INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 6, 1986

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT G. LEWIS

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Lewis' residence, Washington, D.C.

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G: Let's just start briefly with your background and let me ask you to trace the circumstances that brought you to Washington in 1957 on [William] Proxmire's staff. You had been active in politics before and--

L: Well, my background started on a small farm in Wisconsin just shortly after LBJ started on a rural area in Texas. The Depression I remember vividly, and my political ideas and inclinations were formed in the Depression. My people had been Republicans. My grandfather was a member of the state legislature as a Republican, an immigrant from Norway. But they were Republicans of the Progressive persuasion. At the University of Wisconsin, I was a member of the Young Progressives Club, and also in the election of 1940 the whole campus seemed to be Young Democrats or something [to the] left of that. Much to everyone's surprise, a press release came to me as reporter on the Daily Cardinal, the student newspaper, that a [Wendell] Willkie For President Club was being formed, and a prominent student orator named Henry Maier was the president, which created consternation among all of the pro-Roosevelt people. So we put our heads together and I wound up as

president of the Young University of Wisconsin Roosevelt For President Club in 1940.

Many of the young Progressives were also for the New Deal, and the Progressives split with Roosevelt on the war issue. In my senior year I was editor of the Daily Cardinal, and whether to intervene in the war or not was the big issue of our time as students. I think some time in October 1941 I took my stand; I wrote an editorial supporting intervention in World War II, contrary to the position taken by many of my friends in the Young Progressives Club.

So I went to war, and after the war--I was an infantry officer in Europe--I came back to Wisconsin. I had a wife and a child by then; [I had] married a day after I graduated from the university and two weeks before I was inducted into the army. And I had political aspirations to run for Congress in the western district of Wisconsin, which was a solid Progressive district represented then by Merlin Hull who was a Progressive and elected on the Progressive ticket. I had talked to the state Democratic chairman and the national committeeman, Bob Tehan and Andy Greene, both from Milwaukee. They wanted me to run but they had to tell me that they didn't have any money, and neither did I. So I didn't [run] but [worked] with other young people primarily from the University of Wisconsin and the labor movement and the farmers' cooperatives and the Farmers Union--I went to work for the Farmers Union as an organizer when I first came back from the war--and other liberals. Some [were] university faculty people who

were Progressives but felt that it was necessary for Wisconsin to have a liberal Democratic Party.

So in 1946 we started organizing a Democratic organizing committee to try to take the Democratic Party away from the very small minority of Democrats in the state. I like to tell my kids sometimes that when I came to Wisconsin in 1921 at the age of two, there was only one Democrat in statewide office in the whole state of Wisconsin. It was the fourth party in the state. Only one [Democrat was] elected assemblyman from Milwaukee; the Socialists had twenty-six that session. And then there were two Republican parties: the progressives and the stalwarts. They were both elected on the Republican ticket. But the big battle in Wisconsin was between the stalwarts and the progressives in the Republican Party.

I attended the Progressive Party convention in 1946 as a delegate from my home county--Trempealeau County--and I voted and made a speech for the Progressives to join the Democrats. I called it the party of Henry Wallace and Franklin Roosevelt. Henry Wallace was something of a hero of mine at that time because, of course, he was identified with my issue, the agricultural problems. My father had lobbied for rural electrification before Roosevelt created REA. Two winters he went to Washington with other farmers while Mother and my brothers and sisters and I took care of the farm chores while we were going to high school. He had organized electric cooperatives in the state to apply for the loans, and at last REA, by the fall of 1935, had decided to put its

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main effort into organizing farmers into cooperatives to borrow the REA money, which the private utilities didn't seem anxious to do.

So those were the issues that had interested me, and I campaigned for Howard McMurray a little bit up in my territory, up there in that Progressive country. I tried to counter the superstition going around among the Lutherans up there that Howard McMurray was a Catholic. And of course, he was opposing Joe McCarthy, but nobody asked whether Joe McCarthy was a Catholic at that point. So that was one of the little issues that came up, up there in Garrison Keiller land, next to the Twin Cities, across the St. Croix and the Mississippi Rivers.

