INTERVIEWEE: SENATOR MIKE MONRONEY (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE MC SWEENY

February 26, 1969

Mc This is the second interview with Senator Mike Monroney, and we are in his offices. Today is Wednesday, February 26, 1969, and it's 10:45 a.m. This is Dorothy Pierce McSweeny.

Senator, I'd like to begin our discussion this morning centering around 1960. And I'd like to ask you first since I am already aware that you were one of the principal backers in the "Draft Stevenson" movement if you can tell me a little bit about that and how you got involved in that.

M: Frankly, I guess I'm intuitively an egghead. There was something about the class, the style, the depth, the eloquence of Governor [Adlai] Stevenson that attracted me to the fact that he would offer one of the best nominees that the Democratic party could have. I think I'm a one-speech convert. I had never heard much about Stevenson. I had never heard him speak. I had been at Chicago at the convention trying to build up a bonfire for Speaker Sam Rayburn as the Democratic nominee for President, and I wasn't getting very far with that operation.

Mc Which year was this?

M: This was the 1952 convention when Stevenson was first nominated.

Mc '52?

M: '52, yes. And because of this lack of knowledge, why I had no interest particularly in Stevenson until I heard this midnight speech which was, I think, one of the great speeches of all times. Instantly I took up the

Stevenson banner and wound up as manager of the Speakers' Bureau for Governor Stevenson in that race. As you know, we were running against Eisenhower, and it was pretty much an uphill race.

It was quite difficult to even get speakers to represent the Democratic position, particularly to try to educate and elevate the people of this country to accept him as by far the best and most knowledgeable choice that we could possibly have. And so it got so scarce on speakers, that I would come down and try to make out schedules for what few speakers we had. I arranged to supply them to Democratic meetings and public meetings all over the country. Then I would grab my hat at noon and fly across the country to make the speech to some place in Alabama or New York City. Quite often, the only speaker I could get on short notice was myself.

I became acquainted with Betty Furness, whom President Johnson later brought into his Administration. She stayed in the Administration. She didn't have the conflict of interest as we have recently seen. But she was running the Westinghouse program called "Meet Your Candidates," and it was so difficult to get speakers even to debate Republican speakers on a national hookup of free time, that I had to fill in some of those myself. I enjoyed terrifically debating people like Sherman Adams, who was the campaign manager for President Eisenhower at that time.

So I become a dedicated Stevensonian. In the 1960 campaign--this is getting to your original question--never ask a Senator for a short answer because you're going to get a lot of history--I felt that now that Eisenhower was no longer with us, there was a possibility that the field was open. Of the choices, there was Jack Kennedy, who was my seatmate in the Senate, and Lyndon Johnson, who was my very dear friend. I like them both very much

personally, but I still put greater evaluation on Governor Stevenson as the candidate that could cement all elements of the party. In other words, President Johnson had strong and almost undivided support from the South. President Kennedy had almost as strong and undivided support from the North--the big cities and places of that kind, and some in the far West. Neither, I felt, would be able to offer the full commitment of the United States on the non-sectional basis to handle the problems that I thought were there for us. So, for that reason, a few of us got together over at my house and we organized a "draft Stevenson" movement.

Mc Who were some of these people?

M: John Sharon was one of the leading movers in that; Tom Finney, my administrative assistant, was active; and a number--Mary Lasker, Florence Mahoney and several people that were strong Stevensonians. We had a number of them. I would have to look up the records to give you all-- It grew into quite a good affair. We ran sort of a secret campaign in the headquarters space that was given to us to try to get votes for Governor Stevenson.

Mc Where was that located?

M: This was in the Letter Carriers Building down by the Capitol. My son took over what I think is now called the "boiler room operation" to circulate the fact that this "Draft Stevenson" movement was on. Our aim was to contact all of the delegates to past Democratic conventions for several conventions, and trying to stir up strength. I took to the road, along with John Sharon and a few others, to try to engender even more support. George Ball, was quite interested in this, and many men who later became Cabinet members, and others so that we had all chiefs and too few Indians, as it turned out.

But the point I'm making, and it's the long way around to it, was the difference in the relationship of my participation between Jack Kennedy, my

seatmate, and Lyndon Johnson. I remember discussing this with the late President Kennedy. We were good friends. He came to me one day and said he just couldn't understand why I was fighting him for the presidency and trying to organize this third candidate movement, when everybody knew that the race was between then-Majority Leader Johnson and himself. I frankly told him that I had participated in the other Stevenson campaigns, that he had been a martyr to a hopeless cause but willingly even took a second nomination when the party called him to do so; althought he knew it was hopeless in stopping President Eisenhower for his second term.

I felt that it was an obligation of the Party to give him a chance, when things were more equal, to be President. On top of that, I felt that he had a capability and executive experience and so on. But it didn't go down very well with Jack Kennedy. He just felt like you were either for him or you were against him.

On the other hand, President Johnson welcomed this participation and encouraged me in it--the politics of the thing, of course. And President Johnson is a political genius in trying to figure out majority. He couldn't have passed the legislation that he has passed in his period as Majority Leader and as Vice President and as President of the United States, had he not had a chance to see the whole picture. I'm sure that he felt that all of the votes that we got largely would be votes that would have otherwise gone to Jack Kennedy because of his youth and "vigah" [vigor] and various things of that kind. So he welcomes my Stevenson activity as a holding point, I think, for votes that he could ultimately acquire which had failed to go for Kennedy.

This was not my purpose nor the purpose of those of us that were out there working, and the thousands of young people who came out. We talk about youth. We had youth at that convention, and they were well-behaved

youth in demonstrating orderly, may I say, for what they genuinely believed in. Most paid their own way out there. Some hitchhiked across the country just to be there.

