INTERVIEWEE: THRUSTON MORTON

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

DATE: February 26, 1969

F: This is an interview with Senator Thruston Morton in his office in Louisville, Kentucky, on February 26, 1969, and the interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Senator, briefly tell us something about your background, how you came to be a Senator from Kentucky, and how you also came to be a retired Senator from Kentucky.

M: Responding to your first part of your question, I got back from World War II after spending fifty-one months in the Navy, most of it at sea. I commanded three separate ships, and I was--

F: What kind of ships?

M: I ended up with the Doyle, which was a destroyer commissioned in '43.

F: I'm curious as an old Navy man myself.

M: I started in on a minesweep. We had a family business here in Louisville, Ballard and Ballard Company; and when I came back, the business had gotten in pretty bad shape during the war. My father retired--

F: What kind of business?

M: It was a grain and milling business--and grocery products. I couldn't get interested in it. An opportunity came to run for Congress in 1946, and I ran. It was a Republican landslide that year.

F: That's the famous 80th Congress.

M: That's the 80th Congress. And anybody that had run on the Republican ticket without a jail record would have been elected--and I was, very

easily. This is where I first got to know President Johnson. I was sworn in in January of 1947, and he was then a member of the House of Representatives.

One of the first matters that came up during my freshman year in Congress, that affected my community, was the private takeover of government plants that were making synthetic rubber. Louisville had been selected as a city for this--we have what we call "Rubbertown" here. I remember there was one company that couldn't get through--they couldn't get it for some reason, I've forgotten the details now. But when an appropriate bill came up, I offered an amendment to it to enable this private industry to take over this government owned and operated concern. It was my first effort on the floor of the House, and I was nervous and jittery. My Republican friends were sitting behind the table there--at the leadership table and on the Republican side--paying no attention to what I was saying. And a Congressman from Texas by the name of Lyndon B. Johnson happened to be the ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee of Armed Services which handled this particular matter. He listened to my case and he got up and says, "So far as we're concerned, we'll take it to conference and see what we can do." I couldn't get the same cooperation from my Republican friends. And he did, and went to conference, and finally we got the amendment in the final bill. So my first contact, or association, with President Johnson was one that helped me, and for which I've always been grateful.

F: You made yourself then a colleague and a friend right there?

M: I accomplished the mission. He impressed me then and, of course later, when I went to--I went to the State Department in 195-. I didn't

run for reelection in 1952. I had had three terms in the House, and I didn't run that year. I expected to go back into business and didn't of course because President Eisenhower talked me into going to work for the State Department.

F: You were Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations.

M: That's right. And I was also Under Secretary for Administration for six months. I seemed to always wear two hats politically.

But in any event, I didn't go back to the Congress until '56 when I was elected to the Senate. I told Mr. Dulles, who was Secretary of State and for whom I worked, that I was tired of wet-nursing the Senate, and I was either going to join them or quit. I was elected in a very close election in 1956.

But during my tour of duty in the State Department I had, of course, constant association with then-Senator Johnson. He was the Majority Leader of the Senate--Minority Leader for two years, then Majority Leader--and I remember one thing that shows the great political ability that he had, and has. In my mind he's one of the greatest pragmatic politicians that has ever come down the road in this country. President Eisenhower was in Geneva; we had the so-called "Summit Conference." It was Russia, the UK, France, and ourselves. The President represented us, Khrushchev and Bulganin--they were still doing the dual act then--they represented the Russians of course. Sir Anthony Eden represented the British, I believe; Pinay the French. It was at this conference that President Eisenhower proposed the Open Skies business--that each country could fly over the over. This was before satellites, before we had the sort of visage we have now.

So my job--I was in Washington; I didn't go to the conference--and my job was to go down to the State Department at five o'clock in the morning and go through all the tapes, all the cables, everything that we had from Geneva, try to sift it out, and find out what might be of interest to the Congress, what they should know before they read it in the paper. Then at seven o'clock, Herbert Hoover, Jr., who was then Under Secretary of State, would come down, and I would have thrown away most of it, and then we'd go through it together. At 7:30 the Vice-President, Mr. Nixon--the then-Vice President--Mr. Nixon would come down.

