

INTERVIEW III

DATE: July 26, 1978
INTERVIEWEE: RUSSELL B. LONG
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Senator Long's office, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C.

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- G: Let me ask you first of all about your appointment to the Finance Committee. Do you know why you were appointed to the Senate Finance Committee?
- L: Well, in the first place I was interested in serving on the Finance Committee. That played a part in it. Hale Boggs was on the Ways and Means Committee of the House, and he told me it would be a great opportunity to serve. I finally decided I'd like to serve on it because there was only about one reasonably young man on that committee. They were rather elderly men, and the opportunity to advance would be very great because you'd expect some retirements or the good Lord would call some of those men home. That would give you a chance to advance fairly rapidly on that committee. It was a significant committee. I'll put it this way, it was more significant than I realized at the time. But I realized enough of what it had to do with that I decided I'd like to serve on it. The fact that it handled Social Security legislation, unemployment insurance, welfare, was more important to me than the fact that it handled taxes at that time.

I had been campaigning to economize in military spending, especially on these military bases, which had created quite a problem. Lyndon

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Johnson had never personally expressed unhappiness about the matter, but I had reason to suspect that he was unhappy about it. I think Richard Russell was sort of unhappy about it, too. They knew Stuart Symington would like to serve on that committee. Stuart had been the first secretary of the air force, and they were both very fond of him. So that made it, I think, even more to Lyndon's advantage to persuade me that I ought to apply for the Finance Committee. I don't regret it. It was a good decision from my point of view. I enjoyed serving on the Armed Services Committee. I enjoyed working with Dick Russell and all the other members, including Lyndon Johnson, on there. As I say, I was pretty independent, in some respects too independent from their point of view. It was a good move. I think it was a good deal for them and a good deal for me.

G: Was it your idea originally or was it their idea that you go on Finance?

L: I think that it was really more Johnson's idea than mine in the beginning. He told me there was this wonderful opportunity, that the Finance Committee was the committee of the giants, and he told me about some of the men who had served on the Finance Committee. That sounded appealing. As I looked into it, the more I saw it, the more I concluded that I ought to make that move.

G: If you had something, a piece of legislation that you were interested in, and he needed your vote on something, would he hold up that piece of legislation or get it just about to the point where it was ready to go through and hold it up until he got your vote on something else?

L: Oh, I don't think of it in those terms. When Lyndon was the leader in

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the Senate, if you were causing him problems he would find ways to cause you problems. He would be rather open about it as far as I was concerned. He would say, "Well, now, if you're setting my barn on fire I can't put that fire out unless I do something to give you some problems, because as fast as I put one fire out you light another fire. The only way I can get you to stop that is to go set your barn on fire. Then while you're putting your fire out I can put my fire out." He would just not cooperate in things that you'd like to do. All things being equal, it just wasn't a good idea, or there was some reason why it couldn't be done at that moment. After a while you would get the idea that unless you wanted to cooperate with him, that as long as you were making life difficult for him and making it hard for him to move along with his program, that you were going to find that things that you wanted didn't happen very easily either.

G: He went on the Finance Committee in 1955, didn't he, switching from the [Interstate and Foreign] Commerce Committee?

L: Yes. We had an unwritten rule that you couldn't serve on both the Finance Committee and the Appropriations Committee. Generally the Appropriations Committee was the most sought after of the committees in the Senate. I think he just concluded that he could look after Texas more effectively on the Appropriations Committee. Texas is a very big state. They have always been able to benefit from a great deal of federal spending. I think he felt that he could do a little more over there for Texas and for the things that he wanted to do.

You can do more to help people with their problems on the

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Appropriations Committee than you can on the Finance Committee because it has such a broader swarth of activities. In other words, it appropriates money for all sorts of things. You have a chance to look at people's money year-by-year on an item-by-item basis. The Finance Committee attempts to do things on a permanent-type basis, that is, on a periodic basis. At any event, you pass a revenue sharing law, for example, and it lasts for five years before you renew it, that type of thing. But with the Appropriations Committee they have to come back every year and ask you to continue their funds, or perhaps increase it a little bit, or try to resist a cut that someone else wants to make, year by year. So they have to keep coming to you more often if you're on the Appropriations Committee, and it covers a broader swath of activities.

