INTERVIEW I

Interviewee: Wayne Hays

Interviewer: Paige E. Mulhollan

Date: March 11, 1969

Tape 1 of 1

M: Let's begin by simply identifying you. You're Wayne Hays, Democratic Congressman from Ohio--the eighteenth district; and you've been in the House of Representatives since 1949 consecutively.

H: That's correct.

M: Which happens to be the same year that Mr. Johnson went to the Senate. He was a freshman there at the same time you were here. How well did you know Mr. Johnson in the early years of your career?

H: Really, I didn't know him at all in the very early years of my career. I think my first real contact with him came in 1957. That is, I had had contact with him and I had known him, but to know exactly who he was or what he was like, and intimately acquainted with him, came when we went to a meeting of the NATO Parliamentarians Committee in 1957. He was a member of the Senate delegation.

M: That's interesting. He's generally pictured as a Senator who was not very concerned with things in international affairs, more concerned with domestic things. Did you find him pretty well versed in what was going on at that particular assignment that you accompanied him on?

H: Yes, I found him very well versed; and I also found his knowledge of how things ought to operate. This organization had only been set up a short time. Actually, I said '57, I believe on second thought it was '56. The organization was set up in '55, and a Senator from Canada who had been one of the founders of it was elected president. In '56 I was on the Standing Committee, and they made a determination that they wanted an American. Senator Fulbright, who had not attended the thing

in '55, let it be known that he was available; and Senator Johnson said, "Well, the only man on this delegation that knows anything about this organization is Wayne Hays, and if it's going to be an American, it's going to be Wayne Hays." As I say, I didn't know him very well, but what he said, as I look back on it--not because I'm personally involved--but it did make some sense. He stuck to it and that's the way it was. Of course I was very grateful to him. He wrote a letter to Sam Rayburn which I wish I could get hold of.

I presided over the meeting, and the first day we got into a squabble about adoption of rules. The rules had been formulated at a long meeting that spring before in The Hague and had been circulated to all fifteen countries. Everybody had indicated that they would accept them. Then at the last minute, I think it was the Turks or the Greeks decided they wouldn't go for it.

M: If one did, the other wouldn't, that's probably--

H: Yes. So rather than delay the opening at which the Prime Minister of France was going to speak, I suggested we postpone the fight on the rules until a later date and then proceeded to preside over the meeting without any rules all week, and sort of made them up as I went along, saying, "The chair rules this," or, "The chair rules that."

Then Senator Johnson wrote a letter to Rayburn and said that he thought it was the best job of presiding he'd ever seen, even better than the Speaker did, because at least he had rules to go on where I made the rules up as we went along.

M: And coming from a man who's pretty much a master of legislative rules, that's high praise. How much did Mr. Johnson, as either Minority Leader or later Majority Leader, work with House members?

H: I really can't answer that question because I wasn't in any position of

leadership in the days when he was Leader, so I wouldn't have known. But with the rank and file, I don't think he had that much contact. At least I had very little, if any, contact with him.

M: The individual Congressmen were not subject to the famous Johnson treatment--

H: No.

M: That you hear so much about. What about in the shaping of legislation in the House? Did he work with the House in order to shape legislation so that he thought it would get through the Senate--this type of thing?

H: I think there's no question about that. I think he and Mr. Rayburn met frequently. At least I heard they did, and I'm sure it was true, and I'm sure that they did do a lot of collaboration on legislation, both shaping it in the House and after it left the House.

M: When Mr. Johnson decided to run for the Presidential nomination in 1960, you were listed by the press at least as one of his supporters in the State of Ohio. I think it was intimated at least that you might have even changed from Kennedy to Johnson. Were there any details of that episode?

H: Actually, I was a committed Kennedy delegate. I was never convinced in the early part of the year--and even in the early two or three days of the convention--that Mr. Kennedy could be nominated. And I wasn't convinced he could be elected, because I'm a little skeptical on all sides. I had let both Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson know that if he were not nominated by the first or second ballot that I certainly would feel free to change to Johnson. But there was never any doubt in my mind that I would vote for Kennedy on the first ballot. He knew that and so did Senator Johnson know it.

