INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 23, 1974

INTERVIEWEE: ERNEST GRUENING

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Senator Gruening's home, 7926 West Beach Drive, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: The interview opens with a description of my sole trip to Alaska. . . . and Juneau and went up to Skagway by boat. Then we took up the White Pass and Yukon Railroad over to Whitehorse and then took a plane from there up to Dawson and came in at Arctic, or Circle it is, isn't it?

G: Yes.

F: I came on into Fairbanks; took a train then down to McKinley and got off there and went through the Park. I came back down to the McKinley headquarters and from there down to Anchorage. From Anchorage [I went] on into Kachemak, and I stayed down there.

G: Did you see a lot of wildlife?

F: Quite a bit, yes, particularly in McKinley, way back there. I got to watch a moose, I guess, oh, for an hour, just wandering around.

G: I remember seeing three wolves chase a caribou, and I've seen wolverines, which is really a small animal and rather rare. Of course, moose and sheep and bear are very common.

F: I got to see a grizzly, which pleased me. As we were going

into McKinley, about oh, fifteen, twenty miles in, there was one up on a slope. I didn't get too close, if I remember, just a black bear in the woods.

Well, what we're doing, of course, is just trying to fill in pieces here and there in the affair. We have your book on Alaska and its coming to statehood, and so I thought we'd just emphasize your association with Johnson in this. When did you first meet him?

G: Well, of course I met him when he was majority leader of the Senate.

F: That's when you were a delegate?

G: When I was a delegate, yes. He was always very friendly and affable, and we got along very nicely. We had no differences at all. As you know, when the time came, after we'd gotten into this, to me, inexcusable and unjustified war, I sought an opportunity to give him what I thought was the proper policy. He listened very attentively and carefully, and--this is recorded in the book--I said to him, "Mr. President," [and then] I gave all the reasons why we shouldn't be there; that it wasn't our war; we had no business there; that the vital interest of the United States wasn't in jeopardy; we hadn't been attacked as we had been by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor.

F: You were just about the first senator to go on record.

G: I was the first. My first attack was in October of 1963 when I criticized Jack Kennedy for sending so-called advisers down there, who were not advisers at all. They were helicopter pilots, and

they were engaged in combat. The reason they were called advisers is that the Geneva Accords, which we'd agreed to support, forbade the introduction of any troops. So this was the first deception practiced.

Then on March 10, 1964, I made the full-length speech entitled, "The United States Should Get Out of Vietnam." It was a full-length speech, and it was the first statement made by anybody in public life. Being an old newspaperman, I knew it was news, and I fully expected to see it on the front page of New York Times and the Post the next morning. But not a line. But the interesting thing was that the wire services did summarize it and send it out. So that the small papers throughout the country got the news that Senator Ernest Gruening made such and such, with a result that I was deluged with letters, four hundred and four by actual count, of which, believe it or not all but four were favoring my position. They were very respectable letters. They were letters from deans of the colleges and retired military men and ministers and so forth and said, "Fine," "This is right," and "You're giving us something that we ought to know." So that encouraged me to go on. And then as time passed on, as you know, then came the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

F: Right.

G: None of us knew, of course, that the Tonkin Resolution was spurious. And you're familiar, of course, with the telegraph that was suppressed from Captain Herrick of the Maddox. If that telegraph

hadn't been suppressed the Congress would never have voted the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. They would have said, "Let's wait and see what really happened." But none of us knew it. But having already taken my position against the war I knew that this was a further escalation, so I had no difficulty in voting against it.

Then somewhat later I sought an interview with Johnson to tell him that I was going to introduce that afternoon a resolution providing that no draftees should be sent involuntarily to Vietnam. The President said, "Oh, don't do that. Please don't do that!" He was very nice about it, you know. And I said, "Well, why not, Mr. President? I think it should be done." He said, "Listen, if we're not out of there by the next January you can do anything you please. And besides, we're not going to send down any draftees until then." Well, this was a slightly equivocal statement because they were sending draftees, but maybe not new draftees. But then I said, "Well, Mr. President, when I get back to my office I will send you a copy of the speech I was going to make this afternoon and a copy of the resolution." Which I did. I respected his statement that there would be no draftees and that we'd be out of there by January.

