INTERVIEWEE: SENATOR GALE MC GEE (TAPE #2)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

F: This is the second interview with Senator McGee in his office on March 10, 1969.

Senator, without any preliminaries, did not you have some conversation with Mr. Johnson before you went on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee?

M: Well, yes, I did. The Foreign Relations Committee post opened up rather unexpectedly, to me at least. I had been kind of waiting in the wings for an opening on the committee for some time, since that was my primary area of professional experience in the academic world. But I also realized that I was probably blocked by virtue of the rather loose rule of thumb in the Senate that a member could not be on the Appropriations Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. However, there were enough people who had been grandfathered in on that as exceptions to lead me to hope that somehow it might be possible to achieve that combination.

F: Could you explain for our future audience what "grandfathered" means?

M: Well, there were enough special exceptions where individuals like Hubert Humphrey and Mike Mansfield, both of whom were junior to me on the Appropriations Committee, were put on Appropriations in order to get on Foreign Relations. So there was something of a precedent or a parallel there, but when Mansfield and Humphrey could pull this off after the fact, it led me to hope that we might be able to do it.

In any case, Russell Long from Louisiana came to me personally to find out if I would be interested in trading committees with him. The

burden of the trade was this: That he was fed up with being on the Foreign Relations Committee, he said he didn't have time to work at it, or it didn't interest him. He wasn't built that way. But that he very much wanted to get on the Commerce Committee on which I was serving. And he was wondering whether I would be interested in a trade. Well, I told him that I would be interested, but that I'd have to weigh that rather carefully. After eight years, or seven years, I had built up a good bit of seniority on the Commerce Committee; it was a superb committee to service, and its chairman Magnuson from Washington made it one of the most rewarding committees, in terms of sheer interest and enjoyment and personnel and personalities, anywhere on the Hill. So I wanted to go very slow on that one.

Likewise, I was also mindful that with an election coming up also in 1966--Congressional elections--that it was entirely possible that the Democrats would lose some seats and therefore I would be locked off the Foreign Relations Committee, as we tried to readjust the size of that committee to reflect the proportions of the two parties in the Senate.

So I spent a lot of time thinking about this proposition from Russell Long. In the process I discussed what I best ought to do with some of the appropriate people--I discussed it with Dick Russell in the Senate. His advice to me simply was that he didn't think Foreign Relations was worth it, but that he wanted me to know he was biased because he had no use for Foreign Relations and thus he wasn't a good counselor as he cautioned me.

I talked to Mansfield about it. He expressed the hope that I would consider the trade; he thought it would be possible to convince the Rules Committee that such a trade would be legitimate and that it would be a

gain all the way around.

Then I talked to Secretary of State Rusk about it. Of course, he expressed the very strong hope that I would. His point was that the way the dialogue was building up across the country, in which he thought the dialogue was a little one-sided, that it would be very helpful if we could effect this trade. As he put it, because of Senator Long's lack of enthusiasm for foreign relations, his contributions--dialogue-wise--were not always the kind that strengthened the cause of the Administration's position particularly in their policy in Eastern Asia.

Finally, I decided to see the President about this. And the President seemed genuinely reflective about it, and finally suggested that he thought that it would be a greater service if I would make the effort to get on the Foreign Relations Committee; that he was mindful of the risks present in it, politics-wise out Wyoming-way; seniority-wise in terms of other commitments in the Senate itself; but that he personally hoped that I would resolve those in favor of going on the committee. He said that it was desperately important at a time like this that the point of view which I seemed to represent was heard with more force than had been the case up until that point.

F: No question but what you laid your views on the line if you went on the committee?

M: Well, it was commitment, and something that one couldn't weasel out of it very gracefully or explain away in view of the explosiveness of the events ahead.

And so it was after these several weeks that I decided to take the affirmative step in this case and try to get on the committee. The Rules

Committee did not hesitate, and I was gratified when they approved the switch. Among other things, it enabled me to bypass seniority-wise a number of Senators in the Senate who had been waiting, who had applied long ago for membership on Foreign Relations, and had been continually put off. The reason that I could bypass them was that I was not just being put on the committee, but I was trading a spot with a very senior member of the Foreign Relations Committee. And so this was the one element in it going for me.