But I felt then, and subsequent events of course changed things,

but I didn't think that Kennedy would make the President he did make. I felt that due to his lack of really experience in that field that the ticket would have been better Johnson and Kennedy to give him a little seasoning. But I was delighted that the ticket had both men on it, not because of close personal friendship with Mr. Johnson at that time, although we were friends dating from that time I mentioned, but because I thought he had the best experience for the job of anybody in the Democratic party. I tended to feel that it would be better for us if he were nominated.

M: Did his presence on the ticket cause you any trouble with some of the Liberal Democrats in Ohio?

H: No, not a bit.

M: You didn't have the difficulty some places had--

H: No, in fact his presence on the ticket made it easier to sell the ticket in Ohio. We couldn't carry the State. In fact, I couldn't carry my district, and I tried very hard. We came within a thousand votes. Of course, that wasn't too bad considering that Ike had carried by 30,000 just four years before. But the presence of Mr. Johnson on the ticket made it more palatable to conservative Democrats in this district. The thing that beat us was the religious issue. There's no two ways about that. But that is now, I think, a dead issue as far as my district is concerned.

M: It seems to be in most places. After Mr. Johnson became Vice President, did he continue the type of legislative leadership that might have been expected from someone who had been doing that so long and so effectively?

H: No, I got the distinct impression that he was holding himself under wraps and only exerting any type of influence when the President asked him to. And I got the impression that the President didn't ask him

very often, and therefore he didn't seem to have as much influence on legislation as he had in the past.

M: What about his relations with the Congress in the first days of his Presidency after the assassination? By this time you were getting into the higher echelons of House seniority. Did he have early conversations with his old friends?

H: Yes, he certainly did. He had several of us down in groups to the White House. Of course he also called various people, including myself, on the telephone. I'm sure he called many others about certain pieces of legislation, pointing out that he felt a deep urgency that we ought to get the Kennedy program on the road. It hadn't been. It was stalled dead-center. He used all sorts of persuasion on members, and very effectively, I thought.

M: In a personal way rather than through the staff members?

H: Both. But when it came to a sticky point, he didn't hesitate to use a personal phone call or have you down at the White House and plead with you personally. It's a lot easier to say "no" to a staff member than it is to the President.

M: Right. He was known, when he was Senator Leader at least, as some kind of a master of the legislative branch. Do you think he remained that as President?

H: I think he did up until the last two years of his Presidency--or even maybe a shorter length of time than that. When the Viet Nam war began to overshadow everything else, then I think he lost his ability to get the Congress to do the things he wanted mainly because members of Congress being very individualistic, and most of them thinking about their own personal political welfare ahead of anything else, began to think that friendship with the President might be a political liability.

Therefore they weren't anxious to do anything he wanted.

Of course I've always felt that, and I think subsequent events again have proved right, the newspapers did this to him. You know, Nixon has been in now while we're talking nearly two months. According to the press he has handled the Vietnamese situation masterfully. Well, actually he hasn't done a damned thing about it! What the papers did to Mr. Johnson I've often termed "the assassination of Lyndon Johnson," because I think they assassinated him just as certainly as Oswald assassinated Kennedy. That is, he's not physically dead, but they assassinated him politically; and in his political effectiveness, he became politically dead.

M: Why do you think that happened? He was a pretty good manager of the press when he was in the Senate, it seemed like.

H: You see, there's a great deal of difference between being on good relations with the press when you're in the Senate than in the White House because the press corps in the Senate is an intimate little group. I have always felt that they are impressed by the prestige of Senators. They're also a pretty lazy bunch and they depend on handouts, whereas the national press corps is a much larger thing. If you have your friends, as he did have his friends, they resent it. If you show any one the slightest favor, the others are on you.

Of course I think Nixon will have this same problem. I don't think any President can get along with the press indefinitely because if you get along with them indefinitely, you're going to have to let them run the office and you can't do that.

M: How were relations generally between the White House and Congress in the sense of Mr. Johnson's legislative liaison staff? Did he organize an effective network of staff people to deal with the House?