About that time, late in 1946, as a matter of fact in the fall of 1946 just before the election, I was employed by the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative, which was the state federation of REA co-ops, to work on the Wisconsin REA News, the first of the statewide REA member magazines and newspapers in the country. I worked for the first editor and very soon became editor myself. But I got a leave of absence through the good graces of Bill Owen [?], who was the president of Wisconsin Electric Cooperative and who later became a Republican state senator. I got a leave of absence to permit me to go and campaign for about six weeks for Howard McMurray up in his county and others, and I feel sure that Bill Owen voted for McMurray, the Democrat, which most of the REA people did. They viewed McCarthy as a stalwart. Of course, Joe may never have known the difference by that stage of the game, but the rural people remembered their Progressive issues for a long time, and eventually those rural issues brought them

into the new Democratic Party, which we young Progressives, primarily, formed starting in 1946 right after that Progressive convention. I worked closely with Jim Doyle and Carl Thompson and Horace Wilke [?] and Tom Fairchild and the other young leaders of the Democratic organizing committee and set out to build a party from the bottom up.

In that election in 1946 we did manage to pretty much unseat the old-guard Democrats. As a matter of fact, they were probably more conservative than the Republicans, even the stalwarts. About that time, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party formed a coalition to run against Phil LaFollette, the Progressive. That shows where the various political factions stood on the issues. So we formed the Democratic Party in Wisconsin and it was comprised of people who had been Progressives for the most part, young liberal Democrats who became politically interested and active through Roosevelt's leadership--Roosevelt was the unifying force--and Socialists, Dan Hoan, former Socialist mayor for many, many years of Milwaukee, was an active organizer for the Democratic Organizing Committee, and I saw a good deal of Dan Hoan, whom I admired and liked quite a bit.

Well, I never did have an opportunity because I never had the money, nor the constituency, I felt, to take a chance in politics. I had a family to support, unlike some people who were a little bit better placed either vocationally or in terms of personal resources to get into politics. I did work for the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative for five years and was very active in all of the Democratic political campaigns.

Then in 1951 I got a call from Ben Stong, the editor of the National Union Farmer published by the National Farmers Union, and the editor also of the weekly newsletter. He offered me a job in Washington at almost exactly twice as much as I was making in Wisconsin. So I went to Washington. We had just gone through a bitter Democratic primary in 1950 for the U.S. Senate. My candidate lost, Bill Sanderson. He was the farm cooperative leader and a longtime friend and associate of my father's in the farmer cooperative movement. I didn't see much future for myself in Wisconsin at the moment and thought I'd get some Washington experience, so I came here.

After five years of editing the National Farmers Union newsletter and traveling all over the country--actually, I'd say that the Farmers Union newsletter was the organizing vehicle for Democrats throughout the Middle West farm belt. That may sound a little bit boastful, but we had an independent, paid circulation. It was very popular. Senator Bill Proxmire, when he was only a candidate, a perennial candidate for statewide office in Wisconsin, told me that he used to get my newsletter--it would come once a week--and he'd sit down and write a whole string of press releases based on information in that newsletter and then he'd make speeches about it. Then he'd take those press releases out in the country and release them, one at a time, always timing his releases to get on that early morning, farm news broadcast, while the farmers were out there in the barn milking and long before the city folks have got their radios tuned in. And that was true, also, all through the Dakotas and Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas,

Nebraska, Colorado, on down into Wyoming and even into Texas, Utah, Idaho. I had many friends and I think that was the happiest job I ever had. Because I'd go out there and make speeches to those people and they'd flock around me and talk about the newsletter, and they read it, they appreciated it, and the young politicians also subscribed to it and many of them regarded it as Bill Proxmire did.