So I did nothing until the next January, when I introduced it. Of course, it got nowhere. It got two votes: Wayne Morse's and mine. Dick Russell attacked it violently and said it was practically . . . . Of course, you know, in retrospect the whole

thing is incredible. Why should we have gone down there? Well, the reason is that we were in the grip of an obsession. That obsession was that Communism, China and Russia, were a monolithic combination determined to Bolshevize the world and that we had to stop them and that if we didn't stop them in Southeast Asia this would spread. If Vietnam fell then Laos and Cambodia and Thailand would fall, and then Communism would move across the South Pacific and take first the Philippines and Australia, New Zealand, and the Hawaiian Islands, and we'd be fighting them on the beaches of California. Fantastic! But this was the United States policy embodied in the Domino Theory by John Foster Dulles. That was policy, and at that time if you just said, "Communism," that was enough to justify it. And it would still be, in retrospect, the statement of many military people that if we hadn't gone in. Of course, this is the basis of a continuing war in Southeast Asia which is, to my mind, utterly inexcusable.

F: Right. We closed down Vietnam and we've just shifted.

G: Well, I mean this. We're in there now with billions of dollars and millions of dollars worth of sophisticated equipment, and we have thousands of civilians servicing the sophisticated equipment. We have Air Force generals, but not in uniform, running around advising them, and so forth.

F: CIA.

G: And I don't understand why the Congress doesn't step down on it. I talked to Bill Fulbright last fall; he and I have been personally

friendly, and I said, "Listen, Bill, why don't you at least expose what we're doing in Southeast Asia: how much it's costing us, how much of our precious gasoline we're sending to keep this war going?" I thought to myself, "If it's exposed that will lead to enough public sentiment so they'll stop it." He replied that he thought this was a reasonable request, and he hoped it could be done early in the coming year. That was this year. Well, here we're now practically through a quarter of the year and nothing has happened, although there've been a couple of vigorous speeches against our participation by McGovern and by the Senator from California.

F: [Alan] Cranston?

G: Cranston, and by Congressman [Ronald] Dellums and Congressman [John] Conyers. It doesn't seem to make any sense, but Nixon is determined to try to achieve with nonmilitary means, with American dollars and hired people, what he couldn't achieve with the Army. It's not going to work. The war is going to go on as long as we attempt to impose our people on them. They've got to be left to solve their own devices. At least that's my position, and it seems to me a reasonable one.

But I would say that Johnson was always very courteous.

F: He never sort of put you on an enemies list? I know he didn't have one like that.

G: No. There's one very interesting episode that I will relate to

you just as I hear it. When he came through Alaska on his way back from the Philippines, the visit to the Far East, he autographed a photograph, which I have, "To Ernest Gruening, who always fights for what he believes to be right, From his friend, Lyndon Baines Johnson." I thought this was a very gallant and generous thing, and I plan to mention that in my biography.

But then I had information from an unimpeachable source, I can't reveal it but from a person absolutely reliable, who said that Johnson had shown his resentment of me and Morse and others and said, "I'm going to get them. I'm smarter than they are." Then he elaborated and said, "I'm going to offer Morse a job that he won't refuse, and it will ruin him." That job was a job to be the negotiator in the airline mechanics strike, which Johnson figured would ruin him, because although Morse was always a friend of labor, he couldn't go along with them a hundred per cent. He knew how organized labor is, and unless you're a hundred per cent for them, why, you're no good.

Well, one of my last meetings with Johnson was in the White House after it was clear that Abe Fortas was not going to be confirmed. He'd gotten mixed up in--and I said to LBJ, "Why don't you appoint Wayne Morse to the Supreme Court? He'd be confirmed and be a great justice." Well, he just didn't reply, and apparently this was just not acceptable. But he'd have been awful smart if he'd done it.

F: Yes. He might have pulled himself out of the hole there.

G: He'd have gotten a great judge, but he apparently carried a chip.

So, it's really hard to judge Lyndon precisely, except that superficially he was always very kind and generous. He did the kind of little favors that senators appreciate, invited me to go over to Senator [Herbert] Lehman's funeral with him and that kind of thing. So that I certainly have no criticism whatever of Johnson's personal relations to me. I think his failure to stay out of this war was a great personal tragedy, not only for him but for the country.

F: Do you think that he just took bad advice, or do you think he was just dead set on--?

G: Well, I think he took bad advice. But I think that he had a kind of Texas gut reaction, which was illustrated when he said, "Nail that coonskin on the wall." There was a kind of a philosophy abroad at that time, which I think he heard, which was, "Well, maybe we shouldn't have been there, but we're there now. And being there now, we gotta carry on." Of course, I thought it was a very stupid policy. But that was the widespread thinking, and I think Johnson shared that. He wasn't going to be licked. He wasn't going to pull out. He was going to win, and so on.