But as the convention hardened, naturally the two leaders were out in front, and our whole play there was to hold the votes that we had and try to pick up the drop-off from either Vice President Johnson's vote or Kennedy, and in that way move in as the compromise candidate. In other words, we went out there with a tailormade compromise candidate.

This was never objected to by Lyndon Johnson, even down to the very last. He never asked us to yield any votes to him, you know, saying, "It's hopeless," or that "these are wasted votes." I think he appreciated the value to him politically. It was not our purpose to help necessarily either one, but he felt that he would get the break if then-Senator Kennedy stalled out and reached his peak and couldn't go on to get the majority--that they would turn to him rather than to Stevenson.

Mc Both Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Johnson didn't announce during the preconvention activities. Could you tell me what you attributed this to in both cases?

M: They didn't announce? I didn't remember that Johnson didn't. But both Stevenson and Johnson were speaking so loud and clear I couldn't hear what they were saying, because they were both definite candidates and both had powerful organizations and very well financed--and bloc votes. I mean, the big city vote--you couldn't jar Mayor Daley to even give you the time of day for Adlai Stevenson, even though he was from Illinois and had been governor of Illinois and had been helpful to Daley. But he was committed deep down in there, and this was even after that spectacular demonstration at the convention for Stevenson the night that he came out to the Coliseum. The mayor still refused. I went over after-

wards and I said, "Now, will you give us a courtesy vote on the first vote from the Illinois delegation." And the answer was "no." And so this kind of blew up the hope. If we couldn't go in with the home state of the man who had been governor there, it hurt very badly.

But with Johnson, I never received any complaint whatsoever. He felt that whatever Stevenson could finally get that he would be the beneficiary of that vote. I think it demonstrated, if anything, a sort of political maturity. The thing that they criticize Johnson the most is because he was a pro. If he had been a surgeon, he would have been listed as one of the great surgeons because he knew the anatomy of government. And very few men in my experience, other than Franklin D. Roosevelt, knew the anatomy of government.

Mc Did Mr. Johnson ever indicate to you during that preconvention period his desire for the Presidency or his intention to run?

M: Yes, very often. But he was very careful all through this to keep good relationships and above normal friendships with me and with other Stevenson leaders. At no time was there a division over time. Often we would have Senator Kennedy and Majority Leader Johnson speaking at these various state luncheons, breakfasts, dinners. I had to go around and make most of those speeches, because Stevenson himself refused to do so and we just didn't have a speakers' bureau. We just didn't have professional organization because it's hard to put an organization together for a man who says he's not interested. We begged him to declare his availability or anything of that kind, although not seeking it. Stevenson would not do so. The fact of the matter is that we had quite a time talking him out of making the nominating speech for President Kennedy--then-Senator Kennedy--because lots of his good friends, very close friends of

Stevenson, in that campaign and came to him and said, "Well, you've had the opportunity twice to be the nominee. And after all, Senator Kennedy nominated you in 1956, and why shouldn't you nominate him now?" In his great sense of fairness, he couldn't see why this would hurt the draft movement that we were trying to engineer for him.

Mc There was a rumor during this period that Mr. Johnson as Majority Leader might recall Congress after the convention, the purpose being, of course, holding it over Congressional heads as a threat and possibly gathering more votes, I would imagine--or support among the Congressional people. Did you feel there was any truth in this?

M: You know, in a national convention--

Mc I think it was the civil rights bill, wasn't it?

M: Yes. That was pending at the time. But that was just some of this what we call scuttlebut that you get at conventions. I think it was more designed to damage Johnson as making threats and things of that kind. But I never heard of it, or anything, or never took it seriously. I think Johnson felt that he had a chance, and that was all. He didn't recognize the careful professional work that had been done by the Kennedy organization, particularly by the late Robert Kennedy and also his very competent and able brother Ted.

Mc When do you think Jack Kennedy first began to consider running for the Presidency?

M: He came to the House a good many years ago, and I was in the House with him. That was in 1948. I think he had his eye on the Presidency then. I think most of the time he was in the Senate he had his eye on the Presidency, although his participation in legislative work was not very heavy. He was going around the various states consistently making speeches, particularly when he was in the Senate.

Mc When you finally got to the convention, what was your reaction to the way the setup was, the prospects of the candidates?

M: There was no doubt in my mind that we were a very, very poor, low third. And if we were going to make it, it was going to be on a deadlock between the two. And that by helping to get all the votes that we could--the California delegation was still open and it was all over the lot--and we were struggling hard to get Governor Brown's support and the new Senator from California. [Clair Engle]

M: He was strongly for Stevenson and very popular in California, so if we could have had a better base, you see, with a large state like California, we would have had a real pretty good surge there at convention time.

I remember a little incident that was quite good. John Sharon had been out there earlier and I was working up here for Stevenson. Then about three days before the convention opened, I flew out to California. They had what they called the bull pen which was the big large room in the basement of the Biltmore Hotel where all the politics took effect, and every day at noon the press had arranged for press conferences. So everybody else had spoken and so I got out there and John Sharon said, "Well, I've spoken so often down there they know everything I've got to say, and I want you to speak." I never shall forget Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt--thank goodness for her--had spoken before, but she was kind enough to introduce me. So I took the microphone and told them why I thought Stevenson had a chance and what our strategy was pretty much as I've outlined here; that we didn't have the votes going in but we felt that there would inevitably be a deadlock and they would naturally turn to a man who hadn't been for either candidate and was acceptable to both of

the sides in the contest. So we got all through and opened for questions, and one of the first questions was, "Senator Monroney, how many sure votes do you have?"

