INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 28, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: LOYD HACKLER

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

Place: Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: This is an interview with Mr. Loyd Hackler, formerly the assistant press secretary of the White House staff.

I'd like to ask you to provide for the tape some details about your own background. You can be as explicit and as detailed or as brief as you like.

H: Well, essentially, I've been a journalist most of my adult life. I attended school at Oklahoma A & M--now Oklahoma State University--and worked for newspapers in Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and was editor of the Santa Fe New Mexican in Santa Fe. At the time I came to Washington, I was editor of the Laredo Times, Laredo, Texas. I wrote political columns at most of the places I worked.

Incidentally, the first personal association with President Johnson was in New Mexico. He came out to speak. Now I've forgotten the year, but this was when the President [Lyndon Johnson] and John Kennedy were both working for the nomination. He came to speak to the Democratic state meeting in Albuquerque, and at the time John Kennedy was probably my personal choice. But anyhow the publisher of the New Mexican was a friend of Lyndon Johnson's and I went to Albuquerque myself. As I recall, I was editor by that

time. I went to Albuquerque myself, and a group of us got together. Lyndon Johnson had a press conference. I met Lyndon Johnson at the plane when he got off and then he had a press conference in the hotel. There were relatively few reporters. But I remember there were four of us; there may have been a fifth one there. But I remember four of us got together and we were going to cut him up. One of the guys at the television station in Albuquerque, [one from] the Albuquerque Tribune, [one from] the Albuquerque Journal, and myself, I know we'd decided we would take apart this Texan that was running for the [nomination]. At the time he Hadn't announced, but it was obvious what he was going to do.

G: No Dorothy Dix questions?

H: No. So we'd gotten together and had a little discussion, and we went over into the room with a small press conference and we started in on him. But strangely enough, and I keep recalling this, about how effective he is as a communicator. One of the later images he had was that he wasn't very effective as a communicator, maybe not in the mass media, but as a communicator on that level he was extremely effective.

When we all left that room, I remember I went back and wrote a column, just a glowing column about Lyndon Johnson. But we left that room, I think probably to a man, convinced that he was a hell of a man. And we went in there with the impression of what we had read, and this sort of thing.

G: He was good on his feet.

H: Oh, magnificent, magnificent. He could just--you knew you were being mended, but nevertheless. . .

And that was my first personal contact with Lyndon Johnson. This was before I had gone with the Texas newspaper.

G: Did you ask him at that time if he were going to be a candidate?

H: Oh, of course. This was the first question and, as I recall, his reply was that he had plenty to do as majority leader of the Senate, and this sort of thing. But, you know, his story about his philosophy and his position, he went through all this. But the point is, we had some damned tough questions and some loaded questions. And, of course, this was a political atmosphere because he was giving a political speech that evening to the Democrats. We found out then what he could do with a group of people. We prided ourselves on being pretty hard-nosed, tough reporters. We'd run a governor out of office as reporters and we thought we knew something about politics and politicians. But we all left, all the reporters left there, with the impression that he was a hell of a man, that he was a lot more than we thought he [would be, or] than had been reflected in what we had read.

G: Did he remember this later?

H: I don't know. He never brought it up as far as I know. I don't recall. Then, of course, I had some personal contacts with him on occasion after I went to Texas. But that was my first.

Then later, also, when he came out to Santa Fe to visit with Bob McKinney, who was publisher of the New Mexican, a group of people met with him.

But essentially my background is newspapers, is journalism, and mostly I'd say in Oklahoma and New Mexico. But in the last

four years, I guess, before I came to Washington, it was in Laredo, Texas.

G: Would you like to describe how it was that you did come to Washington?

H: Yes. In Laredo, as editor of the paper, of course, I got acquainted with the local forces there and with the state political people and John Connally. I became acquainted with John Connally, who, incidentally, originally I opposed. He was another that I came around to support, particularly in education. In Laredo, the big need in that area is education, vocational training, and he did a hell of a lot in this field. So I became quite a Connally fan for what he was doing for Mexican Americans and what he was doing for that area and what he was doing for education.

I decided to leave Laredo. I felt it was pretty much the end of the stream there. The publisher had died and the paper was in estate and there didn't look like there was much chance for any further movement along. I planned to go back to New Mexico. But Connally suggested that if I was going to leave Laredo, that I shouldn't lose the connections and acquaintances I had in Texas, and he thought I might fit in Washington. And I initially came to Washington as the associate director of information at the Veterans Administration. There I was detailed at the White House on a couple of occasions to do some work there.

G: This was early 1966.

