INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: MIKE MANATOS

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Mr. Manatos' office in Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Mr. Manatos, at the outset, tell us a little bit about how you happened to get to Washington. I know you came out of Wyoming, which is a long way from here, and how does someone in Wyoming end up on the White House staff?

M: That's a great story; at least, I think it is. I'm always surprised that I ever ended up on the White House staff, or even ended up in Washington, for that matter.

I came from a family of coal miners. My father was a coal miner and is retired; he is living now as a retired coal miner.

I got out of high school in 1931.

F: Where was this?

M: At Rock Springs, Wyoming, which is my home town. I did the usual things that people did in those days. I looked for any kind of a job that would help us pay for the groceries. My dad was working about two days a week and not making an awful lot of money in the mines at that time. The best I could do for employment was a job with a poultry house cleaning chickens, candeling eggs and driving truck.

F: When they talk about economic recession, then you know what they're talking about.

M: I know exactly what they're talking about, because I was making ten dollars a week, and that was more than my father was making. Between the two of us, we kept the family going.

I had an opportunity, later on, to go to Cheyenne to work for the National Park Service as a clerk-typist. I stayed there for about six months, and was asked if I'd be interested in coming to Washington as a clerk in the office of the Senator-Elect from Wyoming at that time, Senator Harry H. Schwartz of Casper, Wyoming. I decided that, probably, that was a good idea; came back here and was with Senator Schwartz for six years until he was defeated when he ran for re-election.

Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney of Wyoming was the senior senator from that state, and offered me the opportunity to go to work for him, which I did. I was with Senator O'Mahoney for many years, until he was defeated in the election of 1952.

I was then offered employment with Senator Lester Hunt, who was the junior senator from Wyoming, and became his administrative assistant. This was the first opportunity I'd had to take over a Senate office as the top man, and of course, I was very anxious to do that. Senator Hunt, as you will recall, had an unfortunate end. He committed suicide in his office in 1953, and I was the one whose lot it was to find him that morning.

Senator O'Mahoney then ran for the unexpired term of Senator Hunt and the full Senate term, and was elected. So my second stint with Senator O'Mahoney was as his administrative assistant. One of

the interesting sidelights of that service is that I persuaded Senator O'Mahoney to hire one of the bright, young men in Wyoming, so that we might build a future political candidate, and the Senator hired Gale McGee who was then a professor of history at the University of Wyoming. Gale came to work as the Senator's legislative assistant. Gale and I have been friends ever since.

F: You had a little bit of a problem in Wyoming in that that state is not necessarily a Democratic state.

M: That's true. Wyoming, for some reason, is not a Democratic state insofar as the state offices are concerned. We very seldom elect a Democratic governor. On the other hand, we've had a lot of luck electing Democratic senators. It was in this area that I was involved.

I was with Senator O'Mahoney, then, until he had a stroke in 1958. He was unable to run for re-election and retired at the end of his term. It was about that time that Larry O'Brien was setting up his congressional relations staff after President John F. Kennedy had been elected, and I was given the opportunity to go to the White House as Senate liaison.

F: You had known O'Brien when you were in O'Mahoney's office?

M: No, I didn't know O'Brien. I got acquainted with Larry during the campaign. I met him a couple of times during the campaign. I knew Senator Kennedy, of course. I knew him well enough to talk to, but I can't say I was an intimate friend of his. For some reason the President-elect and Larry thought I could fill the Senate liaison spot at the White House. I happened to be president of the

administrative assistants' group, which might have had some bearing on my selection. My twenty or so years as a Senate staffer made me known to most of the senators, including Senator Lyndon Johnson.

That how I got to the White House. As I said earlier, I've wondered how I ever got there in the first place.

F: Senator Johnson and Senator O'Mahoney were pretty close friends, weren't they?

M: They were very close friends. As a matter of fact, O'Mahoney had intended to go to that Democratic convention in 1960, but because of his health was unable to do so, and he asked the Wyoming Democratic Convention whether I could be designated delegate in his place. He had only one instruction: he wanted me to vote for Lyndon Johnson on the first ballot; if it went to the second ballot, it was up to me then to vote for whomever I chose.

F: Did you go?

M: I did. We went there.

F: As I recall, it was Wyoming that threw it to the Kennedys. Tell us a little bit about how that worked out. I remember there was great excitement at the time as to whether he could make it on the first ballot.

M: Yes. Kennedy had a number of votes in the Wyoming delegation. I don't remember the exact number. Johnson, however, had more. I would imagine Kennedy had less than half the votes of the delegation, maybe not quite that many. Tracy McCraken, who has since died, was then the chairman of the convention delegation,

and Joe Hickey was the governor of Wyoming. He later went to the Senate.

F: You don't have the unit rule out there? You can split your vote?

M: No, we didn't. We voted against a unit rule. I don't believe we've ever had one in Wyoming. I recall, particularly, as the roll call of states approached Wyoming, New Jersey, which had originally passed, came over and asked if we would defer to them when it came Wyoming's time to cast its vote. We were just a little too alert to the possibilities we had. And I recall, particularly, that about the time Wyoming's name was called, Tracy McCraken and Joe Hickey, who were sitting in front of me, turned around and asked, "Well, what are you going to do?"--knowing full well that I was a Johnson delegate.

F: Did you have a personal commitment to Senator Johnson? Or was it just your commitment to Senator O'Mahoney?

M: No, it was my commitment to Senator O'Mahoney. Yes. I recall that my contribution to the hasty conference on the floor was that we would be absolutely foolish to pass up this opportunity to nominate the next president. It was obvious it was going to be John F. Kennedy. Right behind us was the District of Columbia delegation, and if we didn't nominate Kennedy, they sure were going to.

F: Wyoming is at the end of the alphabet, which always gives it a little difficulty to do this sort of thing, too.

M: Yes, very unusual. Because by the time they get to Wyoming, it's usually all over with.

I sometimes think that we ought to switch places with Alabama; just turn the alphabet over once and let Wyoming be the first.

F: Did you have any idea at the time that Senator Johnson would be offered or would take the second place?

M: No, I didn't. I thought that it would be a logical thing. But even after the speculation was that he was going to take second place, I just didn't believe it. I didn't think he would be interested. I thought he would rather be majority leader.

F: There were threats, you know, of a liberal revolt if Kennedy chose Johnson. This didn't infect the Wyoming delegation?

M: No. As a matter of fact, I recall that some of the District of Columbia delegation right behind us were very, very vocal and absolutely furious with the rumor of Johnson being vice presidential selection; threatening to tear the convention apart if they could. I remember arguing with some of the prominent District Democrats, telling them that was about as foolish as anything I had ever heard, that here a lot of Johnson supporters had voted for Kennedy; it seemed to me it would be time for the Kennedy people to reciprocate and do what the President-elect wanted.

F: When did you first get to know either Senator or Congressman Johnson? You overlapped him a long ways.

M: Yes, I knew Lyndon Johnson. As a matter of fact, I didn't know at the time, but shortly after I came to Washington I had a friend in the House of Representatives by the name of Gene Folger, who was the assistant to the the then-Democratic congressman from Wyoming,

Paul Greever of Cody, Wyoming.

F: That's G-R-E-E-V-E-R?

M: Yes. And Gene called me one day and said there was going to be a meeting of staff assistants, and why didn't I come over and sit in on it. This meeting was conducted by two Johnson brothers, and one of the brothers was a very friendly fellow who came down to shake hands with everybody in the group. When I told him I was from Senator O'Mahoney's office, he said, "Well, why don't you keep coming? This is a House group, but that shouldn't bother you. We'd like to have you come over for every meeting." Well, I never did attend any other of those meetings since I felt it to be an intrusion.

Some time later Lyndon Johnson was elected to the Senate and his office was located right across the hall from our office, from Senator O'Mahoney's office, at 232 in the Old Senate Building, and I used to see him. I didn't realize at the time that this was the same Johnson that I had met at this meeting. But we used to exchange greetings over the years, and of course, he and Senator O'Mahoney were good friends, and I used to see him a lot.

