

Interviewee; Dr. Francis Keppel

Interviewer: Joe B. Frantz

Date: August 17, 1972

Tape Two

F: Let's start this with a little editing I guess would be the word for it, for the copy, and we'll start with Page 9, [of the first transcript]. Is that your first reference?

K: Page 9. On the last paragraph of Page 9, a statement in which I make the rather vulgar remark that Congresswoman Edith Green was having "another one of her changes of life." I think in good taste, [it] should be removed.

F: All right.

K: On Page 18 in the last paragraph, I was speaking of the pressure that the President was putting on the staff of the Office of Education to obtain what were described as agreements or documents with Southern school systems, and to get it all done by the opening of school in the fall of 1965. And the tone of the paragraph on the end of Page 18 and the top of Page 19 is not wrong, there was lots of pressure being exerted and I think the President was right to do so, but what I sense as I re-read it is that a reader would not get from this the sense that I, as Commissioner of Education, had during my entire period, that the President was very clear in his mind, and felt very strongly on the importance of desegregation of Southern schools, and exerted a kind of leadership which as I look back on it now was really quite remarkable.

The one time I had met him, I think, before he became President was when he was getting an honorary degree at Tufts--I've forgotten when this was, maybe the spring of '63 or somewhere in there, and he made a speech which was on civil rights, before the passage of the act as I recall it, which was a very forceful document, and a very moving document actually. And the tone of what I have said here on the bottom of [Page] 18 and the top of [Page] 19, does not give adequate background to the sense of a man who really wanted to get things done, and was prepared to take his lumps in doing it. This is an important thing for me to say, because at a later stage in my personal connections, I got into difficulties with the city of Chicago in regard to civil rights matters, and it could be interpreted that the President--although I never interpreted it that way--that the President was weakening with regard to civil rights. I do not think he was. I would like to make it perfectly clear that was an administrative tangle of the sort that I never should have gotten into, and the President did the necessary things to get out of it.

This is a point that I simply want to emphasize strongly.

F: It's been a very short time since all of this happened, and yet we've got all the still racial imbalances that go on, and yet the distance we have come is enormous and it really pretty well stems it seems to me from the middle 60's push.

K: That's right.

F: That you wrapped it up as far as principle was concerned, now you're just working on shaping and honing--

K: Since I've left the government, I've been spending some time here in New York on some state matters, specifically looking at the data on the racial problems in the schools in the city of New York and the other big cities in the state of New York, and the problem is a very much more difficult one to solve structurally and in management terms, than it was in the South, and it's going to take us a darned long time.

F: I'm not at all sure but what this contemporary stage, that Johnson and other like you didn't goad the South [so] that they pushed a little ahead of the rest of the nation in some ways, so that the remainder of the nation is playing catch-up.

K: I suspect you may be right, and when you get into the situation of these northern cities which are having an economic crunch at the same time that they're having the social and racial crunch, you realize that what you're saying is right, they've got to play catch-up.

On Page 19 of the document in the center paragraph, I should add something to the comments made with regard to the President's eagerness to get agreements negotiated at the Southern school systems.

I've seen a good many comments that the agreements that were worked out with these five thousand Southern school systems were in effect paper. Many of them were worth no more than the paper they were written on. And it may be that people will think that this was just a purely political show. I did not talk with the President about this, but I certainly did talk with the people associated with the whole venture around him in the White House and in HEW. And it seemed to

us important at the time to get on paper from a school committee or a school board, or whatever they called it, a commitment toward the goal of desegregation of the schools, as a very important first step, even though all of us were aware that in some cases the boards would change or the fellow might even be lying. Without that first written statement, which in the great American tradition meant simply "don't walk away from without apologizing," we'd have never gotten anywhere. And I think that should be added to the general point on Page 19.

F: Did you have then, have you had since, any real doubts as to Johnson's commitment to desegregation?

K: I have never had any doubts. I don't know when he went through the process in his own life, I suspect it was in the late 50's, but I don't know. I don't know his life well enough. But certainly by the time I was connected with it, every time we came up with a rational procedure to get on with it, we were supported. I never sensed any hesitation when the thing got near the President. I have no doubt some of his political advisers were telling him different things, but I'm talking about when the President was at it, he was no-nonsense.