Well the day that this hit we knew nothing about it in Washington. This whole thing was developed in Geneva, and everybody was in Geneva--the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense. Policy was being made there. Ideas were being generated.

F: This wasn't the result of long staff work?

M: No, there was no staff work. So as soon as I saw this I knew this was the hottest thing. I called Mr. Nixon--the then-Vice President--and said, "You'd better come down here right away. We've got something hot." So we decided that I would contact the Senate, and that he would contact the leadership on the House side, both Republicans and Democrats. This was a contact of all that should know about this. For, indeed, we wanted the Congress to support the President's proposal on this open flight business.

At that time Mr. Johnson--President Johnson--had had his major heart attack, and he was at Bethesda. The acting Majority Leader was Senator Clements of Kentucky. So I went to Earle Clements with this information, and I said, "I hope that you'll say a good word for this plan." And I

outlined it.

He said, "Well, why don't you go out and tell Lyndon about it."

I said, "I don't want to do that. He's a sick man, and there's no reason for me to go--"

"Wait a minute," he said.

So he called Mrs. Johnson on the phone, and she said, "Tell him to come out, and he can spend five minutes with the Senator." And I think I was the first person outside of the family--certainly the first person in the Administration--that saw him.

I went out and he looked fine. He was lying there in the bed, and I told him what the President was proposing. He thanked me very much and I left, drove back to the Capitol, and I went up in the Diplomatic Gallery--I had the privilege of that gallery by virtue of my position in the State Department. When the Senate convened, Senator Clements was recognized immediately as the Acting Majority Leader, and he read a statement dictated by then-Senator Johnson, completely supporting the President in this.

The leader of the Republican party at that time on the floor of the Senate was Bill Knowland of California. Bill got up and made a wishy-washy statement, "Well, maybe one of those planes will have an atomic bomb or something," and he hedged all over the place. I thought then: A man who had such a feeling for the political realities--Lyndon Johnson--because he hit the nail right on the head; this was popular in America, he knew it was going to be popular. This was to me a dramatic experience; and it proved to me what a realist he was in the field of politics.

F: Then you came to the Senate--

M: I came to the Senate and I served there under his leadership until he ran in 1960 for the Vice Presidency.

F: You belonged to the loyal opposition. You had a peculiar situation in that the Administration of course was Republican, but the minority in the Senate was Republican.

M: That's true.

F: How did this work insofar as you were concerned in your relations with the Majority Leader?

M: In the first place, he was a tough leader, and I think you have to be tough to run that place. I can remember time after time when then-Senator Johnson would say, "All right, I don't care how late we stay here tonight. We're going to finish this bill." Well, we generally finished by about eight or nine o'clock.

Now, Senator Mansfield, for whom I have the greatest affection--he started out being too easy. If I went to Senator Mansfield and said, "Mike, this is my anniversary, or my birthday; I hope we can get through early tonight; I've got a dinner party." "Oh, sure, I'll accommodate you." Well, that's fine, but that doesn't get the job done.

Senator Johnson started out--Of course he became leader very shortly after he joined the Senate. When I worked with him when I was in the State Department, he was very careful to touch all bases. I'd call him and ask him: "Would such-and-such a thing be okay? Would this bill be favorably received by the Senate," or "What are you going to do about this treaty? Are you going to support us in trying to get it ratified?"

He'd say, "Well, come on up here, and let's touch some bases." And he'd ask Senator George, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee;

Senator Russell, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee--he'd ask the leaders of the Senate in to sit down, and I'd explain it to them. Then as time went on, I noticed that he got more and more confidence. He started out just the right way. He finally got to the point where they would say--these so-called old-time leaders of the Senate, and they were great men, and are great men--that they relied upon his judgment. In other words, he worked very cautiously and carefully at first. Then he got to the point where he could run it. I don't think any man in history--any leader of either party in history, any leader in the Senate--was more effective than was LBJ.