If I looked at it, even the risks involved had some elements of good on balance, particularly in regard to my future hopes to be on Foreign Relations even if I were knocked off rather soon. That having served on the committee, it was the procedures of the Senate that you then had established that much seniority, and under normal circumstances you were the first one back on. So I thought even if worse came to worse and the Democrats were defeated in 1966 at the mid-term elections, that I would still be protected somewhat in getting back again whenever they had an opening.

So this was the setting under which I went on to the Foreign Relations Committee. I don't mind saying that it was the President's encouragement that finally tipped the scales, because I wasn't without some foreign relations sounding-boards even so. That is, I was on the Appropriations Committee; I had opportunities in many ways to sound off in regard to foreign policy.

F: Well now, on Appropriations did you make a special sphere for you of foreign aid?

M: Well, on the Appropriations Committee that was my special area in the

foreign relations field. And therefore, had a kind of a crack at those subjects that particularly interested me in terms of foreign policy.

The service on the Foreign Relations Committee in those days came at a very meaningful time when the dialogue on Viet Nam stepped up very, very materially. It coincided with the decisions in Hanoi to commit main line troops, for example, and during those fateful winter months of 1965 and 1966, the first genuine Congressional debates on the substance of American policy got under way.

F: Tell me something about the outgrowth of the meeting at Walter Lippmann's in which you decided to go on into Congress with the debates. Was there any objection from Senator Fulbright to your coming onto the committee since your views were well-known?

M: To my knowledge at that stage, there seemed to be no objection. At least none that I heard about and certainly none that was expressed to me. I think the positions of people had not emotionalized quite as much or had become frozen quite as much as they were to become rather soon afterward.

F: In the light of the way things have worked out, do you regret having given your seniority in Commerce?

M: No, not really. Again, much as I loved that committee, I think that I finally have lucked out in a sense on this chance that I took in this trade of committee seats with Russell Long. I know that after I got on the Committee I found it at once easier to gain a sounding board in many segments of the press, particularly the very creditable newspaper and television outlets that treated with foreign policy on a high level. That not to them it seemed to make a difference what I said.

F: You came with more credentials, too, than just the man who was freshman on

the committee?

M: At least they had a great deal to say about it at that time.

Now, I did go back to the President after a few weeks, after I had been on the committee for just a few weeks, and mentioned to him that I needed--it seemed to me that I needed some additional special credentials to help me make up for lost time on the committee; that just having come on as late as I had and being the lowest freshman member of the committee I could still use some additional credentials. So he suggested the possibility of making another trip to Viet Nam in the midst of my appointment to the committee. And he, by Presidential order, assigned me to a trip that Cy Vance, then the number two man in the Pentagon to McNamara, was preparing to undertake to the Viet Nam region.

And so, to make the story short, I ended up going to Viet Nam with Cy Vance and this would have been in April of 1966. As a result of that trip, I updated my Viet Nam experiences. I had already been to Viet Nam two or three times before that time and covered quite a lot of the country, but this was an especially rewarding--

F: Well, let's don't make this story too short. What did you do in Viet Nam?

M: Well, on this particular mission I shared many of the briefing sessions with Cy Vance, who was there measuring the military--the hard military dimensions of our commitment there. But as often as possible, at my request, I was able to splinter off and go into the non-military phases of the American commitment there. The classification program became a special aspect of it that I spent a lot of time at--helicopter-wise, personnel-wise, briefing-wise, follow-up and follow-back-wise. It was perhaps the most thorough part of the study that I indulged. In addition--

F: Were you free to go anywhere you wanted to within--?

M: Within reason, I was free. There were some hazardous areas that were less open--had nothing to do at any time, as I could sense it, had nothing to do with anything they were trying to withhold or to hide. It was a matter that some areas were more secure than others, and I wasn't trying to pull one of these Senatorial gags where you go in an area and get shot at. That's kind of a cheap way of publicity aside from the hazard involved, and I guess I must be a chicken at heart in that respect. I could study a little more--

F: Well, your value is something more than just cannon-fodder.

M: Well, by the end of the trip, I had covered, counting my preceding trips, about half of the forty-three provinces in Viet Nam and in all parts of the country. And I felt that I had a much better grasp of it, certainly by predominantly outside Saigon experience.