H: Early in 1966, as I recall it. Right.

G: And what kinds of assignments or details did you get to the White House?

H: Well, to work as press advance. Initially, I did one in this country, and then an assignment to advance in Korea, when the President made the Asian trip.

G: Could you just explain what you mean by press advance?

H: Well, of course, you have to set up the facilities for the press that accompanies the President, provide the communication, plan the program of what's going to happen when the President arrives, and essentially try to make it as effective as possible as far as communication's concerned, as far as the impact it's going to have on the media, arrange things so that it fits the deadline, so it fits the communication, that sort of thing. There I guess you have the problem of getting all the flow of words that follow a presidential visit and the pictures, the whole thing. It requires a great deal of work. The President doesn't just pick up and go to Korea.

G: How was it that, with the Veterans Administration, you happened to go along on this?

H: Well, I was detailed from over there, because there were so many stops on the trip, itinerary, that the White House press office, which has a limited number of people, did not have sufficient people to make all the advances. As a result, they picked up people in government and had assigned a detail to the White House to help them out.

G: Was this your first experience or your first trip that you took on this kind of assignment?

H: You mean, as the presidential advance?

G: Right.

H: To Kansas City. It was an advance to a speech he gave in Kansas City, which was domestic, you know, one in this country. Then the assignment to Korea, to set the advance up in Korea.

G: Could you go into a little bit about what happened on that Korean trip?

H: Well, essentially, I was green as hell. I didn't know anything much about it and was initially impressed that I had been assigned to do it. It was something I hadn't expected particularly to do. But they were so busy on this trip that contacting people in the press office [was difficult]. As I recall, Tom Johnson, Bill Moyers, and Hal Pachios and Bob Fleming, all of whom I tried to call or contact on several occasions, when I would get them, they would say, "Just do the best you can. We're busy." I'd, for instance, call one and catch him in a motorcade. He'd say, "I can't talk to you now. I'm in a motorcade." Or "I can't talk to you now. We've got a meeting." Or "I can't talk to you. I'm trying to get the President's speech put together. So just do the best you can."

Well, there were a lot of things I didn't know, but I finally reached the conclusion that if the problems were going to be worked out, you just had to go ahead and try to work them out. I probably overdid some of the things. For instance, transportation, helicopters to move the press, and setting up communication; you had to be able to ship communication in to get the flow of words out. All these things had to be worked out, coordinated with the government

in Korea. Bill Stinson, who has an office here, was also on this advance and as a result had very little direction from the press office. These people there had more than they could handle; they had their hands full. It turned out it came out very well. Things worked well. It was one of the best stops on the trip. The President was highly complimentary about the structure and about the way the thing was set up.

G: Were you pretty impressed with the operations?

H: Oh, yes. You bet, you bet. As I say, I was a novice when this began. Of course, one of the jobs that I subsequently ended up with at the White House was doing a lot of these advances after I got over there. But, yes, it takes more people than one would imagine in this sort of visit. You've got to work with the embassy in the country and our own people in the country, and work with the government of the country. There's a lot of finesse and a lot of diplomacy required that you don't even think about, you know.

G: Protocol and that sort of thing.

H: Oh, yes. All this stuff gets involved. And the security-- Secret Service has a man in advance to worry about the security, to set all this stuff up. It was quite an experience.

On the way back from Korea, on the press plane coming back, I was asked if I would be interested in coming to the White House. Of course, I would.

G: And you went then full-time?

H: Yes. It was a few weeks later when it was officially made. I think

that one of the problems was they figured they had sufficient Texans over there at the time, and when they found out I was from Oklahoma there was no problem. (Laughter) I remember at the time of the announcement, by that time Moyers had left and George Christian had become secretary. He made the announcement and he said, "Loyd Hackler of Oklahoma," and went through the brief biography. Of course, I knew some of these reporters. Merriman Smith said, "Let's see. You said he was from Oklahoma. What school in Texas did he go to?" And Christian said, "He went to Oklahoma A & M." There were three or four questions with reference to Texas, and finally Smitty or someone said, "Well, when did he go to Texas?" But that's how I got over there.

G: On these advances, did you deal with the domestic press as well, the people who travel with the President, foreign correspondents for American newspapers.

H: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That's primarily what you work with. You work with the press in the country, but your main thrust, your major effort was for the White House press, not the foreign press. Right.

G: Okay. I want to move on to that topic a little later. But I'd like to ask you at this point: you mention an earlier contact with Johnson back in 1960 before he declared in that campaign [and] your interview with him. When was your next contact with him? Did you come into contact with him when you went to the White House, or before when you were in Washington?