Well, I'd just gotten there, and I wasn't quite sure, and so I said, "Seventy-seven." After we got through and finally after the nomination, we showed up, sure enough, with seventy-six.

And all the press says, "My gosh, how in the world did you figure it that closely?" I never did tell anybody, but I had to have some number, and I just happened to remember that U.S. Highway 77 ran right through Oklahoma City. So this was the seventy-seven.

Mc Did you have any trouble with things like hotel rooms or phones, transportation?

M: They gave us a little tiny headquarters about half the size of this small office we're in now. I would say about 6x12 for our headquarters. You see, the chairman of the Democratic party was the late Mr. [Paul] Butler. He was for Kennedy very strongly. We were not representing an announced candidate so we were denied actually the privilege, as we should have been, of having a mammoth headquarters or lots of rooms and all that. We had nothing. We had to scrounge everything. Finally, he provided this tiny room for our headquarters, and my staff all called it "Butler's Pantry." With all these kids--young people and all coming in, they were the unorganized, but they were moving around. So we would find an empty room that was being set up for a luncheon or some place that was nearby, so we'd just preempt that room and have our little meetings, and get chased out when the guests who had rented the room for a meeting had scheduled it for. We had a terrible time getting tickets, couldn't get any tickets whatever. This was another hang-up. We finally got space in the old Paramount Building right across from the Biltmore, and had space

for our volunteers that came in later on. But we just had to receive them in the Biltmore and say that our main headquarters were over at the Paramount Building.

Mc To what did you attribute this?

M: Well, partly because we weren't representing an announced candidate--Stevenson was not an announced candidate--and the others were. You can't claim you represent Mr. Whoosis as a Presidential candidate and get space or everybody would be asking for quarters. So we just had to take what we got. It was pretty hard on the ticket business. Of course we might not have as many people there to make the demonstrations as big as the others did. But we had the good fortune of the support and of inside maneuvering by Dore Schary, who's the great author and was in charge of the demonstrations out there. Some way somehow when word got out that Stevenson was going to come in, the galleries started filling up with Stevenson people. And I've always had the feeling, and I couldn't prove it, that Dore Schary, who had been a great movie producer, you see, had counterfeited the Pinkerton uniforms and put a major general in the Pinkerton establishment type of uniform on his own men and had removed the guards from the door by order, and that these Stevenson people were allowed to come in.

Mc In getting around to the delegates and assessing your possibilities, did you get the feeling that Mr. Kennedy really had things all sewed up?

M: I think there was no question that he was the front runner, but still lacked the number of votes--mostly until the last night--of getting the nomination. There were the states like Kansas. Luckily we had a very attractive young lady who had been active in Kansas politics and had managed to sort of deadlock the Kansas delegation. The governor of Kansas, who

apparently thought he had been promised the Vice Presidency nomination, was controlling the delegation, but there was enough in there to keep him from getting the majority.

Mc Controlling it for Mr. Jack Kennedy?

M: Yes. So they were in caucus trying to resolve their split when the final total number of votes was acquired by Kennedy. They never did get to vote. But we had problems with others, too, in that governors--a number of them--thought they were going to be Cabinet members or thought they were going to be Vice President.

Mc Can you tell me who some of these were that you recall?

M: Some of them got to be Cabinet members. Mr. Freeman, for example, who was controlling the Minnesota delegation. This is a rather interesting story, if you have time for it. But Hubert Humphrey was for Stevenson, and also the contest between Governor Freeman and Senator Humphrey. I never shall forget this breakfast the day before the vote. I spoke before the Minnesota delegation. Senator Humphrey got me booked to speak there. Finally it came down to the fact of the nominating speech, and I was terribly anxious to have Hubert make the nominating speech for Stevenson because he was well know, and he would have penetrated a lot of the liberal vote that was going for Kennedy because they felt Johnson was too conservative. On the civil rights issue too, you see, he was a very valuable man. So I asked him if he would, and he said he'd give anything in the world if he could do it, he says, "But if I do it, the Minnesota vote which is tied up for me by their primary action--but if I nominate Stevenson--this will be an automatic withdrawal," and would release this vote that he had won in the Presidential primary, and that vote then would be cast by Freeman for Senator Kennedy.

I said, "Good Lord, I need you badly. Who can we get?"

He said, "Why don't you try Gene McCarthy?" So this was the genesis of the great speech that he wrote sitting in a folding chair [redacted] Collins' office with a pad of paper on his knee, and the one that went around the world. It was one of the great speeches of our time.

Mc There was a lot of talk about money exchanging hands in this convention, and of course part of it is attributed to the great wealth of the Kennedys. Did you ever see any evidence of this?

M: I never saw any evidence. I saw a good many people staying at hotels in New York and other places, and I wondered how they could afford it. But I never saw it. I never had any evidence of that occurring. Of course, this is an easy thing to say, but people who are active in politics of wealth many times help finance delegates to the convention whose economic position is not sufficient for them to even afford the trip. I would be more inclined--I mean, to be fair--that the majority of this was done by enthusiasts of people for perhaps both sides. I'm sure the Stevenson people didn't do it because we didn't have any money.

Mc When Mr. Kennedy was nominated, I'm sure that immediately the contention began over who would be the number two spot. Did you have any idea after the nomination of Mr. Kennedy that Mr. Johnson would accept the number two spot?