F: Did you see any evidence of his direct relationship with President Eisenhower?

M: I think they respected each other. They genuinely liked each other. There used to be an awful lot of banter between them about the fact that they had both had a major cardiac problem. But I think they respected each other. I think that President Johnson respected the general as a great military leader, and as a great leader in our time. Conversely, I think that President Eisenhower--General Eisenhower--certainly had a high regard for the pragmatic ability of President Johnson.

F: As a Republican, did you see any evidence of this so-called arm-twisting?

M: Oh yes. There was a lot of arm-twisting, but I don't say that as a Republican. He could be--

F: He worked both sides of the aisle?

M: Oh yes. He was a tough leader. At times, of course, I opposed it. I think the black mark, if there is one, would be the failure of the Senate to confirm the nomination of Lewis Strauss.

F: I was going to ask you about that.

M: I think that President Johnson--Senator Johnson--finally succumbed to the arguments and persuasion of my good friend Clint Anderson of New Mexico, and it was a personal vendetta with him. I think this was a shabby day in the Senate frankly.

F: Where had Senator Anderson gotten at cross purposes with Lewis Strauss?

M: It was on that business down there by TVA--that Memphis thing.

F: Dixon-Yates.

M: Dixon-Yates.

F: And you think in this case that the Majority Leader then definitely succumbed to political pressure?

M: Yes. I think that in that case he did. Of course, Senator Clint Anderson is a persuasive person, and a very delightful person. He had been Secretary of Agriculture under Mr. Truman. He was a man that had great stature in addition to being a Senator from New Mexico. He went at this thing, and had made it a personal vendetta. When the vote came, actually we had been arguing and debating this thing for, I think, two or three weeks. I remember that Senator Dirksen was trying to get Senator Johnson to set a time-certain that we would vote. We said, "Just set it, so we'll know." Well on a certain Tuesday, I believe it was, a quorum call was held, and every Democratic Senator was in Washington. I was on my way to Denver to speak to a national convention of the Young Republicans; Milton Young from North Dakota, a Republican, was attending Milton Young Day in some place in Northwestern North Dakota.

F: Which is about as far away as you can get.

M: About as far as you can get. Wallace Bennett was in his home state of Utah.

And I've forgotten now, but a fourth Republican was away. So suddenly the Leader Senator Johnson announced "there will be a vote." When I got to Denver, I had a phone call before I could even go to the hotel from the airport from Senator Dirksen, saying to come back, and he even had a reservation for me. I didn't even get into the hotel. We got the others back. We voted finally; and, of course, we could talk in the meantime. We voted finally about one o'clock in the morning. But we all got back. Milton Young didn't, but I finally got Senator Mansfield to give him a live pair so that we didn't have to stay up all night. But this is part of the Johnson picture. Nothing wrong in what he did, but--

F: Do you think he called the quorum at that time knowing that you were scattered?

M: When he called the quorum and found out that the four of us were away and all of his troops were there. Then of course on that vote, he didn't need Senator Fulbright's vote. Fulbright would have voted with us, so he persuaded him to stay home.

F: He didn't send for him.

M: No.

F: Dixon-Yates was just a kind of carryover issue by the time you came in the Senate, wasn't it?

M: Oh yes.

F: Were you in during the U-2 incident?

M: Yes.

F: Do you have any memory of Senator Johnson's activities at that time?

M: I think that he was very restrained. There were many in the Senate that jumped very viciously on President--not viciously, but jumped on President

Eisenhower, and I don't think helped us any. As I recall, Senator Johnson, however--in this matter and in all matters in the foreign field--when the chips were down, he did nothing to negate or diminish the President's strength, his influence--this is President Eisenhower, of course. In fact, he tried in every way I think to support the flag.

F: You think then, as far as foreign policy was concerned, that there was a real kind of bipartisan effort here that mirrored what was going on at the Executive level?

M: Yes, I think that then-Senator Johnson agreed with the foreign policy that the Administration developed under President Eisenhower with both Secretary Dulles and Secretary Herter. He was most helpful in this area.