H: Oh, yes. Before, when I was an editor in Texas, he was vice president, I had some contact with him, as a newsman. I'd been to the Ranch on two different occasions. I was invited there when the President of Mexico came to the Ranch if you can recall. I've forgotten the date. But this was after he was president, not too long after the election as I recall; it would be in 1964. But it was no personal association at all. I mean, I was a newsman running a newspaper in Laredo, and he, of course, had some strong contacts in that part of Texas.

G: You say that you did encounter him on several occasions while he was vice president.

H: Right.

G: Maybe this is a double-barreled question, but going back to your first association, your first contact, as a newsman, as an observer, as an analyst, what were your impressions of Johnson, both as a person and, for example, as a vice president? What were the kinds of things that you thought about him?

H: I gave you a pretty good rundown of the impression in Albuquerque. Then, after that, of course as a newsman, [I saw that] Johnson was almost a folk-hero in that part of Texas. The people down there, as you recall, voted I think about 90 per cent for Lyndon Johnson when he ran for president. And Johnson programs were accepted. There's a conservative, relative conservative political leadership in that area. They sort of have some control. But even those people accepted the relatively liberal Johnson programs as something that was beneficial--education and the job enducing programs. Laredo, you know, receives

considerable federal aid in these programs and as such, he was widely accepted. I was at this time convinced that he had great compassion for the needs. I was very strongly for him and wrote several editorials, not just during the campaign. We were violently pro-Johnson.

G: This is 1964?

H: Yes, although I didn't know him in any real personal sense.

G: Would you call him [a populist]? Some people, or some writers, have described him as a populist, as a man of the people, a man sympathetic particularly with poor people, so much of his programs have been directed in this way.

H: Oh, I think that there's no question about this. I think that he has a real deep, strong personal feeling about poor people, the oppressed, the needy, the sick, the elderly people. His rapport with these people in visits after I got over there was just fantastic. I've seen him in enough meetings, in enough discussions, that [I know] now this is a great feeling and there's a lot of sincerity.

G: His commitment is genuine then.

H: Oh, yes. No, he's been accused of using it for political purposes, but I know. I've seen him in enough small meetings and large meetings and off-the-record meetings and things that weren't for public efforts. And some of the comments and discussions of his are deep, strong personal convictions and feeling. He has had a conviction that these things could be corrected, that this government and this

country had the means to do these things. I personally think that one of his greatest frustrations is that he was unable to move these things in a popular way as far as he would have liked to. He was great in getting the legislation, but getting the popular acceptance of some of his programs. . .

G: Did he have the same kind of rapport that you're describing now with, say, members of the press? You say that going back to that initial meeting, you were impressed.

H: No. No. I have a personal theory that Lyndon Johnson never quite understood the national media, national press corps. He came, I think, from Texas where the press is pretty essentially controlled. The people in control of the press in Texas are pretty much--and these are bad terms to use, but I don't know how else to communicate directly about them but sort of the establishment, the order, in Texas is such that. . . You know, look at the Pulitzer Prizes that have been won in Texas. Never by any major newspaper--all by some little country newspaper that has gotten after some of the major issues down there where the big newspapers just ignore them. Pretty harsh criticism of the Texas press, isn't it? Be tough if I want to go back and get a job there. But, at any rate, I think that this was the climate during his congressional years, during his Senate years, you know, this was his environment with the press. There was no particularly incisive, in-depth, intense evaluation by the press in this period. When he became Senate majority leader, of course he had the national press. But there is a great deal of difference

in the Senate covering the Hill than covering the White House, because, one, while he was majority leader and was a strong majority leader, the accomplishments up there were the things that became the focus, not a personality. But after he got to the White House, then the personality after a couple of years became the focus, not the accomplishments. And, you know, you damned sure can't deny the accomplishments. So, the relationship with the press became rather strained and, in some sense, strange.

G: I guess I'm just asking for your observation on this, but what is it that you think the press needs from a man, particularly a president, in order for him to project what he wants to project to them? What is it that they require?

H: What the press requires? Well, I think that if you recognize essentially that they're antagonists in our system, and every president wants the best image. Every president wants the press to report the best side of the thing. He came in for a lot of fire that--you know, we forget. Go back and read the newspapers shortly before Kennedy was killed. I happen to have done a research project--nothing to do with any Washington activities; it was on my own--in this very field. And, my God, the people of the press were eating Kennedy up. Some of the terrible accusations, and they were treating John Kennedy [this way], who now is looked back [on as]: "Look at the great relations he had with the press." Go back and look at some of that.