One of my experiences--I went to a state convention of the Farmers Union in South Dakota and there I met a young man, looking kind of threadbare and lean, who had just accepted the least promising job in the United States politics. He was chairman of the Democratic Party in South Dakota, of all things. Well, South Dakota voted more overwhelmingly for Eisenhower in 1952 than any other state in the Union. And it was shortly after that that I first met George McGovern, the new state chairman. Well, George McGovern got elected to the House of Representatives on the farm revolt against Ezra Taft Benson, and I think that the Farmers Union newsletter was the source of ammunition which McGovern and many other Democrats used in unseating Republicans in that solid Republican farm belt in the fifties.

G: How would you characterize Benson's farm program?

L: Well, Benson's farm program philosophy was very similar to Ronald Reagan's. That is that the ideal thing would be for the government not to be in the picture at all, and that the only reason the government is in it is because somebody got the government into the farm problem, which was a terrible wrong, and that the job has got to be to extricate ourselves and get rid of farm programs. That, of course,

was entirely crosswise with many of the farm leaders--not all of them, but many of them--who had generations behind them of agrarian protest against railroads and the electric utility companies and the grain traders and all of the other people whom they felt were giving them a short end of the bargain. And they had felt that the New Deal farm programs were a way whereby the authority and power of the government could be mobilized, for one thing, to rationalize supply and demand problems. The Wallace "Ever Normal Granary" idea, that you store it up in the rich years of good crops so you'll have plenty is a shortage should come, that appealed to a lot of people. They remembered the biblical story, of course, and I think still it has validity, I still subscribe to it. Then they also felt that farm prices were not just, did not give just compensation to the farmers and I think there is also substantial merit in that.

But aside from the objective merit of these things, they believed deeply in the rightness of farm programs to stabilize prices and to try to achieve parity prices, prices that would be fair. And Benson was entirely against that and he had an unfortunately sanctimonious way of putting it, a self-righteous and sanctimonious way of expressing himself and stating his policies which infuriated me and thousands and thousands of other farmers, often the leading farmers in their communities who had stuck their necks out and spent a lot of free time to help lead their communities to establish electric cooperatives and to run the AAA, the corn and hog programs, and the grain price support programs, and the soil conservation programs and so forth. Many, many

hours of volunteer labor these local leaders had put into these causes, and Benson was rejecting it all and telling them it was wicked. And I think it was that psychological or moral position that was particularly infuriating.

G: Did Benson have more support among the large corporate farmers than he did among the small farmers?

L: Well, I think the term corporate farmer as it is commonly used is so invalid that it's almost irrelevant. I think it needs correcting. There never were many true corporation farms that were producing most of the things that farmers grow in this country. Even now, 90 per cent or more, in many cases close to 100 per cent of the wheat, corn, soybeans, milk, even a large percentage of the beef cattle are produced by family farms on which most of the labor is performed by family members. That's true today; it was true then. But there are some farms that are bigger than others and some are more prosperous than others, and I don't know that Benson had any significant support from farmers producing the main agricultural commodities in this country. California, of course, is a different world, California and South Texas and Arizona and Florida. There you have a lot of farmers producing other things, all the way from wine grapes to asparagus and artichokes and walnuts and almonds and things like that. They were not really a part of any generalized farm movement in this country, and some of those people did support Benson. And there were people among the ordinary dirt farmers in the Middle West who supported Benson; you know, people who had the same general attitude toward

government and toward cooperation and toward the idea of, I call it, caring for your neighbor, being your brother's keeper. You might call it welfare if you want to use a more pejorative term for what I'm talking about. So Benson did appeal to some people on the conservative side, emotional conservatives and ideological conservatives. But he was not popular anywhere that I knew.

G: Did you have any contact with Lyndon Johnson during the time you were working on this publication?

L: No, I never did have any direct contact with LBJ. I knew about him. I first remember, still remember, reading the newspaper account back when I was on the farm in Wisconsin about the young man who had visited Franklin Roosevelt. He was a big, tall man, kind of looked like Roosevelt. It was LBJ. That was before he ever ran for Congress. I think he'd just gone back to run for Congress and, as I recall, he met Roosevelt on a trip or something to get some publicity.

G: It was right after his election, I think.