F: Did you talk with the President after you returned?

M: On our return, yes. I talked to the President at great length. He seemed to be genuinely interested in my reporting back. I'm sure it had to be courtesy on his part because he gets filled in every day on those things. But nonetheless, he made it seem--

F: So that he could measure information against yours, yes.

M: Perhaps this was what he was doing, but he seemed to be genuinely interested and asked a great many relevant and meaningful questions in regard to the things that I had observed. So it led me to believe that he was--he had full grasp of its many implications, and probably was trying to weigh my particular observations against other things that he had been in touch with in regard to--

F: Can you give the gist of what you told him?

M: Well, the gist of what I told him was that it was increasingly important in those days to spare some of the top priority personnel from the military, man-power wise, and permit it to shift to the even-more critical non military areas and projects of the country. In particular, one of the things we struck there was the pressure put on the Vietnamese government by the American military to beef up their manpower in South Viet Nam, in the ARVN and in the South Vietnamese Army. That many of their regiments or their divisions were only half--fifty percent of strength, or seventy percent of strength, and the heat on from our military, understandably, was to get those up close to one hundred percent. But there were only so many bodies, was my point to the President. There were only so many bodies available--young bodies that everybody was competing for. And there weren't that many young bodies to go around to man the paramilitary groups that were in the making at the time, the nonmilitary groups whose services among talented groups at least were desperately urgent, as well as filling out this great gap in the regular military service that our military men felt ought to be filled in. And so it was my recommendation that the American government take the pressure off the military component that was being thrust at the Vietnamese Government, the Army, and permit them to allot a significant percentage of their talented manpower into nonmilitary pursuits. I felt that there was every chance that they were going to win the battle and lose the war if they didn't give this nonmilitary manpower requirement number one priority.

Then I also suggested to the President that this was going to pose

for us a very tough psychological problem in political warfare here at home in the United States, with elections coming on and that sort of thing. That problem, as I saw it, was this: That the American military, Marines, for example, up around Da Nang and Chu Lai and the like, probably ought not to be spending as much of their manpower in pacification programs. That our real contribution that we could make as outsiders was to try to establish security in a military sense, and to use our great strike capabilities, our military prowess, in breaking the back of some of the enemy forces if we could, and converting more and more Vietnamese Nationals into the programs of winning the minds and the hearts of the people in pacification. This seemed to make better sense to me. But that I was mindful that this posed a real toughie. It meant that more Americans would be out on the front line where all the shooting was even as fewer and fewer South Vietnamese would be in the shooting--rather would be back where it was relatively less violent. I thought that this would have a chance of shortening the war.

The President seemed to agree with this emphasis, but was very pointed in reminding us that this would also reverse our chances politically here at home in terms of selling an idea to the people--that public opinion is very sensitive to the loss of American lives, no matter how logically you can make the case for them. And, of course, this came to be the kind of bind that policy-makers were in constantly, as to how you could strike a fair balance in public opinion that would enable you to try to break the back of military resistance with a minimum loss of life and still assign to the Vietnamese an increasing responsibility in nonmilitary programs on which would rest the survival capabilities of any government in South Viet Nam.

The President suggested to Bill Moyers, at the conclusion of my report and Bill was closed in at the wrap-up of it, that it might be a good idea if Bill would alert the proper media so that we might get this report of mine, or the burden of it, out to more people. I mention that because it seemed to me it might be an appropriate moment for something like that at that time, but I add now that nothing ever came of it. Now whether this meant that Bill Moyers didn't follow through, whether it meant that on second thought they decided he shouldn't follow through, or whether the networks were adamant on such a thing because he is no particular drawing card from the standpoint of Nielsen ratings on a network and decided that they just didn't want to allow any significant time such as the Today show, which was one of them I had in mind--they didn't want to take the time for something--. But in any case, nothing happened. Nothing happened on it.

F: This is a question for me to ask Moyers when I see him.

M: Well, I think the real reason, and you can mention it to him that my assessment is that I didn't happen to be enough of an attraction to make that meaningful, really. I was a guy willing to do my work if I could, but not one of the razz-matazz boys.