G: Yes. I recall that he was not at the peak of his popularity at that time.

H: Right. Not only that, the liberal press was eating him up, too. I don't know. I don't know how to answer your question--what the press could do. I think they could do a better job. I think they could have a better understanding. One thing, in the White House press corps, there's some great journalists in the press corps, but there's also some pretty sordid politicians in the press corps, too, who aren't really interested in seeking out the accomplishments, or the direction, or the theory, or the philosophy. They are much more interested in their little political games, seeking to get something so they can sell a book or an article. A lot of this goes on.

G: Yes. I would speculate that it's probably a two-way street, too, with some of the interviewees, particularly on the Hill, I'm sure.

H: Sure, there's no question about it. I think the President was abused some by the press, but I think this is the expectation. I think anyone who will sit in that office can expect to be abused. You look at history; they always have been. Eisenhower is the only one that I know that didn't get any abuse from the press, you know, any major abuse from the press. I think [it was] his father image and, well, I really don't know why, because if you start looking at the accomplishments and activities. . . I think any activist who is president is going to create some opposition in the press corps. Those people have their factions, too. I don't know how to say what the press would do. I just know that there were times when they would get off on a tangent. The whole direction that the press would take was sometimes a little disconcerting.

G: Let me follow through on some of this and bring it closer to home, so to speak, in the White House. When you were at the White House, what was the operations in how to deal with the press? Could you give some sort of a description of that?

H: Well, yes. One, Lyndon Johnson knew in a great deal of detail what the press was doing, what the reports were. Probably from that standpoint [he was] better informed than any president that I've known about. One of my chores, for instance, when I came in early in the morning--the major newspapers were there--was to go through these newspapers. Of course, these had also been delivered to the President, to the Mansion. I would go through these newspapers, read all these newspapers and look for stories that we thought would cause questions and cause issues to be raised. I'd make reference notes about these and have them ready so that when George Christian came in, he took these and went over to the President. He sat down with the President and said, "Well, this is what's going to happen today." And often [I'd refer] even to the pages that these would be in and give a little brief synopsis of what they were. The President may have missed some of these when he went through. He didn't miss very much. (Laughter) But occasionally. And frequently--no, I shouldn't say frequently, I should say occasionally, before the other people got in, the President would be reading the papers and I would get a call from him about this sort of thing, about what was in the paper. He'd want to be sure that those had been brought to George's attention. He had the tickers in the office, as you know.

Essentially, George Christian and in the later part of the administration, Tom Johnson, who became very close to the President, would go sit down with the President in the Mansion before he came to the office and go over the day's expectations, activities, and questions, and what would be expected to come up in the briefing. Then [they'd] come back from the meeting with the President. Of course, we had a briefing twice daily: in the morning usually about ten or eleven o'clock, in the afternoon around four or five o'clock. And these were completely wide-open briefings. The press knew that George Christian had the ear of the President, had the confidence of the President, and there was no question about George giving his opinion about some activities.

G: He could speak confidently for the President?

H: Confidently, and as a speaker or non-speaker as the occasion may be. But they knew that George Christian was reflecting the President's attitudes on these things and the administration's position on them. They knew that he was with the President. George attended all the meetings, all the important meetings, and had access to the President. And the press office is just a few steps down the hall from the President's office.

G: You're saying that Christian had the ear of the President. Do you happen to know whether the previous press secretaries such as, I don't want to go all the way back to Salinger, but Reedy and Moyers, for example, had the same kind of relationship?

H: I don't know. I just don't know that much about it except what I've

read, so I'd have to be. . .In some of the stories that you heard from being over there, I doubt that anyone had the relationship with the President that George Christian had. The President had a tremendous respect for George's judgment. I think one of George's strongest points: he had actually no ambition to grasp power and use power as some people in that place often do. George considered himself a professional news secretary, press secretary, who acted as such. He gave his judgment when he was asked for it. And it wasn't just the President. The other people in that shop and in government all had a tremendous respect for George Christian's judgment. I think one of the probably untold stories of people there is this influence that George had, not just with the President. And he made no effort to extend his influence. It's just that the judgment that he had and his ideas were. . . George wasn't an activist in the sense that he generated programs or he generated ideas but a lot of people came just to bounce something off of George, for instance before they tried it on the President. George's judgment was greatly respected in the government and George could just have a calming influence on the President.

G: He could?

