

INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 13, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: EWING HASS

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Holiday Inn, Sacramento, California

G: Let's start with your first association with Lyndon Johnson. Do you recall the first time that you met him or saw him in action?

H: The first time I saw him was in January of 1953 when we were just opening up Senator [Thomas] Kuchel's office. That was his first session back there. Then I saw him from time to time when I would go back, and then in 1960, I was there full time and saw him rather frequently and, of course, when he was vice president and then later as president.

G: How early in the year did you go back in 1960, do you recall?

H: I went back there in, I believe it was August, so I saw him more during the years that he was vice president and president.

G: Did he seem frustrated to you as vice president?

H: Oh, yes, I thought he was. He had been the leader, and he ran an excellent Senate. That was pretty good Congress when you had the two leaders from Texas back there.

G: And a lot of committee chairmen as well.

H: That's right. That's right. But I think he was frustrated when he became vice president because he couldn't really crack the whip and get things done, and that's sort of a lonesome spot anyway, I think. But I think most people that watched him in those years thought that he was frustrated.

Hass -- I -- 2

G: Did he in your presence ever talk about this frustration?

H: No.

G: You mentioned, before we turned on the tape, his regard for Senator Kuchel and how he expressed it. Do you want to repeat what you said about that?

H: Well, I met him, as I told you, at a reception prior to a dinner, and when I introduced myself and told him where I worked, he said, "You work for a very excellent senator and a very good friend of mine," and he was, I think, completely serious in it. He had worked with the Senator, or vice versa, on quite a few issues around that Senate, so they worked well together, and he was always very nice to Senator Kuchel.

G: What was Senator Kuchel's attitude toward Lyndon Johnson, do you recall, during this period?

H: Oh, he liked him. They got along fine.

G: Now, they were in a sense opposing strategists in that Lyndon Johnson was majority leader while Senator Kuchel was minority whip. Did this create any problems?

H: Oh, I don't think so. In that business, you understand the other fellow's position, and I don't think it created problems. I have no doubt that there were times when one of them would be a little impatient with the other, but no, that didn't interfere with friendship.

G: How did you work against Lyndon Johnson when he was majority leader? Did Senator Kuchel have a strategy for opposing the Johnson maneuvering, his ability to convince people to vote his way?

H: I am sure that he had strategy. In the operation of the Senate, you plan your strategy, as I am sure you know. You will have certain members talk to certain members on the other

Hass -- I -- 3

side. Senator Kuchel couldn't go to each one individually. If it became a party issue, then his problem was to keep the Republicans in line, keep them on a solid front. I don't know that there was any real strategy to just oppose Johnson. It would depend upon issues and whether it became a party issue or whether it was a bipartisan fight.

G: Johnson seems to have been particularly close to both of the Republican leaders, then [Everett] Dirksen, the minority leader, and Kuchel, the whip.

H: I think he was quite close to Dirksen. They were good friends.

G: Was there a degree of accommodation, inter-party accommodation that surprised you?

H: No, I'd been around the state legislature for quite a while, too, and it's pretty much the same set of rules. You look at the record, and your best legislation came from bipartisan support, usually. You didn't just get down to straight party lines on everything. I think there was accommodation all right, and I know that Johnson and Dirksen could arrange accommodation at times, I'm sure Kuchel did, too, working out things. There is a certain amount of trading. I remember that Dirksen had trouble with--I think it was one of the civil rights bills, and it was an election year for him. They were talking about some rather tough opponents, and so the bill didn't move. Everything was sort of held up, and finally, they got the strong opponents in Illinois convinced that that wasn't a good year to run, and when things calmed down, Dirksen had token opposition in his election, and the bill moved. And I think that--I am sure that Lyndon had something to do with that.

G: Do you recall Senator Kuchel's work on the civil rights bill during the time that LBJ was vice president?

H: Yes, I can remember that.

Hass -- I -- 4

G: Can you recall the negotiations?

H: Well, most of the work was--I guess the negotiations went on with Hubert Humphrey. He was pretty much leader on the Democratic side. Then you had Kuchel, [George D.] Aiken, [John Sherman] Cooper, [Jacob] Javits. Mmm, there was one other one. There were five. Steve Horn must have filled you in pretty well on this.

G: No, we haven't gone into that yet. No.

H: Steve was one of the key staff men, and they worked very closely with Humphrey in particular. I am sure that there was direction from the vice president because he was quite interested in that subject, but I think most of the negotiations, the maneuvering, was done with probably Humphrey, who then was strong for it on the floor.