L: Well, it was very early in the game. So I very early on identified LBJ with Roosevelt, as an exotic creature from the South who supported Roosevelt. We were all very aware up there in Wisconsin that there were a lot of Dixiecrats down South that didn't like Roosevelt, so we welcomed a Texas who would come out for Roosevelt.

G: Did you have any association with Senator Proxmire before he was elected to the Senate in 1957?

L: Well, I knew Bill Proxmire shortly after he first came to Wisconsin as a reporter for the Capitol Times. And he also was a part of our

social circle, comprised primarily of people that were interested in promoting the Democratic Party. Then I had worked in a lot of campaigns; I wrote the farm planks for state Democratic platforms year after year. Whenever people running for governor or senator or Congress wanted to know about the farm issue, I was the man that they'd check with, and I'd volunteer a lot of help, and I think I helped Prox along with some others.

But after we came to Washington, I used to have my family--we'd rent a cottage on Lake Mendota in Madison and they'd stay there for a month, and I'd go back and visit. And Prox called me up--he was running then for governor--and asked if he could come over Sunday morning, and we sat around and talked for half a day about farm issues. I briefed him on farm issues. And he seemed to appreciate it. Then he told me at that time about how he used the newsletter to make his press releases. In the special election I had a vacation in Wisconsin, my family and I, about the time the campaign was going on, and I spent quite a bit of my time writing speeches and position papers and direct mail advertising, letters to farm groups, things like that, in the campaign. And we got back to Washington after the election, and he called me on the phone and asked me to be his administrative assistant. Well, I kind of hesitated a little bit, but I finally agreed to do it. But up to till that time I'd never had any direct contact with Lyndon Johnson. As a matter of fact, I never did, I think, do any volunteer work for him until I was in the government, in the Department of Agriculture.

G: Did LBJ help Proxmire in that special election?

L: Yes, he helped him in a very important way. He said that when Proxmire came to the Senate, even though he would be at the very bottom in seniority in the Senate, LBJ would see to it that he got a seat on the Agriculture Committee of the Senate. And that, of course, fit right into Proxmire's campaign. It's interesting how, in a state where farmers were, even then, a fairly small minority, very much of that campaign that Proxmire made against Walter Kohler was against Ezra Taft Benson. But that was characteristic of Democrats all through the farm area. It gave them something to talk about and I think Benson didn't have a lot of popularity with non-farmers either. The farmers did have the sympathy of other people in the small towns and even in the cities.

G: Did Johnson help with money or speakers or anything else?

L: I don't know whether he did that or not. I was not in anything more than a volunteer position in the campaign. I came into the state and had a vacation, went up to the headquarters, and didn't even see Proxmire to offer my services to the people in the campaign. I saw him a few times, I think, during the campaign, but I didn't really participate in the campaign management in that special election.

G: Did you go to Washington right away with Proxmire?

L: Well, I had been in Washington for five years by then.

G: Yes, but did you return immediately after the election?

L: Yes, I went back before the election, as a matter of fact.

G: Oh, I see.

L: I voted absentee and I think I was back here before the election, just a few days probably before the election. But my time in Wisconsin was just a two-week period, and I spent several days of that--

G: And how long after Proxmire's election did you join the staff?

L: Almost immediately. I had to give a little notice to the Farmers Union, and actually I worked both jobs for a couple of weeks.

G: The 1957 civil rights bill was being debated at the time Proxmire was sworn in, do you remember that? Were you privy to--?

L: Well, I think that was well in hand by the time I actually got down there on the ground. I was the administrative assistant and the big job I had to take on immediately was not policy and legislative stuff. The function of legislative representative is to write speeches and draft legislation and advise the senator on things like that. I handled that kind of work on the Agriculture Committee, but I had to organize the staff. And we had seventeen months to go before the election to fill the new term when the partial term expired, and we were determined to make the most of it, as it was a seventeen-month campaign for re-election. So I put a lot of my energy into the administrative side and into organizing what all politicians in Washington do, using robot typewriters to crank out mail to people and things like that. So the civil rights bill was in good hands by the time I got there. Proxmire had Marty Secrest [?], who was a writer, and some other people on his staff by this time who handled that for him. I turned to agriculture and started drafting a farm bill for Proxmire to introduce.

