INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMAN JOHN W. MC CORMACK

INTERVIEWER: T. Harrison Baker

September 23, 1968

B: Back in the 1930's, you had been in the House of Representatives for about ten years, I believe, when the then freshman Congressman Lyndon Johnson arrived. Do you remember any first impression of Mr. Johnson?

M: Well, he made a very profound impression from the outset upon his colleagues, and of course at that time the leadership knew about him, and he made a very profound impression, favorable impression, and his interest in committee work on the floor of the House clearly marked him out as one who is destined for greater responsibilities and higher honors.

B: You said the leadership knew about him. By what means?

M: Well, the leadership knows about men by watching and observing them; by getting information as to their background after they are elected to Congress; of course President Johnson had been up here before he was elected to the Congress. He was at the Capitol, and many of us knew him prior to his election to Congress.

B: Yes, sir, as a Congressional Secretary. Was Mr. Johnson a protege of some of the older hands in the House, like Mr. Rayburn and Carl Vinson?

M: I think he was unusually close to the late Speaker Sam Rayburn. One might say that Sam Rayburn, the late Speaker, sort of looked upon him like he would a son. He was also very close to former Congressman Carl Vinson, who was one of the great giants of the Congress of all times. And he was also close to many others including myself.

B: How close was the relationship between you and Mr. Johnson?

M: Very close. Deep friendship and profound respect. I came into a position of leadership in the latter part of 1940, as I remember, when I was elected Majority Leader. Prior to that time I was a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

B: How do the older hands help a young Congressman in cases like that, once they've singled one out?

M: Well, they see him in his devotion to his work in committee, which is vitally important, because for all practical purposes the committees of Congress are the heart of Congress. Either branch of Congress with very few exceptions cannot act unless a Bill is reported out of a committee. That happens practically 100 percent of the time. And how close they attend to their committee work, their presence on the floor of the House, the speeches that they make, the effectiveness of their speech, logical, sound, their contributions, their associations with their fellow colleagues, their personality.

There are many factors that enter into the leadership recognizing that certain members are very notable, and if they stay in the House long enough or Senate long enough, they are destined for higher honors and greater responsibilities. And being in the House myself for 40 years, I'll confine more or less any remarks I make to the House.

President Johnson was--from the time he came to Congress, his qualifications and his fine qualities were known.

B: Was he fairly close in those days to Mr. Roosevelt?

M: He and the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt had a very close relationship. Particularly after he was elected to Congress.

B: Is that influential in the Congressional career? That is, do other Congressmen know and see that kind of thing?

M: Well, I wouldn't say that. A man makes his career based upon what he does in the House, confining myself to the House of Representatives--the fact that the President thinks very highly of him certainly is helpful, but I think in the case of President Johnson, when he was a member of the House, that President Johnson earned his position and his prestige and his standing, as a result of his own contributions in committee and in the House.

B: How about later on when Mr. Truman was President? Was he close to Mr. Johnson, too?

M: Oh, yes, he was very close. They were very close to each other.

B: Does that kind of closeness take the form of social-personal activities as well as legislative matters?

M: I assume it does. I don't know what you mean by social activities. Will you define what you mean?

B: Oh, invited to the White House for just drinks, meals, poker games, that kind of thing.

M: Well, I don't know of any such social activities in the White House as poker games. I never had any knowledge of that in the case of any President.

B: When Mr. Johnson was first in Congress, could you tell whether he had a sectional or a national outlook; that is, was he Lyndon Johnson-Southerner or Westerner, or exactly what?

M: I would say that he had a broad, national outlook.

B: Even in the earliest days?

M: Exactly, and that's one of the favorable impressions that a new member makes upon not only the leadership but his colleagues.

B: Did Mr. Johnson move into any of the groupings in the House? Could you associate him with the Southerners?

M: Oh, I would say he had friends everywhere. Even where he might disagree with them, friendship is transcendent. I have friends everywhere, even though my colleagues are in disagreement 90 percent or even 100 percent of the time, they're friends of mine, and he had

many friends. Even among those who might not agree with his philosophy of government.

B: That's one of the fascinating things about Congress -- the ability to differ on issues or on partisan matters and still remain personal friends. Is that difficult for many Congressmen to do?

M: It shouldn't be difficult for anyone because I think that one of the finest definitions that I've ever heard of a gentleman or a lady is one who can disagree without being disagreeable.

B: Does that apply to Mr. Johnson in his Congressional days, too?

M: Exactly.

B: He has a reputation of being a hard-driver.

M: Well, one can be firm. I don't know as you call a hard-driver--some people can construe firmness and determination as hard-driving. I don't. I consider it leadership.

B: That brings up the next thing, sir. When Mr. Johnson moved on to the Senate and became fairly soon, in a position of leadership, what is your opinion of the way he led the Senate? I realize you were in the House leadership, but your techniques of leadership and his--you surely are qualified to judge and give an opinion.

M: When he was in the Senate and in a leadership position particularly, and I was in leadership position in the House and the late Speaker Rayburn, our relationship was very close. When he was Majority

Leader, why, he and I would talk over the telephone or see each other two or three times a week. As a matter of fact, President Johnson's philosophy of government while he was a member of the House and the Senate, was substantially the same as my philosophy of government. He was a progressive.

B: Could you define that a little more explicitly, sir?

M: In what respect?

B: Well, progressive meaning advocating change in---

M: Well, advocating the passage of progressive legislation.

B: That legislation which is better for the welfare of the people?

M: For the people of the country, yes.

B: Do the leadership techniques in the House and the Senate differ any? That is, does it take a different sort of man to be Senate Majority Leader or House Majority Leader?

M: I would not think so. Whether leadership in either branch you have to have the qualities of leadership. You've got to have dedication, you've got to have ability, you've got to have character, you've got to have an understanding mind, and you've got to have courage. I'm not eliminating some other qualities, but those are the ones, as we are talking here now extemporaneously answering your questions, I pick out of the air.

B: Can you give an example of political courage of that kind?

M: Public opinion, as you know, plays a very important part in a democracy, and sometimes public opinion is very sharply divided, in its favoring certain legislation and in the opposition for certain legislation. And that public opinion might be stronger in certain sections of the country against a Bill than it is in other sections of the country. And for a member from that section of the country to vote for the passage of legislation under those circumstances evidences unusual courage.

B: Can you think of any specific instances in Mr. Johnson's career where ---

M: Well, as we're talking now, I cannot, but I know there were a number of them.

B: What went on in the famous Board of Education meetings of Mr. Rayburn's?

M: We had many of them. After the House session was over the late Speaker would meet in the room downstairs--you call it the Board of Education--we'll accept that for the purposes of this interview, and we would just sit and talk, exchange views. Sometimes legislation would be brought up and discussed, and many things were discussed there. And the fact that you were gathering there as friends under social conditions.

B: Is that the kind of meeting in which the business of getting legislation under way is really conducted?

M: I wouldn't say that it's a meeting under which getting legislation under way is actually conducted, but legislation was discussed, particularly where there were sharp divisions existing among the members of the House.

