

INTERVIEW II

DATE: June 20, 1977
INTERVIEWEE: RUSSELL B. LONG
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Senator Long's office in the Old Senate Office Building,
Washington, D. C.

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G: Okay, Senator, we're on. Let me give you the list we were working from last time, 1955, and an additional list here. Down at the bottom, in 1956, the Social Security Act amendment, which reduced the disability age to fifty is what I want to ask you about first.

L: Right.

G: I'm sure you remember that one.

L: Is that when he's president?

G: No, that was in 1956. He was majority leader then.

That bill passed by one vote, or the amendment did. You voted for it and he did, and he persuaded Senator Clements to vote for it. But it was a very close vote. Do you remember?

L: I think that the important amendment there was the disability program at age fifty. That was one, if I recall it correctly, and that's the bill I have in mind, where several of us on the committee favored the disability protection. The people from the American Federation of Labor came to me and wanted me to offer the amendment. I said that

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I'd be willing to offer it, but that it was going to be such a very close vote that if you wanted to prevail on that one you ought to try to persuade Walter George to offer it. He was the former chairman of the committee. They went to him and talked to him about it, and after thinking it over he was willing to offer the amendment. And he made a stirring speech, a very impressive speech, coming down the home stretch. We carried that one by one vote. It was a close vote. But without that speech of his we wouldn't have made it.

G: It's been suggested that Senator Clements' vote in favor of that is what cost him re-election. Do you recall the significance of the vote as far as he was concerned?

L: No. I find that difficult to believe, because once we passed that provision most people thereafter seemed to think that it was a good idea. The opposition just seemed to disappear after that in fact; at least that's how it seemed to me. Walter George leading the charge for it gave [it] a lot of prestige that it didn't have before. I felt that there was no longer anyone dumb enough to argue after it was all over with, that the opposition just accepted it and that was the end of it.

G: Another very close vote was the minimum wage bill in 1955, which raised the minimum wage from fifty cents to a dollar. Let's see, that is on your other list there; I believe on the second or third page. The Republicans, I think, were advocating a ninety-cents raise instead of to a dollar. [It is] on page three, up near the top.

L: Well, the key there was that Lyndon Johnson thought that when a Republican president proposed something the Democrats could be for

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that the Democrats should go him one step better, and that's how we came to go for a one dollar minimum wage when the Republicans proposed a ninety-cent minimum wage. As I recall, Lyndon's position there was that it was a kind of thing that was basically a Democratic program to begin with, and that we believed in that kind of thing more than Eisenhower did, and that if we were going to do it we ought to go a step beyond and it should be at least a dollar.

G: I gather that most senators, or a lot of them, did not feel that he could win that vote, and there was a bit of surprise and amusement when he was able to pull it off.

L: I just don't recall.

G: How about the Capehart amendment, which was a day or two before? The defeat of that on the Housing bill? That's on the bottom of the preceding page and continues over.

L: I certainly don't know the details. All I know is that Lyndon was enormously effective in terms of which of these Democrats might be persuaded to go along with the Democratic leadership and that he made good arguments. He was quite a salesman, and I think that he made a big difference. That is probably why the liberal side won by a far bigger vote than anyone had anticipated.

G: The two nominations that I wanted to ask you about are the Albert Beeson nomination to the National Labor Relations Board and the Lewis Strauss nomination. Do you remember the maneuvering involved in Johnson's efforts on those?

L: It seemed to me that Lyndon always had a working arrangement or some

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basis to build a bridge of understanding to Clinton Anderson, but sometimes that came at a price. I think that Lyndon's opposition to Strauss was because Clinton Anderson was determined to fight Admiral Strauss. That, in my judgement, is the reason why that happened. Clinton Anderson felt strongly about it, as he sometimes did about things of that sort, and I think that probably explains Lyndon's position.

G: [Do you] have any insight on his role in the defeat of the Bricker Amendment in 1954 with the George substitute?

L: Where is that listed?

G: Here it is. I just have a line or two on it. It was 1954.

L: I take it that Lyndon thought that the Bricker Amendment went too far, and that the George substitute was something that he could persuade enough people to vote for to where it would put the Bricker Amendment in such shape that it would be a responsible amendment and something that the Congress could pass. And of course that's what happened.

G: Do you recall his work on the Goldwater amendments to the Taft-Hartley Act?

L: I just don't remember that.

G: How about Hell's Canyon? Do you remember his effort to get that approved?