H: Yes, yes, the first time I got fired, for instance--

G: The first time? (Laughter)

H: Something I'd sent in--it was one of those days when Lyndon wasn't in one of his most expansive moods either. I was called in and chewed out, and George was called in and in his presence, George's, said, "If that's his best judgment, get rid of him. I don't want

him around here anymore." Of course, I hadn't been there very long and I felt like that I was on the way out. In fact I mentioned it to one of the girls--the door was open outside the hall--who had heard it. She had had a pretty rough time herself and I said, "Well, I guess I'll be seeing you around." And she said, "Oh, Mr. Hackler, you're not going anywhere." But anyhow, I walked around and left and George stayed in there. I was cleaning out my desk and I said, "George, I guess I'll be seeing you around." And George in his fashion said, "Oh, you're not going anywhere. Put that stuff back." And sure enough, you know, he was unloading. This was a day he was unloading, the time that the President was unloading and it served the purpose.

G: Yes, I've seen a good deal written about this--that he would berate staff people, particularly the people who were closest to him.

H: Well, you know, I've heard a lot about this, but I had some real tough chewings out but never in a personal sense. It was about a judgment, about an action. You know, about how can you be that stupid on this thing.

But on the other hand, if you'd shown any expertise he threw you in the breach in this sometimes. I, for instance, was asked to go over the messages that went up to Congress. He called me over one time when we were in Ramey Air Force Base and said, "You used to be an editor, didn't you?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, I've read this message"--this was a health message--"and I don't understand this damn thing. I'm not very bright. I don't understand what it's all about." That's just a little excessive hyperbole, I guess, but he

said, "Go over it and put it in readable language so I can understand it." It was a lot of the draft and gobbledygook that usually goes into those things. And then others I had referred to me. I don't mean to say that I had anything to do with trying to put any substance into them but primarily word-editing jobs and this sort of thing.

G: The four-letter word, the four-word sentence, the four-sentence paragraph.

H: Right. And try to make them [effective]. The messages were of course sent for impact. They were sent for reaction. They were sent to try to get some mileage. They were sent to help form opinion. The idea was to put them in whatever form works. This is one of the purposes of the messages that went to Congress on various points.

As I say, I had no real close personal association. I was invited over there on occasions for dinner at the White House. During the Israeli crisis the night that George and Tom Johnson and myself were invited over there, he sort of unloaded his feelings about that day.

Incidentally, there was an incident that you may have read about when he and Mrs. Johnson were walking on the front lawn. The hot line exchange had come and the crux and the buildup. The crisis hadn't faded by any means, but the big tension period was over. We hadn't had the head-on bump that it looked like we may have had. He was walking around on the front lawn, and Dan Rather, the CBS correspondent, was setting up to do what he said was a stand-up piece of the day's activities. They had the cameras on Dan, the lights on Dan, and George and Tom and Bob and I were sitting in the press office

looking out the window. Here came the President and Mrs. Johnson walking along the driveway. I'm saying now Rather's recounting of the thing because we were watching the thing from a distance. Rather was discussing with his technicians who had hooked up apparently to the studios about getting the thing set, and he said, "Look, Christ, here comes the President," or "Damn it," or something, "Here comes the President." So these people said, "Aw, quit kidding us," or something to this effect. "Let's get on with this thing." And pretty soon the President walked up and got in view of the camera. Our first reaction there in the press office was that these cameras could have been on and the President started talking to them. Well, you can imagine our consternation because we'd already given the press a lid which means there's going to be no other news tonight. We got on the phone and called the studio and said, "Be sure this doesn't go on the air." I think they taped it. I think they probably have a tape of this. You might check that.

G: Deep in the recesses of CBS's files, no doubt.

H: But he talked with Dan there for some moments and walked on in the office and asked us if we'd like to go over to have dinner with them. This, I guess, may have been as late as nine or ten o'clock in the evening, and he sort of unloaded over there. But, as I say, my relationship wasn't a close personal thing like it was with some of the staff people over there. But my admiration for Lyndon Johnson was that, what a doer, what a mind he had! It wasn't because he was personally attractive, you know, this sort of thing like some of them

have, but what looked pretty. . .

G: Well, just sort of a parenthetical comment, it seems to me that so much of the criticism of Johnson was because of the style, because of the man, the person, rather than because of what he was doing. Of course, a good deal of the stylistic criticism tended to overshadow the accomplishments of the administration.

H: Right.

G: I'm sure he was aware of this.

H: Oh, yes, I think so, too. And watching the operation, you know, his personality may have been a reason for criticism. I don't know, but I know his mind and his basic decisions.