G: Johnson seems to have taken the position during this stage that the administration was not dealing enough with the southern committee chairmen, that it was not being flexible enough, or taking into consideration their imperatives. Do you recall that?

H: I don't remember that specifically, no.

G: Now, of course, in 1964, the act was passed while Johnson was president. How did the fact that he was president and running the legislative initiative affect the fate of the legislation? Did you notice any difference on the Hill in the way [that] the bill moved?

H: Yes, I think that he had the ability to get along with the leadership in both houses pretty much in issues like that. He could call some of those old southern senators and talk turkey to them. They were good friends, and he had worked with them for years. So I always thought that Lyndon was able to put over the Kennedy program where there was a question

Hass -- I -- 5

in my mind as to whether they would have been able to put it over to the same degree, but he knew how to handle that Congress. He had been around there for a while.

G: He had to, as I understand it, bring Dirksen along to a certain point of view. Do you recall his discussions with Dirksen?

H: No. No, I wasn't privy to those, but I know that they did discuss it a lot.

G: Do you know what arguments Johnson used on Dirksen?

H: No.

G: Do you know which ones he might have used on Senator Kuchel?

H: Well, I don't think he had to use strong ones on Kuchel. Kuchel was pretty much committed to that. I'm sure they had plenty of talks on it, but Kuchel was committed. He thought that was the thing to do, and he worked hard for it.

G: What in particular did Senator Kuchel do on that 1964 Civil Rights Act, do you know?

H: Well, he sat in on all of the strategy meetings, and he had his staff really working on it, working with other staffs. His main problem was to try to pick up a few Republican votes, and they were able to do it, but that group of the five Republican senators really worked together on it. Then they worked, as I said, with Humphrey and the Democratic leaders in that fight.

G: Senator Kuchel also supported Medicare, Medicare legislation. Did this take some doing, or was it something that he just instinctively was behind?

H: He just thought it was the right thing to do, and he took an awful lot of heat because of it, but he thought it was something that had to be done, so there again, he worked hard to pick

Hass -- I -- 6

up Republican votes, caused him some problems in the Republican side of the aisle, certainly caused him problems with a lot of the doctors that, of course, love it today.

G: Well, the following year, Senator [Carl T.] Curtis and Senator [Karl E.] Mundt tried to replace him as whip and were unsuccessful. Do you know if the White House had any part in supporting Senator Kuchel?

H: I doubt that they did because it could be a boomerang, but George Aiken and John Sherman Cooper and some of them really pitched in for Kuchel, but I doubt that the White House got in that Republican squabble. George Aiken was quite a power around that Senate, you know, and they all respected him. I think he sort of led that fight.

G: Well, President Johnson must have been pleased with the result.

H: Oh, I'm sure he was. I'm sure he was.

G: Do you think that in view of the fact that the Republican leaders were relatively friendly to Johnson and his programs that he took a special interest in them, in say re-elections and appointments that they were interested in, and things like that?

H: Oh, I think so. Sure. I think he was quite interested in seeing Dirksen stay in there and also Kuchel. Now, that doesn't mean that they supported LBJ on everything that came down the pike by any means because there were differences, but on major issues, they got together pretty well, and I think he was interested in keeping that kind of people in there.

G: Did he, to your knowledge, ever discourage opposition to Senator Kuchel in California?

H: Not that I know of, no. The opposition to Kuchel in California was pretty well picked out here. You had Sam Yorty and Richard Richards. He certainly did not go out of his way to encourage them at all. And let's see, neither Lyndon nor John Kennedy gave any aid and

Hass -- I -- 7

comfort to candidates against Kuchel. I can remember when Kennedy came out they wouldn't even let Tom's opponent on the plane.

G: Is that right?

H: Yes. So they were not encouraging anyone to run against him, but I don't know if they ever, ever got mixed up in these campaigns except to give them a kind word. They did that.

G: How about projects and appointments? Did you have a relatively easy time here considering that you were the minority party?

H: On projects, on defense contracts and all, he was very fair. No problem. On appointments, Kuchel's theory so far as the courts were concerned was that they were presidential appointments; he was entitled to have anyone he wanted. If he sought Kuchel's suggestions or advice, fine, but Tom did not push anyone. He thought, well, that was the prerogative of the president and his party. So on court appointments, I'm reasonably sure that LBJ asked him for his opinion. I know he asked for his opinion on those that had been suggested by Democratic congressmen, and had Tom objected, I'm sure the name wouldn't have gone to the Hill.

G: Oh, really?

H: But Tom didn't try to persuade him to appoint any individual.