F: You rose rather fast in Republican circles and became chairman of the National Committee in '59.

M: That's correct. After the '58 election, which really was one of the worst debacles in the history of the Republican party. Here we had the White House, and we took a terrific beating in the Congressional races and Senatorial races, in gubernatorial races, state legislative races. President Eisenhower asked me to take over the chairmanship of the party. I said, "Mr. President, you must be at the bottom of the barrel."

He says, "You know damned well I am!" He was trying to get these hoops in unison. I mean, we had the House, the Senate, the Administration, the National Committee--everybody was at cross purposes. So he assigned me that task.

F: Did you run athwart Mr. Johnson in that position? I know there was some jockeying, of course, among the Democratic Senators for the nomination. Did this give you any particular insights into the--

M: An amusing thing happened. I think it was in May, I believe, 1960. I had been to Indianapolis to appear at one of these gridiron programs that the press puts on. The two participants were Senator Johnson and myself. We had a good time and put on a pretty good show for them, I guess.

Then when I went back to Washington, I was walking in the Senate floor one morning. The Vice President--I happened to run into him in the corridor--Mr. Nixon. And he said, "Thrus, you want to have some fun?"

I said, "What's that?"

He said, "Why don't you get up and predict the ticket will be Kennedy and Johnson!" I thought that nobody could foresee that in May! So I did. I got up during the morning hour and made this prediction. Well, by virtue of the fact that I was chairman of the Republican National Committee, of course it was going to get some play in the press galleries and so forth. So he wasn't on the floor when I said this, but he had his people on the floor. He came rushing in--he was then Majority Leader.

He said, "I'm sorry. The summer season has hit early this year. This guy Morton, for whom I have the highest respect and regard, he has gone off his rocker just the way everybody does in Washington. It has just hit a little early." In a good natured way, he of course completely denied it.

Well, when it turned out to be a fact in Los Angeles a few months later, people began to think that I had some kind of crystal ball, so now they always ask me who's going to win the eighth at Charlestown or something.

F: I trust you don't put any money on your predictions. At places like this gridiron dinner and at other semi-social occasions, did you get a very

clear picture of Mr. Johnson's sensitivity to the press? Was it evident then, as evident as it became later, after he became President?

M: No, I think he became more sensitive to it after he became President. Back in those days, he was pretty much the same way I am. I mean, you let them take it or leave it. You say what you think, and that's that.

One other thing that I think might be of some interest. I ran in my second race for the Senate in 1962. I ran against a man for whom I have the highest respect, and he's a lifelong friend. He was then Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky--Wilson Wyatt. He had been the first president of the ADA and very active and a leader in the Democratic party nationally--not only in Kentucky, but nationally. It was a tough race. President Kennedy came to Kentucky three times. Of course, whether it was billed that way or not, it was obviously in the interest of Governor Wyatt.

F: It wasn't designed to hurt him.

M: Yes. Then Vice President Johnson didn't come at all. I had gotten word to some Democratic friends of mine that I hoped that he wouldn't come, because he was the only one that could have been effective in this particular state. He could have been effective. And when we went back to Washington after the election in January of '63, then-Vice President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson gave a reception at their home for the newly elected members of the House--Republicans and Democrats--and for those Senators who had just been either reelected or elected. When we went in to the reception, got to the receiving line--I had told my lady on the way out, as we were driving out, I said, "Now, just thank him."

She said, "For what?"

I said, "Never mind, just say th nk you. He'll know." And she did. He knew exactly what she was talking about.

F: He knew and she didn't.

M: Yes. And he gave her a big kiss and said, "Well, I didn't like the guy he was running against any better than you did. I wasn't about to go to Kentucky." He knew exactly what she meant.

F: As national chairman in the election of '60, you had a bit of problem with the Kennedy-Johnson ticket and the fact that you had Mr. Nixon and Mr. Miller, neither of whom had any identification with the South--geographical identification. How did you counter Johnson's at least semi-Southern strain?