M: I'm so glad that none of the press interviewed me as to who was going to be Vice President at that time because had they asked me, "Do you think it will be Johnson?", I'd say, "This is the silliest question I've ever heard in politics." I think most of those who lived in politics thought that giving up the Majority Leadership which Johnson was sure to have if he had wanted it, would have been so much better a place to operate from for the future than to

be chosen as a sort of a catchall, a consolation prize, should we say, for failing in the Presidency.

And the antagonisms of the convention were such--they weren't violent and they weren't knife fighting or anything, but the kind of sharp barbs that passed in the speeches and the rumors as you've said of money being used and all irritated, I'm sure, Kennedy. So your natural reaction was well, it was impossible. It just couldn't happen. And I was down at the Biltmore that morning, and I came down and went around. Stu Symington who was an also-ran, as you'll remember, Senator Symington, and visited with Clark Clifford and Stu in their rooms and saying, "Good fight, but just didn't have enough horse power" and all of that, "Don't give up. Next time, or another time around," so on, you see.

Mc Who did you think was going to be the Vice President?

M: Then I went by to pay my respects to the Johnsons--Majority Leader Johnson. I saw him, and Lady Bird was most gracious and everything. At that point, it was only an hour or so before the decision was announced, I would have bet my car or anything else that neither of these was a possibility. Of course, there had been lots of mention of delegations that had--from the West particularly, and it was somewhat obvious that Kennedy would seek a Vice President from the West or from--there was talk of Pat Brown, there was talk of Hershel Loveless, of Freeman, there was talk of [Governor Frank] Docking from Kansas, I believe it was, and there were so many that had been rumored that they would be Vice President on the Kennedy ticket. It was too many actually to try to figure out who. So I just had dismissed it completely and walked up from the Biltmore to the Town House. It's on the way out to the Ambassador. By the time I got over to Stevenson's headquarters, I got the word that President Kennedy

had chosen Lyndon Johnson, and I couldn't have been more surprised. I would have bet ten to one or more that that wouldn't have happened.

Mc He didn't give any indication of where he stood when you spoke with him just prior to--?

M: Of Johnson?

Mc Yes.

M: No. I don't know whether it had been offered or not at that point. This was--as I said, one hour from the time I left the hotel--when it happened. And I'm sure--Bobby Kennedy had been in to see him. Obviously no one suspected it would be an offer for the Vice Presidency. It was just a matter of sewing up wounds and uniting the party, I'm sure. And Sam Rayburn was there, and I would have bet anything in the world if the thing had been mentioned to Sam--having been a great powerful man in control of the House as Speaker of the House, and in the Senate the nearest thing to the Speaker of the House is of course the Majority Leader. The Vice President who presides is merely a figurehead. The President-pro tem is always the senior Senator, but not one that is an activist in carrying forward the programs.

Mc Do you think there was any handicap in Mr. Johnson's being a Southerner for his Presidential possibilities?

M: Oh, indeed there was, because this was driving away so much of the Northern delegates who had the idea that he would be forever and ever against civil rights, and that things would be tougher rather than easier, that he had oil connections. Of course, anybody from an oil state is going to be for oil. It's economic. But it was always looked upon as something rather evil. Though it was the oil barons and the Southern planters, you could almost picture that Simon

Legree, at any moment, would walk on stage with his big black snake whip to beat down any civil rights movements or anything.

Actually, Johnson passed more civil rights legislation and advanced the cause of the black people far greater than anyone before him. The great landmark legislation that came under Johnson--it was a Southerner who passed that through the Senate where passing that type of legislation is very, very difficult and very hard because the South has equal votes. The smaller states in the South like Mississippi can offset New York's vote, or can offset California's vote, and Alabama or South Carolina.

Mc Now, let me ask you what was your assessment of their chances and Mr. Johnson's contribution to the ticket.

M: My assessment of the chances of that ticket was good. I think it was a necessary recognition that without the Southern vote, if they were to throw it away and lose it by two Northern candidates on the ticket, that it would have been almost a certainty that the Republicans would have carried the election. You'll remember how desperately close it was. So this proves, I think--this thesis that I enunciated--that they knew it was indispensable. Even though it was pretty hard to take, I'm sure, by the Kennedy people, why all the work which had been done to get the nomination would have been of questionable value.

Mc Did you do any campaigning for the ticket?

M: Yes, indeed. I went out. My senior Senator, who was a leading Baptist--they always said that if they had bishops in the Baptist Church, Senator Bob Kerr would have been a bishop--but he was a great benefactor of the Baptist Church and probably one of the great national leaders of the Baptists. He

spoke often in the campaigns for the ticket, but he would always say, "Now, I ask you to elect that great friend of Oklahoma, that great advocate of agriculture, this very, very great and dynamic leader--we must elect Lyndon B. Johnson Vice President of the United States." This was his speech, and I heard it often.

I was out plugging Kennedy as hard as I could, primarily in Oklahoma, but I went out on he road some for him and did the best I could. But not until two nights before the election when Jack Kennedy came into Oklahoma did Senator Kerr make his announcement, saying that his mother was a Baptist school teacher and his father was a Baptist missionary. They came out at the opening of the country when the Indian land was opened up; and they had been faithful to their Baptist religion and the separation of Church and State and so on, you see, for a lifetime. "My parents would turn over in their graves tonight if they thought that their son would vote for a Republican for President of the United States. Therefore, I urge you to vote for Jack Kennedy."

Mc Was Mr. Kennedy's religion much of a problem in Oklahoma?