B: It's in that kind of meeting where they are smoothed over?

M: For example, I can remember when the Bill to admit Hawaii and Alaska was pending in the House, had been pending for several years, and was coming to a head. The late Speaker did not favor the Bill for their admission, because he thought that any admission of new states should be of contiguous territory to the continental United States. Well, the late Speaker was absolutely sincere in his position, but that never even remotely entered my mind. And I know it never even remotely entered the mind of the President when he was in the Senate. And we'd discuss it, and both the President, when he was in the Senate, and I looked eye to eye on the admission of both of the then territories into statehood. And he and I would talk with the late Speaker, one or two others might be there, and while we didn't change his mind, we, in discussing with him, would say, "Well, they're bound to be admitted some time in the Union; it's inescapable, and why not admit them now while the Democrats are in control?

And while the late Speaker didn't change his position on contiguous territory, he did state that he had no objection to the Bill coming up, which was, of course a very marked step forward in the resolution coming up and in the admission of Hawaii and Alaska

into the Union. I refer to that as an illustration of where the President, when he was in the Senate, and I were in complete agreement. And that's one of the conversations that took place down there which played a very important part in the admission of Alaska and Hawaii into the Union at that time.

B: Do you recall any similar cases of disagreement in those years, sir?

M: There would be very little --- most Bills the three of us looked eye to eye on. It's only rarely, occasionally, that something like that would arise. The late Speaker was a progressive, President Johnson, in Congress and as President, certainly is a progressive, and throughout my years I've clearly shown that I am a progressive. It might be on one Bill here and there that one might be more progressive than the other. But the disagreements were very few and far between, or the differences. And only rarely would it arise, because the three of us favored the passage of progressive legislation. It might be some provision of the Bill one didn't favor going as far as the other two did, but on the question of the legislation, practically all of the progressive Bills were supported by the three of us.

B: During the Eisenhower years, sir, do you remember any conscious attempt to sort of mute partisanship during the years of a Republican President and a Democratic Congress when you and Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson were all in leadership positions?

M: I think the minimum of partisanship existed during those eight years. The three of us, after Mr. Eisenhower took office gave the leadership of constructiveness. We did not feel that the Democratic Party with President Eisenhower in the White House should be a party of blind opposition. And we shouldn't just simply oppose legislation that a President elected as a Republican recommended. That if we supported legislation he recommended we should support him, constructively. If we opposed it, we should oppose it constructively. If we supported in part and opposed in part, we should support constructively the part we supported and the part we opposed, we should offer our substitute. Or our alternative. So that the Democratic Party in the Congress during the eight years of President Eisenhower's two administrations was a constructive influence. We certainly took the opposite to many of the actions of our Republican colleagues while Democrats were in ---a President was in the White House elected as a Democrat in their taking practically a position of opposing. And the roll call votes show that, and support this statement of mine, and we were a constructive party because we felt that a party not in control of the White House owed a responsibility to the people to act constructively. And we also thought that a minority party under Constitutional set-up should not be a party of blind opposition, just one of opposition, but should be

constructive---play a constructive role. And we did that during the eight years that President Eisenhower was the Chief Executive of our country. Now, I'll give you an illustration, if I may. President Eisenhower recommended, as I remember, increasing the minimum wage from 75¢ to 90¢. Well, of course, we were for that. But we were for more. So, we put a Bill through increasing it to a dollar.

Another illustration is President Eisenhower recommended the legislation to build forty-one or -two thousand miles of interstate highway system. And as I remember in his recommendation, he proposed that the financing be done by the establishment of a corporation with the authority to issue bonds. Well, we Democrats agreed with his recommendation on the interstate highway system, but we disagreed as to the financing. Because we felt that the establishment of a corporation to issue bonds would result in the long-run in the taxpayers' paying at least two, if not three times, more for the building of the interstate highway system than if we had direct taxation for that purpose. So, we took the hard way and imposed taxes, took the position that we should impose additional taxes to put into a trust fund for the purpose of building the system. And that's an illustration of where we constructively supported him in a major part of his recommendation but we constructively opposed him and constructively proposed our substitute on another major part of the

recommendation in the legislation that he recommended.

B: A monent ago, sir, you made a reference to a Republican Congress and a Democratic President. Was that a reference under the 80th Congress under Truman? Would you consider the 80th Congress the same kind of constructive opposition you have just described?

M: Constructive opposition from whom?

B: When the Republicans controlled Congress while a Democratic President was in office.

M: Well, of course, the recommendations of President Truman were supported by the great majority of the Democratic members. We've always pursued a constructive policy whether we were in the majority or in the minority. I'm talking about now since I've been in Congress.

B: Do you recall the 1956 Democratic Convention when Lyndon Johnson was considered for the vice-presidential nomination? I was wondering about your opinion about how hard he tried then to get the nomination?

M: In 1956?

B: Yes, sir. That's when Mr. Stevenson threw the convention open, and Mr. Johnson was in the running.

M: I thought the contest then was between the late President John F. Kennedy and ex-Senator (Estes) Kefauver.

B: Yes, sir, it ended up being between those two, but in the preliminaries, there was some talk that Mr. Johnson was interested.

M: Well, as we're talking now, my recollection of that is so faint I wouldn't feel qualified to give any kind of an authoritative answer to it. I could talk more about the 1960 Convention. I was Chairman of the Platform Committee in the 1944 Democratic Convention, I was Chairman of the Platform Committee in the 1952 Convention, and Chairman of the Platform Committee in the 1956 Convention. Now in 1960, as I remember, I was Chairman of the Massachusetts delegation---I say that with a little degree of hesitancy. I was a delegate. For two years prior to the 1960 Convention, I was satisfied that the strongest ticket we could present to the people was John F. Kennedy for President, Lyndon B. Johnson for Vice-President. I thought that was the one ticket that could go to the people of the country with the strongest hope of a Democratic success.

B: At this point, had you communicated that to Mr. Johnson?

M: Oh, yes, my views were known by the late Speaker and the then United States Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, now President Johnson. We used to meet downstairs, and while we never discussed it, my views were known.

B: Had you also communicated them to Mr. Kennedy?

M: Oh, yes, my views were known. I couldn't see a Johnson-Kennedy ticket as winning. I couldn't see a Johnson-anyone else without mentioning names, other than Johnson, Lyndon B. Johnson, as presenting to the American people---not only two men who had the qualities to be President of the United States, but the strongest combination from the angle of the Democratic Party.

B: When did Mr. Kennedy first begin seriously considering Mr. Johnson as his running mate?

M: I'm unable to answer that question. I do know this--that I advised ---- in talking with his father some weeks, if not some few months before the Convention, I told him that I thought that in the event of his son, John F. Kennedy, being nominated, I'm talking now back then, because I now say the late President--- being nominated, that the best running mate he could have was Lyndon B. Johnson, and at the Convention I also mentioned that to the late President himself.

B: What was Mr. Joseph Kennedy's reaction when you told him that?