Now the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was a deliberate fraud, as you know. None of us knew it at the time.

F: Do you think it was a White House fraud or a military fraud?

G: No, it was a White House fraud. Because Johnson had in his possession early in the afternoon of August 4 the telegram from Captain Herrick of the Maddox, who in the two days between August 2 and August 4 had been promoted to be commodore of the two vessels, because Johnson had sent a second destroyer, the C. Turner Joy. His telegram said in effect, "Hold it"--I give the text in the book--"The earlier reports may be due to freak weather conditions and over-eager sonar men. No visual sightings by the Maddox." In other words, "We've seen no torpedoes; we've seen no PT boats; suggest complete evaluation for action."

Well, he was the one man who knew what had happened and what hadn't happened. If Johnson had said to himself, "Well now, wait a minute. I've got to show this to the senators." But he suppressed it, and he was determined to find a pretext to go in. This is his great crime, and the thing that will haunt him throughout American history. It's a great pity, because his domestic program was excellent. He was really responsible for the civil rights legislation. He, a southerner from the Deep South, made it possible to have the Voting Rights Bill, the abolition of those signs, "White" and "Colored", and this is his great achievement. But it's lost in the maze of Vietnam and so forth and so on, and he finally felt obliged to resign.

I always liked LBJ personally. I thought he was a nice human being, and I had a very nice visit with his wife. We went

down to see the reservoir down in Canyon, that new great Lake Powell. Our relations were very friendly. As I say, I think he just made a great political mistake and connived at it with a deliberate deception.

F: Did you ever talk with him about the Pueblo incident?

G: No. No, I don't think I did.

F: Now you were fairly forthright in your criticism of the handling of that.

G: I have no recollection that I did. Of course, I felt very definitely that this was a mistake, but I don't think I had any conversation with him. I mean, of course, you know there are limitations upon the number of times anybody, including a senator can go and tell the President what he ought to do.

F: Well, I've counted a number of trips. I can document you were at the White House at least twenty-six times during his presidency, which is farmore than most people.

G: Yes. Well, that's true.

F: You were always down there for a briefing, a ceremony,

G: A briefing, a ceremony.

F: Or something like that?

G: And there were various bill signing ceremonies, and so forth and so on.

F: Were you in Alaska when he came back from Manila?

G: Yes, I was in Alaska.

F: What was that like?

G: Well, we met, I have a picture of the meeting upstairs, Bill Egan, the governor, and Ralph Rivers, the representative in Congress.

F: On that trip I was telling you about Ralph Rivers was with us.

G: Ralph Rivers was there and Hugh Wade, the Governor's secretary of state. He just made inquiries about the needs of Alaska and was sympathetic, and we told him some of the things that were needed, control of the fisheries to prevent excessive Japanese fishing and so forth and so on, a few other things like that. He was always very sympathetic.

F: Now this was in November. Was the weather pretty good?

G: Yes. It was.

F: Did you have to whip out a crowd, or did it just come naturally to see the President?

G: No. This was just a small meeting.

F: At the airport?

G: Yes.

F: How long was he there?

G: Oh, I think he must have been there an hour, an hour and a half.

F: What did he do, come into the airport there? Or did you go aboard the plane?

G: He came into the airport and we met him, and we took off to one of the rooms there.

F: VIP room of some kind? And you all just talked frankly about Alaska troubles?

G: Of course, Alaska has always been a kind of a fief of the

Department of the Interior. Its decisions determine Alaska's fate, and we constantly called attention to that. Some of the things we objected to was the constant withdrawal by Interior secretaries, which still goes on, and determination to overrule the wishes of the people of Alaska.

F: Well, now, you know right at the very last week of his presidency, Johnson overruled Stewart Udall on a huge withdrawal of the Alaskan land. Did Johnson contact you at all about that, or was that pretty much on his own?

G: I think we had discussed that very point at this meeting, to stop these withdrawals arbitrarily made by the Secretary of the Interior.

Now, there was a case of something called the Arctic Wildlife Range in the extreme northeast corner of Alaska, some ten million acres, and this was proposed by Secretary [Fred A.] Seaton. We had hearings on it, and the hearings were conducted by my colleague Bob Bartlett. They came to the conclusion, "Don't do it, but if you must do it at all, turn it over to the state." Well, Seaton arbitrarily ignored that and just withdrew it with a stroke of the pen. This was the kind of thing we were constantly up against.