You talk about Johnson being the politician. I think, and I think history will show this, that he was probably the least politically motivated president in many years, and I even include Eisenhower. Time after time on the decisions that were made, it would have been so easy to make the political decision. I remember the appointment of Walter Washington as mayor of Washington. I don't suppose there was more than one man in the whole operation over there that favored this. There was even argument that White House legislation liaison people had promised congressmen on the Hill that a Negro would not be the mayor if they passed this law to permit the change. I wasn't a participant in the meeting, but you know that when they had these meetings and some of the staff people got clouted, his reaction would be, "I'm going to do it because it's the right thing to do." All the arguments against it, about why it shouldn't be, some sincere

arguments, you know, that they think that, and the political arguments about why it shouldn't happen, he said, "I'm doing it because it's the right thing to do." And he did it. You know, in a lot of things in the [inaudible] he did because it was the right thing to do.

G: You know, it's interesting that you should say that because so much of the critique of what is called consensus politics says that consensus politics demands that it's not the principal thing that one does, it's to get everybody behind the issue and to compromise.

H: Of course, I think in a sense he had a feeling of the need to get people behind him and the need to compromise. But when it got down to the hard decision, I'd say that this guy makes the hard decision and makes the right one. I think as of today that Lyndon Johnson made no major wrong decision. Now, you can argue about the strategy of the war and this sort of thing, but I think that from a policy standpoint and on the information he had to act on that he has yet to make a major wrong decision, domestically. In the foreign area, for instance, his involvement, his interest in and his demand for details and the influence that what would happen in Peru or in the Dominican, the overall view of the thing, scope, how it would affect every place else, he had a hell of a grasp of this. He's never been given, I think, adequate credit for his foreign policy decisions.

You know, working there, he wasn't a loveable personality. He just wasn't. That wasn't my respect for Lyndon Johnson,but he was a hell of a man. He'd make the decision. His process of getting just complete details, of absorption of everything, and he'd make the decision.

G: What was your impression, what kind of observations do you have about the White House staff, the operations of that staff and so on, and how he worked with it?

H: Well, I think he had pretty good staff people. Of course, I came in on the tail end of the thing, but he worked personally with staff people. I mean there was no chain of command as such and the people that he had confidence in and relied on, these are the people that he'd work with. For instance, George Christian--you could get anything to the President through George if George's evaluation was that he ought to act on it, he ought to know about the thing. And there's some other people that had the same relationship in the staff.

G: Who were they?

H: Califano was, in the domestic field, I think. He looked to Califano and Califano's judgment.

G: Califano more or less replaced Moyers' function in that way, didn't he?

H: As I say, all I know about Moyers' operation was what I heard. I have no personal knowledge of it. But I think in the domestic area, yes. Califano's real strength was that he was able to get real bright, exceptionally active people on his staff, and I think one of the people, incidentally, who got less credit than he deserves was Larry Levinson. He was sort of Califano's chief of staff, and he was the generator of a lot of these ideas, just a magnificent mind.

G: They had, under Califano, a whole series of task forces.

H: Right. Oh, yes. And these bright young people to Califano. He'd get

the best ones around and get these young minds, these bright people working on these things, and the President, I think, recognized this.

I think his staff function was just primarily the people that he depended on individually more so than any structure or any organization. He was completely accessible. If you had an idea, he wanted the idea. If you had any suggestions, he wanted the suggestions. Now I wasn't a prolific memo writer but I know that they got to him. I personally would sometimes take them to him or the idea went in, he'd want the answer, he'd call you for the answer. Insofar as our operation, he was completely accessible.

G: You're saying that there was no real chain of command in the sense that there was an informal organization, that certain people did have the confidence of the President more so than others would have.

H: Yes, that's true. I think it depended on the field that you're speaking of. Walt Rostow, for instance, in his area; Califano, in his area. Califano would fall in and out of favor on some of his performances, for instance. At the latter part, Tom Johnson. The President I think just sort of picked up Tom as his son and Tom was very close to the President. But he [the President] was just wide open to anything that you'd suggest. If there was any substance, he got it.

G: I guess what I'm getting at is: Do you feel that he was ever insulated from, let's say, the regular bureaucracy, the cabinet members or heads of the commissions and agencies and so forth, that the staff itself tended to insulate him? Or was he that accessible that he would be available to those kinds of people?