H: That's perhaps his weakness. I don't know whether he had time or whether he didn't, but usually under Kennedy--it takes me a long time to warm up to anybody personally--and Kennedy's staff attempted to contact me and I kept bypassing them when I had a problem going directly to the President until I found that there were two or three of them that I could absolutely trust to make sure that the message got through to the President.

Now when Mr. Johnson came in, we had a little set-to one time over the fact that one of his staff people, namely Kenny O'Donnell, had not passed on the truth of what I had said to him. Whether he did it inadvertently, whether he forgot about it, whether he did it deliberately, I had no way of knowing; but the fact remains he did it. When I got him on the phone with the President on the phone--the three of us on a circuit--it soon clarified itself.

But I never really felt that there was anybody down at the White House that I could talk to and be sure in Mr. Johnson's regime that--after Chuck Dailey left--that would get the message through to him. Now, Barefoot Sanders, I had a medium success with, but I think Barefoot was the only guy down there that most of the Congressmen trusted and that poor fellow was just overburdened with Congressional work until he couldn't possibly humanly get it all done--nobody could.

M: So that you think helped weaken him with Congress?

H: I don't think there's any question about it.

M: Do you think that the Kennedy legislation, the Kennedy program that you mentioned awhile ago, would have passed under Kennedy or not?

H: I'm not sure that it would because Jack Kennedy was a diffident sort of a chap, and a little bit shy and considerably bashful. I remember when he served in the House with me, on more than one occasion he'd mention

some good looking girl and say, "Do you think she'd have a date with me." Well, I never was in any doubt that she would, knowing he had ten million dollars and a Cadillac convertible and was an eligible bachelor. And I think he had that same sort of shyness about--to use the vernacular--"putting the arm on" members of Congress. He did it, but he didn't do it nearly as often, nearly as effectively, as Mr. Johnson did.

M: Mr. Johnson didn't have that shyness.

H: No, he sure didn't.

M: Did he frequently use the "putting the arm on" treatment on individuals?

H: I can only speak for myself. But if he had a bill in front of my subcommittee that he wanted out and somebody called to his attention that it wasn't out or nothing was being done, he had no hesitancy in calling me and asking me what was going on and why it hadn't happened. Of course, usually it hadn't happened because something hadn't happened at the White House that I wanted. I'll be perfectly candid, and when we had a meeting of the minds, usually both of us got something and the bill moved.

M: What about something that doesn't involve legislation? You chaired, for example, the investigation of Adam Clayton Powell. Did the White House or Mr. Johnson personally ever get involved in any way in that?

H: I don't believe they did on the Powell matter. My memory is a little hazy. I know they got involved on my running feud with George Romney. I thought if they'd stayed the hell out of it, that I would have done a lot better because when I wanted him to come before the committee and explain his famous "brainwashing" statement, the White House intervened immediately to have me to not have him come in. Now whether the President knew about this or not, I don't know, but the people who talked

to me said the President did.

M: Did they give you any reason?

H: They thought that Romney would make a fool out of me, I guess. They didn't say that in so many words, but that's the impression I got. I sort of took the position that if Romney would make a fool out of me then I deserved to be made one.

M: And certainly that was a statement that was widely publicized and deserved some investigation.

H: Romney is supposed to have told some of his associates that I drove him out of the race because I just kept talking about it all the time and making fun of him. You know, the press had a tendency to let that statement die, but I tried--and two or three others in the House--to keep it alive and I think we succeeded in having a new go at it about every two or three days. And I think that one statement which Romney made, I think that did drive him out of the race. I think it destroyed his effectiveness and destroyed his credibility.

M: What about the Foreign Affairs Committee? How does the President work with a committee like that? Were the briefings, for example, under Mr. Johnson adequate as compared to your experience under other Presidents?

H: Well, the briefings under both Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kennedy were given generally by the same man, namely, the Secretary of State, so I couldn't see any difference in them. Prior to that, Mr. Dulles--. I thought the briefings under Kennedy and Johnson were much more candid, and I don't think the President had anything to do with it. I think it was the type of man that was Secretary of State. I always thought that John Foster Dulles was extremely condescending towards the committee. I thought Rusk had a tendency to be more open, although sometimes you really had to pick at him to get an answer to a question. He tended to be very bland and very general.