F: Was this after you became senator? I know it was during Eisenhower's period.

G: Yes. It was after I became senator.

F: Did Johnson talk to you about the strategy of getting Alaskan statehood and how they were going to have to balance it off

with Hawaii? Did you all necessarily work that together?

G: Well, in the early days he was not an enthusiast for statehood, but he came around.

F: Was this just education on your part?

G: We talked about it. I pointed out this was a basic principle of government by the consent of the governed, that it would strengthen the Union, that we would have a bulwark of defense at the time when that seemed like a very sensitive area, right opposite Soviet Russia, and so on and so forth. So I think he came around.

F: Do you think that there was any conscious delaying in the hope that maybe they could do it during a Democratic administration?

G: I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

F: They just waited until it could be done and did it? Well, with Johnson as majority leader, did he sort of help you convince other people that the time had come?

G: He cleared the way so that the legislation wouldn't be impeded. Of course, you know, one of the things that is so striking when we contrast what's happening on the Hill now [is that] we at that time had great congressional leadership, LBJ in the Senate and Rayburn in the House. The Congress functioned. I don't mean necessarily ideologically, but when the time came when a bill was supposed to pass, they said, "This is it." You see? And they stopped filibusters and they stopped other things.

F: They tried to get through with things.

G: Yes, get through things. Now we have great difficulty, although I was pleased to see that the other day they did finally pass the Campaign Financing Bill, which was quite an achievement in the face of the filibuster by [Senator James B.] Allen, and so on. But that was a great team, and, of course, that they were fellow Texans I think helped. Sam was a great guy. Sam was at first very much opposed to both statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, but he finally said he was less opposed to Alaska. I asked him why. "Well," he said, "It's on the continent."

F: He wasn't sure about all that water?

G: And then, also, "Why are you opposed to Hawaii?" "Too many Japs," [Rayburn said]. But he got over that.

F: Well, now, it was pretty clearly understood that Alaska was more heavily Democratic than Republican.

G: Yes. It was.

F: And that probably didn't . . .

G: I don't think that hurt any.

F: Was that a strong selling point with Johnson and Rayburn or not?

G: They never said so in so many words. I think they probably may have had their own ideas. But actually, of course, the assumption that Hawaii would be Republican was negated by events. I mean, they've got three out of four delegates who are all Democrats.

F: You tried several times to see President Johnson to talk about overpopulation and the need for birth control.

G: Oh, yes.

F: Did you ever get to him on this?

G: Oh, I sure did, and he was great on that. He made not fewer than twenty statements on the subject. One of the greatest disappointments was the complete flop of the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, John W. Gardner, in just lying down on it. In the hearings which I held I finally felt obliged to really almost rebuke him sharply. I said, "Here the President of the United States has made twenty statements on the subject, and you're doing nothing." Johnson was great on that subject.

F: You didn't have to sell him particularly on it? I mean, he saw what you were driving at?

G: I mean that the thing that is so sad is that Johnson could have gone down as one of our great all-time presidents if he'd just said, "We're not going to go into this war." And of course, the consequences are going to haunt us indefinitely.

F: Yes.

G: Not only the fifty thousand dead and the crippled but the great cost and the damage to our reputation and morale. In retrospect it's always going to be tied in with what Nixon's doing now. It's going to be that. I notice that the press has a habit of calling it now the "era of Vietnam." They don't call it the war in Vietnam. I don't know whether that's a way of trying to soften it.

F: I don't know. Of course, it was a definite period in our life. But it's not really over yet.

G: But you see I'm no pacifist. I was a rootin'-tootin' supporter of World War I and II. In fact, I volunteered for service in World War I, although I didn't serve very long, and as a newspaper editor on both occasions I did everything I could to support it. I felt in the case of the First World War that if England fell to the Kaiser the whole free world would be in jeopardy, and even more so when it was Adolf Hitler. So I'm not a pacifist, and I just think that this war was so completely without justification that we should have never been in it.

F: Yes. You would agree with Fulbright's statement, "It's just the wrong war in the wrong place in the wrong time."

G: Yes. I'm testifying again for amnesty for these people, and I think that in time it will come. I think the guy who refused to go showed real courage.

F: Yes.