M: Well, he listened to me, and I didn't---I wouldn't say he gave any reaction, I didn't give it to him---I didn't make that observation for him to give me a reaction, I made the observation so that he would know what my views were.

Certainly I found no hostility, but I remember on talking with others, neither Joseph Kennedy or the late President, but others close, they'd make the comment that Lyndon Johnson, then United States Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, wouldn't take the nomination of Vice-President. And I said, "I agree with you now, but if, in the event of John Kennedy's being nominated, and then he offers the Vice-Presidency to Lyndon B. Johnson, that in a split second, both Lyndon B. Johnson and Sam Rayburn, being responsible men, will rise to their responsibility and I have every confidence that at the particular point when the nomination for President has been made and offered---if it is offered to Lyndon B. Johnson, that both Lyndon B. Johnson and Sam Rayburn would do the things that they should do, because they're both responsible men and I have every confidence that Lyndon Johnson would accept the offer, or the suggestion made to him by the nominee of the Democratic Party in 1960."

B: There has been some talk that at least some of the Kennedy advisors felt offering Mr. Johnson the vice-presidential position was a shrewd political ploy but that he would not take it.

M: I have no knowledge about that. I would say that when the late President offered---the late President was certainly sincere.

B: Was there any dissension among the other Kennedy advisors?

M: I don't know. In the 1960 Convention, the late President designated me to handle his campaign in the Convention in Los Angeles and that meant, of course, on the floor of the House with Senator Ribicoff, because of my knowledge of parliamentary law, I assumed, and the many friends I had developed throughout the county.

I was confident he would be nominated on the first ballot from my survey, and of course he was. And when President Johnson was asked by him to be his running-mate as Vice-President, that made me very, very happy. And while the roll call of states for Vice-President was going on, there was a lot of excitement in certain directions. What might be called the rule-or-ruin group.

B: Can you identify them more specifically?

M: No need of identifying them. There's a certain rule-or-ruin group; if they can't rule, they'll ruin if they can. And you can't argue with them. They were scampering all around the floor trying to get members to vote against Lyndon B. Johnson. Probably didn't care who they voted for, so I made the motion to suspend the rules, that he be nominated by acclamation, which was a very important motion at that time, because that avoided the call of the States.

B: There was also some indication, sir, that Mr. Rayburn was at first hesitant about Mr. Johnson's taking the vice-presidential position and that you, among others, were influential in talking Mr. Rayburn

into changing his mind. Is that correct?

M: I think the first part of your question--there's complete substance to it. But I never talked with him about changing his mind. I didn't have to. Knowing the late Speaker as I did, I knew he'd do the right thing at the right time.

B: You mean at the Convention itself you did not see Mr. Rayburn?

M: I did not speak to Mr. Rayburn at that time, no. But I knew that with the nomination of the late President in the 1960 Convention, if he offered the second place to Senator Johnson, I had every confidence, knowing both men, that they'd do the things that they ought to do. Even in a split second--they wouldn't have to consider for months whether they would or not. All the weeks and months prior to that, they could honestly say they wouldn't accept it, but when the nomination for presidency was accomplished, and the Convention had acted, and the nominee of the party offered them, I had such confidence in the late Speaker Rayburn and in the then United States Senator Lyndon B. Johnson that I knew they'd do the right thing at the right time. They're both men of character, and I knew that at that time--no matter what their inward feelings or disappointment might be--that they would accept, and that Lyndon Johnson would be the running-mate of John F. Kennedy. I have no hesitancy in my mind, basing my opinion on my knowledge of the two men.

B: Precisely what do you think Mr. Johnson added to the ticket, sir?

M: Well, to begin with, the American people knew that he was a man capable of being President of the United States if anything should happen to the Democratic nominee after his election, which is important. It's vitally important for Conventions to nominate men for second place who have all the qualities of Presidents--to be President of the United States. And the then Senator Johnson had a very favorable national standing and prestige and image. He also came from a part of the country which was very important from a political angle, so it's not alone political that he was added to it, but his great capacity, the respect held for him throughout the country, but then the fact that he came from Texas, from a political angle, was of vital importance not only in connection with Texas, but in connection with other states in the Southern part of the country, but not confined because Lyndon Johnson added something---in a number of States in the Union.

B: Was he an effective campaigner in that election?

M: Yes.

B: In any particular area? Was his effect most notable in the South, for example?

M: Well, no, he came up to Boston that year and several hundred thousand persons turned out--well, at least 300,000 persons turned

out from on the streets. At the rally he had that night in Boston, there was a big overflow rally with thousands outside unable to get in. And he had evidenced by his leadership in the Senate a refreshing and courageous, progressive leadership that impressed itself upon the people of the country.

B: This isn't directly related to Mr. Johnson, perhaps, sir, but it's worth asking. How big an issue was Mr. Kennedy's Catholicism in the 1960 election?

M: I would say that underneath the surface that it was there. At that time, you want to remember that the ecumenical spirit did not exist like it does today when you're interviewing me. And I would say that in some states of the Union, without bigotry existing, but people misunderstanding--in some cases some people deliberate--but they're in the marked minority; nevertheless, I would say that in some states of the Union it was the difference between victory and defeat in that particular state.

B: Can you think of any specific examples of states?

M: I can, but I'm not going to mention any particular state at this time.

B: You feel that the issue has perhaps been stilled for good now?

M: That issue on religion, I think, has been stilled, as you say, for good. Who can tell for good? That's looking into the future for countless of decades. The probability is that it has been stilled for good. There's always a minimum everywhere. It's a minimum that

I don't think would have much effect in any particular election. There are other emotional influences existing in the world of today besides the religious, emotional reaction.

B: You mean perhaps issues like race are now more ---

M: Yes, there's a reaction to many things existing today. But I would say the religious question probably in America, is at an irreducible minimum, and that as I look into the future, that would continue for far beyond the time I can look into.

B: To move on into Mr. Kennedy's years as President, what kind of rapport did Mr. Kennedy have with Congress and the Congressional leadership?

M: His relationship with the Congressional leadership was very close. Very friendly. We have always had frank discussions. In the leaders' meeting, we frankly tell the President what the chances are on this and that Bill. Of course, when you have a progressive President, and you have progressive leadership, there is very little area of disagreement, because we're all in favor of progressive legislation. And the relationship of President Kennedy was very close--of course, it was particularly close in the case of President Johnson. President Kennedy, unfortunately, didn't live long enough to see the greater part of his program enacted into law. And President Johnson followed through with his own additional

recommendations and the accomplishments of the Democratic Congresses under his leadership as President have been amazingly outstanding.

B: Why do you suppose it was, sir, that Mr. Kennedy's legislative program did seem to get bogged down?

M: Well, I wouldn't say it got bogged down. I would say that he didn't live long enough---of course, when far-reaching legislation is recommended, it takes two to four, six years to get started. And I am not prepared to say that his legislative program was bogged down. Unfortunately, he was assassinated at a time when many of his recommendations were in the process of Committee consideration and being reported out and acted upon by the Congress.