M: Very much so. You see, you had this deep-seated feeling that, theoretically, it violated the separation of Church-State concept. And there's no question that there was strong support by the hierarchy of that Church, but there were also millions of people who were Baptists--not Baptists, should I day, but Episcopalians--I'm an Episcopalian, and we had no feeling with that regard. But others did, it had been part of their religion with them, and in parts of Oklahoma it was rough. You'll remember they had organizations all around the country raising this question. Finally, I think Jack Kennedy, in his session with Baptist leaders and preachers, you'll remember, in Texas--I think in Houston--

Mc Houston.

M: Houston, was it, yes. He did so well I think he ameliorated some of that, but it didn't reach the grassroots, you see.

Mc Did you go on any campaign trips with the candidates?

M: I don't recall. I, of course, was in Oklahoma City when he flew in. He flew in the evening and then left that night. I don't believe I went on any.

Mc Or with Mr. Johnson? The same way?

M: No. I don't recall--I might have.

Mc If you could sum up or say one single thing about that 1960 convention and campaign, what would it be?

M: I think this is a good example of how the country finally gets together after all kinds of bruising--convention, antics, and charges and countercharges, and all--and finally nominates a man that they feel is electable and would be the majority choice of the country; and then pretty well close ranks--although this was an unpopular vote--it was very close, as I recall, extremely close. Had it not been for the televised debate we might have lost. President Kennedy was good, but the makeup man and a few other things--for Nixon was the deciding factor.

I can take a little pride in that because Governor Stevenson was the one who first suggested to me that we should have legislation permitting these Presidential debates. And I introduced the bill and Governor Stevenson came up to testify for the bill. The television people were bitter against it because they said, "What are you going to do about the sons and daughters of these other parties?"

"Well, it says you have to give them equal time, but it doesn't say they have to be on the same program."

And it would be within the power of the networks to schedule the two men as they saw fit if they gave equal time to these other people. Finally, while they had been resisting the compulsion of law to give these Presidential debates, they voluntarily gave it so they could withdraw, you see, and not have it on some future occasion. So I'm rather proud of the fact that this little bill that Governor Stevenson suggested and that I got through had a little bit to do with helping to elect President Kennedy.

Mc Was that the first time that type of legislation has been introduced?

M: First time it had, yes.

Mc Of course, it has come up subsequently--

M: It has come up subsequently a good many times, and we never quite resolved the ideal way of doing it.

Mc Was there very strong resistance on the Hill?

M: Only by the networks. I think most of the members of Congress felt that it would be a pretty good thing except some wondered how it was going to come out, you see. It did come out that President Kennedy had charisma, would you say, and that Mr. Nixon was charisma-minus, you see--which I'm afraid he still is.

Mc I want to continue now into the Vice Presidential years of '61 through '63. Did you have much contact with Mr. Johnson during this period?

M: A good deal of contact. We were rather good friends, although I think as I told you previously--I think I misstated myself in going back--that I believe his continuation of the admittance to the caucus was a thing that I disagreed on. I'm not sure. I'm going to have to check that because I may be mixed up on the dates that he was the Majority Leader when he insisted on admission to the caucus, and I believe presided over the caucus. I'd like to clarify that with Senator Gore, who was with me on this fight.

This had to be a personal thing because I wanted the party itself to caucus and not to have someone who would be vitally concerned as an official. And I can't remember whether it was as Vice President or whether it was as Majority Leader. In other words, in the caucus we're all equal, you see. But if you have an official in there who is concerned with the Administration program or with his own program, you get the feeling, "Well, we mustn't buck the Establishment," when the caucus is supposed to generate the stuff [as] to what the Senate itself wants to do.

Mc You can check that or correct that, either one, when you have the transcript.

M: Yes, I'd like to do that. But I'll say this. President Johnson never kept books much in politics. If you were against him one time, he wanted you for him the next time. He was very broadminded on that, and many people in top spots in political life were not. Once you were against them, they consider you're always against them.

Mc Senator, I know you've had a close association and interest in aviation problems and the SST--the Supersonic Transport. Did this come up during the Vice Presidential years?

M: I rode the airplanes an awful lot when I was carrying on that Stevenson campaign. I'd fly at night and fly back to Washington from Alabama or California, or places of that kind. No, I've always been interested in aviation. I fell in love with an airplane at the age of about twelve, and I've never gotten over it.

Mc Was there any legislation that you worked on during 1961, '62, '63 concerning this?

M: I was always involved in passing aviation legislation. I got to be chairman, two years after President Eisenhower came in, of the Aviation Subcommittee. We

were in very bad shape on airports. About the only thing the nation had done was to give to the cities the military airports that we had. We were building no new ones, and aviation was escalating greatly as a matter of transportation. So I sponsored the first bill two years after Eisenhower. When the Republicans lost the Congress, I became chairman, you see, of the Aviation Subcommittee, and I got the Federal Aid to Airports Bill through. Later on I continued my interest in federal aid to airports.

Then when we had so many accidents with the military not paying any attention to air traffic control--they felt they were exempt from it and they would cross over our principal airways and we had a collision at Nellis Air Force Base at Las Vegas that killed a great number of people there. We had a collision between two airliners [both commercial] over Grand Canyon, later a national guard plane flew into a Capital Airlines plane right north of Washington. We had all these accidents, and at that point I pulled together a set of hearings and we brought out, after a long study, the Federal Aviation Act and put everybody under air traffic control and appropriated reasonable amounts of money for improvement of our electronics and elevated the agency to separate status rather than being in the basement of the Commerce Department where the Eisenhower appointees, most of them from the railroad industry and things of that kind, were just ignoring the air completely.

Mc What was Mr. Johnson's reaction and position on this aviation legislation?

M: He was very strongly for it. We had support, I would say, whenever necessary, but we didn't have too much opposition, as many accidents as we had. We're just hoping that the new Republican President will have the same enthusiasm or we will get right back to where we were before.