F: When one of the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee comes back from one of those on-the-spot investigations, does he have an opportunity to present more or less in total his views on what he has seen, or is it just a matter of strengthening your own stance within the committee?

M: It has been my experience and I've been involved in making these reports at least once every year from some hot-spot and sometimes two or three times in a given year, that there was always the opportunity to make a

report, a rather widely based report, or widely received report, always to the President and always specifically to the Senate; and often in connection with it through other kinds of media outlets at the same time.

F: Did you have anything you want to get on record on the Tonkin Gulf incident?

M: Well, about all that I think belongs on the record on Tonkin Gulf are two fundamental points, because in hindsight, there has been a tendency on some to make the Tonkin Gulf incident appear to be one of those critical incidents that determine whether we were going to have a real hot war in that part of the world or not. And the first of these is that as far as Congressional cooperation with the President, as far as the President checking with the Congress is concerned, every check was made with the Congress. The chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Bill Fulbright made perhaps the single most eloquent speech recommending the adoption of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Only two Senators dissented. I think it would be a disrespectful, allusion to Senators or a negative commentary on their brains to suggest that they would brainwash, or hogwash, or whatever-wash fits it, by some city slickers who sold them a bill of goods. I think that all of it-- I felt that it was--I was conscious of all that was involved in the Tonkin Resolution, and what rode on our making a decision--I think most other Senators did. And so that's the first observation I would make. And for those Senators who later said that we were fooled that we were lied to, or we were taken in, I simply say they haven't done their homework in the first place. That's why it's interesting to note, in hindsight, the drive in the Senate led by the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and by the Majority Leader, Senator Mansfield, to require in the future that no President be permitted to commit troops

without first securing the approval of the Congress becomes such a ludicrous suggestion. There's nothing in the proposal that would suggest that the Congress would be any wiser or any less inclined to commit than they were in August of 1964, when the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was submitted. It simply is a slap, an effort to slap in hindsight the Administration decision to move in August.

But that's the only area of some significance, I think, on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The second area is this: That the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had very little relevance, in fact, to the American decision to build up its forces in Viet Nam. The argument is often used in the debates on Viet Nam that it was Tonkin Gulf that created the American buildup, and that, therefore, if Tonkin Gulf was a mistake, America made a mistake in committing herself. Tonkin Gulf had really no substantive connection. The American buildup did stem from two now-known circumstances that were not in evidence in August 1964. One of those was the North Vietnamese decision, three or four months earlier, probably in March or April of 1964, to commit regular troops in the South. We did not discover this fact in the American government, through Intelligence or any other devices, until December of 1964. This is a normal lag-time in any kind of infiltration or change of decision, given the terrain and the other logistical problems of that part of the world. But it was the discovery of the presence of large numbers of regulars in December that finally forces to a head some kind of a decision. Is Viet Nam important enough, is all Southeast Asia at stake if the North Vietnamese are now able to overrun the South? So this is an ingredient that wasn't consciously present at the time of Tonkin Gulf in August.

The second element that was present there that wasn't known yet was the decision also in North Viet Nam to introduce into the guerilla cadres in the South a new family of weapons, the AK-47 family. These are Soviet and Czech weapons of a very high sophistication. This decision was probably in April of 1964. The first caches of these weapons were uncovered in the middle and latter parts of November 1964, and I can't overstress how significant this factor was. It meant that any guerrilla cadre could outshoot several times its numbers when confronted by the Vietnamese because of the superiority of the weapons at this level.

It's those two factors that were absent consciously from the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, so that without Tonkin Gulf, no matter what it meant, or even if it had never been initiated, it would have been necessary for the United States by January of 1965 to have come hard on to the decision that required an American troop commitment that was made then subsequently during 1965.

F: As a member of the Appropriations Committee, were you given much consultation about the military buildup?

M: We had all the information as we went along. And a great many Senators didn't. Only because they didn't bother to come to the invitations to sit in on the briefings. Those Senators who say now, in hindsight, they didn't know, nobody told them, are in most cases Senators who simply didn't take the time to find out. Every Senator was invited. No one was denied access to these continuing bits of intelligence that were coming in.

