

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 11, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: OVETA CULP HOBBY

INTERVIEWER: David G. McComb

PLACE: Mrs. Hobby's executive office at the *Houston Post*, Houston, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

M: Mrs. Hobby has been kind enough to give me a few sheets here of biographical information which I'll place into the file, and this takes care of question number one.*

So we're going to move on to the second question on this list that we have prepared. I'd like to know if there was any relationship between your father and President Johnson's father in the early Texas Legislature.

H: Yes, Dr. McComb. I'm sure that President Johnson's father and my father served at least one term in the Texas Legislature, and maybe more. I remember seeing the President's father when I went there to visit my father.

M: Were they good friends, do you think?

H: Yes. I don't know how close, but I know that they were friends.

M: Did Governor Hobby have any relationship with Lyndon Johnson that you know of?

H: The first time that I can recall was when young Mr. Johnson was a candidate for the Congress to succeed Mr. Buchanan, I think it was. He came to Houston to see my husband, and my husband called me into the office, and that is the first time I remember meeting him. But my husband, of course, knew his father, and I think his father served in the legislature when my husband was lieutenant governor and then governor.

M: Did you have any impressions of young Lyndon Johnson when you first met him?

*See attachment.

Hobby -- I -- 2

H: Well, yes, I was very impressed, because this was a very personable and handsome young man and obviously, even at that age, very knowledgeable about governmental processes, and had what I thought was a tremendous understanding and vision.

I'm not sure whether they had ever met before, though I rather imagine that they had met before. But I remember what my husband said when he left the office, "That's a young man to watch. He will go far."

M: Did Mr. Hobby give Lyndon Johnson any advice?

H: I'm sure he did because, you know, all young men who were running for office usually came to see my husband because he had a great interest in young people seeking public office.

M: He had a knowledge of politics, too.

H: And he had a knowledge of politics. Most of his life had been--by and large a newspaper editor is--one of public service. And my husband was always glad and willing to counsel any young men who wished to come to see him, and I'm certain that he did give him advice.

M: Did you ever participate in any of Johnson's campaigns? Did you ever aid in them or help him in any way?

H: Only through the paper, of course, and through telephone conversations many times when the candidate ran. Particularly the campaign that I remember was when he was running in a run-off against former Governor Coke Stevenson for the Senate.

M: That was in 1948.

H: It was in 1948. The *Post* in that primary had supported Mr. George Peddy, who was a Houston lawyer. In the run-off between Mr. Johnson and Governor Stevenson, the *Post* supported him quite vigorously. In 1960 the *Post* endorsed Senator Johnson for the Democratic nomination before the convention, and it was obviously won of course by

Hobby -- I -- 3

President Kennedy. The *Post* did not support the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, but supported Mr. Nixon in that year. And in 1964 we supported Mr. Johnson.

M: So the stand of the *Post*, then, has been on one side one time and on the other the other.

H: As far as Mr. Johnson is concerned?

M: Yes.

H: Well, the only time we didn't support him was on the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Of course when he ran for Congress, you see, this was not in his area. The first time he ran for the Senate, in researching our files, as nearly as we can discover about all we had was a very friendly editorial about Senator Johnson, so apparently the *Post* did not in that campaign endorse anyone.

M: Speaking of the 1960 campaign, there's a question further down about the meeting of Kennedy with the ministers in Houston.

H: No one knows about any involvement of the *Post* in that, so I suppose--

M: Since you're supporting the Nixon ticket then, you probably wouldn't have been concerned with that, other than reporting the incident.

H: Other than reporting, no. I've asked several of the old-time editors and they seem to have no--I don't believe the paper was involved in any way.

M: You spent some time in Washington yourself.

H: Yes.

M: Especially during the war years--World War II years. Did you have any relationship with Congressman Johnson when you were with the War Department, Bureau of Public Relations?

H: Only in the most pleasant way. I saw the Congressman and Mrs. Johnson many times while I was there. Indeed, they were very kind. And, of course, you know the close relationship that existed between Speaker Sam Rayburn and--

M: Yes.

Hobby -- I -- 4

H: The Speaker was always very kind to me. So I saw the Johnsons a great many times, and had great admiration for him because, as you know, he left the Congress and went into the navy, and then returned. So some of those war years he was actually away in the service.

M: Then you became the director of the first WAAC, and then the WACS--the WACS.

H: Yes. WAAC was Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.

M: This was the precursor.

H: Yes.

M: Did Johnson have anything to do with that appointment, do you know?

H: I know very well no one had anything to do with that appointment except Mr. [Henry L.] Stimson who was then secretary of war, and General Marshall, who was then chief of staff.

M: I am curious. Just how did that appointment come about? Did you know them, or did they know of you?

