit it out.

G: But at any rate I did what I needed to do, and I couldn't have lived with myself if I hadn't. So I came home and asked Hubert if I could be useful to him, and he was very enthusiastic about it. So I went over to see the President and told him that my wishes were to resign and

help Hubert in the campaign. He said, "If that's what you choose to do, fine," very, very careful not to express a partisan interest. And that's the last I've seen the President after that meeting. We had a very warm exchange of letters. I wrote a letter to him of resignation which summed up in a page and a half my feelings about his administration, as best you can in a page and a half. And he wrote a warm letter back. Neither have been published.

M: Did the Humphrey people think Johnson did anything for them during the campaign, or did they feel like. . . ?

G: No. You had all kinds of varieties of opinions among the Humphreyites, sometimes changing day-by-day among the same people. In any campaign there is a great deal of bickering about what the other guy ain't doing, and this was true about Johnson. Of course quite a few of Humphrey supporters felt strongly that Johnson should play Vietnam politics for Hubert very early. They didn't say it that way, but they thought he should stop the bombing. And I used to say once in a while, "For Christ's sake, if he wouldn't stop the bombing for himself to win the election, how do you expect him to do it for Hubert?" But at any rate there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with Johnson's handling of a $700,000 fund.

M: This was the New York--

G: The New York fund. I don't know what happened to that, by the way. It's still sitting there I guess.

M: It dropped out of the news.

G: But many of us felt that that should go into a registration program--I felt that, and I don't understand why Johnson didn't release it for that--a bipartisan one. You know, the kind of bipartisan registration program, you put it in an organization like a Negro group, you know, like the Philip Randolph Foundation or something of this sort, and let them organize Republicans and Democrats alike in the Negro districts-- register Republicans and Democrats alike.

M: All the Negro Republicans you can find.

G: This is the sort of thing that could have been legally done with this money, and I can't understand now why it wasn't released for this purpose. I understand it was asked to be released for this purpose by the Humphrey people, but it never happened. I think that that was important because we might have with a more effective registration done better in some of the states and could conceivably have won. I don't know that $700,000 would have done it, but we needed money so badly that it would have helped us get the thing off dead center earlier and made it more effective.

Second criticism, of course--well, the war criticism, that criticism of Johnson, plus of course the whole question of whether the convention should be held in Chicago. The Humphreyites were very much for moving it to Florida, and they got stopped cold at the White House. I think probably, although I don't know this as a fact, Hubert talked to Johnson about this personally. But at any rate there was a general feeling among the Humphreyites, including myself, that we should take advantage of the luck of having a communications strike in Chicago and get the hell out of there. But Johnson, to my understanding supported Daley right down the line on this.

What I'm saying is, generally the feeling was that Johnson wasn't being very helpful. [John] Criswell, who was running the convention, apparently played it so neutral that he leaned over backwards toward McCarthy people, and McCarthy actually got more rooms in the central hotels than the Humphrey people did.

M: Again curious, considering the position of the candidate.

G: Certainly the national committee didn't give us inside information as we might have expected them to do, let us know earlier what was going to happen. It was very late in the game before we knew at all what was happening in Chicago. You don't know how much of this is Johnson and how much is the coterie around him, but generally while we all felt Johnson was for Hubert, I don't think anybody felt otherwise, we all felt that he wasn't helping him much--some for legitimate reasons, some for silly reasons like the war reason. I didn't feel that Johnson should change his war stance for or against Hubert. So by and large the attitude was pretty negative toward Johnson in the campaign.

The other item, the fifth point I was going to make where the criticism was pretty loud was in the picking of Hale Boggs and Carl Albert and the establishment people to head up the committee and to chair the convention. There was a great deal of interest on Hubert's part to have Ed Muskie play one of these roles, but it never got off the ground with the President.

I don't know how much Hubert held back and didn't say what he intended to say to the President; I don't know how much the President knew about this. Hubert, you know, with the President I don't think was the greatest fighter for his own interests. I just have a hunch he deferred too much to him at this point; he didn't act like the guy who was going to

be candidate for president of the United States, and perhaps those things that we thought Hubert was going to talk to the President about never came up in the conversations--I don't know this. Knowing Hubert quite well and getting to know him a lot better, I have a hunch that maybe this happened a lot of times, and that the reasons things didn't happen like we had hoped they were going to happen in the Johnson-Humphrey relationship was that Humphrey never asked for them to happen. I don't know.

At any rate on these five areas there was a general feeling at the Humphrey headquarters that we weren't getting the kind of cooperation that we should expect from the President of the United States. Part of this, of course, was just that things were going badly and people looked for excuses. If things were going well, probably most of these things would never have come up.

M: Mighty fine, sir. I certainly do thank you for all your generous contribution of time. And if there's anything you want to add, please feel free to do so.

[End of Tape l of l and Interview III]

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

JOHN GRONOUSKI

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Mary Gronouski, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted with my late husband, John Gronouski, on February 5, February 10, and February 14, 1969 in Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to researchers.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

/s/ John Gronouski
Donor

11-30-99
Date

Archivist of the United States

12-16-99
Date

Deceased 1/7/96