F: Do you judge the other Johnson was Sam Houston?

M: Must have been, must have been.

F: Is there any particular time when you became sort of friendly with Senator Johnson, or did it just grow gradually over a period of time?

M: He's an overwhelming personality, and I used to be on the floor of the Senate a lot, and he'd come over and talk. Knowing that I was with Senator O'Mahoney, he was extremely nice, very courteous.

F: Did he ever campaign for Senator O'Mahoney in those days?

M: He sure did. I recall he came out to Wyoming several times. One time in particular in a close election I think he might have made the difference. Of course, this was not the time when he was campaigning for O'Mahoney; he did that, too, but I have in mind the time that he, as majority leader, campaigned for Gale McGee.

F: Yes. I remember how affectionately he always spoke of the Senator O'Mahoney.

M: Oh, yes, there was a great deal of fondness there, real friendship.

F: This is skipping ahead, but later on when Mrs. Johnson began to move out west in some of her trips, one of the first ones she made was into Wyoming. There was no announced political reason, but it was the time Gale McGee was having a little difficulty on re-election. Were you in any way responsible for that?

M: No, I think I knew the trip was in the planning stage, and I talked to some of the staff people about it. I don't think I was consulted about it particularly. I thought it was a very fine idea.

F: Okay. So you moved over then into the White House under President Kennedy. We'll talk about that in a moment. But one thing that

interests me: you are one of those rare people, not too rare, who made the transition and who remained all the way through. Did you find any particular difficulty in that?

M: No, I didn't. Because I had known Lyndon Johnson better than I knew Kennedy, I found no problem in working for the President of the United States.

F: Did you see much of Lyndon Johnson while he was vice president?

M: Oh, yes. I used to see him a lot. As a matter of fact, I recall that at one of the briefings that President Kennedy had, he was introduced by Lyndon Johnson. And Johnson's speech was so good that I called up and asked for a copy of it. I still have it. It was one of those moving things.

F: What was this, a press briefing?

M: No, it was a briefing for senators.

F: Oh, I see.

M: Just a regular briefing.

F: There was some charge in those days that Johnson was still a frustrated senator. Did you see any evidence of that?

M: No, I didn't. I used to see the then-Vice President from time to time, and he was always willing to do anything he could to help us. My job, as you might know, was to count heads and make sure we had enough votes to pass legislation. And I found him anxious to be helpful at any time.

F: He was intent on getting Kennedy's legislative program through Congress just as much as Kennedy was?

M: Abolutely. Yes.

F: Where were you at the time of the assassination?

M: As a matter of fact, I was having lunch at Paul Young's. Mr. Young came down with a very sad expression on his face and he said, "The President's been shot." And I said, "Paul, that's a hell of a cruel joke." And he said, "No, Mike, it is not a joke." He had a portable radio with him, and he turned it on, and that was it.

F: What did you do then?

M: I just left lunch and went back to the White House.

F: What was the situation like there?

M: Oh, gosh, it was terrible, terrible.

F: Did you know he was dead then?

M: No, we didn't at that time. Reports were that he was still alive. But it wasn't long after that that the dreaded news was announced. That period is sort of fuzzy. It's hard to imagine the feeling at the White House.

I do recall that some of us waited for the new President to arrive, and I was there when he walked by. He shook hands with three or four of us who were standing there, and then walked through the West Wing of the White House over to his office in the Executive Office Building. He did not go into the President's office at that time.

F: Did he call any kind of staff meeting at the outset, or did he talk to you individually? How did he get [to know everyone]? Of course, he knew everybody, more or less, but most of them, I'd say, not as well

as he did you.

M: He knew us all. He communicated with us either directly or through Walter Jenkins. He asked us all to stay. I don't recall now whether that was in a personal conversation or not. But it may have been relayed to us through Larry O'Brien.

F: Had you gotten any feeling back there, in those early sixties, anything you could base it on, that there was a movement within the Kennedy group to dump Johnson in 1964?

M: No, I read these stories with a great deal of interest, but I couldn't detect any such movement.

F: Did you see any overt evidence of the schism between the Vice President and the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy?

M: No, I couldn't see that either. Of course, I--

F: On the surface, then, that was all glossed over, if it existed.

M: If it existed, I saw no evidence of it.

F: You had no hesitancy, yourself, about staying on with the new President?

M: Oh, none whatsoever.

F: You were going to stay as long as he wanted you?

M: I think it was a trying period. If the President wanted me to stay, I was certainly willing to. We have one president at a time.

F: As far as you could tell, was that a general staff sentiment?

M: Oh, yes. Well, no, I shouldn't say it was general, because there were some of the lesser people--I don't mean to imply that they

were graded in that sense; there were those of us who were appointed by the President--and some who were just staff people appointed by a presidential appointee, who thought they ought not to stay and that we all ought to leave. I don't believe it was because they didn't want to serve with Johnson. I think it was more a question that we came down to be with Kennedy, and he was no longer president, so perhaps we ought to leave.

F: Were there any change in your duties under the new President?

M: None whatsoever. I was the sole Senate man under President Kennedy and the sole man under President Johnson.

F: Under the two presidents, did you have any sort of formal liaison with the people who were working the lower House?

M: Oh, yes. Henry Wilson was then--and I assume you'll be talking with Henry--the House congressional liaison head. He had two or three people working with him. We were officed next to one another all that time. Of course, Larry O'Brien had the overall congressional relations responsibility. He was right down the hall. The three offices were right together there, and we were about as informal as anyone could be; walked in and out of offices as we saw need.

F: Did it make any difference, for instance, when someone like Barefoot Sanders moved in?

M: No. Barefoot came much later. No, at that time, that was after Larry O'Brien had left. When Larry left, there was no layer between me and the President, not that there was such a formal layer with Larry, but it was there in the normal routines President Kennedy and

President Johnson were both accessible any time by telephone or in person, if we wanted to see or talk to them.

F: You had, more or less, equal access to either president if you detected some problem on the Hill?

M: Oh, yes. You could either go to Larry or go to the President direct. Larry had no objection. One thing I did notice, however, after Larry left, you had this direct access to President Johnson; he was just totally accessible, any time of the day or night, by telephone or in person, if you wanted to see him. There was no question of what you wanted to see him about. It was just like I were to pick up the phone and say to you, "I'd like to discuss a matter with you," and that was it.

F: You had an advantage with him in his famed sleeplessness any hour, he was available. Wasn't he?

M: (Laughter) I made it a point to try to have something of real urgency to talk to him about!

F: Did it make any difference on the Hill which president you were working for?

M: No, it didn't.

F: Could you tell any there?

M: No, I worked the Senate, as I say, for eight years. I've never found a better group of individuals, a better group of people to deal with than those senators. And it didn't make much difference whether they were Democrats or Republicans. They were all very cooperative.

F: Whether you came as President Kennedy's representative or as President Johnson's?

M: No, it didn't make any difference. I didn't detect any change in any of them.

F: How do you account for the fact that President Johnson was able to push through so much more legislation than President Kennedy was?

M: You know, I've been asked that question many, many times. And I think that if you go back and check the record, you'll find that the Senate, in the Kennedy years, passed all the Kennedy legislation. It bogged down in the House of Representatives. And I think the difference was the forty-five additional Democratic congressmen we had after the 1964 election. The Senate ratio was pretty much the same.

F: From the administration standpoint then, you had a better Congress after 1964.

M: A better House. No question about it. Yes.

Now, one of the things that people seem to forget, for instance, I think this is a great example. During the early Kennedy years, we passed, in the Senate, a five-year authorization on foreign aid, and we managed to have backdoor spending on it. By that I mean there was no spending limitation on the program. It bogged down in the House, where it never saw the light of day. I think we finally ended up with a three-year authorization and a budget ceiling. If we had had the forty-five additional members,

Democrats, in the House at that time, the chances are we could have had that five-year authorization and back door spending.

F: Now, one of your jobs, of course, was to count heads. And Lyndon was a famed head-counter himself. How did you all count?

M: The way I did it, I worked very closely with the leadership, with Senator [Mike] Mansfield, and Senator [Everett] Dirksen, and Bobby Baker, who was at the time secretary of the Senate Majority.