H: I think probably to the contrary. At least my experience, one of my functions was to try to keep in contact with all the agencies and departments in our area, in the press area, you see. God, if anybody in AID or somebody in the Treasury, in the press information had any idea about the President's activities, the President should maybe make a visit, you know, very often some of these things went to him for judgment. He ended up at nights, you've heard about all the night reading. My impression was that, for instance, there was some friction between Califano and some of the cabinet people because they sort of looked at Joe as maybe getting between them and the President. I personally was not involved in very much of this activity, except the impression that if they wanted to see the President there were ways that they could get to see the President. As far as I know, nobody [in the cabinet] was ever turned down on meeting with the President. As I say, I had no personal effort in setting it up.

G: Perhaps you could comment on this: It's been suggested that as Vietnam became more and more an obsessive thing, maybe that's not the right word to use, but that Johnson was able to pay less and less attention to other kinds of priorities. Could you make a comment on that?

H: I probably am not qualified to judge it except from a standpoint of observation, certainly not as a participant. But there's no question that the time required for Vietnam prevented him from focusing on some of the other areas. It became the overriding activity. But also my personal judgment is that in so doing this and in also trying to keep the cogs of the domestic front activities that I think that if he had

taken a different stance by just going into Vietnam. . . You know, people don't object to the war as much as they object to losing the war, and I think maybe history will judge him right. But from the climate and the temper of the country, this thing going on and no particular end in sight and not using all the force that we had, I think he just created some real problems from the standpoint of it having an excessive influence on this country. But again I'm not qualified to judge; this is a personal opinion. I had some reservations about why we were even there, except that you know the process of decision about what had to be done was done, but I don't think the judgment's in on that yet.

G: How would the White House press staff handle what I would call delicate situations? I was thinking, for example, of the Johnson-Kennedy relationship. Well, I guess this was before you got there.

H: Johnson-Bobby Kennedy relationship?

G: Yes. I have a whole series of issues that I can mention. I was thinking of the White House Festival. That, of course, was before you came there, the Eartha Kitt incident.

H: Of course the Eartha Kitt incident was pretty much away from our office. Liz Carpenter and her people had that problem. Except that the questions that would come up [affected us], and these things as reflected in the stories were very often blown out of proportion to the importance. Now, of course, the President would get upset, would get angry about these sort of things. I mean, what human being wouldn't? But a lot of these reporters knew Lyndon Johnson's personality

and they would interpret his personality, his reaction to these things. And a lot of his reaction in private may have reflected some of this interpretation but from the public stance I think that there was a lot of over-interpretation of some of the stuff.

How we handled it? Oh, kind of like the porcupine. Very carefully. These were the things sometimes that got an inordinate amount of attention. What the hell influence it really did have except in that it required a lot of our effort, a lot of I'm sure the President's involvement in the thing, and we tried of course to put the best face possible on these things. I don't think George Christian's press office particularly sought to try to give any false impressions, but we tried to put the best face that was possible. And very often in the latter stages of the thing you get to the point where the press refused to accept some explanations.

I recall one incident: We were coming back from Texas at the air base, Randolph in San Antonio. Somebody had told the people at the air base that the President didn't particularly care about being seen getting on his airplane because he didn't want to have to put a tie and coat on. So some idiot ordered a van pulled up in front of the steps to Air Force One, with the press there. Well, immediately the interpretation: "What's going on?" And some of them decided that there was an assassination threat. Well, as soon as we found out about it, Tom Johnson or George Christian, I forgot who was there, we said, "Get it out of the way." We had a discussion and a debate about the thing, and it was moved out of the way so that when the President did get off

he walked up the thing in full sight of the press. But the interpretation and the stories got out about an assassination plot. Hell, I picked up the Oklahoma City paper, for instance, and it was a banner story. It didn't get much attention up here because they began to see people on the roof, you know, armed guards that are always there, but they took on greater importance, you see. So these things could be [a problem]. We said, "Look, this is not so. This is what happened." But they didn't accept it, so this was a real problem when they refused to accept the explanations of a thing.

G: What about the LBJ-RFK relationship?

H: Well, yes, we talked to the people and I think there's no question about personal feelings there. But tragically enough the political approaches to the thing I think were probably also overblown even after Kennedy became a candidate. He came there, you know, and there was no personal bitterness. I was not there when Kennedy came back from the European trip that got so many stories.

G: This is the peace-feeler thing in 1967?

H: Right. You know, I heard the President make some comments which indicate his feelings, and they weren't particularly benevolent comments about the Senator. I remember before the announcement, before Kennedy decided to run, the effort to get the President to make certain concessions and the President's feeling about this, and I think rightly so, that he was still the president and he didn't have any intention of being dictated to. You know, Kennedy was not going to run if certain things happened. But our relationship from the press standpoint; well, we had to handle a lot of the Kennedy-

generated criticism and we'd get the comments, but it wasn't an overwhelming thing.