H: Well, you see, I went there before we went to war to set up something that was called the Women's Interest Section in the Bureau of Public Relations, War Department.

M: Why did you do that?

H: I know why I went, but I don't know why I was invited. But I was invited by General [Alexander] Surles, who was then director of public relations. Apparently he had sort of cast around the country to see if he could find a woman that would come in there and set up this bureau. You see, we had for the first time in our history a peace-time draft, and the letters from wives and mothers and sisters were coming in there at the rate of thousands a day. And it was really trying to communicate with the women of the country to tell them the necessity for the peace-time draft, for the types of training the men had to have. I went there just on a six-months basis because I couldn't take a job away.

M: Was your job then in organizing this public relations part of it?

Hobby -- I -- 5

H: Yes.

M: So then when they set up the Women's Auxiliary--

H: General Marshall and Mr. Stimson asked me to give them a list of names of the women I thought could set it up, and I did. They had the list for quite some time, and then called me in and asked me if I would do it. And I explained that I really couldn't. I had a husband and two children and a job. But they both asked me to talk to my husband before I said no. I talked to my husband, and I remember very well that [he said] that we were in war, and everyone must do what his government asked him to do.

M: That's what the Governor told you?

H: Yes.

M: Yes, I remember seeing a picture in an old newspaper of you in uniform taking over your new job. So you then spent the war years in Washington.

H: In Washington, and of course in all the other theaters.

M: Did you have much contact with the Johnsons during those war years?

H: No, as you can imagine, you didn't have very much contact with anybody but your job.

M: Yes, I would imagine that. Then there's a note here that says the *Post* on May 16, 1943, congratulated Congressman Johnson for bringing into the open the abuse of draft deferments. Does that ring any memories with you?

H: Well, I remember it, but, you see, I was not then associated with the *Post* because I had taken leave of absence when I went to Washington.

M: Do you remember that Texas State Society meeting where they honored you, and Admiral Nimitz, and General Eisenhower?

H: Yes, and I can't remember what year that was in. Do your records [show that]?

M: No, I don't remember what year that was. It must have been right after the war.

H: Yes, I'm sure it was, but I don't remember the year.

M: Were all of the Texas politicians there, do you remember?

Hobby -- I -- 6

H: A great many of them.

M: Do you remember if Lyndon Johnson did anything in particular? Did he congratulate you? I'm sure he did.

H: Oh, I'm sure he did, and of course kind remarks to General Eisenhower and Admiral Nimitz. Of course, Admiral Nimitz really came from his part of the country, as you know, out in Fredericksburg. Of course all Texans had a very great pride in him. And you know what kind of pride and love they had for General Eisenhower because they always considered him a Texan.

M: You must have gotten to know General Eisenhower during the war then. Did you?

H: Yes. Of course he was in both Africa and in England when I was in those theaters, so I did get to know him very well.

M: Were you impressed with his ability?

H: Oh, yes, and particularly with his great organizing skill--I hate to use the word "amazing," but I can't think of a substitute for it--in welding together all the generals of the different commands and the different armies. It was a skill that I never saw equaled.

M: You mean in getting them to work together?

H: Work together.

M: Then you worked for the Eisenhower Administration.

H: Yes.

M: And I believe the first contact was the Federal Security Administration.

H: Yes, Federal Security Agency.

M: That was a presidential appointment, was it not?

H: Yes.

M: So therefore you had to get senatorial approval, is that correct?

H: Yes. That had been a presidential appointment. That agency had gone through many reorganizations, because many sort of diverse things were put together in that agency.

Hobby -- I -- 7

Then President Eisenhower made it reorganization plan number one to change the status of the Federal Security Agency into a cabinet post.

M: Then to get senatorial approval you had to have the approval of Texas senators, and Johnson was a senator at that time. Do you remember contacting--

H: No, I didn't. I was delighted and very much touched when he appeared before the Senate Committee on Confirmations, and introduced me and made a remark that I have never forgotten. I hope I can quote it, that "Mrs. Hobby was the kind of woman you would want as a trustee of your estate."

M: That's a high compliment.

H: I considered it so.

M: And then you were appointed with no great difficulty?

H: No, no difficulty.

M: Also in this period of time the new Department of HEW was formed. You must have been right in the middle of that.

H: Of course that was my job, to reorganize it. I must tell you something that I think you might find of interest here. When President Eisenhower decided to send the reorganization plan number one up, Senator Johnson was then the minority leader. This was in the first Eisenhower Administration. So I was to call on Senator Johnson and Senator Taft. I called on Senator Taft and explained the outline of the reorganization plan and because he at one time had had a bill to do something like this, he was very interested and very helpful. And I called and made an appointment with Senator Johnson and went over to explain the reorganization plan to him, and he listened very attentively and made very constructive suggestions, and said, "Now, Senator McClellan is chairman of the Government Operations Committee, and he will be concerned with this."