G: LBJ rewarded Proxmire right away with a trip to Germany--do you recall that?--that the German government sponsored?

L: Yes, I remember that. I didn't go with him and don't have a vivid recollection of that particular thing, but I do know that Johnson went out of his way to welcome Proxmire. I considered it not intended personally for Proxmire but in recognition that here we had a state that was on the verge of going Democratic, and we had to win the seat when the regular election came up. I felt that his support for Proxmire was party building, and I also recognized that Johnson wanted all the support he could get in the Senate as majority leader.

G: What else did Johnson do in this connection, do you recall?

L: I don't recall specifically, but there were many kinds of little things--giving Prox a chance, for example, to introduce the amendment for increasing the amount of dairy products that the army and the navy had to buy--you know, things that would make good little headlines back in a dairy state. But things like that would come up and Prox got a break, time after time. And I suppose any Democrat who had a particularly uphill but fighting chance to win a seat for the Democrats might have gotten that kind of recognition. I don't really think that Proxmire got more than would be deserved from a smart political leader who wanted to build his party.

G: What was Proxmire's attitude toward Johnson during this period?

L: Hard to tell. Obviously what happened afterwards, he accepted all of these gratuities but kind of resented it in some ways. Proxmire was trying to decide in that period what kind of a senator he was going to

be. I used to drive him home; he lived out in Bethesda, and we lived in this home here in Cleveland Park. I had a beat-up old Ford convertible which I parked--Proxmire didn't often drive himself--in the Senate staff garage and often gave Prox a ride all the way home to Bethesda. We had some very good talks in those drives after the rush hour, because both of us worked long hours. Both of us would get down there before the rush hour and get home long after it. But we didn't talk very much about Lyndon Johnson specifically. Oh, he'd remark about Johnson's egotism and things like that. I can remember Prox telling me that he had pretty much decided he didn't want to be a member of the Senate club, that he'd decided that the people that he admired in the Senate were Paul Douglas and Wayne Morse, and both were loners. Senator [Herbert] Lehman from New York was not psychologically a loner but his issues made him a loner, too. But I think Prox consciously decided that he would be a loner and not get involved in a lot of personal obligations back and forth with other senators.

G: He was, though, during this period lavish in his praise for Johnson, and then he seems to have almost rebelled overnight. I am just wondering if there was some incident, some slight perpetrated by Johnson that might have sparked that rebellion.

L: I think that there was an incident and that incident was the regular election of 1958 when Proxmire won re-election to his seat and had a six-year term, and that changed his need or his dependence on Johnson. Another thing I'd heard Proxmire say is that the ideal position for a politician of his kind, that is, a loner, would be to have a president

of your own party that you are against because that would--particularly in the Wisconsin scene. Wisconsin people, aside from all of their virtues, do kind of like to see somebody picking on the boss. And that, I think, is a part of Proxmire's political strategy. I don't think it was terribly much personal animosity. There may have been some of that in it, but, you know, Johnson was kind of hard to take sometimes.

G: How so?

L: Well, I've heard many people say--it never happened to me--that he was pretty hard on people that crossed him, and he was a great arm-twister and so on, and seemed to be--my view is sort of about what comes through the media--kind of arrogant. But I don't really think that it was a strong personal animosity or rebellion or resentment of any specific thing, but a pretty cold-blooded decision that he didn't want to look like Johnson's creature in the Senate, didn't want to look that way back in Wisconsin. So he chose to take on the Majority Leader as a way of demonstrating vividly that he was his own man and not Johnson's.

G: One of his first acts seems to have been voting against Johnson on that Rule 22 fight in the beginning of 1959.

L: I don't remember that specifically but it's part of the picture. I think he probably chose to go against Rule 22 because he had in mind identifying himself as not Johnson's man.

G: Yes. There is speculation that Johnson retaliated by not granting

Proxmire's request to serve on the Senate Finance Committee. Do you recall anything about that?