I never heard him say an unkind word about John Kennedy. I think there were times he felt like some of the things that he did, the press tended to reach back and say they originated in John Kennedy's administration, and he had some feelings about this.

G: You mean he felt that they were giving credit where credit wasn't due?

H: He just felt that they were giving credit where credit wasn't due and were reluctant to give him credit for some of these things. After Senator Kennedy was assassinated, I was at home late one night, the night that he died and the President put out a statement. The White House got the call and they referred it to me at home. The Kennedy staff here, the Kennedy headquarters here, I don't even know the names, said they would like to have some copies of the statement and I said, "Fine. The press office is closed, but I'll call a guard down there and ask them to put some in an envelope and put them at the gate and you can pick them up at the gate." And they said, "No, you bring them over here." So I was just as courteous as could be and understood those kids' feelings; you know, their man had died. But they wanted to blame Lyndon Johnson for it; their whole attitude was to blame Lyndon Johnson which I thought was not quite proper. But still, you know, it was quite an emotional thing, but I don't recall what I'd call a lot of comments. I happen to think that Bobby Kennedy wasn't the ogre that some of our people tended to think he was. I think that there was no question about what he intended to do, what he hoped to

do. But we got a lot of questions, a lot of press interested in the relationship.

G: Who was the bigger threat? I would expect that it would have been Kennedy rather than McCarthy. But what was the reaction to the McCarthy campaign in New Hampshire and Wisconsin and so forth?

H: Well, some consternation. The McCarthy announcement initially was not, because he had been critical. I don't know what the President's feeling [was], but I think probably generally the feeling of people over there was that it was not going to be too much of a problem. Of course, the thing that many or most of us, I'd say all of us, did not know was really what went on in the President's mind. George Christian probably knew more than anybody else, but I think most of us there had no idea what went on in the President's mind about this. I, for instance, was given the job of--I resigned over there briefly and was going to go over to the committee.

G: Which committee?

H: The Johnson-Humphrey committee. And the Friday before the Sunday speech, the announcement that he wasn't going to run.

G: So nobody really knew in the White House?

H: Nobody really knew. George had left on his desk a draft of a statement--this was some weeks before--that George had drafted that he was not going to run again. I read this thing. At first there was a great deal of shock.

G: When did you read this?

H: Oh, it was, I don't know the dates, but it was weeks before the announcement. Of course in restrospect after the thing was over, George and I

discussed this, but I read this and my first reaction was, "What use is this going to be put to? What use is this?" I had some questions raised. Was he indeed going to? Because there was nothing in his actions, at least that I interpreted or the other people around here interpreted, that he was not going to run. Then I forgot about it. I didn't even say anything to George, just put it in his drawer, until after the thing was over. I mentioned, "George,you know, you left this statement." I worked at George's desk when I first came in in the morning and, as far as I know, there was never any effort for anybody in the press office to try to keep any particular secrets. George kept his confidences, but you know if you had something on your desk it was available to anybody in the press office. I told him after the President quit that I'd read this, and he looked at me and said, "I didn't know I'd left that there." But George knew back then that the President was thinking about not even running.

But as to your question about McCarthy, our reaction was that no one could take the nomination. I don't think they could. I saw some counts after I spent two days at the committee and saw a tally of the thing. You know, we're going to lose so many in Missouri, and I don't think there was any way that he [McCarthy] could have gotten the nomination if the President wanted the nomination. But I think [with] the President reading of the situation, his evaluation was such that he felt like that he could have gotten the nomination and probably been re-elected but that what he did was good for the country's interest.

G: Yes, I wanted to ask if subsequent to the announcement whether or not it became know about the reasons why.

H: I think there isn't any question about the President's reading. He sincerely felt that this would, one, maybe be the step that would cause a response in Hanoi to end that thing. You know, he suffered; Lyndon Johnson suffered more than anybody about that war. I mean, it was a tough, personal thing with him and I think he sincerely felt that this was a step that could cause some motion to the domestic situation, the concern and the dissent here. I think he sincerely felt that if this action that he would take would be the best thing to help heal some of the divisions, [he would do it]. I don't think there's any question about it, about his sincerity in his feeling on this thing. But he felt that if he had stayed that this country would have been divided even more. I think personally that he could, I know he could have gotten the nomination. I think that at that point he probably could have gotten re-elected. You know, there were a lot of things that he could have done politically even with the war. But I think it was quite a sacrifice on his part if you want to look at it from his personal standpoint. I think, again, it's one of those decisions he made that he felt was best for the country.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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