L: Yes, I recall something about Hell's Canyon. It will take a while for me to recall just exactly how all that did work out. I think that I'll just have to tell you about that some other time. I do recall what happened vaguely. It was basically that there were some of us interested in some other issue, and so the Hell's Canyon wouldn't be

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very important to us. Lyndon persuaded us that we ought to go along with the side that he was supporting, which would go into Hell's Canyon, and some of our friends from the West would go along with us on some other issue.

G: Was it natural gas? Was it tied to a quid pro quo for that?

L: I don't believe it was natural gas. It seems to me there was something else. I can't recall it, though, at the moment. It had to do with some other matter. As a matter of fact, it might have had something to do with that jury trial amendment. If I recall correctly, Sam Ervin and certain others were contending with regard to the Civil Rights Bill that one who was accused of violating this measure should have a right of jury trial. The opposition was contending that a judge should be able to punish those people summarily, or without a jury trial. It became a rather heated controversy. I think Lyndon managed to work it out in such a fashion that some of the western senators would go along with us in regard to the jury trial.

G: Frank Church, I guess, was the one who introduced it.

L: I am not in a position to say who all they were at this point, but it seems to me as though he worked it out that some of those fellows would go along with us on the jury trial problem if we'd go along with them on the Hell's Canyon issue. That made a difference to the extent, I think, that the side he was advocating prevailed on both sides. Where Lyndon was concerned that was a double win, because it had the effect of making the side he was on prevail on both sides of it. Theoretically there was a trade-off in the votes with people on both sides, but

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Lyndon was winning on both sides with regard to that, because he was favoring the high dam at the Hell's Canyon and he was also favoring the jury trial amendments. So the way it worked out was something that he would be happy with on both sides.

G: How important was this strategy of his in his normal operating procedure of shepherding, say, two bills together in sort of a quid pro quo arrangement?

L: It was very effective that time. People make a mistake, though, when they think in terms of a compromise that people make on these issues. Those things don't happen when people feel very strongly one way or the other, but they do happen when people don't feel very strongly about the issue one way or the other. I know in my case, for example, I had voted against the high dam at Hell's Canyon because Herman Welker had supported my position in the Tidelands struggle and Wayne Morse had been very much on the other side. To me, the Hell's Canyon issue was not really important.

Now, with Herman Welker out of the United States Senate and the other Republican senator from the same state as Welker taking a completely different view with regard to the same type matter, from my point of view any consideration I owed to Herman Welker would cease to exist when Herman Welker left the Senate. So it was a whole new situation, a whole new ball game, one might say. Because it was between two men, Herman Welker and Wayne Morse; one of them had befriended me on a matter very important to Louisiana and the other had been just the opposite. When you take all those issues out of it, then you go

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back to look at the same thing where you have no obligation one way or the other to anybody, you can vote just as well on one side as the other. It was not a matter of great consequence to me whether you built a high dam at Hell's Canyon or a low dam at Hell's Canyon.

G: I get the impression that in his relations with Bill Knowland that he would either outmaneuver Knowland when he felt like he needed to or had to, or else he would more or less help Knowland call the Republican shots and put ideas in Knowland's head. Is this the way he operated here? Is this exaggerated?

L: Bill Knowland was a good, decent sort of fellow and a man dedicated on certain matters, but he was no general to lead his army any way except straight ahead. Now Lyndon was one who would use all the command that any general ever conceived to either attack from the flanks or the rear or to outmaneuver the opposition any way he knew how to do so. If you can think in terms of a tactician, Lyndon was all of that and Knowland was none of it. If Knowland had the votes his side was going to win, and if he didn't have the votes he wasn't going to win. Lyndon was one that just couldn't be counted out up until you'd counted the last vote.

G: Is that right? Can you recall any particular incident where he got the best of Knowland on some of these?

L: I don't have specific things in mind, but if I recall correctly Knowland had the majority with him, and yet repeatedly Lyndon managed to find some way to win on certain issues. And, after all, when you have a majority of the senators and you have a popular President supporting that position, it takes some real doing for the other side to

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get enough troops together to win with all that going against them. Because that White House is able to influence quite a few votes, and usually those conservative Democrats would like to work with the White House if they could.

G: I gather that he was often able to pick off a few Republican votes, like Senator Malone's, who would inexplicably vote for him on occasion.