L: I don't recall that. I know Proxmire wanted to get on the Senate Finance Committee. I don't remember just what the timing on that was but I dimly recall Proxmire feeling that he'd blown his chance or maybe had consciously sacrificed his chance to get on that committee by taking on Johnson. Obviously you don't get any breaks from a majority leader when you're fighting the majority leader of your own party.

G: But this appointment was after the Rule 22 fight that year but it was before Proxmire's speech against a lack of democracy in the Senate. I'm just wondering if this failure of Johnson's to make that appointment to put Proxmire on the Finance Committee might have contributed to Proxmire making that speech.

L: Well, I can only speculate about that, and I think Proxmire had decided well before he got around to making that first speech that he was going to someway pick a fight with Lyndon Johnson. I think. But that's only speculation.

G: He did apparently give an interview back in Wisconsin first, a broadcast interview, in which he criticized the practices in the Senate.

L: I don't remember that, but I do remember that very soon after the election in 1958, he gave an interview to the Chicago Tribune in which he took a relatively conservative position on everything. And we had a kind of chuckle about that down through the years because Prox seems

to have a tactic or strategy of doing something on one side of the political spectrum and then immediately canceling it out by doing something on the other side, you know, switching from being liberal on civil rights to being conservative on fiscal policy, or back and forth like that. So I'm sorry I can't really enlighten you significantly about the details of just how the big row against Lyndon Johnson was formulated nor--

G: Did you help on the speech?

L: No, I never did participate in any of the speech-writing on the Johnson thing. I was still concentrating on agriculture and administrative things, and I personally liked Johnson--not personally, because I didn't know him personally, but as a Democrat. I felt he was smart, and I still remembered his origins with Franklin Roosevelt and his own rural background and the support he'd given to the kinds of issues that I believed in. As a matter of fact, in 1960 I worked for Hubert Humphrey informally in the Wisconsin primary and down through the years have done a lot of writing speeches for Humphrey to give on the Senate floor and in campaigns and furnishing ammunition and working with his staff and so forth. And when Humphrey got clearly out of the picture for president in 1960, I [would have] kind of preferred that the convention would have nominated Johnson for president to Kennedy, because I felt that Johnson would come closer to my favorite issues, my position on the issues that were important to me, such things as public power and farm policy and so on. I'm more a populist Democrat than an urban eastern Democrat.

Kennedy had made a speech to the Farm Bureau national convention down in Florida a few years before and had taken the Farm Bureau line, which was the Ezra Taft Benson line, which didn't wash at all out West, or with me, and had opposed some public power issues, Tennessee Valley issues and so forth. As a matter of fact, when I worked for Proxmire, just after my appointment as administrative assistant was announced, before I was released from my obligations to the Farmers Union, I wrote a newsletter article--this was in late 1957--panning Kennedy's position on some things, farm policy and so forth. About that time I turned up in the Senate staff, about the time this got published, still kind of a foot in both jobs yet--

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L: I was "summoned"--and I put that word in quotes because it was kind of, not pre-emptory but it was very anxious--[by] a call from Mike [Myer] Feldman who worked for Jack Kennedy: "We'd better talk about this." I can't remember whether Ted Sorensen worked for him at that point or not, but I think I had lunch with Mike Feldman and Ted Sorensen down in the Senate staff dining room for about three hours, trying to explain to them why I didn't like Kennedy's farm policy and his Tennessee Valley Authority policy and his public power policy and some of the other things that stuck in my craw about his position on things. I may have contributed something to their education. But anyway, I learned to work with those people when Kennedy was president and I was in the government, although I think that they never did view me as one of their own, by any means.

G: Well, let's go back to that Proxmire speech, the first one in February [1959]. Do you recall who worked on the speech for him?

L: Well, I think Roland Day, who is now an associate justice of the Wisconsin State Supreme Court, was Proxmire's legal counsel and I think he worked on it. I had thought Ralph Huitt might have worked on it because when Ralph worked there he did a lot of that close-in floor support work for Prox. But perhaps Ralph by that time had left the staff. He was there only for a short time, a limited time. I just can't remember who worked on it. If I reviewed the names of the staff members, I might recollect.