So he called and Senator McClellan was kind enough to come over to Senator Johnson's office, and then I explained the purpose of the reorganization plan to Senator

Hobby -- I -- 8

McClellan and how we hoped it would operate. They were both very constructive in their suggestions and very constructive on the floor.

M: Then they did not oppose that plan at all.

H: No.

M: In forming a department like that, you must have run into great difficulties just in administration.

H: I'm sure that you can understand it. You see, we had public health, education, the Office of Social Security, all the children's programs under this, all the old age and survivors' insurance, aid to the blind, aid to all the various groups. Then we had a big Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation where we rehabilitated the people and trained them. We had food and drug.

M: Many of these had been independent agencies.

H: This is the whole corps. You see, they had been at one time or another independent agencies or a part of an agency, but really autonomous. And trying to bring people together and secure an understanding that there was a thread of human welfare through everything all of us did, whether it was education, public health, vocational rehabilitation, any form of social security, any of NIH which is so big that it's almost autonomous, food and drugs. So these were difficult times to try to weave a thread of common interest and common obligation to the general welfare. There was some resistance, of course. It's only human that there should have been. But I shall always regard it as one of the greatest things that ever happened to me.

Before I left, it was functioning as a department. We had really what we called a sub-cabinet level where the heads of all these agencies participated each week in a general discussion of objectives for any and all of them, and helped in many instances in the preparation of legislation, you see, in which one would have an overlap with the other. It was a very rewarding experience.

Hobby -- I -- 9

M: Where did the idea of forming HEW come from, do you know? Was this Eisenhower's?

H: This was his.

M: This was Eisenhower's idea.

H: Yes.

M: Do you suspect that he sensed the need of this from his own organizational acumen.

H: Oh, I think so. As I recall, he talked about this during the campaign. Now, at some time--I've forgotten, Dr. McComb--Senator Taft had introduced a bill creating a department; it was not named HEW, but it was along these things. There were so many things that needed to be brought together. As I said before, General Eisenhower was an organizational man and he knew that things didn't get done unless there was organization and unless there was somebody who could really represent those interests at the cabinet level.

M: This brings up another point. Forming a department takes a pretty tough administrator, I would guess, because you have these independent agencies that are almost autonomous agencies coming together. It makes me a little bit curious. Did your sex have anything to do with this? Did it make the job easier, or did it make it harder?

H: You know, I never really found in any job I ever had anything to do with that it made any difference. If you're dealing with ideas and facts, it doesn't make any difference whether they come from a man or a woman. Now that isn't to say that some people may not have an emotional reaction. I know that's true. But I have never found this to be a handicap or a help. And I think you don't with reasonable people.

M: You were appointed then as the first secretary. And as I recall actually before the department got under way.

H: No, I was appointed Federal Security Agency director.

M: But then you became the first secretary, too. Did that call for a new appointment?

H: Yes, I had to be reappointed.

Hobby -- I -- 10

M: And reaffirmed by the Senate.

H: Yes.

M: And did Johnson aid again?

H: Aided again, yes. And all through I never hesitated to seek his advice or counsel. While I was on the Republican side and he was on the Democratic side, never any difference. This has always been to me an amazing thing in President Johnson. All during the Eisenhower presidency, he was very helpful to President Eisenhower, particularly on all foreign policy matters.

M: His was an attitude of cooperation.

H: Oh, yes, and constructive cooperation.

M: Why was that? Did he wish the best for the country, or--?

H: I think he wished the best for the country, and I think it was just that simple. President Eisenhower had great respect for him. I remember once a testimonial dinner was being held for Senator Johnson here in Houston, and I asked General Persons in the White House to tell President Eisenhower that the dinner was being held here. President Eisenhower sent him a very warm and cordial telegram. So while they were members of different parties, they both loved their country so much they never let the party thing interfere.

M: I have heard that Lyndon Johnson had great respect for President Eisenhower.

H: I'm sure he did.

M: And even after Johnson became president, he would consult with Eisenhower.

H: Yes.

M: Do you have this same impression of this relationship between the two?

H: I'm sure that's true. Both from hearing President Johnson speak and from hearing President Eisenhower speak.

M: Do you have any idea what the basis of that respect was?