Let me throw in a little footnote there while we're at it, Dr. Frantz. That has to do with the implications of all of this for the political campaign for President in 1964. In hindsight, we hear a great

deal said, you know, about how the winner--President Lyndon Johnson--after winning, bought Barry Goldwater's line. Now, that's a phony and inaccurate and untrue allegation.

In October of 1964, when the voter was asked to make the judgment in regard to the two candidates, Johnson and Goldwater, each man--President Johnson and Senator Goldwater--had to advocate policies in accord with the best information that was at hand at that time. And I stress this. Barry Goldwater had no information that would warrant taking the drastic actions that he advocated. President Johnson had no information that would warrant that kind of action. The fact that subsequent events required the decisions that Goldwater advocated should not get us off the track. It simply reflected Goldwater's rather reckless inclination to overstrike or over-react to a crisis and take greater chances with greater weaponry, even when the facts didn't seem to warrant it. So, it's not only unfair, it's dangerously irresponsible to conclude from all of this that Goldwater was right and President Johnson was wrong and lied to the people.

F: There are two schools of thought, but insofar as one man can succeed another one and carry on (and I will readily grant you that no one is going to be a carbon copy of another one who has any strength), but one school of thought holds that President Johnson continued the same general advisory team that President Kennedy had and that you've got the sort of continuity that you'd have with keeping on the same team. Another is that Johnson in effect has sabotaged the Kennedy approach to foreign affairs. And I'd like a comment on that.

M: My answer to that is--or explanation of it is that the whole set of

circumstances in Southeast Asia were worsening by stages. And that first of all, the agreement among the Kennedy advisers, who later continued on with President Johnson, was basically the same--that Southeast Asia made a difference to the United States. That what happened to it made a difference to the chances for a balance of forces or stability in Eastern Asia; and that all that shifted was the intensity of the crisis problems. When the North Vietnamese, in particular, introduced the new family of weapons, introduced the regulars intensifying manpower pressures, that this changed the whole complexion, but it did not change the basic strategic importance of the area. And that what was called for was a tactical policy response rather than a strategic re-evaluation or a change. And that a lot of the almost smart-alecky hindsight from a handful of the Kennedy team, once they were out of the responsibilities for the decision they had to make, is not very valid recollecting on their part.

I think one of the rare ones that was honest about it was Bob Kennedy. Bob Kennedy said, "I thought it was all for the right reasons in the beginning, I've changed my mind." Now, one admires a man who will say, "I was wrong, I've changed my mind." He was almost the only one that said so. The others all tried to alibi it. And I give him credit for that. Now, that doesn't necessarily make him right. We have a fetish in this country if a man admits "I was wrong," then they immediately jump to the conclusion, he now must be a saint and he can't issue an untruth or an incorrect judgment. But even so, he was forthright about it.

F: Following the President's March 31 declaration that he would not be a candidate for office, did you see him with any frequency after that?

M: Yes, quite frequently after that. As a matter of fact, I think the tempo

may have picked up a bit. I'm not sure how to explain it, except that he seemed to be genuinely, almost--I guess you would say--grateful to many of us who had stood by him when the going was the very roughest, but more than that, he seemed to take an increasing delight out of just chewing the fat, almost with the thought that he didn't have to make a decision by three a.m. in the morning as a result of those conversations--where he just wanted to let down a bit and visit very informally.

So Loraine and I were down there, as I say, I think at an increased tempo in the closing months of LBJ's Administration.

F: By down there, you mean at the White House?

M: Well, at the White House, often on a Saturday night with only a couple hours' warning. It wasn't a big party affair.

F: Sort of "You-all come?"

M: That's right, exactly that. And then a few times just floating down the Potomac on the Presidential yacht. But those were some of our warmest moments with Lady Bird and the President and some of the most refreshing, some of the most enduring--

F: Did you talk policy, or was it personal, or--?