G: Did Proxmire try to get other senators to join in his efforts?

L: I don't know whether he did or not. I didn't like what he was doing, and I just kind of cold-shouldered it and tended to other things around the office. I didn't quarrel with Prox about it but I just sort of ignored what he was doing.

G: Do you think that other senators were afraid to join him in this effort?

L: I don't know about that. I think if they had felt that there was legitimate cause they would have not been afraid. I just don't think they felt it was wise. Paul Douglas was in the Senate; he had all the grievances that you could imagine Proxmire having and still he was on relatively decent personal terms with Johnson. But this was not a mere difference of issues but it got into personalities. It was an attack on Johnson's personality to some extent, not only the policy positions; it was not an attack on Johnson's policies but on Johnson.

G: Of course, Proxmire during the speech and the debate thereafter denied that this was the case. He said that he did not intend it as a personal attack, that he had respect for Johnson's leadership, that he felt that more caucuses were needed, that the Policy Committee needed to be revamped so that more senators could have input.

L: It has been a long time since I read those speeches, twenty years at least. Well, let's see, 1957 to 1986, is that possible that it's twenty-nine years?

G: A long time.

L: So it is closer to twenty-nine years since I've read those speeches, and I don't really remember very much just what the content of the speeches was. I can remember some of my feelings about it, and my feelings about what other senators may have been feeling and some of the reaction of other staff people and other Democrats.

G: What was the reaction of other senators?

L: Well, I can't speak for the senators so much as I can for other staff people. They felt that it was not a team-player kind of thing to do. They saw it as "What is he up to? What's he driving at?" It didn't come across to the people that I talked to as serious policy building to get something done.

G: What was Johnson's reaction to the speeches, do you recall? Did he retaliate?

L: I don't recall any specific, overt retaliation. I'm sure there are other people who were closer to Johnson than I was who could tell you much better than I. I can only guess about what his reaction was.

I'm sure that he wasn't pleased, but that's only because I can't see how he would be. I didn't have any direct evidence of what his reaction was. I think I felt that this foreclosed Proxmire's getting counted in on the leadership of the Senate, which I'd hoped he would.

G: I wonder to what extent the real target of Proxmire's complaint was the whole seniority system itself rather than the Policy Committee or the lack of caucuses.

L: Well, I think you should go back to Prox for a statement of what he was driving at, what his objectives were. I sort of concluded and settled in my mind that his purpose was to identify himself as a loner and put on a show of having the guts to take on the boss. And I haven't thought much more about it since then.

G: Anything else on the Johnson-Proxmire relationship during this period?

L: I just say this. Dick Bolling, for example, whom I knew since before he was in Congress, he believed in reform of the House. And Dick, they tell me and I've observed, wasn't the easiest guy to get along with in the world, but he tried conscientiously to build support for his ideas, and he won a lot of respect for what he was driving at. But you don't try to reform the world's greatest deliberative body by being a lone wolf and barking at it. You try to build support within the institution, it seems to me, by persuasion, and [you] get at least a good, strong minority to take a position that other people have got to listen to.

G: One thing I am curious about here, that Johnson's defenders in reply indicated that Proxmire could call a caucus any time he wanted to,

that Johnson would call a caucus or conference any time any Democratic senator wanted to. Did Proxmire ever ask for a caucus or conference to be [called]?

L: Not to my recollection. But that would support my feeling about it. If Proxmire really wanted to reform the way the Senate worked, he'd talk to one senator, his best friend, and touch base there and then see where he could go on from there to persuade others that "Here'as a problem, we ought to do something about it," and "Here's what we ought to do about it."

G: Anything on some of the legislative issues during that period that might reflect on the relationship between Proxmire and Johnson, like Proxmire's advocacy of reducing the oil depletion allowance?