Hobby -- I -- 11

H: I'm supposing now. I think there's always a great respect between people when each is sure that the other is dedicated to the public welfare. I certainly found it true in dealing with Democrats on the Hill and Republicans on the Hill. It doesn't make any difference. If people are really interested in research and facts and legislation, I didn't find that it made any difference whether they were Republicans or Democrats. Now, there were a few exceptions of course of people who would try to make politics out of an issue, but by and large this is not true. The whole game of politics is a different kind of thing. You're a Democrat, and so the Democrats are best to be in; you're a Republican, so the Republicans are best to be in. But among men and women up there who are really dedicated to the best interest of this country, you've seen it many times, the crossing over of party lines.

M: While you were secretary of HEW, I assume you had to consult with Lyndon Johnson on legislative matters.

H: Oh, often.

M: Since he was minority leader.

H: Yes.

M: Do you remember any legislation in particular that you had close dealings with him on?

H: I recall conversations with him on the amendments to the Social Security Act. You see, during that time we were able to bring in a great many people who had worked--in governmentalese--in uncovered employment. And our object was to get more and more people, and to give them this basic security. He was always very constructive in this. I discussed many education bills with him. I think the Federal Health Reinsurance. I don't know that he always agreed with me, but that was not the important thing. The important thing is that he was always constructive in every discussion I ever had with him.

M: Did it seem to you that he had a sincere interest in Health, Education and Welfare matters?

Hobby -- I -- 12

H: Oh, yes, without any doubt.

M: There is the criticism of Johnson that he was merely a legislative tactician, interested in moving legislation, and he wasn't really sincere in these programs.

H: I think that that must come from people who really didn't know him. Of course he was a superb legislative tactician, superb! Maybe none better that I can recall. But I think the people who criticize him there perhaps do not understand the importance of being a legislative tactician. So the two have to go together.

M: When you were secretary and you had a bill coming up, and you had to start contacting politicians, was he one of the first people you contacted?

H: On many things. Usually what you do is go to see the chairman of the particular committee before which the legislation will appear or you're going to testify. And of course HEW is unlike State or Agriculture or Defense or Labor--all of these departments appear before one committee in the House and one committee in the Senate. Well, with all the variety of programs HEW had, we had to appear before eleven different committees. So that the procedure was of course that I would brief the President and then brief the cabinet on a proposed piece of legislation, then brief the majority leaders. From the time I went in the Republicans were in control. They would come to a meeting--I believe it was every Tuesday morning--with President Eisenhower. If any one of us, any cabinet member, had legislation upcoming of a wide policy nature, the congressional leaders were briefed and we answered any questions or cleared up any doubts that we had.

Then almost invariably I would talk to the minority leaders or General Persons, who was General Eisenhower's chief of congressional liaison. So, yes, I talked to Senator Johnson. I talked to Senator Byrd because Senator Byrd was the ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee. We went to the Senate Finance Committee on all matters involving social security, as I did in the House to the Ways and Means Committee,

Hobby -- I -- 13

because that's where taxes originated and where all the tax structure was involved. Well, to the limit of my ability, as you can see, eleven committees And most of the things in HEW, you see, were new and were of a policy nature because the department was new, and [we were] trying to reshape the whole programs. So, as much preparatory work as you could do with a congressman before it came before the committee, it was always in your favor. If they had any questions to ask they could ask them. It was always a help to you because then you'd realize that you hadn't made something clear that you must clarify.

M: Did you notice Johnson and Sam Rayburn working together?

H: Oh, yes, very closely. It was a very close affectionate friendship, almost like father and son.

M: It was not only a political relationship.

H: Oh, no. It was a close personal relationship.

M: Now, there are some specific items on this list of questions, starting with number thirteen, which have come out of the *Congressional Quarterly* which you may have some memory of. In 1955, for example, your name was mentioned objecting to the passage of disability insurance and women's retirement age provisions. Do you remember anything about that?

H: No, I really don't. But I have great respect for the *Congressional Quarterly*, and if they say I did--you see, so many of those things, as I'm sure you know, Dr. McComb, were simply actuarial problems, because every time you made an exception there, you increased the price tag on something in social security. And you always had to keep in balance just what the revenues would pay for. Now a thing like that increases the cost, you see, because this would give women preferential treatment over men, and there would be an absolute dollar tag on that. So we always had the actuaries to make studies on any amendments whether we originated them or somebody in Congress to find out

Hobby -- I -- 14

what the actual dollar cost is and whether it was fiscally prudent for the trust fund to become involved in that. Now, as you know, they've now reduced men to this point. So you always have to ask yourself to whom do you give preferential treatment, and what will it cost, can the trust fund pay for it.

M: Was not President Eisenhower quite conscious of costs in government?

H: Oh, yes.

M: Budget and that sort of thing?

H: Yes, we all were.

M: This leads into the fourteenth question which had to do with emergency school construction. Again, the *Congressional Quarterly* said something about your objecting to this because it would unbalance the budget.