G: And also the guy who didn't refuse to go, but when he got down there and saw us butchering women and children and raining death and destruction on them got nauseated and said, "I can't take this any more" and got out. I talked to many of these kids in colleges before, when the draft was nearing, and I found almost a unanimous sentiment that, "If this were a war of defense we'd go in a moment, but it has nothing to do with the defense of our country." I remember one time on the floor of the Senate I

asked Jack Javits, who had been defending the war, "I'd like to ask my colleague from New York that if his son were drafted and sent to South Vietnam and killed, would he feel that he had died for our country?" He wouldn't answer. He ducked the question. He went off on something else, and I repeated it but he still ducked it.

F: Did Johnson ever discuss with you strategy for your campaigns for the Senate?

G: No, no.

F: You never got into that sort of politics? Did you get any intimations that he wasn't going to run again in 1968?

G: No, it came as a complete surprise.

F: Were you watching it that night?

G: Well, I was up at the University of Alaska at that time when the news came, and, of course, we were pleased in a way because of the vindication of our position on the war.

Let me ask you a question. What's ever happened to Ralph Yarborough?

F: Ralph is busy making speeches and--

G: Great guy.

F: He really is.

G: Wonderful guy.

F: He's making speeches. He is trying to pay off his debts by doing a little lawyering, and mainly that's what he's doing. He and

I were just on a panel. Texas is having a constitutional convention, and they set up first a citizens' advisory commission. Ralph was on that, and that kept him busy for a long time.

G: You know, I think from my standpoint Texas is improving a lot. I remember talking years ago to a now-congressman called Henry Gonzalez who came to Alaska. He told me that when he was knocking on doors one woman said, "You, a Mexican. You haven't got a Chinaman's chance!" He said, "I don't want a Chinaman's chance. All I want is a Mexican's chance." Well, they've got him now, and they have [Kika] de la Garza. They're getting in.

F: They don't pay much attention to that now.

G: You have a black congresswoman.

F: Yes, Barbara Jordan.

G: Well.

F: She is superb, I think.

G: I think the South is greatly transformed.

F: We've got Bob Eckhardt out at Houston that's got some savvy in him.

G: By the way is Bob Eckhardt . . .?

F: He's from Houston.

G: What kind of a congressman is he?

F: Well, he's quite liberal. So Houston's got two good ones. They've got Bob Casey, for instance, who represents the old style.

G: Tell me, has [Lloyd] Bentsen got any chance for the nomination?

F: It'd have to be one of those things.

G: How great--we won't play that.

(Interruption)

F: You never did get Johnson up to Alaska just for a visit, did you.

G: Only on his way back from the Southeast Asia theater.

F: Someone who'd like to go very much is Lady Bird, incidentally. She's always asking questions about it.

G: Yes.

F: Very intrigued. You worked with Johnson some on clean air and water pollution acts.

G: Yes, yes. He was always on the right side of that. You know, the thing that I think is sad is that his domestic record is excellent, one of the best from the standpoint of history.

F: How did he get someone like Everett Dirksen to come around on open housing bills? You know, Dirksen would always oppose the civil rights acts and wound up in the long run dragging a few Republicans in with him, enough to put it over.

G: Well, Johnson was a great persuader. I mean Johnson was a skillful person at getting his point of view accepted by others. I think that was one of his strengths.

F: When you lost the election in Alaska did you hear anything out of Johnson?

G: No, no.

F: Did you have any relationship with him after he got out of the presidency?

G: No. No, I never did.

F: Back there in those Senate days, did you think he was ever going to make it as president?

G: Yes. Well, of course we didn't expect Jack Kennedy to be assassinated.

F: Right.

G: But I was out at the convention when Kennedy and Johnson were nominated and supported them both enthusiastically. I thought it was a very strong ticket.

F: Were you surprised when Johnson took the second place position?

G: A little surprised.

F: Did you have any advance knowledge?

G: No, I didn't.

F: Mr. Sam ever talk to you about it?

G: No. No, he never did.

F: Did Johnson?

G: No.

F: Where'd you hear the news?

G: Well, I think he was of great help to Kennedy, and of course when he got the presidency, as I say, I think he was a great president until he got us enmeshed in this war. Has anybody ever gotten really down to cases with him and asked him whether he didn't

realize that this was a mistake in retrospect?

F: I think people have talked around it with him, but, you know, when he wanted to avoid a question he could take over and do all the talking himself. He'd start giving you what all the alternatives were and that sort of thing.