Mc I believe it was in the early part of the '60's that the SST program or the question of developing it, first began to come up. Did you work on that at all?

M: Yes, I worked on it a great deal. I think it's a little later than that, however. I'm not sure. I think our first appropriations for it was probably about four years ago. But it has been a hard one to sell because people hear a lot about sonic booms and are scared they're going to be boomed out of their homes, or that their calves won't calf, their pigs won't pig, and their hens won't lay. I know more about sonic booms than anybody in the United States because my hometown was sonic-boomed for six months in a test of whether the public would be able to live with it.

Mc I recall reading about that.

M: It was really a cross to bear, I'll tell you. But I still have been for supersonic aircraft because I think if we fail to develop it, we'd be like--was it Lubid, or one of the great movie producers of the time, that threw the man out of his office who was trying to sell him Vitaphone or the talking pictures, and he said, "Nobody wants to have a lot of conversation, the movies are good enough."

Mc The mention of your hometown, did you participate in establishing that as a place where they--?

M: No, but I didn't object to it. They did it because we have a very important aviation complex there, and they were more air-minded really than the average community. They were used to all types of military planes and civilian planes. Tinker Field is located there where most of the big stuff was brought in for overhaul.

They just figured it would be a favorable spot for it, but the complaints that it generated were so great that they convinced me.

The more study I've done on it the more I feel certain that you're not likely to fly them over land. It's a water bird and not a land bird. But about three-fourths of the world's air mileage is over water so that for the long haul and for coastal service to coastal areas, why, it's all right. It'll fly subsonically and not make a boom, you see. It's just as good as the 707 or DC-8 in speed and all.

But who wants to pay twenty-five or thirty-five million dollars for a plane that won't fly any faster than one you can buy for seven or eight million! So the economics are going to be, I'm afraid, against it, excepting for water. But this is where you get your advantage. Good Lord, you wouldn't get any advantage over flights half-way across the continent, you see, because your climb-out--you're a hundred and fifty miles away from the airport before you go supersonic. And you have to start going subsonic when you come in for a landing a hundred and fifty miles away. You're coming down seventy thousand feet, you see. So you just don't have the economics to sustain it except, I don't think, in most routes excepting coast to coast now, and you can get there at a slow speed of about six hundred miles an hour instead of fourteen-fifteen hundred miles an hour.

Mc Let me ask you a broad question of how you thought the Congress responded under Kennedy. It was said that it was a very stagnated and uncooperative and unproductive sessions under his Presidency.

M: We didn't enact as much legislation as we did later under President Johnson. It was said that President Kennedy proposed and President Johnson disposed. President Kennedy, while he was personally popular with most of the Senators, didn't have the Establishment of the Senate behind him. The Southerners were still pretty much in control, not because of numbers

but because of their ability and their seniority and their widespread knowledge of parliamentary procedures, and their committee chairmanships and things of that kind. So it didn't enact very much legislation, not much of landmark legislation.

But President Johnson knew all the chairmen, was on a very close personal basis with them. Perhaps if he had been elected President, there would have been a delay of months, as there generally is with a new President. But I think the shock of the assassination and all has then, as it generally has, a reaction of cooperation with the incoming Vice President who has assumed the duties of the Presidency. I think it was both President Johnson's popularity, his technical knowledge of how to deal with the Establishment, and a feeling of national unity being at stake in many of these things.

Mc Do you recall any examples of sort of the direction and tactics from the White House that were a part of the great flood of legislation in '64 and '65?

M: I have never seen, to my knowledge, the famous armtwisting nor the so-called "treatment" that President Johnson was rumored to use. Being a Texan and Westerner, he's a good deal more vocal. He has telephonitis, I guess, as much as any President ever had. He didn't hesitate to call up a man and talk to him over the telephone or even ask him down or even to communicate in every way. Most Presidents have been rather stand-offish in doing that, but I think President Johnson, relying on his long personal friendships, plus the great asset he had had with Sam Rayburn, you see--because Sam Rayburn at that period was still Speaker of the House, and the Speaker of the House when you've got a Rayburn is a real man to have on your side. He was operating, shall we say, in a home environment which is as familiar to him as his own home.

President Kennedy was operating in a strange environment where he had been junior to most of the Senators. His legislative proposals were few, and his passage of bills were few.

But President Johnson--when you've been the Majority Leader, Minority Whip, and various things of that kind, had this pattern. He knew the Presidency. He knew the points of interest of the individual members of the Senate.

To President Kennedy, I think the Senate was a body that he could never quite penetrate to the personal elements that Johnson knew by habit. Many of these men in the Senate--twenty-five, thirty-five percent or more, were House members who had served with President Johnson.

Mc It has also been written or said that Mr. Johnson had more Congressmen--Representatives and Senators--down to the White House than any other President. Do you feel that this was so?

M: It's certainly so as far as I was concerned, and I think most men. It wasn't uncommon at all for you to get a call at four and say, "Come by the White House. I'm having some committee chairmen down, and I want to have a little visit," or something. Now, you'd have all the lists of the bills before each committee that he was interested in. "What's the position of this?" This is an executive. In private business, you think this is a good business operation. You've got the heads of your departments, which they were in a way the legislative department. They were the head of various facets.

And you'd have to say, "Well, Mr. President, we haven't had hearings yet."

"When are you going to have hearings?" You know, it was nothing brutal. It was pretty strong management techniques. And this is why the calendar

moved, because he had to do this as Majority Leader. So it was just second nature to him. It was pleasant for the members to go by and see the President. He always tried his dead-level best.