G: Senator, in one of our earlier sessions you talked about Lyndon Johnson's techniques of molding a majority, and how on one occasion he parlayed one vote into three on that Marine Corps appropriations. Can you recall other examples of how he was able to get these majorities on narrow votes?

L: We had a fight at one time over the civil rights bill. Sam Ervin made the issue about jury trial, when someone was cited for contempt by these federal judges. Johnson decided he ought to help us with the jury trial amendment, and he put together sort of a gentlemen's agreement where about four of us would vote for the high dam at Hell's Canyon and about four of the fellows on the other side would vote with us on the jury trial amendment. Now I don't know to what extent that was portrayed as being just purely a matter of each person having thoroughly

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thought the matter out and decided to come down on that side. But that was a case where four votes shifted in favor of that high dam at Hell's Canyon, and then four votes shifted, or at least came down on the side of the jury trial amendment, on a completely unrelated subject, civil rights, something that had to do with the federal powers, to punish for contempt. Johnson was a winner on both sides, because he was both for the jury trial amendment and he was for the high dam at Hell's Canyon. He made himself some friends on both side of the issue. He did that kind of thing more times than one. That was a good example of it.

G: Would he know how to appeal to you in a situation where he needed your vote for something? What arguments would he use with you?

L: He could think of more reasons why you ought to vote that way sometimes than you could yourself. He kept a good book on senators. I say that in the spirit of a baseball manager, knowing what the various pitchers have on the ball and what the various fielders can do. Because he would make it a point to study everyone's background and know what sort of thing turned them on and what sort of thing turned them off. He knew very well how to get close to people and what to say to them, what might impress them, what might not.

G: Was Bobby Baker effective as an instrument in this regard?

L: To a considerable extent, and Bobby learned a lot from Lyndon. But I think that Bobby learned and he made progress. He would see how Johnson would do things, and he would admire him and emulate him, almost like a youngster learns from his father. Bobby could make good arguments as to why people should vote one way and why they should vote

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the other, but when Bobby writes a book and pictures himself as one who would swing a lot of votes, that's just so much foolishness. Bob would explain a problem in a way that might be calculated to make you lean in one direction or the other, but Bob had no following in the Senate as far as votes on issues were concerned. He worked for someone; he worked for Lyndon, and later on he worked for Mike Mansfield. Part of his downfall came because when Lyndon left Bob got too independent and more set out for himself, and Mike Mansfield really didn't feel that it was his duty to hold a tight rein on Bobby.

G: Johnson kept him too busy, I guess.

The one thing that I've always heard about Bobby Baker was that he could really count votes. He knew exactly how many votes, or helped Johnson know exactly how many they had before any measure was brought up for a vote. Is this a characteristic?

L: Well, Johnson taught him that, but anyone can do that. Working for Lyndon, all a person had to do would be to go to someone and say, "The Leader would like to know what you think about this matter. He would like to know if you could vote for this, or what your view about the matter would be." It really doesn't take much of a person to find that out. All it takes is for a person to be active.

G: Did you observe him during the McCarthy censure and his efforts to stop Joe McCarthy?

L: He maneuvered it around in a way that that censure was inevitable when he prevented the charge of the light brigade. Bill Fulbright offered a resolution at one point that would have, if he had had his way, led

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to something of a censure of Joe McCarthy. And the way he was proposing to do it, it would not have carried because it gave everybody the excuse not to vote for it. They could all say, "Well, this matter hasn't been studied. It hasn't been carefully considered." Instead, Johnson appointed this committee, and they were men who were well regarded and had the respect of the Senate and a following each in his own right. So that when those men met and they agreed that there should be a censure, Joe McCarthy had no choice.

G: Did he try to persuade you to go on that committee?

L: No. He did discuss it with me and asked what I thought about it. I told him I thought that if he did that, that that committee would recommend a censure and that it would be voted by the Senate. But it was not until the very end that I decided I was going to vote to censure Joe McCarthy.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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