B: Do you feel that they would have been enacted?

M: I would feel that most of them would have been enacted upon, if he had lived, before his first term was over. Before his term was over and of course, I say this first term, if he had lived, he'd have been, in my opinion, re-elected for a second term.

B: I ask this next question with some hesitation, but I feel the future historian is going to notice it and wonder about it. About your individual personal relationship with Mr. Kennedy.

M: I'm very glad you asked that question.

B: There has been a good deal written about Massachusetts politics, and whether or not he would have preferred someone else as Speaker

and so on. Would you comment on that?

M: The relationship between the late President and myself was very friendly. Of course, commentators, or columnists, are not always right. They have to write something that's controversial or sensational, and one of their pet hobbies was writing about the relationship between the late President and myself. As a matter of fact, in 1946 when he first ran for the House of Representatives in Congress, I was the one he came to for advice as to whether or not he would be a candidate. When he left my office, he announced his candidacy the next morning.

In 1952 when he was running for the Senate and Henry Cabot Lodge was up for re-election on the Republican side, and he was a very strong candidate, I played a very important part in that campaign. Because through some misunderstanding, the Americans of Jewish blood, our American friends of Jewish blood, had misjudged him, and I was one man in Massachusetts that they had tremendous confidence in, whom they would listen to, and I was able to, I think, bring them back on the line for the late President when he was a candidate for senator in 1952.

B: How did the misapprehension come about?

M: Well, those misapprehensions do arise, and they did at that

particular time. Arose and it seemed that some few years prior to that someone of my enemies wrote a poem about me called "Rabbi John." And it became widely known, and, of course, put me in a position where with reference to those of Jewish blood I was much stronger than I could get into from a political angle. And while at this time of our interview, years have gone by, and it's not as strong as it was then, it was particularly strong at that time.

B: I believe it was in 1956 when there was a struggle over the Democratic State Committee in Massachusetts and then when your nephew and the President's younger brother ran in the primary--this kind of thing did not leave any bad blood or ill-feeling?

M: No, no. No, in the contest for the chairmanship of the State Committee a very good friend of mine, William H. Burke, Jr.--he had been chairman of the Democratic State Committee, and he had been a very successful one. Then he was appointed Collector of Internal Revenue, and I was one of those who recommended him for appointment. And in '56, I think you have the right year, but whenever that was, he came into my office and wanted to be a candidate for re-election as chairman of the Committee. Well, prior to that, as chairman of the Committee in one of the terms of President Roosevelt, he had made a decision which was very important to the Roosevelt cause in the delegation

of Massachusetts by deciding that each delegate would have a half-vote instead of a full-vote, and that was most pleasing to me, and he was the one to make the decision. Well, when he called in to see me in 1956, as you say, if that is the year, on his second effort to be chairman of the Democratic State Committee, I said,

"Well, what do you want to be a candidate for? And why do you want to run for this again? I said, "You've been chairman of the Committee, Democratic State Committee; you've been Collector of Internal Revenue, and if a Democrat is elected, you might be in the position for appointment to ---elected as President in 1956--- you might be in the position to be appointed for another federal office."

And I said, "I should think you'd rest on your laurels. You've been very victorious in being chairman of the Committee, when we won nationally, and when we won on the state level."

I tried to talk him out of it, but he persisted in being a candidate and I owed it to him. There were no marked differences between John Kennedy, then Senator Kennedy, and myself. At that time, the then candidate had made himself personally offensive to Senator Kennedy. And Senator Kennedy on at least two occasions sent word to me that he would support any man that I might suggest

with the exception of Mr. Burke.

But Burke had made this decision of vital importance in one of President Roosevelt's campaigns and he made it at my request. And if he persisted in running, why I couldn't see anything else but to support him. The only ones I contacted were those half-dozen members of the State Committee that they asked me to contact. I don't say that apologetically -- it was a secret ballot and a close vote. But the relationship between the then Senator Kennedy and myself was very pleasant, no disturbance, and as I say, on two occasions he sent word to me that he would support any one that I might suggest that had the stature, of course. And there's certainly nothing unfriendly about that.

Now, you come to my nephew. This is for the historians of tomorrow. I didn't want my nephew to run for the Senate. I have very [great] fondness for the Kennedys. Not only for the Ambassador (Joseph Kennedy), but for John Fitzgerald, who preceded me in political life from Massachusetts, but in my early career we knew each other and I respected him very much. And we had a very close relationship. And friendship. And the President, John F. Kennedy, in the White House. And my nephew could have gotten the nomination for governor without any difficulty and the Kennedy forces would have welcomed him running on the ticket

with Edward M. Kennedy, now Senator Kennedy, as a running-mate for governor. And while I couldn't tell him directly, I several times suggest to him a colateral way, and he knew my mind. And that ticket of Kennedy and McCormack would be a tremendous ticket in Massachusetts.

I also had the feeling that if I was a disinterested voter between Edward M. Kenndy then and my nephew, Edward J. McCormack, Jr., that I was strongly inclined to favor McCormack, but I'd vote for Kennedy because if Edward M. Kennedy was not nominated, it would be construed not only by the country but throughout the world as a repudiation of President John F. Kennedy, particularly because he's a son of Massachusetts. And that was an influence which was basic—bound to be in the minds of practically everybody.

B: Do you think perhaps, sir, it was unwise for Edward Kennedy to run for Senate while his brother was--

M: No, no. He had a perfect right to run. And then after that, during the campaign, the relationship between the President and I, myself, was very close, we never discussed it, never interfered. I was up here fighting for the progressive legislation that he recommended, because I believed in the legislation.

B: During Mr. Kennedy's years of President when Mr. Johnson was Vice-President, was Mr. Johnson active in the legislative process or in influencing the legislative process?

M: The answer to that is the relationship of the President himself -- He assumed his duties and responsibilities in an excellent manner, and while I cannot in answering the question now, particularize as to any Bill, I would say that on many occasions with his many friendships, that he did everything he possibly could in a proper way as Vice-President to try and help the leadership in the House, and the President in the White House and himself as Vice-President to get through progressive legislation recommended by the President that was hotly contested and where the vote would be particularly close.

So my answer to that would be that I, without being able to point to any particular thing, could say that he did everything within his power to cooperate with the President of the United States in getting through the progressive legislation that he had recommended.

B: Is it difficult from that position as Vice-President to exercise influence over Congressmen and Senators?

M: Well, you say influence. I don't like the word.

B: I don't mean any derogatory ---

M: Influence. No, I know you don't. But that's the reason I brought it up so that anyone reading this tape in the future will not have any misunderstanding.

He had been a member of the House, a very influential member of the House, growing and growing and growing in his influence in the House. His influence in the Senate was a matter of paramount importance, and certainly the many friendships he has made and his experience--the fact that he served in both branches of the House (Congress), would enable him to talk with members on pending legislation where they wouldn't feel that there was any attempt on the Executive to impose the powers of the Executive upon them, that would exist if someone was Vice-President who served in neither body. So, I would say that service in the House and in the Senate, the friendships he made, the many things he was able to do for different members himself--that was very helpful. And in a proper way.