M: This is what we couldn't do. This is the reason that we lost the election. The strength that Mr. Johnson brought to that ticket in 1960 was just enough. You know the total margin was only 115,000. Of course I don't say that Mr. Johnson brought the strength to the ticket in Illinois necessarily, but if you take the Illinois picture and then change the Texas picture, you'd have had a different election. There's no question about it. We won some Southern states in 1960, but we'd have won a lot more had it not been for Mr. Johnson being on the ticket.

F: Did you see personally any evidence of his campaigning here in Kentucky?

M: The Republicans carried Kentucky in 1960. The religious issue unfortunately was involved in that. It cost the Republicans a lot of votes in New York State and in many others. However, in Kentucky and Tennessee, I'd have to say that the issue worked for the Republicans in those states. Mr. Johnson couldn't offset that.

F: You though laid off the issue yourself?

M: Oh yes. We were in a terrible position. We didn't know how to handle the issue. I think President Kennedy handled it well when he had that meeting in Texas with those Protestant ministers. He had us on the defensive on that all the time. It was a question of beating your wife. We were in a really tough bind on that.

F: Going back a minute, were you surprised at the fact that your prediction on the Democratic ticket came true?

M: Yes, very much so. I was amazed. I didn't think that the then-Senator from Texas--Senator Johnson--would accept that nomination. This was a great surprise to me, even though I'd predicted it.

F: Did you have any idea prior to the Democratic convention that Mr. Johnson's candidacy for the Presidential nomination would get off the ground?

M: No, I never thought he could get the nomination. I thought geography was against him, and many things were against him. I didn't think he could get that nomination, but I didn't expect to see him go on as number two.

F: Did you see any difference in his leadership as Majority Leader as the time for the convention approached? Did he seem to mellow or to polish off edges and so forth in an attempt to get more support?

M: No, I don't think so. I think he thought that the smart thing--and I agree with him--the smart thing politically was to support the Eisenhower Administration, especially in foreign policy where he felt genuinely that they were right. He didn't get into partisan carping. Well, you're always in a certain amount of that, of course, but he didn't get into it any more as the Democratic convention approached, as I recall.

F: There was a strong feeling among many political observers that, in the Eisenhower Administration so much of the domestic legislation particularly,

M: If it hadn't been for his firm aggressive leadership in keeping our nose to the grindstone, it wouldn't have gone through. That was one of the few real major filibusters that I've seen in the Senate in the last twenty years. He had us sleeping on cots. I slept in the old Supreme Court room. And had he not held our nose to the grindstone, it wouldn't have happened.

F: Does he have the power to hold your nose to the grindstone?

M: Of course, a leader has no power unless he can back it up with votes, and he had the loyalty of enough members of his party to stay in session.

F: It wasn't wise then for the opponents to walk out?

M: No, you couldn't. If we'd had enough to walk out and break up a quorum that would have been one thing, but we couldn't do it. I didn't want to. I was helping him to make the quorum.

F: I know. One thing that has always been intriguing through these years has been his relationship on many of these pieces of more progressive legislation with Senator Dirksen. I know Senator Dirksen as Minority Leader frequently made possible passage of certain acts that, to my mind at least, Mr. Johnson couldn't have gotten through under his own power. Can you comment on this?

M: They had a very cordial relationship. Both are pragmatic politicians to begin with. They understand that politics is the art of the possible. I think that when a problem came up, both would give. If Dirksen didn't like something and Lyndon Johnson didn't like something, then they would work out some kind of a compromise accommodation and try together to put it through. I think this is what has made our country, frankly. It wasn't envisaged that we'd have a two-party political system when our

forefathers formed the Constitution, but this did evolve. It evolved very quickly; and it's success, I think, has been the fact that there are times when you just have to work out an accommodation which isn't satisfactory to either side but is the best you can get.

F: Moving ahead on strictly politics, where were you on November 22, 1963, the date of the assassination?

M: That was a very tragic day for me. I was speaking in St. Louis in a downtown hotel to a Republican meeting. I can't remember whether it was the meeting of the National Committee--I think it probably was--and I was making a very partisan speech. When I left the room, some reporter--I believe it was Jack Bell of Associated Press who covers the Hill--and he said, "The President has been shot." And here I'd been making a very partisan speech!