M: Oh, a lot of it was kind of rehashing all of the things that had gone before. Reconstructing them, second-guessing again, and reminiscing a good bit. But on one of the occasions the President did talk seriously about what my future plans might be. He often always prefaced these approaches by saying that he hoped that my tenure in the Senate would be a very long one and that he wanted to do everything he could do, that was available for him to do, to help me get back into the Senate again in 1970, to continue the career there as long as I chose to. But he said if I

ever reached the point where I hesitated about that kind of public service, he would hope that I would weigh carefully the possibility of becoming dean to administer the affairs of the Lyndon Johnson School of Public Affairs that he was in process of founding in connection with the University of Texas. He pointed out its many advantages to me, that I had some natural affinities in that direction, having come from the academic world and all that sort of thing, and that such a position in his judgment would probably pay in the neighborhood of forty to fifty thousand dollars a year, that it would be worth it in terms of a man finding some kind of economic return after he was fifty years old.

Believe me, it was a very, very exciting proposition to think about.

F: Not with its temptations?

M: A real temptation. But Loraine and I talked about it at great length several nights, a good many nights in fact; and we finally decided that my real--if I have any contribution to make, it was in the field of perhaps foreign policy and that the most direct hand that I could have in it would be at the Senatorial level. And that to hide behind the academic cloth once again in the interests of comfort, of what you would regard as feeling sorry for yourself, as having earned the right to read and reflect again, seemed to be a sort of a retreat from what I would like to think was a noble dedication.

Now, of course, we all overestimate our own motivations in times like this, so I know that's pretty strong language. But it is a very real kind of concern on my part, and this was what was--. This was the reason that finally turned down this very stimulating proposal and with a great deal of honor attached.

F: Without gilding the lily at all, I think Wyoming has needed if not you, somebody like you.

Senator, you were active in the investigation of the chain store situation. Did you come in contact with the President on that? Give us a little bit of history of how you got into this.

M: Well, in the first place, the chain store question was kind of the other end of the economic crisis condition that triggered action in that direction. And that was the drop in cattle prices in the early 1960's, almost disastrous drop. And therefore, I sent up a proposal introducing this legislation to create a Presidential study of food marketing prices. And it was a very controversial kind of proposal.

As it turned out, we held hearings on it in the Commerce Committee. We did it under the idea this was food prices rather than strictly agriculture. That's how--. That's the committee I was on, so we had to put it some place where I could personally nurse it along rather than turn it over to what otherwise might have been a problem for the Agricultural Committee. But there was no friendliness at the top of the Agricultural Committee on this question, and we were afraid that it would be killed there.

On the House side, the bill went through the Ag Committee, but in the Senate we ran it through Commerce where we had a friendlier reception. But even as this proposal, which was--say, of which I was the sole author, finally passed the Senate and the House, it came out recommending a Presidential commission in which the President would appoint five members of Congress, five public, five professional types, and get a commission study going.

The opposition to the proposal came from the American Farm Bureau Federation, generally the national livestock organizations that felt this would be rocking the boat. And, of course, the big chain store groups likewise, for understandable reasons, testified in our hearings very strongly against it.

So, once the Congress had completed the resolution on this, it was tossed into the President's lap for action--whether he would act upon it or not, or whether we would be shot down by cutting out all monies in connection. That would be a sly way to defeat it.

My personal dealings down there, before talking to the President, were with Mike Feldman, who seemed to be friendly toward the idea. But the upshot of it all was that the President all along seemed a bit cool to the idea, disturbed about what it would do to particularly some of the larger elements in our marketing structure--marketing economy--and doubting its implications in terms of how much that marketing structure needed a new re-examination since many had examined it before. I suppose, from the President's point of view, that there was an honest doubt that this was anything but just another old look at the same old things for local mileage out home, publicity-wise. But I tried to assure him that there was really an alarming upsurge in the power, the bargaining power, of chain stores in setting prices at the top, and the diminishing power for the producer at the bottom. That he was the guy that was being squeezed out, as the outlets for produce at the top were becoming fewer and fewer but larger and larger.

In any case, we finally got the thing approved by the President, but the commission that was appointed, we felt, was not the friendliest

commission. It was, again--

F: It went outside the Congress--

M: Well, it included the members of the Congress. There were five of us on it from the Congress, but there were also ten from outside. The point is that the commission in advance probably was made up of a more conservative bent than more liberal bent, and therefore, it intensified the problem of making the case by disposition. There was no conspiracy that I know of or any plot. It was just a--. It made it tougher to make the case. And the nub of it is, we came up with a pretty strong series of recommendations suggesting that we were bordering on a situation of administered prices by fewer and fewer retail outlets.