Larry had a policy that I think was absolutely right. I learned a great deal about head-counting from Larry O'Brien. I think he is the master of them all. Well, when I say that, I don't mean to say that President Johnson isn't also a master, but I mean from our staff level, he [O'Brien] was undoubtedly the best. He has an instinctive feel for politics which I think is unmatched. Larry would never accept a count on a senator if I didn't talk to the senator. I couldn't go to a staff man and say, "How's your man going to vote on this issue?" That wasn't good enough.

F: Would he take if Mansfield says he's all right on this issue? Did you still have to go see the senator?

M: Well, if Mansfield said that he had talked to some senator on the floor, of course, that was fine. We'd take that word.

F: Otherwise, you saw them personally.

M: He didn't go for soft head counts. Yes, I saw them personally or I called them on the telephone.

F: Something that I can't put a finger on: everybody writes about, well presidential pressure in any administration and Johnson, particularly, as an arm-twister. How much pressure does the White House actually put, allowing for the fact that I cannot call up and say "This is the White House calling," without that in itself implying a certain pressure?

M: Well, I've found, since leaving the White House, that--something that I knew before--the fact that you are calling from the White House is--

F: There is a magic there.

M: A bit of magic, yes. But, when people talk about arm-twisting and forcing senators to vote with you, that's just a lot of poppycock. You can't do that. At least, I've never done it, and I've never tried to do it. You must persuade them. For instance, I think a fine example is this vote on the ABM system this year. We won that, last year, fairly easily. We won it only because I was able to persuade eight liberal Democrats to vote with us. And they bought only one argument, and that argument was that the President was going to sit down with the Russians, and the chances are would never build the ABM system; but, by golly, when he did sit down, he had to have this ace card up his sleeve. And they said, "I'll buy that." There went eight votes right there, and that was the difference. You could never have said to them, "Now, look, you have to vote with us or else." They would have

told you to go fly a kite.

F: Well, now, I remember your problem of a tax cut, which carried over from the Kennedy years into the Johnson years and was then passed. In that case you had, particularly, to get past Senator Byrd who was insisting on cutting spending rather than cutting taxes.

M: Yes.

F: How did you approach that problem?

M: Oh, I talked to Senator Byrd about it. And he just told me that, as much as he would like to be helpful, he just thought that this was the wrong way to do it, and that he couldn't see his way clear to support the President on this issue. However, he said that he was not about to bottle the legislation up; that if we had the votes in committee, to report the bill, and on the floor, to pass it, he certainly would do nothing to stop it; he'd vote against it. And he did. He was a man of his word.

F: Did you find it more effective to talk to your senators personally, or was telephone sufficient?

M: Initially, I used to go up and see them personally, so that they could see me and I could see them, and we finally worked out a very fine relationship where I could just call them on the phone. Depending on the issue, I would want to sit down with them.

F: If it's vital enough and close enough, then you're going to go talk.

M: That's right. Yes.

I remember an incident involving arm-twisting. I think it

falls into that category. Senator Mansfield once asked me to be sure to have the President call Senator Dick Russell on an issue. I've forgotten the issue. And he said, "We have to have Dick, and the only one who is going to be able to get him is the President." I remember calling the President and telling him that Senator Mansfield insisted that I call him and relate the situation as he saw it. And the President said, "Well, Goddamn it, Mike. I couldn't get Dick Russell to vote with me when I was majority leader. What makes Mike think he's going to vote with me now?" (Laughter) And he didn't call him. Or I don't think he did.

F: Well, let's go back to your time when Johnson was made minority leader. You were working then.

M: Yes.

F: First, for O'Mahoney, and then, briefly, for Hunt. Did O'Mahoney express any opinions to you on Johnson as a minority leader ? I know that Dick Russell really should have been the first in line for that position.

M: Yes, I know that O'Mahoney supported Johnson, and I would imagine that it was because he felt that Johnson was a more liberal-thinking southerner than Dick Russell. Although he had a great respect for Dick Russell, he was afraid he was not quite as liberal as a leader ought to be.

F: And so he'd take Johnson in preference?

M: Yes.

F: Did you watch Johnson operate very much as majority leader?

M: Oh, yes, yes. As a matter of fact, he used to collar me once in a while and ask me if I could do some things for him, even though I wasn't on his payroll.

F: What kind of things?

M: Oh, he'd ask me to run up and get a bill or some darn thing. Or he'd call me and say, "Now you get hold of Senator O'Mahoney," or "Get hold of Senator Hunt. I need some help on this issue. Would you give me a hand?

Of course, I'd say, "Sure, I'll do what I can."

F: In general, he and Senator O'Mahoney went down the line together, but I presume some places they had their differences. Did he ever talk to you to go talk to your senator about this?

M: I don't believe that there was that much difference between them. I recall that one of the early votes was the time when the Congress voted to cut back the numbers of our Air Force. There were nine Democratic senators who voted against that; two of whom were Lyndon Johnson and Joe O'Mahoney.

F: On the civil rights bills that started when Johnson was majority leader and went on through the whole Johnson Administration, one thing that has always intrigued me was the fact that almost totally, not quite, but almost, Senator Dirksen has come around.

This may be purely guesswork on your part, but why do you think Senator Dirksen has gone against what you would expect to be his usual stance and so often the stance of his party? Because, as you know, in most instances, he could have killed these future acts if he had really been aggressive about it.

M: Yes, I think that Dirksen is the kind of individual who wants to

see progress. And I think that once you persuade Dirksen that he's wrong in a particular area, that he ought to be going in another direction, he can be turned around. There are some things you learn up there. One of them is that you can't get cloture without Ev Dirksen. So the question is, whether it's on civil rights or anything else, to find out whether you can work out an agreement with Senator Dirksen; maybe take half a loaf or three-quarters of a particular loaf. I was always amused by thinking back to some of the things that President Johnson used to say. He used to say, "Now, you get me half a loaf, and I'll go back next year and get the other half. I want something to show for it." And Senator Dirksen was the kind of individual who could be persuaded on the basis of logic and justice that his course was wrong. He'd do an about-turn.

F: I remember on this authorization, for instance, of an atomic energy plant that was much sought after by various towns over the country, almost a nationwide contest.

M: Yes.

F: It went to Illinois, and there was talk at the time that this was a payoff for Senator Dirksen. Is it possible to make such a payoff?

M: No. I don't think so. I've never been involved in anything that would ever approach a payoff. I happen to know that that wasn't the case in this issue. It was the logical site. There were locations that several of us preferred, but the mathematics of

the thing were just such that it had to be in Illinois. And I'm sure that there was no quid pro quo.

F: What about the placement of NASA down in Johnson's home state by the Kennedy Administration?

M: Well, that I don't know too much about. I think that it would be more logical to assume--and again, I'm just guessing, because I was not involved in that--that this was something that perhaps Senator Bob Kerr might have worked out.He was very prominent in the whole space area, as of course was Lyndon Johnson. But I don't know how that worked out.

F: When you talk to senators on specific bills, will they stand still, in a sense, for you to educate them?

M: I didn't try to educate them. I would go up and tell them that we needed their assistance in any particular area. If they wanted to talk about the bill itself, I made no pretense of being an expert in all the fields that I was trying to deal with. I would take up a technician if they wanted to know about language and specific provisions of the bill. I knew enough to discuss a bill generally, but I didn't try to be a technician.

F: Did you work mainly on sort of the prime bills, the bills that are controversial, or did you treat all administration bills alike? Some of them, you know, pass with comparative ease. On others, of course, you fight like dogs.

M: Well, I worked on them all. Of course, we had our priorities, and there were some we wanted more so than others; but much of the

legislation, once you get this working relationship with the leadership, is fairly automatic.

F: Did you ever sort of lay off a bill so that it could continue as an issue?