H: I don't remember this. I read this over.

M: I'm sure there are many things that came up.

H: You know, the only thing that I can remember about that was there were two bills which related to federally impacted areas--I mean by that, where there was a post camp or some kind of government installation where you'd move in a great many people, and where the local school district really couldn't bear the expense of having all these children in the school district. Now, there were two bills on different formulae to aid these schools. The only thing that I can recall, because those bills were there and I was for them, was not going for an emergency appropriation one time--not the general appropriation.

M: And did you have anything to do with trying to expand the food and drug program?

H: We did something that I'm very proud of. One of my first acts there was to bring in a commission to study the whole concept of food and drug--the monies and the amount of staff--because we just didn't have enough staff to do what we were supposed to do under the law. That made it very hard for the commissioner of food and drug and very hard for

Hobby -- I -- 15

his people. And after this commission made its report, we were able to get increased funds for food and drug and increased people and increased scientists.

M: Do you remember if Lyndon Johnson had any part in all of that?

H: No. I'm sure he supported it, but I don't remember any particular conversation with him. But it was the kind of thing that he would always support.

M: On question seventeen, did either you or Mr. Johnson have any relationship with the American Medical Association in the Truman Administration or Eisenhower Administration with regard to national health insurance and what is today Medicare?

H: I can't speak for Mr. Johnson. I had many conferences with the American Medical Association in an attempt to a) get their agreement to support a bill which would have provided funds for medical colleges to increase the number of students--this construction bill. Because you can't increase the number of students, as you well know, without facilities. I was never able to get the support of the American Medical Association. Then I had many, many conferences with the American Medical Association because we had proposed something called the National Health Reinsurance Program.

I must say in great tribute to the great insurance companies of this country when I called them and told them that we were going to propose this bill and we wanted guidance and counsel because we wanted to do it correctly, they sent their best actuaries there to help me. Later when the bill was about to come up, President Eisenhower asked me if I would like to invite all the heads of the big insurance companies who had sent their actuaries. This didn't mean that they were going to support the bill, it only meant that they were going to try to help me draw it wisely from an actuarial point of view. But President Eisenhower had about twenty of them to lunch and we explained the whole purpose of the program. Much to my pleasure and much to his, they left the White House and reconvened and passed a resolution to support it. I was never able to get the support of the American Medical Association on it, and the bill was killed in Congress.

Hobby -- I -- 16

M: Did you have anything to do with advocating what would be consumer protection bills, such as specifying the quantity on containers, other than this food and drug which you've already mentioned?

H: Well, food and drug, you see, was really about the only place in Health, Education and Welfare where consumer protection came. The rest came in the Labor Department. Let me see, what else would they have had? Agriculture had some concern with consumer protection, and of course we disagreed many times with agriculture. We had the responsibility of setting the clean grain standards. And, you see, under the government subsidy program, there were great silos of grain, and this grain would deteriorate, as you can imagine. So it was our obligation to test, and test, and test, and then set clean grain standards. So, to that extent, we were involved.

Now, food and drug has a much more pervasive influence now in consumer protection than it did then, and I really think it came about because we were able to tell the Congress and the people that this agency of the government had been under-appropriated and under-staffed for many years.

M: In this connection there was of course some controversy right at the end of your secretaryship in 1955 over the polio--

H: On the Salk vaccine.

M: On the Salk vaccine. Apparently there was some move for the government to issue emergency funds for the distribution of this vaccine. Is that correct?

H: Now, let me see if I can go back. What we did was set up a regional system of distribution to be sure that what vaccine we had available was apportioned fairly, giving preference to the southeastern states where the incidence of polio is always higher. Then we made funds available really in the public health and public welfare for people who could not afford it.

M: Do you recall, were you in support of this program in distributing the vaccine?

Hobby -- I -- 17

H: Oh, yes. We originated it.

M: Was there any controversy over how it should be financed?

H: There were many congressional hearings on the Salk vaccine because it was a very controversial thing, as you know. And the questions would come whether it should come through public health or children's department or through public welfare, and finally we worked it out by regions and by states and got the fastest distribution. There were many problems in that vaccine because it looked as if it were going to be a terrible polio year. Our concern was to get this vaccine out as quickly as we could. So by going by the state and regions, we could actually get this vaccine out fast. If you'd gone some cumbersome method, it might have been sitting up there six months later after the polio season was gone.

M: In this period of time apparently--I'm not sure that my information is correct, but did you actually change parties from Democrat to Republican?

H: I have for years called myself an independent because I've voted Democrat, I've voted Republican--national elections, state elections, local elections. And I really then and now call myself an independent.

M: So you don't consider yourself either one?

H: No.

M: You support the man on the issues.

H: Man on the issues and his beliefs and his ideology.