Now, these bill signing ceremonies. I don't think this was just a show from Johnson because Johnson got all the television he wanted--the President did. But the committee chairmen or the committee members were on nationwide television, and certainly television back home for a little old bill that they--Gosh, he has had ceremonies to sign bills I can't even remember that I passed. But he was sharing, in a way, his prestige with the individual member. It's a good technique. This is where, I think, he got his reputation as armtwisting, but actually he was in many cases giving a helping hand to the legislator. And the Republicans all came down too. They weren't excluded.

Mc What do you recall, Senator, about the passage of the '64 Civil Rights Bill?

M: My memory is not too clear on that. As I recall, it had been before us so long--ever since I can remember in the House of Representatives. I think I told you the other day my experience of presiding over the Commerce Committee hearings on the public accommodations feature and tangling with then-Governor Wallace. But this was the beginning. But once we crossed that bridge, and this hit pretty home--the only thing we had to compromise on that was Mrs. Murphy's rooming house--you remember?

Mc Yes.

M: What do you do about this! So we exempted Mrs. Murphy's rooming house, and it got through, you see. I don't recall too many great fights from then on. I think the pattern was set. President Johnson, recognizing it was set--it took a skilled parliamentarian to recognize that he had the backing then, that most of them who had voted for it, and it was a pretty good majority,

were not going to back up and become anti-civil rights on the next bill, you see. So it led to equal housing opportunities and led to many, many other reforms.

Mc I believe you did mention that, and I have it checked here. Id like to ask you about some various other areas of legislation, if you recall any--what your activities were or what interest Mr. Johnson used or pursued in getting the passage, such things as Aid to Education and the War on Poverty.

M: On the Aid to Education, this was rather easy. President Johnson was one of the early movers in the House on the aid to the defense-impacted areas, which was about our first direct aid to education. My friend, the late great Oscar Rose, who was head of Midwest City School system near Oklahoma City, had this big defense complex there, an excellent school system, but the war being over, the school system would have fallen apart had it not been for massive federal aid. This came rather easy in passage. Again, it was the opening wedge of federal aid to education in my memory.

We have done some throughout history--I mean, President Lincoln with the Morill Act established the giving away of huge amounts of land for the support of public education. But it was handled differently. We've had aid to agriculture in education in many ways. So the ground was not completely unbroken.

The need was there. As the cost of education went up and the explosion of enrollments went up, you had to have something, so it was more or less a gradual thing. It didn't hit us all at once. It got so that it was almost Holy Writ that you didn't want an ignorant country, and therefore you were going to help out. The hard fights were always on, not whether you'd have it or not, but who was going to get the major share, you see.

Mc What do you recall about the Tonkin Gulf legislation in '65?

M: Contrary to the storms that blow out of the Foreign Relations Committee, they were strangely silent excepting for Wayne Morse. I think his was--maybe two votes, I think, Senator [Ernest] Gruening voted against it, and he perhaps talked, too. I don't recall. Everyone was gungho for protecting our interests in the Far East. The attack on our shipping--that Navy vessel--was a great insult. We would have gone to pretty near any extent, I think, in the Tonkin Gulf to enlarge the powers if anyone had asked for it. Certainly if the President had asked for greater powers, he would have gotten it with an overwhelming majority.

Mc What is your feeling about the Congressional power to declare war, and the fact that it was not invoked in the situation with Viet Nam?

M: When you consider the vast powers that are passed to the President with a declaration of war, it was my feeling, and I think of most members, that this was quite a moderate and modest thing.

We had done it under the Presidential powers of our interests being adversely affected or people being endangered in the Middle East. We did it in Greece. We did it in Turkey. The whole Mediterranean is safer today because of the Truman policy. The way I thought of it, it was just an extension of largely the Truman policy--that we felt that our vital interests were affected and therefore we would authorize activities to increase, short of war, on this matter. Our interests were strong in Asia the same as they were in Europe, I thought, and still think. There's more chance of a giant Communist coup taking over, had it not been for our demonstration of interest there.

I can remember when the French held Viet Nam. It wasn't Viet Nam then. When was it?

Mc Prior to '54.

M: Yes. And I remember then the interview the press had with now-President Nixon, and then Vice President Nixon, where he was urging that we send troops to rescue the French that were embattled at Dien Bien Phu. And this was to preserve the colonial government.

Our point was, we're trying to preserve a government that is at least the best possible example of their electoral system, and that if we believe in democracy in Western Europe as we did in the Middle East, then how can we avoid this challenge!

We started in, of course, in a low operation of training crews, but as Viet Nam stepped up the war--and I was over there at about that time--you realized that something had to be done to give our men the right to fight. You see, we weren't fighting at that point. Our men were piloting the helicopters. The fighting was being done by the Vietnamese. Our men were going out with the ground troops and being shot at, but they weren't allowed to shoot back. So this was the difference to me, and I think that it's one that's not understood.

The fallout that we had hoped our presence would create would be to stabilize to a degree the slippage of vast areas behind the Chinese Bamboo Curtain. I think Indonesia--the seventh largest country in the world with the seventh largest population--fell under control practically of a Communist-led military command, and it was our presence there that caused the anti-Communist revolution and the removal of the Communist military hold that was fastening on this country, which is quite close to our best good neighbor, which is Australia. There's almost a land route, there's not too much water between the islands as it extends down to the Australian area.

I think that this has not been properly debated as to what our interests are. If we are interested in preserving world peace, and trying to stop little wars before they become world wars, that we have to realize we're a two-ocean country. The Pacific has got to be as important to us as the Atlantic.