Now if I may turn to Page 23, there are references to the problems that I personally had as Commissioner of Education with regard to the appointment of a deputy. His name was Henry Loomis, and in fact the President got pretty cross that I had appointed him, because he felt that Loomis had been unfair in some public statements he'd made about the Voice of America.

The only thing I want to add to that was, the President used to tease me about it a little bit and in comments that I make on Page 23,

I indicate that I think in the course of that whole business the President lost personal confidence in my capacity to run an office. That's the kind of statement that obviously should be checked with someone else, and the notes that I take on this one are, I would hope that somebody could check with Douglass Cater, the President's key man, to see whether that was a fact or not.

F: Incidentally, is Loomis someone I should see?

K: I think so, I think so with regard to two things. One of them, his relations with the President, which I suspect by the way, have been critical long before the President was either vice president or president. And second, for his angle on the issues I stated very briefly on Page 23.

F: Do you have any idea where he is?

K: The Deputy Director of the U. S. Information Agency in Washington now. That is the only comment I made on that one.

With regard to Page 24, I would be grateful if there could be filed with this document a copy of a letter actually addressed to you, Mr. Frantz, with regard to the Chicago situation giving a great deal more detail, written by the man who was then Assistant Commission of Education [David S. Seeley] who handled the matter. And what he does is to give much more procedural detail [about] some of the issues which were taken up. And puts, I think, both the role of Mayor Daley and the President in a more detached context than is stated in my ~~transcript. Perhaps~~ this document could be just filed.

F: Will do.

K: On Page 25 I state in the second paragraph that President Johnson himself told me about the fact that Mayor Daley had come to see him in New York. I tried to check back my memory on that, now that it's been questioned by Mr. Lodge on other matters, and I can't really swear to it. I remember the story being told to me in the White House, but I'll be darned if I remember whether the President told it or not.

Then on Page 27, I make a somewhat derogatory statement about just one of the President's staff-- I withdraw that, on Page 27--about one of the President's staff with whom I found it less easy to work than the others to put it mildly, whose name is [Marvin] Watson.

F: I might say you're not exclusive.

K: I'm by far from exclusive in that, but I think that the phrase such as "singularly unpleasant" was perhaps going stronger in that. We had to fight him, and all the rest of the story is true, but unattractive adjectives attract the press.

Finally, with regard to the material on particularly Pages 27 and 28, in which I was quoting my memory of conversations with Ambassador Lodge, when I spent a couple of days with him in Viet Nam--South Viet Nam. I would like, if I could, [to] have included in the official record my note of apology to him for telling a story without checking with him, and his response to me, which I think should go into the record.

Thanks
And ~~much~~ very much.

F: Now, that gets that up-to-date.

A couple of things. In looking over the papers that have been done, and the interviews and so forth, I feel that we have slighted the

International Education Act. And that somewhere down the line that will be a point at which at least I'll be stuck for not having done my part.

Do you have anything to animadvert on that?

K: I'm going to have to dig in my memory here a bit. The major activity on the International Education Act, if my memory's right, was in the winter of 1966 and a lot of the initiative on that, I believe, came from Assistant Secretary Charles Frankel, of the Department of State, and also Douglass Cater in the White House. I was at the time out of the Office of Education, at least during much of this, I was an Assistant Secretary of Education with very little to do really, and I was associated with those two. I got along very well with Frankel and as the record shows, more than well with Cater. He was a very good friend. And we finally put together a piece of legislation, but I wasn't around at the time it went through the Congress, and I don't have that feel for it.

F: You're not a shaper.

K: I don't regard myself as a shaper at all. Frankel, who may or may not have been interviewed--

F: I have not interviewed Frankel.

K: He plays two parts, one of them on the Viet Nam side, but on the International Education side I would have thought he was a very central figure. Gardner, then Secretary of HEW, played a role--I'm pretty clear--at a couple of points in the shaping of that legislation. Gardner knew a lot about it, personally interested in it, and I remember going to some meetings with him. I would not regard myself as a shaper on that.

There's a bit of background here that might be useful to you, not so much for the International Education Act and the way it was put together, but why there was a push to do something about it. And this is a minor piece of brickwork for you.