M: There's another question, number twenty, which says that in the effort of you and Nelson Rockefeller to provide a unified approach to grants for health programs under which states would obtain more control, did Senator Johnson support or oppose your efforts? Do you remember anything about that?

H: I remember our efforts for a more unified system.

Hobby -- I -- 18

M: I believe that was 1954, and I think the proposal which came up never went through into legislation.

H: No. You see, it's too bad. I don't know that that would have been the ideal one. I was reading an interview last night with Dr. Burns, asking him if government was too big, and he said, well, government was so big that you couldn't evaluate it, and "If you can't evaluate it, you don't know whether it's working efficiently or not." And this particularly was true in all the agencies of HEW. You can imagine from having almost independent status, that there'd be a health program, and there'd be a vocational rehabilitation, and there'd be a social security program, and there'd be a public health program, in the states all operating more or less autonomously.

Well, a) this is wasteful from an administrative point of view. Now, you can't have the same people because you've got to have educators. But we could have saved much manpower and really made it work for the states most effectively, because I still believe that, by and large, a state, whether you go to a matching fund or a bloc grant, it's very hard for somebody to sit in Washington and write a law or a regulation that operates equitably among the states. It just is. You never know, one state may have a need that another state doesn't have. Certainly in the public health field where you'd have a high incidence of polio, where you'd have--thank heaven not true now--a high incidence of pellagra, a high incidence of malaria, really the problems are different. And believe it or not, it was somewhat true in education, where you'd come into the poorer states where the funds weren't there, and particularly after the Supreme Court decision on integration. There are different problems.

But I also have great sympathy for a congressman because the formulae by which these different programs worked are almost non-understandable. (Laughter) It's really true. And I notice in President Nixon's--some of the proposals to revise it, whether there will be a sharing of revenues and perhaps bloc grants, too, which ought to enable a state .

Hobby -- I -- 19

. . . Now this doesn't mean to say you don't have to have federal standards because you do. If the federal government is going to collect the revenue and share it, you must have standards. But I would like a state to be able, if it has a particular problem, to take more of funds to try to meet that problem and move on because this gives a state flexibility in trying to meet its problems. Now all states will not meet them with the same efficiency, but if you're told that you had x-hundreds of thousands of dollars for this program when you know that this, as far as your state is concerned you'd better be spending this x-hundreds of thousands of dollars over here, you ought to be able to evaluate.

I'll give you an example. You will find diseases such as measles, malaria, polio, pellagra, tuberculosis, the venereal diseases, and this curve will go up and down in a state. For instance, for years the curve on venereal disease was way down. Now, it's on the rise again. The state public health officer ought to have some way of saying, "This is the most immediate problem in my state. I really need all the money I can get for this particular thing."

M: So you are, in effect, advocating flexible policies.

H: Yes.

M: And this is what you were trying to do back then with Nelson Rockefeller?

H: Yes. You just need to have some flexibility. If a state doesn't perform well under these standards, you can go back to the Congress or go back to the granting authority, but you almost always must have some way to measure what they do with it.

M: Did you have anything to do with Lyndon Johnson and the cold war in the Eisenhower years? Did you ever consult with Johnson or Knowland or any of that group, other than, say, through the newspaper editorials?

H: No.

M: How about on the tidelands problem? Was there any connection with Johnson, say, and Eisenhower over the tidelands question?

Hobby -- I -- 20

H: I suppose there must have been because as senator from this state, of course, he would be vitally concerned, but I don't know of any.

M: But not connected with you?

H: No.

M: Did Lyndon Johnson ever have anything to do with your obtaining licenses to operate KPRC or KPRC-TV?

H: No. I can remember one instance when we were considering buying KLEE, which is now KPRC. The price tag on it, I thought, was enormous. And since this had to be borrowed capital, I called--I guess Mr. Johnson was in the Congress--once to ask him what he thought about the future of TV. Now, if you'll remember, back in those days TV was nothing. There were very few stations in the country. And at the time, you may not remember, a few channels were let, and then the FCC put a freeze on because they wished to restudy the whole spectrum. We had an application in for a TV station in Houston when the freeze went on, and then of course we were caught in the freeze as everyone was.

But at this time Mr. Lee, who had never been in the broadcast business, came to see me and wanted to know if I would be interested in buying a half of his station. We talked a long time. He was losing money and wanted some help really. Well, we finally negotiated an agreement, and we sent it to the FCC. The FCC turned it down, and I think quite properly at that time, though the rules have changed since, by saying that if it was to be a 50/50 ownership that somebody in effect had to be the licensee. You had to go 51 per cent. Now of course with all the publicly owned ones, that's no longer true, but that was the rule at that time. Then I just dropped it because I was terrified of the financial obligation, as you can well imagine. Then he came back and wanted to sell it all. But, no, I never asked the Congressman to do anything.