M: No. No. As a matter of fact, that was one of the things that entered a lot of people's minds on the question of Medicare. I remember the year we won the Medicare fight, when we had a meeting in Senator Mansfield's office, and one of the senators suggested that, well, why don't we go to a vote right now; let's go to a vote; even if we lose it, it's a good campaign issue. I remember Larry O'Brien saying and Senator Mansfield agreeing, "If we go to a vote on this issue, we're going to win it. We're not going to just about win it; we're going to win it. And we won't vote until we have the votes." Which I think was wise.

F: In general, the administration does not like to put out a proposed piece of legislation to be voted down just so that it can advertise it anyway.

M: There's no percentage in that. I think if a bill is good enough to send up, it's good enough to pass.

F: If you can't win, don't stick your neck out.

M: Well, there's some of this legislation that you have to send up, knowing that not much is going to happen on it. I would imagine that, from time to time, there are pieces of legislation of that kind. This revenue-sharing which President Nixon has sent up is something we toyed with for a long time. I think there are a lot of

bugs in it, and I think that--I'm not so sure--but I would imagine that he doesn't really think he's going to get that this year; maybe, not even next; it may be ten years down the road. But it's an issue, like Medicare, which ought to be thought about.

F: It took Medicare close to twenty years.

M: Close to twenty years.

F: Do you have a sort of blank check on whom you see on the Hill, or are there certain people who are off limits for one reason or another? For instance, on something involving Vietnam, would you go talk to Senator [J. William] Fulbright? On the [Abe] Fortas nomination, would you talk to Senator [Strom] Thurmond?

M: Oh, yes. I had no limitations whatsoever. The President didn't have any strings on me. I had complete carte blanche.

F: Right wing, left wing, Republican, Democrats, nothing?

M: No. If we're going to win a vote, let's win it. Sometimes the combinations you put together to win a vote were very strange, but they were there.

F: Well, now, what do you think happened with the Fortas nomination? It's colored, you've got to remember by the later disclosures; but at the time that all this started none of this was known, but the opposition was already there. Do you think the President's decision not to run again weakened his power in Congress?

M: Oh, I think there's no doubt about that. I think that if we had been allowed to vote on the Fortas nomination, we could have carried that very easily. My head count--and this was based on personal

conversations with the senators--on the issue of whether Fortas should be chief justice or not we had at least seventy votes. There was no problem there. The opposition to Fortas was purely political. Strom Thurmond and others wanted to hold this vacancy for the new president, hopefully Richard Nixon, and it's nothing more than that. They'll never convince me that anything more was behind the effort. Later, of course, as it developed, the disclosures weakened our case considerably. It was still pure politics, and I'll argue that from now till doomsday with Bob Griffin.

F: Incidentally, how did Griffin get started on this?

M: I don't know. I don't know how he did. As a matter of fact, I remember bumping into Sam Shaffer of Newsweek and Senator John Williams, and we were kidding one another in the hall quite early. Senator Williams and Sam indicated that we'd never get the Fortas nomination. I said, "Well, we're never going to get it if they're going to filibuster it. That's obvious." If you know how to run a filibuster, you can talk for weeks. But I said, "If they'll let us vote, we'll have it easily." And they were kidding me that that wouldn't be so. And I said, "Well, then you're telling me that you are going to filibuster." Williams was saying, oh, he wasn't going to take part in a filibuster. And he did not. He thought that this was one of those things that they were going to make an issue of if the nominations were called up by the Senate.

F: When you decided to talk to a senator who is a little shaky as far

as your voting on an issue is concerned, did the President sometimes initiate whom you should talk to, or did you pretty well suggest to him who you ought to make a special effort to [talk to]?

M: No, the President would never call me to ask, to suggest that I talk to . . . Oh, I shouldn't say that he wouldn't call and ask me to go and see a senator on an issue. But he would never call me and say, "Now, you ought to see this senator or this senator or this senator. He could call up often and say, "What are you doing about it? Who are you seeing?" And in the course of conversation, he would say, "Well, how about Senator Fulbright?" And I'd say, "Well, I intend to talk to him."

F: Between January 1961 and his coming out of office in January 1969 is eight years and a lot of changes in personnel in the Senate in that time. Did he pretty well keep up on new senators?

M: Yes. As a matter of fact, I wonder if some of President Nixon's problems with the Senate aren't the result of the ability that senators had, under both Kennedy and Johnson, to see the President. It was never any problem. Any senator who wanted to see Johnson or Kennedy would just call either me, which they would do nine times out of ten, since I was the Senate man and say, "I want to see the President." And I'd either pick up the phone and call Johnson and say, "Senator Fulbright wants to see you," or I'd call Marvin [Watson], or Jim Jones, or whoever was down there, and we'd set it up. There was never any problem. The same procedure existed under President Kennedy.

F: Yes.

M: Whether it was Bill Fulbright or anybody else. You might think that Strom Thurmond might have had a little trouble getting in, but he never did, if he wanted to see the President.

F: The President was available to anybody.

M: Any member of Congress. And I think that this is a problem. I'm not so sure that President Nixon is seeing all these senators. They're used to this sort of treatment, and -- if the press reports are correct--to tell them, "Why don't you come down and see Mr. Kissinger?" Well, hell, they don't want to see Kissinger.

F: Senators had the advantage, or disadvantage as the case may be, of having known Lyndon for so many years as Lyndon. Did that give them kind of a special feeling for talking out things with him?

M: Oh, I think so, I think so. Senators [Dirksen] would come down and spend a half hour, an hour, talking with the President about matters that only the two of them would know. Or I might be in on many of those conversations. But I think that they had a special feeling about Lyndon Johnson, because he was a senator with whom they'd served.

F: Did you ever get any feeling that Mike Mansfield felt that, first, Vice President, later President Johnson, was trying to stay on, kind of doubling, as Senate majority leader?

M: No.

F: You see references to this.

M: Yes. No, I didn't find that at all. I think that Senator Mansfield was just the most cooperative and helpful individual that we could

have had.

F: Did you get a feeling--again, this has to be subjective--that maybe Johnson, as senator, had raised the Senate majority leadership to kind of a peak, and that it had topped off, or would have topped even if he had continued as Senate majority leader. I think it's generally admitted that the Senate leadership in the sixties, in some ways, was not as strong as it was in the middle or latter fifties.

M: Well, I think that you'll find there that it was a matter of different personalities and a matter of a difference in the way things are done. Senator Mansfield would never take it upon himself to say to a senator, "Now, look, you have to do it this way," or, "this is going to be our party position." He felt and he expressed many times, that a senator is elected by the people of his state; he is a big boy, and, by golly, he could make up his own mind. If he were asked for a view, he would give it to them, but he never tried to force anything on them.

And I have the feeling that Lyndon Johnson was a little more forceful than that. What he'd say is, "Look, I don't give a damn about how you feel about this. You have to help me on it."

F: Did Senate Majority Leader Johnson, or President Johnson, show any interest in rolling up sort of big votes? What I'm getting at, you're a senator from some state that it's not politically very good for you to take an administration position and they don't need your vote. Would he tend to just leave you alone and let

you vote your state's position?

M: Oh, yes. Well, on many issues, we had senators who would say to us, "Well, if you really need me, I'll vote with you. Otherwise, I'd like to get off the hook." And we'd say, "Fine," if we didn't need the votes. I'd say to many of them, "Will you wait 'til the roll call is finished? If the vote is lopsided and we don't need you, well, vote anyway you want. And this was a good arrangement.

F: They appreciated it?

M: Oh, certainly. Most of them want to help their President. There's no question about that.

F: All that President Johnson wanted them to do then was just to pass the piece of legislation with a comfortable margin?

M: Well, I think that any President would like to get as big a margin as possible, but as Senator Mansfield used to say -- I remember the first time I asked him; I said, "Senator, what's the vote going to be on this bill"? He said, "I'll take it by one." That was pretty much my policy from then on.

F: Did President Johnson ever tell you to lay off of anybody?

M: No, never did. He gave me a complete free run. He figured, I guess, that that was my responsibility and unless I goofed up somewhere, why, he was going to let me assume it.

F: Did he pay any attention at all to where you spent your time, or how many hours you put in, or how much you were in the office, how much you were out of the office, or were you just given a job to do, and he checked up once in a while to see if you were doing it all right?