The Office of Education, for a good many years (I wouldn't know how long but decades anyway) had had the operating responsibility for the interchange and the routing and arrangements for overseas teachers in the schools of the United States. This was basically done under a contract from the Department of State, from the so-called CU, Cultural Affairs Division of State. Roughly speaking the program in international education, which on a chart looked as if it came under the Office of Education, in fact was probably 75 or 80 percent paid for by contract from the State Department. And it was always a part of the Office of Education which somehow felt that its dignity had never been fully recognized, ^{that} it was kind of a hired hand.

I asked, and it is on the record somewhere, for a study to be made by the Institute of International Education of the role of the Office of Education in international education matters, I think in the year '65. It was done under the supervision of then Chancellor Herman Wells of the University of Indiana and some of the staff people, and there is a report which was one of the building blocks that went toward some of the thinking that went on in the much larger conception that was ~~of~~ of the International Education Bill, ~~and~~

F: As a man with a good bit of task force experience, and inheritor of task force reports, a sort of an activator after you see them, what did you think of the task forces? That's not a Johnson innovation but--

K: No, no, heavens no. They were going on in Eisenhower's time and elsewhere.

I've never really put my mind to generalizations about them. They have a certain advantage, like any task force, that you can distill views if you get the right people on it, and under the great impetus of the White House and the presidency, really get an enormous amount out of people in a very short time, which would be very hard to do any other way. I found it extremely difficult to do much lower down, whereas if there was something going on in the White House meeting, oh boy, you got it done. And I think that was true of a few of the task forces I saw operating. John Gardner's in the summer of '64, I think, was one of them. In that case however, the President used them internally, and did not make them public. The results, as I recall, are even now not public, or maybe they have been made public, I don't recall.

F: I think he may have made them public at the time of the opening of the education papers, but I'm not--

K: I really can't remember. There was not the advantage of a public statement at the time, and I confess I thought that was too bad, maybe.

~~At the time I thought that was perhaps~~ At the time I thought that was perhaps too bad, it would have helped in sort of stirring up the atmosphere. ~~Later~~ later I concluded that maybe the President was right about that. Because he had a half-dozen of them or a dozen of them, and if somebody had totaled up the cost of what was being proposed, ~~the President~~ the President would have been stuck with his own task force economic recommendations that he couldn't possibly have funded.

F: It's better to piecemeal it out.

K: So I think maybe he was right. As I say, I changed my mind on that in the intervening time. The principal advantage is that under the great pulling power of the White House, you can get in a very short time a condensed set of views. You're not going to get anything terribly radically imaginative, I think, but what you will get is a forceful statement of the best of what's going in the specialists' thinking. There's value to it.

F: Is there a tendency for task forces to work sort of antiseptically in their charge? Are they supposed to be pragmatic, or are they supposed to come up with, under optimum conditions, "here's what you need"?

K: It depends entirely upon who writes the terms of reference. As I recall the general terms that President Johnson put down for his task forces, and this is one of the reasons why it's perhaps wise not to make them public, was that "you leave out the politics, that's my business. You write down what looks to you in your professional -- "

F: If you could control the thing--

K: If you could do the darned thing, this is what you would do. And I think that was an advantage. In the case of the particular one I remember the most clearly, the one in which Mr. Gardner was chairman, the one whole conception which eventually became legislation, called Title III of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act, really came out of that, I think. And I do not think that would have been put in without that task force.

F: Did you have any firsthand insight into why Gardner quit?

K: No, no. I had gone before that. I take it that he is on the list of interviewees sometime?

F: Yes, he's been interviewed.

K: But I know nothing of it personally at all.

F: Can you think of anything else we ought to talk about?

K: No. I'd just like to say for the record, I'm grateful to straighten out these specific points with regard to the former document, and to emphasize again, ~~the~~ ^{first,} the President's, I think, remarkable leadership on civil rights issues; and second, which is stated in here but I'd be glad to state again, that the education legislation was very much, I sensed, high on his priority list. And the deepening demands on him on other things never meant that he lost interest in it. It think it was simply he was taken away for other purposes. I thought that **his concern** was perfectly genuine.