M: You did ask his advice about the future of TV, though.

Hobby -- I -- 21

H: Yes.

M: Do you remember what he said?

H: Yes, he thought it was bright. It would go through some rough days, but very bright.

M: Of course, as it turned out, KPRC has been a success.

H: Yes. Fortunately, we've had good management, and we're very proud of that station. We're very proud of all its public service awards and, we think, the constructive part it has played in the community.

M: Did you have any contact, any particular contact, with Lyndon Johnson when he was vice president or president? Did he ever call you up for a special appointment or anything of that nature--committee work or anything like that?

H: I saw him several times when he was vice president. My husband was then, you know, confined to his room. The Vice President always came to see him when he came to Houston. No, other than seeing him and the most cordial and friendly relations--no, I can recall of no appointment.

After he became president, I worked on that commission to study the extension of the draft at his appointment. And I'm told that I was one of the people that he suggested on the Carnegie Commission to study the whole future.

M: Did he ever talk to you about that work?

H: No, because he had Burke Marshall as chairman. Really I talked to him more about the draft after he was out of office than I ever did. The chairman, of course, always represented the committee.

He had great interest in seeing educational television come into the fore. It was suggested before the Carnegie Commission was set up that this be a governmental commission. And I think he was quite right in saying that he thought this ought to be a non-governmental group to study the future of educational television. Of course we

Hobby -- I -- 22

worked very hard for a year on that study, and of course it was the basis for the legislation which was proposed setting up the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

M: Was the President very interested in this?

H: Very. And he did appoint me to the board for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting on which I now serve.

M: Did he ever make a statement to you about what he hoped for public broadcasting?

H: Let's see. Let me go back. The Carnegie Commission, I believe, met twice in Washington with White House aides--Doug Cater, for instance, Mr. Marks, who was then USIA head. Then I think General O'Connell, the President's chairman of this whole committee to study the spectrum, always appeared before the commission. So the President had a great feeling that there was a great need for public television. We call it public corporation (?) now. Actually, you know, the grants are fed into the stations now. It's really just moving now, and setting up workshops to train technicians, for bright new program people. So he proposed the legislation, so you know he had to have an interest in it.

M: Did he also have a deep interest in the nature of the draft?

H: Yes, I think it concerned him greatly.

M: Did he ever say anything to you about this?

H: No. We talked more after he was out of office.

M: You mean after his retirement from the presidency?

H: Yes. Because the Congress did not take all of our suggestions, and I don't want you to think that I think our suggestions were sacrosanct, although I believe they would have been a very great improvement over the way of the draft. You see, the theory of the local draft board goes back to when we were a small agrarian society where the members of the local draft board actually knew the young men. Of course, you know this is no longer true. They never see them. They can't see them! We thought that there should be more

Hobby -- I -- 23

federal planning, so you would be calling one type of young man in Texas and another type in California. Or when you got into the areas of short personnel such as doctors and dentists, you'd find that you could be robbing one state, taking needed people away from a hospital staff, or maybe taking the single doctor away from a county, when in other states there were people you could take. We finally came to the random selection of the thing, because the pool of manpower is so great that the way it works now is really almost by chance. But you could have given the young man some ability to plan if you'd gone that way, because, you see, if his name went in the pool and he were not called, he could finish his school.

M: Did Lyndon Johnson like this idea?

H: I believe he did. Now, I'm frank to say, there are many people who disagree with this. Chairman Rivers had a different committee; of course General Hershey was very much opposed to this system. General Hershey is a very influential man in Congress. But this draft law will be changed, there's no question in my mind about it. I think a young man has an obligation to serve his country, but I think we should make it as easy for him to plan his life as he can to do it. And that I don't think we've done.

M: Were you surprised that Lyndon Johnson chose to retire from the presidency rather than run again?

H: Well, yes, though I had known that he was worried about the demands it made on him. I knew how she was worried for fear this was really endangering his health.

M: Had she expressed this to you?

H: No, never to me. But I know that she did to other people. She had a very deep and abiding concern. So, yes, I was shocked. I certainly didn't know it before I heard it on TV. But in looking back I wasn't so shocked. Does that come through to you?

M: Yes.

Hobby -- I -- 24

H: And perhaps that's long enough to finish out President Kennedy's unexpired term and then . . . the burdens of that office are so tremendous that I'd almost go on, I think, one of his proposals for a six-year term and no re-election, because it isn't possible for any one of us to really understand the burdens of that office.

M: Now, your secretary has told me that you have to be on the move again about eleven-thirty, and in the last minute I've got I'd like to ask you one more question.