M: No, he never did. He never did ask what we were doing, how we were spending our time. All he wanted was results.

F: After you were on the White House staff, did he encourage you, in a sense, to socialize with senators or to lunch with them?

M: Yes. He was constantly suggesting that this was a way to stay in touch with them. I don't think I really spent too much time going to lunch with senators. I used to see them all the time. Senator Mansfield was absolutely great. He would let me have his leader's office as my base of operations. And if I needed to talk to a senator, he would often say, "Well, why don't you just wait here, and I'll send them in"--or two or three senators--and they'd come in. Or I'd see them out in the hall or over in their offices.

F: What was, in your opinion, your toughest piece of legislation to get through?

M: Oh, I don't think there's any question about that. It was Medicare. We lost it the first time around by one vote. Bob Kerr has always said, "Well, we had two or three more in my hip pocket, if we needed them." And then we won it the second time around. To me, that was the biggest.

F: What made the difference?

M: I think the election. The first loss gave us an issue, even though we weren't playing it that way.

F: You didn't intend to have an issue out of it.

M: No, we didn't intend it. We lost it by one, and we hoped that we

could have won it. But as it turned out, it became a good issue, and we elected a couple of senators--I don't recall now who they were--and it made a difference.

F: You were in office, of course, during an election campaign. What did that do to your duties? In 1964?

M: The only thing that did: the President called me one day and asked if I would mind, when he went out on these campaign swings, where he had senators with him, going along. Of course, I was just waiting to be asked. That's about all. We went along.

F: You didn't get into the actual campaigning, in a sense, except--

M: No, no, except when there were senators on the trips with him.

F: No, when Johnson is making a swing, it seemed to me he's been very punctilious about seeing local senators, congressman, and so forth always got their due. This was without regard to party, was it not?

M: Absolutely.

F: That is, if he went into Texas, whether he liked it or not, he'd see that John Tower got his[invitation].

M: Absolutely. He never went into any area in which the members of both parties weren't invited. Whether they supported him or not, he took them along.

F: I was struck by this, by the absence of an invitation to Senator [Alan] Cranston.

M: Oh, I think that was a terrible mistake. It would never have happened under us.

F: Poor elementary politics.

M: Absolutely. President Johnson would never have gone into California in a situation of that kind without inviting Senator [George] Murphy. He just shouldn't have done it.

F: Did he sort of charge you, when he'd move into one of these states, with seeing that the proper senators and congressmen were present? I'm sure it didn't take much urging on your part.

M: Well, we knew that he expected that, and we'd send down a list of the people who ought to go along.

F: Some trips looked to be spontaneous, impulsive. But was there usually enough consideration that you could have your recommendations ready?

M: When we had the opportunity, yes. They would sometimes ask us if we had any thoughts on what should be said or any issues that might be involved in a particular area, and we used to feed those into the speech writing department.

F: Now, as the war in Vietnam accelerated, of course, you begin to get some divisions in the Senate as well as elsewhere, did this make any difference in your relationship with the senators?

M: No, it didn't. I think it made things a little harder. There was the feeling on the part of the so-called doves--and I'd like to stay away from names like that--but there was a feeling that we were spending too much money on Vietnam and we ought to be doing something more for cities and that sort of thing.

F: Yes.

M: But it didn't make any difference.

F: Was there, to a certain extent, a tendency to divorce domestic needs from international realities?

M: It made it more difficult for us to get the kind of money we needed for model cities, and some of the health programs, and mass transportation--that sort of thing.

F: Well, to keep up the cliche, there is that one that President Johnson promised both guns and butter. You must have been faced with that a time or two. It's got to be one or the other.

M: I think maybe that developed a bit early in the war, but I think the President felt that he could do both. It hurt us on appropriations mostly. The programs that the President sent up generally were enacted, or authorized at least. It hurt us, for instance, on highway beautification. It didn't affect us so much in the Senate. Again, the Senate managed to pass all of this legislation, even until the last day I was there, so to speak. The problems developed in the House.

F: Why is that? Just because the House, being elected every two years and being large, is just less manageable?

M: No, I think that, there again, you have that 1966 election which took away that forty-five [vote] margin I keep going back to.

F: Did you have a full warning of the March 31 speech?

M: No, I did not.

F: Where were you at that time?

M: I was at home.

F: Watching?

M: I was at home watching on television, and I just couldn't believe what I was hearing. But when it was all over with, I said to my wife, "Did you understand what I think I understood." She said, "I sure did. Are you going down to the White House?" I said, "I most certainly am." I got dressed. I was enjoying the speech. I thought it was one of the best speeches the President had made.

So I went down to the White House, and went up to the living quarters there, and even though I wasn't invited, no problem, just walked right in. I walked over toward the President. He saw me and said, "Mike, come on in." I walked over and said, "Mr. President, that was about the best speech I ever heard you make. There was only one thing wrong with it: you talked five minutes too long."

He laughed and he said, "Well, Mike, if you'd been listening to some of the things I'd been saying, you'd have known this." And he told me about a couple of situations which he felt should have indicated his attitude, but I didn't quite see it. I was caught completely by surprise.

F: This was on a Sunday night. What were things like over at the Senate when you went over there next?

M: Disbelief mostly. Because even the senators who thought the President might have a hard time, I believe mostly thought he he could win. To this day, I'm convinced he could have won.

F: You don't think, then, that this was kind of a political escapism, that this was a hard decision.

M: No, sir. I really believe that the President felt the only way he was going to get any perspective, any balance in this whole area, was to get out as a candidate; just step aside as a candidate; devote his time and attention to this one, big overriding problem.

F: From that time forward, then, you had lost a little of your leverage?

M: There's no doubt about it. Once people saw the light at the end of the tunnel, they were not as interested as they were when they couldn't see it.

F: You must have had any number of talks with Senator Bobby Kennedy.

M: I did.

F: Was he generally receptive to the President's programs?

M: Oh, yes. Oh, he was one of our best supporters. Yes. Never had any problem getting Bobby's support on the President's programs.

F: Did there come to be sort of a Kennedy clique within the White House left over from the old days? What I'm getting at, do you think the President made a mistake by continuingso many Kennedy people in office?

M: It's been reported that he has said that that was his biggest mistake, but I didn't [see it]. Of course, I was dealing with congressional relations mostly with Larry O'Brien, and I didn't detect that. I didn't detect it among, well, any of them, Mike Feldman, or Ken O'Donnell, or any of them.

F: Did you get the feeling that the Bobby Baker incident hurt Johnson?

M: I don't know that it hurt him. It didn't hurt him from the standpoint of legislation. I didn't find that it was any harder to pass

bills. Those senators knew Bobby, and I think they were all as surprised as I was that he was involved as he was, but I don't think they held Johnson responsible for that.

F: Bobby wasn't somebody who these things had kind of been whispered for some time and then they broke. It was a complete surprise?

M: It was. As a matter of fact, when they were being whispered about and stories started to break in the press, I was talking to Bobby one day, and I was saying, "Well, you know Bob, for crying out loud, it seems to me that if you're any kind of a friend, if you could run nothing into three and a half million, then the least you could have done was to cut me in on it." And he would say, "Oh, Mike, don't believe what you reading. There's nothing to it."

That's how surprised I was.

F: Did the Walter Jenkins' disclosure give you any problems?

M: It did not. As a matter of fact, I've often looked back on that and tried to assess the impact that had on legislation, and I can't find any.

F: It seemed remarkable to me that the Johnson Administration apparently got by without any sort of major financial scandal. You usually get one just on sheer percentage.

M: I think this is one of the things that the President's proudest of.

F: How did that happen? I mean, do you think he worked a little harder at it, and had a little bit better understanding of what the possibilities and probabilities were, and therefore could checkmate them,

or do you think he was just lucky? There has to be a certain amount of luck.

M: Oh, there's probably some luck in it, but I think it goes deeper than that. I think that the President was so interested in actually what was going on, everything that was going on, that it would be pretty hard to be doing something that he didn't know about. Because he wanted to know what was taking place.