B: How did Mr. Johnson get along during those years with President Kennedy, and particularly with President Kennedy's advisors?

M: I'm unable to talk about his relationship with the advisors, and I don't want anyone to assume that there's anything adverse by my inability to answer that part of the question. But I can say that between President Kennedy and Vice-President Johnson, the then Vice-President Johnson, there was a close relationship, an understanding relationship, and they were as perfect a team as I've ever seen.

B: Do you think Mr. Johnson contributed to Executive leadership in those years?

M: No question about it.

B: With advice or ---

M: Yes, no question about it. Most of his advice, I assume, was when he was with the President.

B: All right sir, we move on to another area that I know you've been in the past reluctant to talk about: the assassination and the immediate aftermath. Do you recall what your reaction to the assassination of President Kennedy was?

M: I was downstairs in the restaurant in the Capitol having lunch--in the noon hour. And one of the reporters came over and told me. And I said, "My God. Has that happened here?" or some words to that effect. It was carried extensively at the time. The exact words I don't know. It had a terrific impact upon me.

B: Sir, were you also told at that time, or did you have reason to believe that Vice-President Johnson had been wounded or killed?

M: No, not that he'd been wounded or killed, but one of the reporters said that he was seen going into the hospital holding the area of his body where the heart was located. And they did raise a question that he might have had a heart attack. And I made no comment, but I made a lot of prayers that the rumor was not correct. Because if that had happened, I'd have been shot right into the President's office, the presidency of the United States.

B: That's what I was going to ask, sir. Surely in spite of your depth of feeling for Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson, the thought must have crossed your mind that you possibly were President of the United States then.

M: Will you repeat that question?

B: Did it cross your mind that possibly you were or were about to become President of the United States?

M: No, that impact was too sharp for that thought to come to my mind. I did say to the reporters, "Keep me informed of anything you hear."

Well, they came over later, a few minutes later, and said that the report about a possible heart attack, or something of that kind of the Vice-President, had been completely negative. And I heaved a very high sigh of relief.

B: Is it true, sir, that you refused the Secret Service protection that was instituted for you then?

M: Well, I wouldn't say I refused it. I avoided it. If some future historian wants to construe it that I refused it, why, I won't argue with him. I won't be around here, and I wouldn't say that they are not justified in drawing that inference, but it wasn't a refusal--I was able to avoid it. Are you interested in knowing?

B: Yes, sir.

M: Well, of course, after the assassination of the late President, they had Secret Service up here and outside of my office where you're

interviewing me now, in the Speaker's office, which was proper, and that night I went down to the hotel (Washington Hotel), Mrs. McCormack and I always have dinner together and spend the evening together, unless I have some matter that takes me up, and we always have dinner together, anyway, and very seldom any engagement in the evening that would cause me after dinner to go to attend. And in the course of it, Mrs. McCormack said she "thinks that there's some Secret Service men or others in the adjoining room to our suite."

So as I was leaving the next morning, the door of the adjoining room was half-open, and I looked in and I saw three gentlemen in there, and I just stuck my head in, and I said,

"Any of you gentlemen connected with members of the Secret Service?"

And it happened that either one or two was, and one was FBI. I said, "I don't want you."

They said, "Well, we've got to do it."

I said, "Well," in substance, I said to this Secret Service man, "Well, who do I have to talk to?" So I called up and I told them I didn't want any protection.

B: Whom did you call, sir?

M: I think it was the head of the Secret Service, Jim, oh, well, the head of the Secret Service. He's now the head--I just temporarily forget his name. (James J. Rowley, Chief of the Secret Service) For historians of tomorrow, I give you permission to fill his name in. And I called up the FBI and got hold of J. Edgar Hoover, I think it was, or the man next to him. So I talked them out of protection. Of course, they told me they had to protect me under the law. Well, I said of course I'd looked up the law. I said, "The law is permissive. May." Well, they said, "May means shall." Well, I couldn't argue that with them. And I said, "But, I am not in the position of the Vice-President of the United States. There's a clear distinction between protection for the next in line, the Vice-President, under those circumstances, and me. I'm the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and under the constitution I'm the number one legislator on the legislative branch."

And I said, "I am Speaker with the right of succession." And I said, the law doesn't apply to me, because you're trying to give protection to me as Speaker. I'm Speaker of the House of Representatives, and there is a separation of powers."

Of course, I had to pull that out of the air, trying to create some justification. As far as I know, I got away with it. Whether they were watching me during that 14 months that transpired, I'm

unable to say, but I'm sure if they were I would have detected them at some time or another.

B: Why were you so insistent upon avoiding them?

M: There are certain calculated risks you've got to take in public life, and what I said about being Speaker is correct. I felt it. That I was Speaker of the House of Representatives. That the protection went to those in the Executive branch next in line of succession. True, under the law I was next in line of succession, but not by reason of being an official in the Executive branch of government. That I am the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and that as such, I felt the protection didn't run to me. Now, I could have accepted it, but I felt that very strongly, that the Speaker under a division of powers that exists in our country is by reason of being---the Speaker being established in the Constitution of the United States is recognized and is under the Constitution, at least technically, if not actually, the head of Legislative branch of government. And I felt that the protection [should be] granted the Executive branch next in line of succession and not to the Speaker who is head of the Legislative branch. And, thereby comingling the Legislative with the Executive. And whether right or wrong, I felt strongly on maintaining the dignity of the Legislative branch by maintaining a separation of powers.

B: During those 14 months, when you were next in line of succession, did President Johnson make a distinct attempt to keep you informed of Executive actions?

M: Yes, we had arrangements as to what I would do in case anything happened to him. As a matter of fact, you're sitting here now, and you see this safe here (gestures to behind his desk).

B: Yes, sir.

M: The letter from him agreed to by me is in that safe now.

B: Do you recall what that letter says, sir?

M: Well, it recalled what agreements we made as to what I should do, whom I should consult, what I should do in case anything should happen to him while he was in the office of President.

B: Does it describe the circumstances under which you might take over, that is, short of death? Incapacity or anything like that?

M: It's in the safe there, and I'd have to look at it, and I'm not looking at it now, because I don't know if I should make it public.

In other words, the letter represented an understanding of minds between us, and it was clear and specific as to what course of action I should take, and whom I should consult in relation to legal questions--I think it was the Attorney General. And, of course, I knew myself in case anything like that happened, which, thank God it didn't, pretty

well what to do, because the Constitution and the law provides for it.

B: Were you also kept informed periodically---?

M: Oh, yes, yes, I sat in on the Joint Chiefs of Staff meetings and with the Cabinet.

B: Do you feel that the 1947 law which puts the Speaker next in succession after the Vice-President is a wise law?