F: You know, some of his critics said that he threw out education acts in such profusion that they were indigestible and that we're paying for it since. Now I think his reasoning would be that by God, if he got it on the books, you've got it--

K: I agree with his reasoning entirely. As he pointed out early after his own election to the presidency, he didn't have an awful lot of months to get a lot of legislation through, it was that first session of that Congress that began to get it through, and who was to say what was going to happen the second session of that particular Congress. And he was perfectly clear that he had to get this on the books and get it through, and I thought he was absolutely right. Yes, we had a lot of stuff. This isn't to say that the President or his staff were

(he had available, to operate the new programs,) not aware of the fact that ~~the government~~ (a government bureaucracy in the form of HEW and the Office of Education, which was certainly not constituted to manage a large government program. It was simply not staffed for it, it wasn't put together that way. And the President and his staff--I assume the President took a part in this though I have no direct knowledge, but Cater and others took an active part in trying to get that Office of Education changed around so it could do a new job. So it wasn't that the President, or at least his staff, were unaware of the problems that would come with a lot of new bills all at once dumped on an existing bureaucracy which had mostly been writing reports. They were perfectly aware of it, did their best to get it organized, and I take it it will take plenty more time before it gets really done.

F: You know there are also those critics who say HEW is unmanageable.

Now you got in a fairly high-level management position there, do you agree with that?

K: While I was down there and mixed up with it, I did not, ~~see~~ I saw ^a ~~very~~ very considerable advantages, potentially but not actually, ~~in~~ in the relations between the welfare programs and problems of education of the poor and the public health problems.

On the books it looks as if they should have fused. It makes sense on the books. And while I was in there I kept ~~on~~ of arguing about it.

As I look back at it now I conclude that I don't think it makes ~~as~~ ^{as} much difference whether these programs are under a single cabinet officer, as I used to think it did. Because the cabinet officer when he's got an awful lot ^{of programs} ~~of programs~~ is pulled all over the place to put out fires.

So I would myself think ~~that~~ ^{that} each one of those ^{programs} (the welfare, the health and the education) are now large enough to ~~deserve~~ ^{deserve} what might be something like the Defense Department system, ^{with} a separate cabinet secretary ~~to each.~~ ^{to each.} I've changed my mind, in other words.

F: Did bureaus and programs inside HEW sort of watch the Secretary and the administration to see whether he was leaning more heavily toward the H or the E or the W?

K: Inevitably, inevitably. I don't think it can be helped. And it's not necessarily that the Secretary wants to do that, it's just what the current political and social demands are. But it's inevitable. The answer to your question is yes.

F: Well, is it the sort of competitive edge that sort of whets the desires and accelerates programs, or does it get in the way of forward movement?

K: I don't think that the competitive part of it got in the way of forward movement. Actually most of the legislation you and I have seen passed in our lifetimes have not come from Washington really, they've come from a lot of other forces around, and they get fused there. No, I don't think competition was a disadvantage.

One of the problems has obviously been the usual problem of any government--the allocation of scarce resources, money and people. Those decisions were increasingly coming at an ever higher level, but not in the HEW Secretary's office, as I saw it. Those decisions tended, even in Mr. Johnson's time, ^{as} he was trying, through ^PBBBS and other ways, to get a hold on it, were being done up in what is now the office of management and budget. And I suppose it is happening even more now,

where the real decisions are being made, on fund allocations. I did not think that HEW in my time was really well put together to allocate those funds out as between priorities. Partly because HEW really consisted of a conglomeration of a group of special acts of Congress with each program, ^{whether} in health, or welfare or education, having its own act, its own appropriations and very little really the Secretary could do.

F: Kind of like building a body one part at a time.

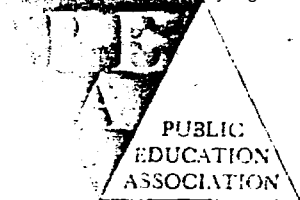
K: And very little the Secretary could do to move funds around. My successor, Mr. Sidney Marland, I see in the press, was trying to move funds from one area to another. I don't know the legalities of it, but the politics of it got him into trouble up on the Hill. ^{Apparently,} the House people said, "we didn't vote the money for this, we voted it for that," and you'll jolly well spend it ^{that way.}

Marland had wanted to move funds and probably breach them. But the specific act of Congress makes administration difficult. This is the real problem I think in HEW.

F: You can get yourself in that trap of starving alongside plenty.

K: Exactly. ^{In such a} huge enterprise, something or other is neglected, or the Congress isn't interested, ^{or the Congress won't change.} There's a whale of a lot of money, ^{for example,} in impacted area bills, a gorgeous example of legislation that everybody--President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, President Johnson, President Nixon--all want to try to change, and they can't get it done.

F: Thank you.



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