F: Wasn't going to be like some residents, who are just as dumb-founded as the man on the street when the story breaks?

M: No. Lyndon Johnson knew exactly what was going on all the time. I would sit down and write a memorandum on a matter and make it as long or short as I wanted. It didn't bother him. He'd read them.

F: Did you get a feeling, in working with the Senate, that they thought that Johnson understood the intricacies of the government and got a certain confidence out of that, even though they might oppose him on issues?

M: Yes. I think that's true, and I think that even the Republicans who opposed him respected him for his knowledge of the government and the whole area of government.

F: There was always a lot of talk when he brought in budget messages, forecasts, and so forth, that he was juggling figures. Now, we won't argue whether every President may juggle figures, as you know. But was that a real feeling, or was this just some political sniping for the record?

M: Oh, I think it's the same sort of thing that we did when Eisenhower was President. The Democrats did; they used to snipe at his figures. I think it's something you have to expect.

F: But there's no kind of profound belief that this man is really monkeying with the finances?

M: No, I didn't find that.

F: There seems to have been as of August 1968 a disenchantment between many of the senators and the Pentagon. Did you see any signs of that setting in while you were in the latter days of the Johnson Administration?

M: Yes. You could feel it coming on.

F: Was there just too much exposure to the military brass or what?

M: No, I think it was the constant increase in the expenditures for the military and the statements, for instance, that Secretary McNamara used to make, the briefings he used to give members of the Congress in which he would say we had a 4 to 1 superiority over the Russians in nuclear warheads and everything. And he would project way into the future and [say] they couldn't possibly catch up with us, even at this slow pace at which we were going. And suddenly, everybody found that this so-called superiority had disappeared, and now we're equal. I'm sure that what they're saying-- and I haven't talked to any of them since the 20th of January--is, "Whatever happened to that 4 to 1 superiority?"

F: Did you have much of a job defending certain Cabinet members in the Johnson Administration to senators, or did that ever enter into

your talk?

M: No, I don't believe that I ever had any problems at all with that.

F: Some were obviously liked better than others.

M: Yes.

F: But they never really turned that against the administration when it came down to a--

M: Oh, no. I think that McNamara was an easy target. That's where most of the money was going, and it was easy to kick hell out of McNamara. But I think he was an excellent secretary.

F: And it didn't matter, as far as getting a piece of necessary legislation through, whether McNamara would win or lose a popularity contest with the Senate?

M: No, we didn't worry about a popularity contest as long as we were winning these legislative battles.

F: Did you ever see any evidence that the President was ultra-sensitive to this matter of popularity, and opinion polls, and so forth?

M: Yes. I think the President was sensitive to opinion polls, and sometimes I wish he hadn't carried them around with him.

F: Do you have tangible evidence of this?

M: Well, I know that he used to, once in a while, carry around an opinion poll and show it to Mansfield,and Mansfield would never say anything. But it seemed to me that this was the sort of thing that they're going to read anyhow. So why bother him with it?

F: Did the President ever, again as far as you could tell, change his thrust on certain legislation because he thought that the opinion

polls showed the public wasn't behind him?

M: No, I don't think so.

F: Once he stuck it out there, he was committed?

M: I think the President made up his mind where he was going, and he went there, regardless. It would have been a very simple thing for him to have pulled Fortas back and say, "Well, if that's the way it is, I'll just withdraw Fortas' name, or ask Fortas to withdraw, and send somebody else up."

F: Did the President talk to you about Fortas?

M: No. Well, he talked to me just before he sent the nomination up, asking me what I thought would be the reaction on the Hill. I thought it would be very good.

F: You don't think that that hurt the President on the Hill. I'm sure it hurt his pride.

M: No, I don't think it hurt him as far as legislation is concerned. I'm sure it hurt his pride: I think he felt let down. Obviously, Abe Fortas was as well qualified as any individual. Some of the things that developed later make you wonder about his judgment, but--

F: Not his legal judgment.

M: Not his legal judgment. He was a great individual.

F: Did you get any intimation that part of the Fortas difficulty, at the outset, was the fact that the Senate, in a sense, was handed a package with [Homer] Thornberry?

M: I think that hurt a little bit. I recall talking to one senator,

who said that, "Mike, I can go along on Abe Fortas. But I served with Thornberry over in the House, and he just isn't qualified to be a member of the Supreme Court." He said, "Of course, I'm going to swallow hard and vote for him, but that's a mistake." This was a good friend of the President's.

F: I know that this, again, is just a judgment, but you think it might have been an easier road if he had just pushed Fortas up alone and left the other vacancy until later?

M: Well, looking back on it, Monday morning quarterbacking in a sense, I think probably that would have been better if he'd sent Fortas up and then dangled out another spot on the Supreme Court for a more conservative type. The southerners and some Republicans might have bought that. I don't know.

F: Just guessing again, but you wonder if it might not have been well to pick a liberal Republican and hook the Republicans in on the package.

M: Yes. Or the suggestion had been made to me many times that, "Why doesn't he send [Arthur] Goldberg up?" He would have been confirmed immediately.

F: Yes. Why didn't he sent Goldberg up?

M: I don't know. I don't know. I never discussed that with him.

F: You had these various alleged breaks of the President, and every president, of course, for one reason or another, loses certain members of his official family. But you had a break with McNamara, a break with Goldberg, et cetera, et cetera. Were these real or

just so much journalistic and opposition talk?

M: Well, I'm not so sure that I'm really qualified to talk on them. But my view, just observing it, is that McNamara had about all he could take, and he really wanted to get away from being secretary of defense, eight long years, seven long years. And Goldberg, I think pretty much the same thing. I think he probably preferred the Supreme Court, but he was called on by the President to do a job which had to be done, and he took it. I'm sure he took it willingly.

F: Yes. Were there any divisions within the White House staff? Did you ever tend to range into two groups?

M: Oh, I think that's probably true about most White House staffs. I think you had in the so-called Califano group, which was the think tank group, and the rest of us who had to do the work, you know. I think it was a friendly rivalry, but I think there was a division.

F: There were no deep-seated betrayals of each other?

M: Oh, no.

F: [There were] no knifings in the back or anything like that?

M: No. I didn't find anything of that sort.

F: You just went separate ways to a certain extent?

M: And yet we cooperated all the while. But I think there was this little bit of rivalry between these two groups.

F: Did you get a sort of a staff camaraderie in this, or did each man tend to go his own way within his orbit?

M: I think there was probably more the going in your own orbit.

ecause everybody had as much access to the President, I'm sure, as I did. So that you did things with the President that you had to do.

F: Was it more or less the same under Kennedy?

M: No, I think the Kennedy organization was a little more structured in the sense that--of course, I can speak only from legislative liaison--Larry O'Brien was between us and the President, and he was between us and President Johnson for a while. By the same token, if you had to talk to President Kennedy, or if you wanted to see him, there was no bar. You could call him or see him at any time.

F: What did you call Johnson about mostly?

M: Legislation.

F: To request, report, worry him, or what?

M: No, I tried not to worry him. He would call me more often than I would call him, just to ask how things were going and I'd give him a thumbnail rundown.

F: Did you give him any regular resume of the status of various legislation?

M: Oh, yes. We used to send out a weekly compilation of the progress of bills, and he used to go over that. Then, of course, we attended all the leadership breakfasts every Tuesday morning.

F: Oh, you did.

M: Yes. And there was a chance there to kind of line things up?

F: Your presence at the leadership breakfasts didn't upset anybody?

M: Actually, it was mostly legislation that we discussed there. Of course, there were always discussions of foreign affairs and all that.

F: Was there anyone in the Senate like, well, easy examples are Thurmond or Senator [John J.] Williams from Delaware, who were so anti-administration that you could not go and talk with them?

M: No, I had no trouble going to anybody. I could pick up the phone and go up and see Strom Thurmond anytime. The same with John Williams. They were both [accessible]. I haven't found a door up there which was closed to me.

F: Did the President himself ever get at sufficiently intense cross-purposes that he just more or less rubbed somebody off his list?

M: No. He had some strong opinions about people.