M: I do, I do. I was for it strongly then; I'm for it strongly now. The Speaker is an elective official and prior to that, of course, the line of succession went to the Cabinet in the order of their establishment. And with all due respect to members of the Cabinet, they are appointed, and I felt that the Speaker should be next in line of succession, because first, he's elected by the people of his district, and second, he's selected in a democratic Congress by his democratic colleagues nationally as the candidate for Speaker, and third, when he's elected as Speaker, he's elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives, of which members from all sections of the country sit and legislate. So that he, next to the Vice-President, has the most national background or picture or strength as to coming from the people throughout the nation as anyone under our Constitutional setup.

B: I know you were close to Mr. Truman. Can you compare Mr. Truman on his accession with Mr. Johnson in preparedness and so

on for the office?

M: Well, I would think that, of course, former President Truman had had his experience in the Senate. He had had previous experience in a limited way in elective office and in public office in his home state. But he had great capacity. President Truman had great, tremendous powers of intuition, in looking into the future. He always made that impression upon me.

Now President Johnson, of course, had the profound experience in the House and the Senate. And in the Senate of positions of leadership before he assumed the office as President upon the assassination of the late President John F. Kennedy. Upon the assumption of the office and the background of experience, President Johnson had a much broader background of experience, but President Truman filled in that very quickly by his tremendous capacity to analyze, and through his extraordinary powers of intuition, which is amazing in a member of the male sex, to arrive at the right decision.

B: Sir, I believe you were one of the people, one of the leaders of the government, that Mr. Johnson called that Friday night after the assassination. Do you remember what he said to you or asked you?

M: No. I cannot remember what he said. I know I was present

downstairs with the late Speaker Rayburn when Vice-President Truman was President--when he got word, hasty word, to go to the White House.

B: You and Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Truman were all together when he received the message?

M: Lyndon Johnson wasn't in the Senate at that time. But I think he was there as a member of the House. There were four or five of us there, anyway, and he got a telephone call and he got up and hastily---you could see, he was under---that the information he got made profound impression upon him. He didn't tell us what it was, and he had to leave to go to the White House right away.

B: Did your group have any idea what it might be?

M: No, I didn't.

B: Getting back to Mr. Johnson's first weeks as President, did he not during those weeks make a deliberate attempt to talk to you and to other Congressmen to gather together the government there?

M: I don't know whether it was the first week or not, but he'd have meetings of members of the House and the Senate, the House being so many members, he'd bring them down in probably two or three groups. I don't know what he did over there, whether it was one or two groups, but that was natural with him.

B: In those days did he drop by here?

M: Yes.

B: By the Capitol Building?

M: Yes, oh yes.

B: Would that kind of thing be just an informal visit?

M: Yes, yes.

B: Unannounced in advance?

M: Well, yes. When you say unannounced, we'd probably know it an hour or two before.

B: And what was the purpose of those visits?

M: Well, usually he might come up to a luncheon of the Texas delegation--they have it every Wednesday--occasionally. Or he might come up to some meeting that's up here. I remember I was having some honor conferred upon me by a university. I couldn't go to the university to get it, so they came up here in the Rayburn Room, the reception room. And unexpectedly, the President arrived. I didn't know it until five minutes before.

B: Is that thing considered a nice and a pleasant and an unusual ---?

M: More than nice and pleasant. It's an unusual tribute. Yes. More than nice and pleasant. It's a very significant act. Profoundly appreciated. President Johnson is always considerate.

He's a great leader. A man of strong convictions and extraordinary courage. But he's possessed of a mind, an understanding mind, that will leave him his place in history when the historians write about him as one of the great Presidents of our country. And he'll be found right on South Vietnam. Don't worry about that. I'm satisfied as to that.

B: Do you feel that he had no alternative in Vietnam?

M: I say his course of action is for the best interest of our country at this time in connection with South Vietnam.

B: Do you feel that in relation to South Vietnam he has adequately consulted with Congress?

M: Yes. No question about it.

B: I believe you've been present at most of the briefing meetings, haven't you sir?

M: I've been present at all of them.

B: Exactly, so far as you can tell, what goes on in those meetings?

M: Well, the President makes some remarks and he'll have the Secretary of State brief us on certain aspects, and have the Secretary of Defense brief us on certain aspects. He might have one or two of his advisors on foreign affairs brief us, I'm talking about foreign affairs now. And then any one of us can ask any question we want to. It's wide open for members to ask questions, if they want to.

B: Does Mr. Johnson appear to welcome dissent in cases like that?

M: He certainly welcomes, if you call it dissent, he certainly welcomes suggestions. He's only too anxious, always anxious, to get any suggestions anyone--any member can make. Either there or to communicate with him later on. And not only those present, but any other member of either branch, or anywhere throughout the country, anybody makes suggestions to him.

B: Does much the same sort of thing happen in domestic legislation? That is, do not he and you and the other Democratic leaders of Congress get together regularly and chart the legislative plan?

M: Well, yes, we usually meet anywheres every week or two weeks at the most. While Congress is in session.

B: To what do you attribute the rather large amount of legislation in '64 and '65 -- the Johnson program?

M: He had a leadership in the Congress, both branches of the Congress, and top leadership who agreed with the progressive recommendations that he made. In those years, we had 47 more Democrats in the House than we have now. We lost, I think, 47 Democrats in 1966; we expected to lose about 30, because many of them were elected from Republican districts in the '64 sweep, that ordinarily wouldn't have been elected. And we had that reservoir--most of

them were progressive members, so we had complete coordination in thought and action between the leadership, top leadership, in both branches of Congress on domestic matters, and the President. And we had the votes to put them through.

B: Can you give some specific examples of what you consider major pieces of legislation during that period?

M: I think the school legislation was the most historic in the history of our country. That those two years, the last Congress, the 89th Congress, put through the greatest school program both on the higher education level and on the elementary and secondary school legislation ever in the entire history of our country. The leadership in the economic stability of our country was superb. We've had no recessions at all since President Kennedy took office, when we recovered from the third recession that occurred under President Eisenhower. We've had a continuous growth all that time in our economy under the late President and under President Johnson.

In the field of conservation, the 89th Congress, and this Congress has been following up, has been historic. And in the

field of civil rights, tremendous advances were made in the last Congress and in this Congress, too. All of it under the leadership of President Johnson and with the Democratic leadership in the House.

Other important legislation like the anti-poverty program, very important. The housing program of this year alone is the greatest housing program ever in the history of our country. We've had good Bills in the past, but this Bill that passed this year is particularly advancing and the greatest in history--and against powerful opposition, too. So that the--on the domestic level, the advances made have been tremendous.

We've made advances in minimum wage in the last four years--in health, in legislation for the building of hospitals. Medical research. Health--all aspects of health of our people. The greatest in the last four years in the entire history of our country put together.

B: Would you consider all that a Johnson Program, or would you also call it a Johnson-Kennedy Program?

M: I would call it a Kennedy-Johnson Program. Most of them started originally with President Kennedy and President Johnson effectively under his leadership carried them through. But President Johnson

also, on his own, made his own original recommendations. So essentially, you might say, and I think the President himself would refer to it as the Kennedy-Johnson Program. But there are very progressive recommendations made by President Johnson himself.