I had to rush to the airport. My youngest son was getting married the next day, so I had to give a rehearsal dinner here in Louisville, or whatever the father of the groom has to do. We got in a limousine to go to the airport, and it didn't have a radio. I didn't know whether the President was alive or not. You'll remember there were about twenty minutes there, or twenty-five minutes, when we didn't know. When we got to the airport, of course, it was known then that he was dead. It was a very harrowing and shocking experience, I can tell you that. It's something I hope I never have to go through with again.

F: Then you came right on back to Washington as soon as your wedding was over?

M: Yes, I came up to Washington. I came up Sunday with my brother who came down for the wedding. He's a Congressman from the First District of Maryland.

F: You were chairman by this time of the Republican Senatorial Committee.

M: I was chairman of the Senatorial Campaign Committee.

F: Did this make any difference in your approach to political problems, particularly the political problem of getting elected and getting Senators elected?

M: No, I don't think so. We were approaching the '64 election, and we fielded a great team for the Senate--Republican team--in '64. Unfortunately, because of the Presidential campaign in '64, most of them went down to defeat. I mean, we had young Bob Taft running in Ohio, and he ran fifteen or sixteen percent ahead of the ticket; Bud Wilkinson in Oklahoma ran sixteen percent ahead of the ticket and still lost. The same thing happened in Wisconsin-state after state. We fielded the best team in '64 for the Senate that I know of, and most of them went down because of the fact that Senator Goldwater only got thirty-five or whatever it was percent of the vote.

F: Did you observe Mr. Johnson's campaigning in Kentucky during that election?

M: In '64?

F: Yes, sir.

M: He carried it without any trouble at all, and he was here. I was campaigning all over the country, and I crossed paths with him in '64 and in '60. But in '64 he didn't have any problem.

F: Do you think that the election of '64 with Mr. Goldwater from Arizona and Mr. Johnson from Texas somewhat got rid of the old geographical considerations?

M: Oh yes. The geographic considerations in two ways: One, the idea that you have to be a big state--of course, Texas is a big state with electoral votes--and the question of balance between your Presidential candidate

and your Vice Presidential candidate. I think those are things of the past. I think that the communications today, the electronic communications that we have today--television, radio, and so forth--have gotten away from these old clichés that we have to have a big state represented, and if we have a man from the East, we have to have one from the West, etc.

F: You and I both grew up on the maxim that a Senator is a closed-in position that he cannot be elected President because he exposes himself. We had the example, Bob Taft, for instance. Now then, since 1960, the Senate has furnished most of the candidates and has certainly put the Presidents in. How do you account for that change?

M: It's interesting. You see, it used to be that the gubernatorial position was the best stepping stone. It's unique that there has been recently the Senate. I don't know how to account for it except for the fact that--well, for instance this morning, I watched a good television show which is on every morning--the Today Show, and Senator Ted Kennedy was on it. The exposure that the members of the Senate get, the exposure to the public that they get--maybe it is controversial, maybe they do have to take certain stands, but they're getting a lot more news, and largely through radio and television, I'd say because in the old days they made their home state newspapers. But it wasn't so easy to become a national figure in the old days as a member of the Senate as it is today.

F: The fact that they have to stick their necks out on national issues doesn't matter?

M: I don't think it matters so much because as the federal government has become such a participant in our daily lives--I mean, it's more with us than it used to be. Therefore the Senate or the House, for that matter,

provides a better forum. I mean, fifty years ago it didn't make much difference how a Senator voted on a particular issue because the federal government wasn't living with the people and all these programs today are federal programs. The Congress is the focal point today, not the state house. I think that this accounts for it.

This is one of the reasons, for instance--well, of course there were many reasons why we couldn't get Governor Rockefeller's candidacy off the ground on the Republican side. You'd think that a governor of New York would almost be automatic fifty years ago. But of course his vacillation was one problem. But another thing is that people are concerned about what happens in Congress today just as they used to be concerned about what happens in the state house.