M: How frequently were these type of briefings held?

H: I think it's fair to say whenever the committee felt the need of it, or wanted them. I never knew either Mr. Dulles or Mr. Rusk to refuse to come up, or Mr. Herter.

M: Just the senior people down there?

H: Well, normally the briefings were held at the request of the committee up here, but on the few occasions when--you see, I was the fourth-ranking member on the committee then, but occasionally they would call up the top five or six people on each side down at the White House. I think that happened maybe on four or five occasions, and I always thought the briefings were completely candid. I certainly felt free to ask any question I wanted to ask.

M: Were they seeking advice in those sessions, or were they really just sort of telling you what had already been decided?

H: Sometimes they were telling you, and sometimes they were genuinely seeking advice. I remember one time the President had about thirty of us down there who had been out to Viet Nam and let every fellow say his piece. I thought it was an extremely boring thing to listen to all these Congressmen and Senators, and I thought it was an exercise in extreme patience on the part of the President, because I happened to be the last one he called on so I had to sit through all of them and I know how bad some of it was.

M: You mentioned sometimes they called the top portion of both sides of the committee down to the White House. Were there any specific ones of those that stand out in your mind? The Tonkin Bay resolution, for example--was that--?

H: I wasn't down there on that one, so I don't recall.

M: What kind of episodes prompted that kind of call?

H: I would say that kind of episode--I can't, at the moment, think of just exactly what it was. It would be some crisis in Viet Nam or something of that kind--some crisis in NATO or some Mideast explosion, or a Bay of Pigs thing. I remember a group were called down on that. That was of course before Mr. Johnson was President.

M: In those sessions did individual Congressmen, as you recall it, particularly on Viet Nam in this case, express the kind of dissent to the President that they were sometimes apt to express publicly?

H: No, I don't think they did, and I think that was one of the weaknesses in the thing. That certainly wasn't his fault, although I know that a lot of people figured that you didn't express dissent to him. But I never felt any hesitation in expressing it.

M: He would allow--?

H: I sought him out on a couple of occasions to give him some unsolicited advice about some things that I thought he was doing wrong. On one occasion, I remember I told him I thought he was appearing on television too often.

M: And he took this kind of criticism pleasantly?

H: Yes, he sure didn't get upset about it seemingly. I just said, I remember saying to him, "Mr. President, not even Jackie Gleason can be on that medium once a week and last. He had to go off for a cooling off period." And I said, "I think it will eventually--you'll over do it. I'm very careful with it. There's nothing that can get stale faster than being on television too much."

M: Do you think that Mr. Johnson's famous "hostility" toward the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in any way enhanced his usage of the House Foreign Affairs Committee? Did he tend to go to your group more frequently perhaps than before?

H: I expect he did. I don't know as I agree with your terminology, "his hostility toward the Senate group." I think it was more the hostility of the Senate group towards him.

M: That's fair.

H: I think there's no question but what Fulbright thought he ought to be Secretary of State. I don't mind saying that Kennedy asked me what I thought about it. He didn't call to ask me. I called him about a matter before he was inaugurated, but in the course of the conversation he brought up two things: one, the appointment of his brother, "what did I think about that."

I said, "Well, I think you'll get some criticism, but if you think he can do the job and do it better than anybody you can think of, then I guess the criticism won't matter that much." Then he asked me about Secretary of State and what I thought about Fulbright. I said "I certainly don't dislike Fulbright. He and I have been friends, but I don't see how you could possibly appoint him Secretary of State."

And he said, "Why not?"

And I said, "Well, he has voted against every civil rights bill that has ever come up. He signed the Southern Manifesto, and I don't see how you could appoint a man like that and then have him deal with all of these African nations. I think you'd just be asking for pecks of trouble. But, again, you're the President-elect, and if you think his usefulness outweighs the disadvantages of this position of his, then, certainly I'm not going to raise any fuss about it if you appoint him. I'll work with him."

M: Did the House committee divide in the same way that the Senate Committee did between what's generally called hawks and doves?