F: Yes.

M: But he never went that far.

F: Was he fairly free--I won't embarrass you by asking for anything specific--with you on his opinions of various senators?

M: Yes. I remember one of his classic comments was about a senator. He asked me how I was getting along with him, and I said, well, that I was doing my best to get him to support us. And he said, "Well, now, don't forget one thing. He'll be as tough as you'll let him be." And he's absolutely right, because this is kind of senator you could practically--well, you couldn't lead him, but you could take him about as far as you really wanted if you wanted to be tough.

I mean tough in the sense of saying, "Look, we need you."

F: In the latter days of the administration the Civil Rights Acts, instead of pacifying the racial situation in this country, sort of, I suppose, gave enough hope as to accelerate the amount of racial unrest. Did this make particular problems for you on the Hill? Was there a kickback on, "Now, look what you've done."

M: Oh, I think there was a little bit of resentment. I think the attitude on the Hill was that we had passed all of the social legislation that was ever conceived in the last four years, and there ought to be some gratitude and some feeling on the part of the minorities of this country that maybe we had done a hell of a lot, and they ought to try to work with us, instead of having their marches and all that. And I think that had its effect on the Hill.

F: There was, again, some charge with the death of Martin Luther King right at the time that open housing was up and so on that this practically. . .The administration puts a gun at the head of the Senate. Did you run into this, or was this journalese?

M: No, that's pure journalism. Open housing was an issue long before Martin Luther King's death. It was a tough thing to work out, but we did work it out. It wasn't easy, but that had nothing to do with it.

F: Among senators, did you see such a thing as a real white backlash?

M: No. I did not.

F: It didn't operate at that level, anyhow?

M: No.

F: Did they ever talk to you about the fact that they did have that back in their home areas?

M: Oh, yes. [There were] many senators who would say that people are just getting sick and tired of all this.

F: You think it changed votes, or you think it just worried them?

M: No, I don't think it changed any votes. But it did worry them.

F: Yes. Of course, his first job is to stay in office.

M: Yes.

F: Okay. Have you kept up with your senator friends since you've been out of office?

M: Yes. As a matter of fact, the thing that makes me feel best is that they all still greet me with a smile and--as a matter of fact, I guess it's a compliment--they tell me that they wish that I were back. That makes me feel pretty good.

F: Well, from your vantage point, admittedly on the outside, do you see any change in the approach to the Senate over the way the Senate was handled during the Kennedy-Johnson years?

M: Oh, yes. I think there's been a great change. And I think probably that change is due to the fact that Bryce Harlow is probably the only real pro they have down there in congressional relations, and he's spread so thin that he can't devote the time to congressional relations that he ought to be devoting. And I think the problems stem from that. I don't think there is the rapport between the White House [and the Senate]. Of course, this is just based on what senators tell me, and what I read, and the things I see. There

isn't the rapport between the White House and the Senate. I can't talk about the House, but I would imagine the same applies to the House that we used to have.

F: Probably more so.

M: Yes.

F: I'm sure that senators, being busy people, sometimes felt that you took up their time. But do you feel, on the other hand, that probably they miss the kind of daily attention of being sought after?

M: Oh, I know they do. As a matter of fact, I tried not to talk to or call up a senator unless I had something to talk to him about. And I know from what I've heard, mostly from Republican senators, that they miss this. They say that they're being ignored downtown and they don't like it.

F: They want to be interrupted.

M: They want to be interrupted. They want to feel that they're part of the team.

F: When was the best time for you to contact a senator when you had a piece of legislation going up? Was there a better time of day, a better time of the week?

M: No, it depended. If you wanted to get most senators, you ought to get them before they go to committee meetings. But if you want to talk to Ev Dirksen you'd go to Mansfield's office or call on Ev Dirksen at his own office after hours. He was always available.

F: At what stage in legislation would you start, sort of, working

the Senate? The minute that it was sent over by the White House, or after you began to get some notion of votes?

M: Well, there were times when the President would send me up ahead of time, and ask me to go up and clear with Senator Dirksen, particularly, and Mansfield and Dirksen, but particularly Dirksen, depending on the legislation, to get his reaction to a bill. I'd go up, and sit down with him, and we'd go over it. If it were the type bill I had to have one of the technicians, I remember going up with Nick Katzenbach, when he was attorney general, on an issue once. And we'd go up in the late afternoon, and have a good, long talk with Dirksen, and find that nine times out of ten he'd cooperate with us.

F: Within the President's family, official family, what secretaries or heads of agencies did you find that you could work best with in working with the Senate? If I had to give you a choice of two of three people to go to the Senate with, to get something sold, who would you choose?

M: I guess the best salesman among the senators was probably [Stewart] Udall. Maybe he had an easier package to sell, but he used to get along very well with them. McNamara was very good, most of his time, until he ran into this trouble of Vietnam.

F: Despite the fact that apparently McNamara sometimes irritated people with his vast knowledge of facts, I gather there was a great deal of respect there for the man.

M: Yes. Dean Rusk was probably the most highly thought of individual

in the Cabinet. I think he lost a little ground toward the end when the feeling about Vietnam got out of bounds, but they always respected him.

F: Speaking of Udall, were you involved at all in that sort of last minute mix-up of signals about Robert Kennedy Stadium, and the setting aside of lands, and so forth?

M: No, I wasn't. As a matter of fact, I was as taken by surprise by it as everybody else.

F: You can't throw any light on that?

M: No, I can't.

F: What happened to the highway bill?

M: The highway bill bogged down in the House again. See, we passed the highway beautification bill through the Senate, but we couldn't get it budged in the House.

F: Why?

M: They just figured it was an expenditure we could get along without. There were people who were not too anxious about highway beautification in the first place. They didn't like the idea. Other years, we were able to put it over, but finally, in my view, the demands for Vietnam spending and all just kind of pushed that into a corner.

F: Was the general Johnson push for improved quality of life, beautification, diminution of air pollution, and so forth--were these things accepted as necessary, or were they looked upon as just sort of visionary by many senators?

M: I think that they came to be accepted as necessary, but in the first instance they were kind of a wild scheme that we had to sell. And

I think the President was way ahead of the Congress in that respect.

F: How did you sell it?

M: I can only speak for the Senate side, but I sold clean air and clean water by selling Ed Muskie on the proposition that this was something we had to grapple with and it was a hell of a popular thing. I remember kidding Ed. I said, "You know, if you really take hold of this you can be Mr. Clean."

F: Why did you work him?

M: He was the chairman of the subcommittee on the enabling legislation.

F: And of course, he had a clean water problem himself, didn't he?

M: Yes, he did.

F: So he knew what you were talking about.

M: It was just a matter of getting a person like Ed Muskie interested. Once he was interested, he was able to carry the committee, and the committee carried the Congress.

F: Now, where you had an educational job, would you generally pick a man like that?

M: Oh, yes.

F: And let him, in a sense, be your spokesman?

M: Sure. As a matter of fact--

F: That's more effective than Mike Manatos.

M: Oh, yes. Mike Manatos doesn't mean a darn except that they knew me up there, they knew what I was trying to do. But you get a guy like Ed Muskie out front of you on this, and he can sell a program. And of course, you're working with him, and he's liable to

call you and say, "I need a vote here and a vote there," and you go over the list, and you decide which votes you can pick up, and you go out and help him.

I remember one situation when we had to have Senator Lister Hill on a vote. I wish I remembered now what the vote was about, but we had to have him. It was that close a vote out of committee. I called on Hill. He was always jolly, just the greatest guy in the world. Finally, after we finished kidding one another, I said, "Senator, how would you like to make a hero out of Mike Manatos?" And he said, "Well, I don't know anybody in the country I'd rather make a hero than Mike Manatos. By golly, you're my friend." And he went on, and on, and on. So I gave him my problem. And he said, "Mike, let me tell you. I'll give it very careful consideration." That was about as close to a commitment one could ever get out of Lister Hill. I never bothered him after that, but he voted with us. Because you can only make a hero out of a guy once. (Laughter)

F: Okay. What determined what you were going to work on and how much you were going to work on it?