L: He was great at thinking in terms of what it was that this person or that person was irritated about at the moment and taking advantage of that.

G: I see. Can you give us any insight into the working relationship between Johnson and Dirksen?

L: The two men liked one another very much and they were both very practical, as well as having certain things that they thought they'd both have to fight for and insist on, either because of their principles or for the good of the country. Johnson was such an effective parliamentary leader that he succeeded in persuading Everett Dirksen that it was to Dirksen's advantage to work with him. So just repeatedly Lyndon Johnson would persuade Dirksen to join forces with him on first one thing and next another. And Dirksen did that because he thought that it was a good deal from his point of view, that the help he was getting from Lyndon Johnson on the areas where Everett Dirksen hoped to prevail was certainly worth the consideration he gave Lyndon on the areas where he was helping Lyndon to prevail. So many times they got together and talked matters over and agreed that they would join forces in supporting one position or another.

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Lyndon was the kind who would recognize that it didn't make much difference what position a person took on an issue where the votes were in a large majority one way or the other. He was one of those who realized that the only time it's really important is when the vote was going to be close and the position that that person took on that particular issue or some aspect of it might be decisive. Now Dirksen, I think, pretty much realized those things, too. Those two would visit; they'd associate oftentimes long hours at meetings after the Senate had adjourned, and in talking matters over Lyndon would sell Everett that he ought to go along with him on one amendment or another or on one vote or another that was important. Dirksen, I think, frequently had something that he wanted to insist on, and as often as not Lyndon would go along with that, when he could.

G: Let me ask you about the 1957 Civil Rights Bill. To what extent did Senator Russell influence the final form of that legislation?

L: Those civil rights bills sort of run into one another at this stage.

G: You were talking about jury trial and how they were successful in getting the jury trial amendment in.

L: On that occasion the final settlement was pretty much one that Richard Russell was willing to settle for as being about the best that could be done under the circumstances.

G: Do you think that Russell felt that there was a need to get some sort of legislation on the record of the Democratic Party in order to be successful for the presidency next time?

L: I don't think that Richard Russell wanted any bill at all. But I

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think it was his view that in order to resolve the filibuster something would have to happen, and that the compromise that was worked out was about the best that could be done under the circumstances. So that this Civil Rights Commission was created, and the attorney general was empowered to seek an injunction when an individual was deprived of the right to vote. But the bill, as we indicated, did provide for jury trial when a person was accused of violating someone's civil rights.

G: Did Senator Johnson work on you on that bill and try to get you to support it, or at least to limit opposition? Do you recall any association with him on this legislation?

L: If you could show me what the final vote was and who the people were that voted for it in the end I might could tell you more about it.

G: Let's see, I do have a vote breakdown there.

L: My recollection of that was that Lyndon thought that that bill had been worked out to where it was something that liberal senators should be able to vote with--

G: It'll be item four on that. The fourth vote on all of those columns.

L: That would be the fifth item rather than the fourth one. Here's how I recall that: when the matter came to final passage Lyndon felt that the South had been accommodated to the greatest extent that it could be accommodated, and he also thought that it was a meritorious bill. And in view of the fact that he was going to vote for it, coming from a state that was part of the old Confederacy, he was hoping that as many southern Democrats as conscientiously could go along with it could lean the extra mile and go along with that bill. He didn't dis-

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cuss it with me personally, but someone communicated to me that he hoped I could go along and vote for the bill. I felt that my vote would be misunderstood and that the safe thing to do was to vote against it, even on final passage. And so I did vote against it.

I notice that Senator Smathers voted for it. I think the reason he did was because of the same type of argument, that the bill had a lot of merit to it and that those of us from the South had been accommodated to just about the greatest extent that one could expect under the circumstances. I was just looking down this list here to see who else besides George Smathers might have gone along with him on that. He had a difficult time persuading others from the South to vote for it. I notice that he did persuade Bob Kerr and Mike Monroney to go along with him, for example, coming from a border state.

G: It seems that Senator Russell could have fought it more vigorously if he'd wanted to.

L: I see that Senator Daniel also voted for it, coming from the same state as Senator Johnson.

G: Are we out of time?

Secretary: I think we are.

L: I wish I had more time to work with you.

G: Senator, I appreciate the time you have given us. If you think of anything else, let me know and I'll come back.

L: You might leave me some questions, and I'll try to go over them.

G: Okay, I sure will.

[End of tape 1 of 1 and of Interview I]

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