But he gave the leadership that carried them through.

B: In the first year or so of Mr. Johnson's presidency, do you feel that he got adequate loyalty from the former Kennedy staff members that still remained?

M: I'm unable to answer that question. Oh, oh, that still remained. I cannot answer it in relation to each one, but I do know that I could pick one out in particular. I don't want to downgrade anyone else. Larry (Lawrence F.) O'Brien certainly was loyal, an amazing gentleman. Enjoying the confidence of the late President, and the President--and the confidence of President Johnson, in a way that I've never seen any Cabinet officer enjoy the confidence of not only one, but two Presidents. Because if we have a meeting of the leadership of the Democratic Party with the President, or the leadership of both parties, if it was on foreign affairs, Larry O'Brien was always there. If it was on economic matters, Larry O'Brien was always there. Have a leadership on economic matters, you'd

find the Secretary of the Treasury and one or two of his assistants there. And some of the economic advisors of the President. On foreign affairs, you'd find the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, some Under-Secretary might be there and one or two advisors of foreign affairs of the President. But in all of the meetings, you'd find Larry O'Brien there, no matter what they were called for. On national defense, foreign affairs, or economic matters.

B: There has also been a good deal of speculation about ill-feeling between Robert Kennedy and Mr. Johnson.

M: I cannot give any information on that--I never saw any evidence of it. Of course, the newspapers write it up, but I don't believe everything the newspapers carry. I'm for freedom of the press, but they carry some very strange stories at times. I suppose when the historians of tomorrow might come across this observation of mine, they might say, "Well, it's happening today." (laughs)

B: Obviously you admire Lyndon Johnson.

M: Very much.

B: But tell me, sir, I think you would also agree that today, here in 1968, his popularity with the nation as a whole, is considerably lessened from its peak.

M: If you judge from what the columnists in the newspapers say, yes, but I don't agree with that. I think President Johnson is very strong with the American people.

B: Do you feel that he could have been re-elected had he chosen to run?

M: Yes.

B: Did the announcement of his withdrawal from the race come as a surprise to you?

M: Tremendous surprise. As a matter of fact, I knew nothing about it. I'd been notified he was going to make his television remarks, and I was sent a copy of what he was going to say. And Mrs. McCormack and I were in our apartment and were listening to him and watching and listening to him; then I got a telephone call from Barefoot Sanders (of the White House staff) as to the addition the President was going to say. That he was not going to be a candidate again. That's the first time I knew anything about it. Never gave the slightest hint in our associations of any such intent on his part.

B: Did you receive the call while the television speech was---

M: While the President was speaking over television. It'd been going along then about ten minutes.

B: What do you suppose were his motives for withdrawal?

M: Well, he stated his motives, his reasons, and I accept--he had the highest motives; he had South Vietnam. He had a division among

the people which I don't think is as sharp as what some people think as of today. For example, I think there's a very small percentage of the American people who would want us to withdraw our forces completely from South Vietnam. They might be divided as to whether they should be bombing further--continued bombing in the limited part of North Vietnam, but we are now bombing to protect our soldiers from greater losses, and there might be some division on that, but---there's some who advocate the enclave theory which I do not subscribe to. But I think the great majority of the American people today would not want us to draw out troops completely out of South Vietnam and just let the Communists take over.

Neither do I think a great majority of the people of our country want us to be a party to imposing upon the people of South Vietnam--notice I say imposing--a Communist coalition goverment. Because we know from Poland, we know from Czechoslovakia, we know from Hungary, we know from North Vietnam itself, that they started out with a coalition government imposed upon the people and very rapidly the Communists drove out, took care of the non-Communists, put the Communists in control, and quickly became a completely dominated Communist country. And so I think there

might be differences on the part of the American people on this or that question or aspect of the situation, but I think the great majority of our people would oppose an outright, abrupt, unilateral withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam.

B: Sir, you've made it quite clear your opinion of Mr. Johnson's strengths; what about his weaknesses, sir? What would you estimate are his greatest weaknesses as a man or as a President?

M: We're all human beings, and we all have our strengths and weaknesses. So none of us are perfect. We've got to start out with that proposition. The old saying is "to err is human."

I've suggested to the President on more than one occasion for many months, having fireside chats with the American people like Franklin D. Roosevelt did. I felt that if he had them with some degree of frequency, that it would be very helpful to the people of our country in understanding many things that he was doing, many of our policies, and it would maintain that closeness between the people and the President which is always vitally important in a Democracy.

I don't say that critically, but I've thought that if he had some in the last year or so, he had a number of what Franklin D. Roosevelt did--fireside chats, that would be very effective.

B: You mean you feel that Mr. Johnson has just not been able to explain himself adequately to the people?

M: Well, I wouldn't say that, but what I would say is if he had those -- and again it's my own personal opinion--if he had those chats, he would be understood more clearly.

B: There has been some criticism, this may again be from the newspapermen, whom we've already done many disservices to, but there has been some criticism of his mannerisms, his way of speaking and moving, do you think those are valid?

M: No, I think a mind that is not ---is prejudiced --- I won't say intentionally prejudiced, but is prejudiced, arrives at that conclusion --- we all are human beings and we have our different characteristics. And the characteristics of a man in his position and who is a natural-born leader as he is, are bound to be construed by some as abrupt, when they're not abrupt on his part. It's simply evidence of leadership on his part. If he expresses himself definitely, it's because he has got a definite mind. And I want in the White House a man who has got a definite mind. I don't care who he is, whether he's elected as a Republican or a Democrat, I want in the White House a man whose got the confidence to make his own decision and not let others make decisions for him on the Presidential level. And one thing is certain: the country has been blessed with Presidents, at least during my 40 years in Congress, starting with Franklin D. Roosevelt,

who are capable of making their own decisions.

B: You've almost anticipated a question. I was going to ask you if you could place in historical perspective Mr. Johnson and the other Presidents you've known over those 40 years.

M: Well, I've sat in on every meeting with the Presidents since 1940, when I was first elected Majority Leader of my party, my party then being in control of the House, Majority Leader in the House of Representatives.

President Roosevelt was a man of strong convictions. If we had a leaders' meeting with him, oh, we'd be there for a hour and a half, an hour and three-quarters, and there'd be the leadership and talk about different things other than the matters brought up. And then when we'd get through, we'd all agree what we'd tell the press so that the President would know, in case they asked him, we'd have an understanding what we'd tell the press, and we'd tell them the truth, but we'd have an understanding. And I remember one time, we were there for about an hour and a half, an hour and three-quarters, we'd go in about 10 o'clock and leave to get up to the House and Senate, the leadership, and President Roosevelt--there was nothing brought up, a lot of just talking and telling--and talking about experiences and politics

and telling some jokes. And so when the time came when we said, "Well, now, what will we tell the press, so the President would know," I remember I spoke up and jokingly it was, but fitting the occasion, I said,

"Well, if we told the press that the President was in a filibustering mood, we'd be completely truthful (laugh) and correct."