G: Now, matters of interest to California and, indeed, the western part of the state, and the Udall decision with regard to the Imperial Valley and Senator Kuchel obtained a hearing here. Do you recall the circumstances of that?

H: Well, that was on the 160-acre limitation. There's a difference between the Imperial Valley and the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys, what we call the California Water Plan, or

Hass -- I -- 8

the--I can't think of the name right now, but when the Hoover Dam legislation was passed, there were either two or three occasions when the Senate voted to specifically omit the 160-acre limitation because the growers down there had built a canal. There was an existing canal bringing the river water over there, so it was not an entirely new project with them. So Kuchel was opposed to the Udall decision at that point that imposed it after all these years, and he did hold hearings on it. Incidentally, Warren Christopher was the lawyer representing the growers.

G: Well, did LBJ support him on that?

H: I don't recall that he actually got into it.

G: Now, Senator Kuchel sponsored the Redwood National Park bill.

H: Right.

G: Do you recall how that was effected?

H: Well, that was worked out pretty much on the Hill with Kuchel and Jackson actually sitting down and putting together the final draft. They did it in secrecy. Not even their staffs knew where they were. The President supported Tom on that; of course, signed the bill, but I don't know that he got involved. That was done--

G: Governor Reagan opposed it initially.

H: Right. Right. Senator [George] Murphy opposed it. The Congressman from the area opposed it, but when Lady Bird came out for the dedication of that grove, both Senator Murphy and the Congressman tried to get on the platform with her, and they were going around claiming credit for the legislation. That's politics. Yes, there was opposition, and, of course, the lumbermen up in that area fought it, but it's worked out pretty well.

Hass -- I -- 9

G: Now, let me ask you about the Colorado River Basin bill. Here was a question of the Central Arizona Project of diverting water to Arizona.

H: Right.

G: I suppose he had to work with Carl Hayden on this.

H: Oh, sure.

G: Can you recall the circumstances of that measure?

H: Well, Carl Hayden--I think it was more his administrative assistant, more due to him than anything else. But Carl Hayden put a hold on the Auburn Dam legislation. Kuchel was sponsoring that in the Senate with [Harold] Bizz Johnson on the House side, and Kuchel's main fight with Hayden over that was the allocation of water to California, and he wanted the legislation amended to provide that I think it's 4.2 million acre feet at a certain point on the river would be guaranteed to California, in dry years in particular, so that California had some protection. I think we take now something over six million acre feet, maybe closer to seven million acre feet a year, but when the Central Arizona Project is completed, our only guarantee will be 4.2 million acres, I believe it is, and Kuchel wrote that amendment in there, and then finally went along with them. Of course, Kuchel was almost like a son to Carl Hayden, called him Uncle Carlos, and they used to speak Spanish back and forth, or Mexican, I guess, would be a little more appropriate. They had to clean it up a little. But as far as I know, the President didn't put any pressure on Kuchel one way or another. Tom's problem was with Carl Hayden, working it out.

G: Senator Kuchel supported the administration on the Vietnam War.

H: Right.

Hass -- I -- 10

G: Anything on this? I suppose Senator Kuchel would go to the leadership meetings?

H: Oh, sure. Sure.

G: Anything on the course of the war that you feel is significant in their relationship?

H: No, he supported the administration right down the line, was with them to the bitter end, but he did sit in on all the leadership meetings, and I know on several occasions was called down to the White House when there was some real emergency, real concern.

There's sort of a cute story I could tell you. On Betty Kuchel's birthday, which is March 13, some friends had a Mexican dinner, and they cooked real good Mexican food, and we were all over there. The White House called, and the Senator had to go down to the White House for a meeting. Well, when the President found it was Betty's birthday, he called her, and the hostess really panicked. She thought for a while the President was going to come out and sit down and have some enchiladas with us. Scared her to death. And when Tom came back from the White House, he had every gadget that the President was giving out at the point, pictures, autographed pictures, everything the President could put his hands on, so they all got a big kick out of that. But we actually thought for a while he [was coming]. He wanted to come out, but he just couldn't get away, but when he heard that they had those enchiladas, he was ready to join us.

[Interruption]

H: The Senator had a bad gall bladder. It had given him trouble for years, and, as you recall, the President had his gall bladder removed. The day after the operation he called the Senator, and he said, "Tom, get down here and get that damned gall bladder out!" It was the very next morning, and he just figured that that was the thing for Tom to do.

Hass -- I -- 11

Subsequently, he did. He had some serious attacks and had to have it out, but LBJ was going to get him down there in the bed next to him, practically. But I think that indicated his friendliness towards the Senator and his regard for him. To think about it the day after an operation was sort of nice.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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