G: Of course, one of the great myths of the whole war which the American people still aren't wise to is that we were fighting aggression, whereas actually we were the agressors from start to finish. This is one of the things in Johnson's statements before the Tonkin Gulf, the Johns Hopkins speech: "Why are we there? Because a friendly nation asked us to help them repel aggression and three presidents have made that pledge." Well, it wasn't true. No. Three presidents hadn't made it. Eisenhower never promised anything but economic aid, and Kennedy never made any such promise. Then Johnson included himself with the three presidents, and that was just one of those deceptions that he practiced. But I'm not at all sure that he did believe this himself, although of course he couldn't have. The thing that is really so shocking is when this telegram came from Herrick, he didn't say, "Well, yes, this puts a different light on the whole business. I'll show this to the senators."

You see, this was a few hours before the Senate and House leaders were assembled to hear from him what he was going to tell the American people over TV later that night and tell them that he wanted them to adopt the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which would

give him the power to use the armed forces of the United States every way he saw fit. But I think this was part of this reaction: "We're there now, and we've got to win." I find that is a position that a lot of southerners took. Sam Ervin, who is a delightful person on the Constitution, says, "We should have cleaned them up down there." And I said, "You mean butcher those innocent people?" He said, "When we were in there we shouldn't have stopped anything." I said, "We had no business to be there." And he said, "That's another issue. Once we were there we should have gone ahead." Well, I think that was pretty much Johnson's idea, "We're not going to be licked." I think this goes back to a Texas tradition, don't you know?

F: Not like Senator Aiken, who said way back there, "Well, let's just say we won it and come home," which I always thought was a rather more sophisticated answer than it sounded.

G: Johnson never subscribed to the idea that many Texans had that it was horrible to think of a state bigger than Texas.

F: He never opposed the admission of Alaska on that basis.

G: No, no.

F: That we're going to get rid of . . .

G: No, he was always friendly on the subject.

F: Did you see him much during his last presidential days?

G: Well, more or less. I had entree to the White House without any difficulty. It would usually be on some Alaska matter, and then there would be a bill signing ceremony and various social

events. Johnson was very generous in doing little favors for people, don't you know, and inviting you to the White House on particular occasions and so forth and so on.

F: I noticed you were there for the signing of the Beautification Bill. Had you been a particular supporter of that?

G: Yes, I had.

F: Did you really have as strong a highway sign lobby as was indicated?

G: When I was governor we abolished billboards on highways. That's one of the things I sponsored, and of course there was no reason why the beautiful scenery in Alaska should be defaced by billboards advertising Old Granddad and Old Taylor. So Alaska is free from that, billboards.

F: Yes. You can see Alaska. Did you work with Lady Bird at all on that?

G: We were very sympathetic about it, and the time that we went together to--well, she was there when I was there at Lake Powell. We discussed all of it. Lake Powell was an interesting refutation of the conservationists' claim, you know, that this was a horrible thing to do to interfere with nature. Instead of having a parched desert, now there's a beautiful lake where there's swimming and boating and fishing. Actually, the scenery is enhanced, because the walls of the Grand Canyon are mirrored in this lake. So you see twice as much.

F: I have boated down there from Moab all the way down to the dam and slept out on a sandbar, and it is, I think, just superb

scenery. Did Johnson ever discuss with you the Ramparts issue?

G: Yes. Yes, he was sympathetic with that. It was Udall that killed that off. Udall is a fanatical conservationist.

F: Did you think that Johnson just didn't feel that he ought to push Udall on this?

G: You see, Udall was really an appointee of Kennedy's.

F: Right.

G: So that Johnson didn't have much influence on him, and so forth. And, of course, the emotional appeal to conservation is very strong, the slogan, "We have ruined the forty-eight lower states; let's save Alaska, it's the only place left." [This] is completely without any justification. The idea is correct, but no one's going to ruin Alaska. The people of Alaska are just as much concerned about preserving their beauty and their wildlife, and this latest proposal of setting aside a hundred and six million acres is just going to be ruinous. We are going to fight it tooth and nail, and I think we're going to win that fight in the long run because of the resource problem.

F: Johnson didn't really get into that North Slope problem,did he?

G: No, no. This was before him. He came after this time.

F: So you never got to talk that over with him?

G: Is this going to be a book?

F: This is going to be in part just archival material for future historians and anyone else, journalists, who want to use it.