H: No. There were two or three doves on the committee, but they--. The

chairman was pretty strong and the top echelon of the committee pretty strong in support of the President, and we just didn't give them any opportunity to--. They had all the opportunity in the world in the committee to dissent, but we didn't give them the forum to dissent publicly, as Fulbright made a television forum for the dissenters in the Senate. You know, you can fulminate all you want to in private; but if it doesn't get in the press, it doesn't do them much good and doesn't make them feel good and doesn't expand their ego.

M: What about the issue of foreign aid? You've sometimes been an opponent of Mr. Johnson's activities in this general area. Has he put pressure on you to support such things as--?

H: I supported foreign aid nineteen out of the twenty years that it was up. I'll be very candid with you. I was disenchanted with it for a long time, with the administration of it. I told Jack Kennedy I thought that he didn't have a decent administrator of foreign aid while he was President. I said, "What you need is a fellow who is a Grade A bastard and who knows he is, and who doesn't mind being called one."

He said, "Well, will you take the job?"

I said, "Well, I have all the qualifications, but I'm not interested in it."

But very candidly, since I can put a limitation on when this is going to be use--and I don't care as long as I'm out of Congress--I voted against foreign aid the last time in order to be in a position to vote against it if I want to this year without being accused of being political. Because I had a strong feeling that Nixon was going to be President, and I wanted to have a completely free hand on foreign aid. And I didn't want people to say, "Yeah, you voted for it for twenty years; you voted for it right down the line through Kennedy and Johnson,

but now we've got a Republican President, you're against it."

M: Democratic foreign aid is all right, but Republican foreign aid is not.

H: Yes. And I'm not saying that I'm going to vote against it this year because I don't really know. I've got to see what they propose and who the administrator is, and I'm not really entranced by the man they've named--Mr. Hanna--and what they're proposing to do about it. If they're going to run it the way it has been run, I probably will be against it.

M: What about the trade policy thing? Mr. Johnson made a lot of building bridges to the East and loosening trade with the Communist bloc--and also liberalizing trade restrictions. In your state, did this cause you trouble?

H: Well, it causes me trouble, but I went along with him. In fact, I was inadvertently the first one to propose selling wheat to Russia. I made the statement at a closed meeting of newspapermen which was supposed to be off the record. There was a fellow from Ohio in there, not from my district, and he ran out and called his newspaper which in turn called my newspaper and it was a big headline. I was the first one to speak out on it. It caused me a little trouble, but not that much. I went home and told them why--that I'd rather have them have the wheat and eat it up and have it pass on into infinity than I would have them save the gold and use it to buy machine tools or something.

M: I've been watching the clock up here and I've kind of skipped fast through this, Congressman Hays, but as kind of a wind-up of this, a general estimate of the Presidency is very difficult to make. But you've been here for twenty years; you've seen quite a few come and go.

H: I can do that very easily. I just happened to be in San Antonio on the twentieth of January in the evening, and had a long wait at the airport. Strictly on impulse, I went to the phone and called the LBJ

Ranch, and the President was there. He had just gotten back from Washington. I told him I was in Texas for the first time in my life and I wanted to say "hello" to him and to tell him that at least one person--just because there had been a new President inaugurated--hadn't forgotten him. And I said, "I want to say something else. I think, as an old history teacher, I think I can say with some authority that when history is written fifteen or twenty or thirty years from now, you'll be listed as one of the great Presidents." And I think that.

M: Do you have a specific reason you think history will pick out?

H: I think the great accomplishments of his Administration on the domestic side will outweigh the Viet Nam war because it'll be like the Spanish-American war, or the Korean war. It'll have a tendency to be forgotten. It'll be forgotten as Truman's letter to the music critic is forgotten. It's a little interesting sidelight, but the great enduring things that Truman did like aid to Greece and Turkey and NATO and the Marshall Plan, will stand. And I think Mr. Johnson's program of aid to education, aid to higher education, expansion of the Social Security, Medicare, and those things will stand out as landmarks long after the Viet Nam war becomes a footnote to history.

M: You've been very kind with your time. It's 10:25, and you can make your meeting, so, I appreciate so much your having--

H: Thank you so much.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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By Wayne L. Hays

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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