Mc A great deal of criticism of course has arisen out of the Viet Nam issue out there, tending to refer to it almost as the Johnson tragedy.

M: I think it's a tragedy that they are referring to it th[redacted]esident Johnson[redacted]nd wasn't made up when he bec[redacted]ause I had gone over to Viet Nam shortly before that time and I talked to him myself. He was not firm on this at that time. I'm saying that as my own estimation of the thing, because certainly I can tell when I am talking to a man whether he is convinced of doing a thing or not. I remember talking to Mr. Mac Bundy and others at the White House, telling them largely what I thought as a result of my visit there, that we would have to step up our participation and stop the business of sending American men into battle where they were not allowed by orders to fire a shot. The evidence was clear then of the infiltration that we were having from the North, and the seriousness with which North Viet Nam was taking it and their willingness to lose men and material.

Mc What was your assessment and the effects of the usefulness of the bombing and the result of the various bombing pauses we had over several years?

M: I think we had at that point to not give privileged sanctuary to the manufacture, assembly, and shipping of goods. In other words, the material was getting down [redacted]rough the DMZ without any harassment, militarily, at all. Now this is an untenable positi[redacted] when you let the guns get almost in place before you try to disrupt their abili[redacted] began, and I think quite logically, on destroying their rail

yards, which we kept doing and they would rebuild them. That's probably futile, you see, but it tied up some four or five hundred thousand North Vietnamese and Red Chinese coolies, probably, to repair them as we bombed them out.

The care which the President used in trying to avoid hitting civilian targets has never been given its proper attention. I remember one time at the White House the President got on this subject, and he said, "You know, they're just giving me hell because we haven't blasted this tire plant in Saigon [Hanoi]." He said, "Do you know about that tire plant? On one side of it is a hospital, and on antoher side of it is an orphanage, and on the other side are tenement houses. It's an island surrounded by civilians. They want me to take that out. That's listed as a war installation. Do you know how many tires they make a day?" We all said, "No."

He said, "About thirty-six tires a day. Am I going to risk the men that will be lost in doing that bombing, to begin with, for thirty-six tires! Am I going to risk the charge of the world that I've destroyed an orphanage or hit a hospital! The weather changes after the takeoff, and it's awfully hard to change bombing missions. And on a clear day with the greatest precision, we might knock it out and it would be at work again pretty soon." So this was an example of how careful he was of trying to preserve the military target concept. I think by having done this--I was a little shocked at it at first--and I was always hopeful that we would not enlarge the war, we'd keep it south of the DMZ. It shocked me until I got a little better informed and figured the degree of the freedom of shipment and the availability of artillery and of heavy supplies coming in unabated from Red China and coming

down that one railroad route was worth the gamble. The only risk would be that we would hit a civilian target, or that we'd accidentally overrun the very close boundary between that and Red China. I think that was a calculated risk that we had to take, and I don't think yet they've shown very many bombing errors. At least the press dramatizes each such error made.

And when they talk about closing the harbor, they were ultra-careful about that, you see, because then we involve the freedom of the sea complex. While they say there are British ships coming in there, they're Hong Kong ships. They're under British registry because Hong Kong bel ngs to Great Britain. But they're really in a position--you can't stop this from coming in. And yet he hasn't bombed within the harbor. He has taken out the bridges and the approaches to the harbor, which I think makes sense.

Mc Did he ever discuss with you the bombing pauses that we had?

M: No, he hasn't. But I think it was obvious--it's kind of like the old Chinese torture treatment, hot and cold water treatment. You put them in hot water and then put them in cold water. So this is the idea that you have at your hand, without increasing danger--the fact that this is demonstrating the difficulties of the war. In times of no bombing the people of North Viet Nam get a little glad that the war has kind of cooled off a little bit. If there's anything, I think it would sow seeds of desire up there of the cessation, and then perhaps the resumption when they don't respond in kind. I mean, if they want to reduce theirs, I think you would have found that President Johnson would have quickly reduced our efforts, you see.

Mc I'm sure you had many occasions to discuss defense spending on the Appropriations Committee. Do you recall some things related to particularly Viet Nam that came up then?

M: I just know that the cost of it has been staggeringly higher than anybody ever dreamed of. In the early days it was a matter of surpluses and things of that kind. But it escalated, particularly with helicopters--we've lost over a thousand helicopters. Of course, money is not as important as men. The material costs were greater, but a great deal in early days was war surplus that we had really no use for. We had planes flying--B-47's originally--which were obsolete to our use here. The B-52's that are carrying it on today are obsolete and would be phased out. A lot of bases have been closed. But those have carried the brunt of the battle.

We've sent in our good fighters because we want to protect our bombers and help to take out military installations that only fast supersonic fighter planes rigged like bombers could do. And this has been well worth the cost in money because of the cost in lives it has saved by giving us an air element against the numbers of troops that they have. We bombed many jungles that would have shielded many men and much material. It's a terrific waste of ammunition--oh how much! But most of it has been in the wild sections, and there are a great many wild sections particularly on the Mekong River and all that that have traffic importing down to the lower parts of Viet Nam--the weapons and material that is coming in from Red China. We have to interdict it. From that point of view, we have been, I think, been rather extravagant in our use of planes. But you want them fast, and you want to be sure that they can avoid the rather excellent anti-aircraft systems that the Vietnamese have adapted--the Viet Cong.

I'm going to have to go now.

(End of tape)

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By A. S. Mike Monroney

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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Signed A. S. Mike Monroney

Date Feb. 3, 1972

Accepted Harry J. Middleton - for
Archivist of the United States

Date March 11, 1975

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