H: Take ten more minutes.

M: You mentioned that you saw President Johnson after retirement. Is this true? I mean, you said you talked about the draft after he retired.

H: Yes. Oh, I've seen him several times since he has come back to Texas.

M: Has he ever expressed any regrets about his career in politics?

H: I don't suppose we ever got to that point because when I have seen him we've always been so busy talking about something of current interest, or it would remind him of something that happened in his administration.

M: How does a man de-accelerate from being the president? Have you got any insight on that?

H: No.

M: That must be a terrible task.

H: I can't imagine a worse one. The times I've seen him he has been talking to me about his lectures and about school, and just full of it, and what he hopes the school can accomplish, and working out the lectures. So I think he's a very busy man.

M: So the energy and enthusiasm are continuous?

H: Oh, still there--oh, my, yes!

M: Have you had any connection with him in regard to the Sam Rayburn Foundation?

H: No, I haven't. I believe I was on the Sam Rayburn Foundation--I don't know whether I still am or not. Isn't that dreadful! I did try to help raise some money for it.

Hobby -- I -- 25

M: But you haven't had much connection with Mr. Johnson on that?

H: No.

M: Now, you've mentioned the appointments you've had, the Carnegie Commission and the Selective Service Commission. Have there been any other commissions that you've served on during the Johnson years?

H: No.

M: Any honors or anything like that?

H: No.

M: Have you visited the Johnsons in the White House or the Ranch?

H: Yes, both.

M: Do you remember any occasion in particular?

H: I should amend an earlier statement. I just thought of it. When Secretary Gardner took this mission to Vietnam, he was kind enough to invite me, and I'm sure that was with the President's approval.

I've stayed at the White House several times when I've been there on other affairs, and they've known I was coming and invited me to stay. I think I went to dinner there maybe twice. And I've gone to the Ranch when he has had prominent political figures out there; several times for dinner when he'd have either political figures or friends from Washington, New York.

M: Did you talk to him about Vietnam after that trip?

H: No, because I came back a little early. We spent a week trying to write the report. Then Secretary Gardner--oh, he talked to us before we went.

M: Do you remember what he said to you?

H: Obviously ours was not a military mission. Ours was health, hospitals, schools, water. Water pollution in Vietnam, you know, is something incredible. The whole food supply,

Hobby -- I -- 26

the whole health supply; and diseases, you know, have been rampant over there. He was particularly concerned with schools and health programs.

M: So this concern over health, education and welfare extended even to Vietnam.

H: This is genuine. I wish more people understood this. This is a very genuine, sort of an abiding passion with this man.

M: Are you impressed with the way Mrs. Johnson has played the role of first lady?

H: Oh, yes, very much indeed!

M: You've known a few first ladies.

H: Mrs. Johnson is a star. First, she's a very unselfish woman, but it's good to be unselfish. But unless you do something with your time, unless you make it count, the unselfishness is just there. She really made it count. She worked as hard at her job as I can imagine anyone working. She's a lady in every variation of the word. First, in her concern and consideration for people. And she has an integrity of mind and purpose that I've never seen equaled.

M: She also was a strong support to her husband?

H: Very.

M: I have heard it said that she was sort of a counterbalance.

H: I've heard it said, too. I don't suppose anyone would really know how a husband and wife talk things out. But she was, I think, always involved in the big decisions. I don't think there's any doubt about that.

M: Now, to conclude this, do you have any impressions or thoughts with which you might evaluate Lyndon Johnson as a president, as an administrator, and what he has done for government and the country, good or bad?

H: First, I'd have to say I think it's too early to say. Had it not been for the war in Vietnam, President Johnson would have been one of the most--what's the word--productive presidents. When you look at the legislation that man was able to get through Congress,

Hobby -- I -- 27

and when one remembers the terrible circumstances under which he came to the office, the man's dignity in that situation, his restraint, his consideration. Of course, a part of all of this is that he knows so much about government. He knows so much about government that I think this country was blessed that he was vice president when this tragedy occurred, because no one comes to mind that I think could have picked up as easily and as effectively as he picked up. So I think history will record him as a great president. The war in Vietnam is of course the--we didn't find a solution for it, haven't found one yet. But, yes, I think when you look at his accomplishments, they will be staggering.

M: Well, I thank you for your time.

H: Dr. McComb, I've enjoyed this. I hope I have said something that will be useful.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of
OVETA CULP HOBBY

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, Oveta Culp Hobby of Houston, Texas 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 in Houston, Texas on July 11, 1969 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.

WP Hobby p.o.a. Oveta Culp Hobby
Donor

April 25, 1995
Date

John W. Carl
Archivist of the United States

8-31-95
Date