G: Why don't you write a book?

F: Well, I'm going to do that, too.

G: Hasn't the University of Texas got a publication bureau of its own?

F: Right, right. Yes, I'm beginning to put together something.

G: I think that history should do justice to LBJ and realize that his one great mistake shouldn't erase all the other good things that he did.

F: You think as far as domestic policy was concerned he was a fine president.

G: I think he was tops, much more effective than Jack had been. Jack couldn't get his program across, but Johnson did.

F: Could you feel the power of the White House after Johnson became president over on the Hill?

G: Yes, yes, yes. He was influential.

F: Did Johnson have pretty good staff help?

G: Well, I mean he did very effective stuff. Johnson didn't use any of the scaly methods of Richard Nixon. I mean he talked frankly to people and gave his point of view and presented it logically, and I think he was a great persuader.

F: Can you think of anything else we ought to cover, Senator?

G: I can't think of anything else. But I hope you write a book on it and that you at least will record that I think he made one great mistake, and that that should not, however tragic that was, [overshadow his

accomplishments]. It was a tragedy for him as well as for the nation.

F: Right, right.

G: I mean he'd have gone down as one of the great presidents.

F: It's a shame to let one thing overbalance all the others.

G: Yes. Well, I mean this was a thing; he runs us into the war, and he did it by deception. That was the thing that was unforgiveable. If he'd done it openly that might have been another matter, but he lied to the American people when he told of the Tonkin Gulf episode. He deceived the Congress, and then he continued to deceive the Congress. That's pretty hard to forgive. But he was his own victim.

F: Did you get the feeling that he and McNamara understood each other on this, at least at the time?

G: Oh, yes. Well, McNamara was slipping away from him. But I think that in any study of Johnson you've got to take into effect what I call, perhaps incorrectly, the Texas gut reaction, and maybe a southern reaction. You know, "We're in there now; we've got to lick them. We can't take a beating; we can't pull out." As I say, "Nail that coonskin to the wall. Don't spoil those people down there."

F: Of course, a lot of Texans didn't agree with Johnson either.

G: That may well be. If you ever run into Ralph Yarborough, give him my warm greeting. He's a loveable person. I hated to see him defeated.

F: Did you get to observe his and Johnson's relationship?

G: No. Were they friendly?

F: Oh, they were off and on. You know, they're both hard driving people, and once in a while one got in the way of the other one. So sometimes they'd work very closely. I think Ralph went right down the line with him domestically, of course.

G: Well, I don't think [Senator John] Tower is any equivalent of Yarborough.

F: No. No. Okay.

(Interruption)

G: I'm keeping active. I'm lecturing in various universities, on campuses.

F: Yes. I see your name popping up here and there.

G: I'm trying to rouse the people to get active and not be turned off by the propaganda that all politics are corrupt. I think they should get in and be active and try to throw the rascals out and get good people in. I find they're responsive, although there's a lot of apathy. Congress is in kind of a bad situation. I hope the next election will change that. But a lot of good people are dropping out. Oh, they're fed up and they say, "It isn't worth it; it used to be fun," you know. And I mean good people, people like, oh, Julia Butler Hansen of Washington and Edith Green and [John A.] Blatnik, first class guys, you know. They just get weary, and of course they realize that the job is too much to do thoroughly.

F: Yes.

G: Then you have a few people who are just in there for the salary and emoluments. I think the next few months are going to show some important changes.

F: You can't tell what will happen between now and November. I was looking this morning with a fellow named Lawrence Henderson who does surveys for various people, and it shows that if you continued at the same rate of improvement in Democratic congressional races as you have in these several districts that the Democrats would probably gain a hundred ten to a hundred and twenty seats, which, you know, would just be overwhelming.

G: But the thing that the Democrats still lack is a presidential candidate.

F: Right.

G: I mean wouldn't you have supposed that with all this Watergate that there would have been a great outpouring of would-be hopefuls, but no.

F: No, this has amazed me that there--

G: I'm not enthusiastic about any of our present hopefuls.

F: I really think we need a new face, but we don't know who the new face is.

G: We need somebody who'll turn out to be an FDR. But where is he?

F: Right.

G: He isn't there.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Ernest Gruening

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, Huntington Sanders Gruening of Issaquah, Washington do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on April 23, 1974 at 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 transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

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

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

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

Huntington S. Gruening
Donor

February 22, 1979
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

March 22, 1979
Date