M: Well, as I indicated earlier, we had this master list of legislation.

F: With priorities.

M: What is called a "must" list, with priorities. But Lyndon Johnson was a kind of a generator of interest, and he was so thorough in his knowledge of legislation, and so interested in even the smallest piece of legislation. As long as it was on that list, he

wanted you to go out and win it. He'd go over the list with you and say, "Well, what are we doing about this? Where are we here, and where are we there? What are we doing? As a consequence, you'd sometimes get sixty, seventy, eighty bills on that list, and he knew them all. He knew just exactly where they were, and he'd follow them.

F: He carried a lot of the details in his head, I gather.

M: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I used to try to stay away from giving him a head count. Because if I told him we were going to win a vote by 56-44, and we won it by 58-42, well, he'd say, "You know, Mike, you were two votes off."

F: You created your own credibility gap.

M: Yes.

F: Was there a credibility gap with the Senate, or was that again just so much talk?

M: That, to me, was the biggest hoax of all. I just don't think there ever was a credibility gap, and I just think it made good reading and good writing for the columnists. No such thing, in my view, as a credibility gap.

F: Now, it's been eight or nine months since the new administration came in, and you say you've seen your senator friends off and on. Do you get any feeling of a reassessment of the Johnson years or of Lyndon Johnson as a person, among senators? Do you feel that their attitude toward him is the same, or lesser, or more favorable?

M: I think that Lyndon Johnson, as time goes on--I think it's already

started; I find it reflected in my conversations--is just going to take on more and more stature. There's no question about it but that senators are saying to themselves, and saying to me at times, that, "By golly, Johnson was one hell of a president."

F: You think, then, there's going to be a gradual--resurrection is too strong a word but . . .

M: I don't think there's any doubt about it.

F: . . . increase in stature?

M: No question, no question. I think that the more we try to get out of Vietnam, the more people are realizing that it's a damned quagmire and that it's pretty hard to extricate oneself.

F: Did you see any examples of these famous rages or sulks?

M: In all the years I worked with him, I was only given a slight taste of that one time, and that was toward the end of our existence down there, and was a very mild thing. I understand that he used to take off once in a while. But I wasn't the victim, and I didn't see too much of it.

F: So, you never got humiliated?

M: Oh, no.

F: Or shreaded?

M: No, no. I don't know whether that means anything, but I just [wasn't].

F: Of course, that may be a tribute to you.

M: May be. I hope that's the case. But I had no problems.

F: It never interfered, as far as you can tell, with getting on with the work around the country?

M: No, absolutely not.

F: How did you handle coordination? The various departments have their own congressional liaison people, assistant secretary for x or y, for congressional relations. How did you keep from getting in each other's way? In other words, how did you complement each other?

M: Well, Larry O'Brien set up a system eight years ago in which we'd have these weekly meetings with all of our liaison people from the various agencies. We'd just have our charts, and we'd go down the lists, and Larry or any of us would join in discussions with these liaison people. I remember that when we had the Reciprocal Trade Agreement bill up under consideration in the Senate, we had so many people from the State Department and the Special Trade Committee that was set up on the Hill that they were running over one another. You know, having four or five guys who talked to our supporters. And finally Senator Mansfield said to me, "Mike, get those goddamned guys off the Hill. We're going to lose this bill." So we pulled them all off the Hill. They were hurting us.

They would go to a guy like Senator McNamara, and four or five guys would talk to him on the matter. Finally he came to me one day, and he said, "Mike, goddamn it, when have I ever voted against you? What the hell are those guys up here lobbying me for? Tell them to lobby guys who are against you." You had to kind of watch that.

That's one reason that we had a system whereby I was the only one on the Hill working the Senate. And if we needed any of these

congressional relations people we would call them up. But as a rule, we would keep them off the Hill. They were supposed to do their work before the legislation was up, not when it was on the floor.

F: Once it went to the Senate, it was your baby.

M: Yes.

F: In effect, you called the shots from then on.

M: Yes. But they had the responsibility when the committee hearings were on and all during the consideration of lining up votes. And when we'd ask for a head count, we'd ask them to give us their count. Very often, I'd find that their count was absolutely terrible. You just couldn't depend on it.

F: Was that just failure to contact individuals?

M: Sure. They were talking to staff people. So as a consequence, we just made our own head count and worked with the leadership or I would call Senators personally.

F: Was, in any way, Mrs. Johnson an asset to you? Did she make your work any easier, or was she just out of it as far as what you had to do was concerned?

M: She was the greatest asset we had. She was the most liked individual up there, liked individual by members of the Senate. They all loved her. Oh, I'm sure the highway beautification program was attributed to her. No question about it. It was just that she was a great asset. Everybody liked her.

F: You had a real problem, which you never brought to any really successful completion, on home rule here in the District and increasing the

District's role in things generally. How did you handle that problem?

M: We had no problem in the Senate, because the Senate, for years and years, has always passed a Home Rule bill, and the House would kill it.

F: Same routine.

M: So, every year we'd pass it by an overwhelming vote, and then it was a matter of getting it through the House. It died over there by one vote, as you will recall.

F: What do you think's the basic difference between the House and the Senate? Why do you pass things like this in the Senate, which in some ways is supposed to be the more conservative body? I don't think it works out that way.

M: Well, I'm convinced that the Senate and the House have a game they play. The House passes some legislation which they know darn well the Senate will never pass, and the Senate passes other legislation which they know the House won't pass.

F: Do you really think that legislation is passed with the idea that: "I may not be for it, but I"ll get credit for passing it, and I know it's . . ."

M: Sure. They know it's not going anywhere.

F: Does your conference committee have pretty good power in working a bill out to suit--

M: Yes. As a matter of fact, on Medicare, you see, we put the Medicare language in a bill which the House had passed. So then, it

became a question of getting the House to go along on the Medicare program. And the first thing we had to do was to get the Senate conferees to stand pat, which they did. I talked to Harry Byrd: I talked to Russell Long; I talked to George Smathers; all of whom were against Medicare and said to them, "Now, look, we think that you're bound to stand by the Senate position even though you're against the bill, or you were against it when it was voted." And they all three said, "Yes, we understand, and we'll stay with it in conference." And that was the only way we got the House to recede; the Senate just wouldn't give up on the point, and the House finally took it, not that same year, but the next year.

F: All right, now, you get three pretty forthright opposition people on something like Medicare, like Smathers and Byrd and Long. Is there a respect at the House level for the fact that these fellows go with the Senate bill even though it does not represent their views, that would tend to make the House show more tenderness?

M: Oh, yes. And I think there was a little bit of politics involved in that, too. I have a feeling, although I've never had it expressed in so many words, that Senator Russell Long, and Smathers, and probably some of the House people figured, "Well, this has been twenty years in coming, and maybe it's time that we did something anyhow." So they just folded their tents and capitulated.

F: You're a great believer in the fact that you do have to have, frequently, on fundamental legislation like that, a long period of gestation and education before people come around?

M: Absolutely.

F: You must have watched the federal aid to education fight over years.

M: Oh, gosh, sure did.

F: It goes back to your beginning.

M: Yes, it does. And it was a long time coming, but it's here now, and it would be a difficult thing to change.

F: I noticed Hubert Humphrey saying when someone questioned him on the Nixon civil rights program that it really didn't matter, because civil rights has now created its own momentum. I wonder if that isn't true on a number of issues now, allowing for the fact that you can propel more momentum or less.

M: I think up to a point it does. But getting that last mile is sometimes the most difficult.

F: Did you get the feeling that Johnson, almost cynically but quite effectively, used the Kennedy assassination and the kind of instant transferral of Kennedy into a folk-myth as an excuse and a catalyst for getting legislation through that maybe couldn't have been put through so easily and quickly?

M: Well, I think there was some of that. I don't think there's any doubt about it. I think it would have come. Some of the legislation which passed right after the assassination was legislation which was right on the brink of passing anyhow. Had Kennedy lived, we would have

passed it. I'm sure we had some momentum off the assassination.

F: Okay, well, thank you, sir.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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