Well, when you get into a leaders' meeting with Truman, it would be half an hour. Take up different things. Some of the department heads would want to take up matters with the leadership, or the different agencies, and call this to the President's attention, and we'd be with him for about thirty-thirty-five minutes, our leadership meeting would be over because he'd just bring the matters up and bring them right to a head, and discuss them with us.

President Eisenhower would probably take over an hour at a leaders' meeting; President Kennedy would be decisive, probably take three-quarters of an hour for a leadership meeting to an hour; and of course, with President Johnson, he usually has the leadership meeting at breakfast, and a fair part of the time is taken by those present who were eating their breakfast with him.

B: How does he get to the business?

M: He'd have it before him--he had a list of the Bills, status of the Bills, the legislative assistants would give him a list of the Bills, their status; he'd bring them up with us; what the status was from the legislative angle in Congress, House and Senate; what the chances of certain Bills getting out of Committee; there's a fight over some provision; what the situation was; gone into very carefully.

B: Do you find Mr. Johnson knowledgeable and informed?

M: Oh yes, oh, yes. He has everything right at his fingertips.

B: Can you rank the Presidents from Mr. Roosevelt through Mr. Johnson? It's really a matter of guessing, I suppose, as history is going to grade them. Which one of them would you think would be the greatest?

M: Well, it's pretty hard to say who is the greatest at a particular time. The problems confronting President Roosevelt were somewhat different than those confronting President Johnson.

President Roosevelt came into office at a time when we had the greatest depression of our nation's history. He had 12 to 15 million people unemployed, and back of them were their wives and children dependent upon them, and he gave tremendous leadership in the rehabilitation of our country and the hopes and the confidence

of our people. Then during his time Hitler came across the horizon. And Roosevelt had Hitler diagnosed right, but a great majority of the American people were strongly isolationist at that time. And the same thing was [true] in Britain. The responsibility mainly rested on Britain and also on France. In Britain they had a (Neville) Chamberlain instead of a (Winston) Churchill. Churchill was trying to warn the people of Britain against the menace of Nazism and Hitler, but he was like a voice talking in the wilderness.

And then came the Saar, and Hitler got away with it; then he got away with Austria; then he got away with Sudetenland; then he got away with the rest of Czechoslovakia. Then came the so-called peace for all time at Munich; then rapidly after that came what was referred to in the newspapers as the rape of Poland. Certainly it was a terrible thing that happened. And then came World War II. Then the people of Britain turned in desperation to Churchill. If Churchill was Prime Minister, I'm satisfied that there would never have been a World War II with Hitler. He would never let Hitler take over Austria, and Hitler wouldn't have wanted direct confrontation. And he would have gone in some other direction, toward concentrating probably on the Soviet

Union. Today, you have pretty much the same situation. Only it's South Vietnam. It's hard for the people to understand it, but basically, it's the same thing. Arrogant aggression. And if you have weak leadership, the arrogant aggressor preys, p-r-e-y-s [he spells it] on weak leadership on the other side. And if we're forced out of South Vietnam, in my opinion the next step would be the Philippines. What are we going to do? Where's our national defense? If we're forced out of South Vietnam, are we going to maintain troops in Europe? Are we going to maintain troops abroad? Are we going to just simply in the course of three or four years come back to the concept of "fortress America" which was quite strong in the 1930's by many prominent Americans, and pretty widespreadly felt as a refuge, they thought of security, by substantial percentage of our people.

B: And you believe Mr. Johnson has taken that kind of strong stand?

M: He's given strong, firm leadership, and his leadership is going to be determined in terms of history. It can't be determined today; it's going to be determined in terms of history; the historian of tomorrow will pass upon that. And if we had a man in the White House who is weak, the situation throughout the world would

be entirely different today than it is. As deeply concerned as we are with what it is. Now, most people overlook the fact that in addition to our moral obligation in South Vietnam, our national interest is concerned. Our whole Far Eastern foreign defenses are linked up. If we're forced out of South Vietnam, it's only a short time when we're forced back to the continental defense of the defenses of Hawaii and Alaska. Is that for the national interest of our country? Is it for the national interest of our country seeing what happened to Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union (in the late summer of 1968) with the threat they have, capable of going any place in Europe? To withdraw our forces and to weaken ourselves? What effect will it have on other countries? The people of other countries? And their leadership? Can they depend on America and its word? All those things are involved.

What is the best thing in the national interest of our country? And in the national interest of our country and of any other country should be of paramount concern to the leaders of a country and to the people of a country. It is hard to see that national interest, because that concerns the future, and it's awfully hard to look into the future for us human beings to do it. And those of us who have contributed to the making of decisions, are just human beings like everybody else. And all we can do is try to use our God-given judgment, looking into tomorrow. Not the past, but to tomorrow.

We can see the mistakes of the past, but it is difficult to look into tomorrow.

Now when you look into tomorrow and the world of tension, you've got to consider not only the calculated risks of action, but you've got to consider what most people overlook, are the calculated risks of in-action. Certainly in the 1930's when Hitler flourished and went ahead shows what the calculated risks of in-action does during that period. Because it was in-action that allowed him to get the Saar or the Ruhr; inaction that allowed him to absorb Austria; we must remember his first demand on Austria was not absorption, it was for three or four Nazi-minded Austrians to be put into the Cabinet; of course, into the prominent positions of the Cabinet--to take over, in the course of a year or two.

And then when the Austrian leader, I think it was Chancellor (Engelbert) Dolfuss at the time, refused to submit--Britain let them down under Chamberlain--Hitler moved his forces up on the border. But at that time, Mussolini and Hitler hadn't made their deal or accord. Politely called the Berlin-Rome Accord. And Mussolini moved his forces up on the border of Italy and Austria, and at that time, Hitler withdrew his forces. Then in the next year or so they got together, and Hitler had free-hand to go ahead, so the next demand was not for three or four or five

Austrian, Nazi-oriented members of the ministry of Austria, but was to take over. Then came Sudetenland and the rest.

B: To change the subject slightly, you've been in politics for a long time now. Do you think that during your career in politics the art of getting elected to office has changed?

M: Yes, when I first ran for office, the pulling of the doors and your friends going around among their friends and neighbors, and enlisting their support for you, was a matter of paramount importance. We didn't have television in those days. Might have had a radio talk. I remember when I started I didn't have the money to even hire radio time, and there were the corner rallies--the corner rally has gone by now. Even very hard to get rallies in the inside, and if you do, you've got to organize them. And the whole character of campaigning has changed, and the cost of campaigning has increased tremendously, and that's a matter of concern to me, because ---can the average person carry on a campaign with the expenses incurred, and it will increase as the years go by. Is this going to become a rich man's government?

B: Do you think all of this has made a difference in the quality of man serving in Congress?

M: No, I think we have able men. I think the quality is (still high).

tape runs out.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By John W. McCormack

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, John W. McCormack, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed John W. McCormack

Date 5/28/69

Accepted Harry J. Middleton for
Archivist of the United States

Date September 12, 1974