L: Well, I know that in Wisconsin you have got to be against the depletion allowance if you were a liberal Democrat in the fifties. And I think that was pretty well understood. I think that's the position that Hubert Humphrey took and [he] did not make himself an enduring enmity with Lyndon Johnson in doing so. Paul Douglas was the great leader of that issue and still he was able to work with other senators on things that he agreed about. No, I don't think that the way the Senate works and the way politics works, people don't try to cut off a personal relationship just because they differ on an issue, no matter how devoted they might be to that issue, because you can't just take somebody out and execute them and then be rid of them. They are going to be there tomorrow if they vote against you today. And you might need their vote tomorrow for something that is as important as where

you differed the day before. I should remind you that I didn't work for Proxmire very long after that 1968 [1958] election. I left just a few months after the election actually, after the beginning of the new session, to go to Wisconsin with Governor [Gaylord] Nelson.

G: Can you recall the circumstance of your leaving?

L: Well, I wanted to get back to Wisconsin. And right after Nelson was elected, I started agitating for him to do something about farm policy in Wisconsin. I felt that I'd have greater scope for building farm policy ideas in Wisconsin. So I was offered a job there and went. I think I went out to Wisconsin in April, or maybe even March. So you see, the period when Proxmire was making his speeches against Johnson were kind of the wind-up of my service on Proxmire's staff.

G: But your leaving didn't have anything to do with the Johnson-Proxmire fight at all?

L: No. No.

G: Any observations of Lyndon Johnson during this period that you haven't talked about?

L: Well, no. As I say, I never worked directly with Johnson in the Senate or in politics or any place else. I knew him as a senator from Texas who often was on the side of the people that I did work with. You see, when I was at the Farmers Union, I did a lot of volunteer work writing speeches. Actually the Farmers Union was paying me to represent them in support of public power and farm policy and things like that, and one of the ways we did that is to help gather information for our friends. I never did any of that for Johnson. He had,

of course, adequate staff support for his issues in another part of the country. And I worked mainly with senators from Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, politicians from the Dakotas, and the area where my constituency was.

G: Sure. Did Johnson help Proxmire in the 1958 election when Proxmire ran for the full term?

L: Oh, I think so. Yes, I think he said good things about him, and I think Proxmire was able to represent that he was thought well of in the Senate and had a good future there. I certainly had that impression. I was very active in the 1958 campaign.

G: Well, what about fund-raising? Did Johnson help him with that?

L: Didn't know much about the fund-raising. Somebody else handled that. I handled the policy issues and organizing.

G: You headed the Kennedy-Johnson for President group in Wisconsin, is that right, among farmers?

L: No, I headed the Washington office.

G: Okay. This was among farmers, is that right?

L: Well, the Kennedy campaign ran it. I worked directly with Sargent Shriver representing the Kennedy family, and Will Cochran [?] was not in my organization but he was on the main campaign staff and he and I worked on the agriculture thing together. That is, he was my liaison directly with the candidate. And I wrote a few speeches for Kennedy, one of which he gave almost verbatim, advocating the use of more non-fat dry milk in the Food for Peace program, which he delivered in

La Crosse, Wisconsin, where it couldn't have done him any harm. It may not have sounded terribly original there either.

G: Did you have any association with Johnson during that campaign?

L: I did. I roomed with Ralph Huitt who I believe was heading up the Johnson vice presidential campaign. He and I roomed in Kaz Oshiki's apartment while Kaz, who is Bob Kastenmeier's administrative assistant in the House, was out in Wisconsin campaigning. So he vacated his apartment and I left my home in Wisconsin and came here and Ralph and I batched together down at Quebec House. So I had a very close association with Ralph at that time, and, you know, we exchanged information about what the two wings of the ticket were doing on policy issues and so forth. We collaborated in a friendly way and helped each other. We organized committees in the states. Now, these were primarily publicity committees. You get up a list of people in each state who form a committee for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Then you get a press release and the public thereby learns that certain people whose names they'll recognize are supporting the ticket. We also helped out in providing material for speeches and campaign literature and things of that kind.

G: Okay.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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