But the President was caught up right against the blade then of the housewife's quest for lower prices at this same time, where you have the consumer at stake. That's a tough one. How do you cater to the consumer's demands for lower food prices and the producer's demands for higher farm prices? My answer to them always was that the consumer is living on borrowed time; that if the market is taken over by those who administer prices at the top, pretty soon the consumer is going to have no impact, whatever consumer demand may be, and the housewife will pay steadily higher prices--whatever is called--on the part of those few who set those prices. And that therefore, the houswife ought to throw her lot in with the farmer who produces, realizing that he too is a consumer, and keep the market more fluid and more open at the bottom. This was the best hope for protecting the housewife over the long pull. But in the Congress, it was difficult to get enough popular support for that because Congressmen seemed inclined to count housewives nose by nose and lay that

alongside the intricacies of complicated economics in the market place. And so the impact of the study was less than it might have been, had not the popularity of the consumer issue required such public trappings at that particular moment.

F: Moving up toward the end of the Johnson period, as you know, there was this debate on foreign policy which I thought was American statecraft really at its finest--

M: You mean at the convention in Chicago?

F: The convention in Chicago. You were one of the proponents of the majority plank viewpoint, and I wish you'd give us some of the circumstances surrounding that and also how much interest, if any, direct or indirect, the President took in what was--

M: Well, as I recall it, the interest was rather strong at the President's level to please see that we had a fair shake. The protesters and those who thought otherwise always had the advantage. They were getting all the coverage on T.V.; they were getting the headlines; here's where the interest was. Because these were the people who were challenging the President and they represented where the action was. It was a problem of how do you state the case that might even be a correct one, and yet it has the limitation of being the Establishment's case. So I was talked to by the President and by members of his staff from time to time about whether I would be willing to participate in some kind of an effort to keep this on a high plane or restore it to a high plane, if we could, in Chicago.

There was even some thought, I was told later, I didn't know this at the time, that perhaps I would be the keynote speaker because of the overbearing dimensions of the foreign policy issues. But it was finally

decided, so also I was told, that in the attempt to try to unite the convention, that mine would hardly qualify as the voice of unity because of the emotions separating our Democrats on Viet Nam. But that in any case, I was asked to assume a role as one of those whose goal was to articulate the ADMINISTRATION's case for our policy in Eastern Asia. And thus I took it on in that context, believing that there was a great deal that needed to be said that reflected the kind of responsibility that has to be that of a President to offset the irresponsibility of those who only want to be President.

F: Did the two sides get together separately and more or less set a set of ground rules so that you would not duplicate each other?

M: Well, for the most it was done on the side that I was speaking on--. Senator Ed Muskie was designated as sort of the captain of the team or the coach or the quarterback--the coordinator--and in our--. As we discussed this, we generally agreed that Muskie and McGee would make the first two presentations and take the larger segment of the time. We were allowed, I think, a three-to-one proportion on time. That the remaining members of the team would receive a different allocation-a shorter one--on a topical basis or on a personality basis, if they had some particular aspect that they themselves seemed to fit best. We had a governor, we had we had Congressmen, we had private citizen-types and this sort of thing.

The strategy was loused up a bit when the prevailing officials of the convention injected some of their friends in this, apparently because they had promised them and sort of stole the ball away a bit from the committee's strategy--this plank committee's strategy on this question. And the result was we couldn't follow it quite as carefully. But even so, after even the

private little favors were done and the debts were paid off, it was possible to keep some semblance of balance on it all and I think the net result was a positive one in terms of conventions and conventions procedure.

F: You mean that in toto you think it was a good debate?

M: I think that it was a helpful debate. It wouldn't be my idea of a debate. I thought they should quit dividing it up among eight or ten or twelve. I think the other group had as many as fourteen speakers. I think this only confuses. I think it might have been better if they had confined it to two or three on each side and let them spell it out a little more carefully. It made it a big shotgunnish and helter-skelter this way, but I think it was surprisingly useful and constructive and even surprisingly cohesive, given the great numbers that finally participated in it.

F: Thank you, Senator.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

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By Gale McGee

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, GALE McGEE, 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:

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Date 5-19-71

Accepted James J. Middleton - for
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Date September 30, 1974