F: As a member of the Republican Policy Committee, how did you try to counter Mr. Johnson's initial great popularity?

M: My advice to them was " don't try to counter it" because in the situation in which he became President after the unfortunate incident in Dallas--in that situation there's nothing you can do, and you shouldn't. Great sympathies developed. There's a lot of emotional overtones that get into--and this, of course, carried on into the '64 campaign. There were many other issues in the '64 campaign which made it so horrendous for the Republicans. But I thought, and I think most of my colleagues agreed with me, that "You're just going to have to ride this out from a political standpoint."

F: Do you look on the failure to confirm Abe Fortas for the Chief Justice position on the Supreme Court as a sort of hang-over or get-even proposition from the Strauss days? Or do you think this was entirely an independent matter?

M: I think it was entirely different. I think the thing that drew that to a head really was this association with the American University there in Washington, the way Paul Porter raised the money to pay him for doing that. I mean, Abe Fortas didn't need the money, and this was rather shocking to a good many people.

I know that President Johnson is a very domineering person, and I can understand he would call up--and he had the highest respect and regard for Mr. Justice Fortas--he would call him up and say, "Abe, stop by on your way home tonight; I want to talk to you about some things." Well, when the President of the United States asks you to do it, I guess you do it. I remember Mr. Chief Justice Vinson, who was very intimate and very close to President Truman, and I was talking to him on one occasion. I admired him very much and we were great friends, and he certainly was nice to me in my early days in Washington. He said that he hadn't seen the President since he took over the job as Chief Justice. He hadn't seen the President except on the occasions of state where the Judiciary would be asked to a State dinner or some meeting at the White House.

F: He made a conscious effort not to see him.

M: Yes, they both did. Yet he was a member of the so-called "Kitchen Cabinet." I mean, he was as close to him as anyone. This was not the case when Mr. Fortas went on the bench on the Court. I think that it's unfortunate, because there's no question about Fortas being a brilliant man. I don't agree with all of his decisions, but I don't question his intelligence.

F: Do you think part of the opposition was just a desire to get back at the President?

M: No, I don't think it was to get at the President. I think the President

used very bad judgment in the way he used Mr. Fortas. Senator Allott of Colorado during the debate on this brought up the point that--he's a very conscientious member of the Appropriations Committee--Senator Allott--and he called the White House finally because different agencies were telling different stories on a certain supplemental appropriations bill. He finally called the White House and said, "I want to know what the Administration's position is. I don't want to be necessarily against you, but I can't make sense out of it." And the President was away. He said, "I think the only person who can answer this is the President."

Some member of the White House staff said, "Well, the President is away, but Mr. Justice Fortas is here and he's managing this bill for the White House." I mean, this sort of thing just blew it right out of the park--that coupled with the fifteen thousand dollars or whatever he got--thirty thousand dollars.

F: Fifteen thousand dollars I think.

M: Fifteen thousand dollars is what he got, and the University got the thirty thousand dollars. But the President of the Stock Exchange was a contributor to that, and they've got a case pending before the Supreme Court. This sort of thing got people like John Cooper, for example, who certainly is objective and I think one of the best judicial minds in the Senate. I had said publicly that I would vote for cloture, and that I'd vote to confirm Fortas. John had been more cautious. He changed his position. I mean, he didn't change; he just said he wouldn't vote for him.

F: You have been on the Senate's District of Columbia Committee.

M: Yes, I wasn't a very faithful member, I have to confess.

F: Did you see any evidence of Mr. Johnson's pushing hard to get home rule for

the District? Did that become a committee concern?

M: I think frankly that the Administration gave more lip service to it than arm-twisting.

F: It was just a matter of throwing it out there and if you want to do it, fine?

M: Yes.

F: You also were on the Special Committee on the Aging, so you must have been in the middle of the Medicare fight.

M: No. I was in the middle of that fight because of my position on the Finance Committee. That Select Committee on the Province of the Aging is rather--I mean, that doesn't do anything; frankly, it doesn't amount to anything.

But in '62 I voted against Medicare, and the vote was fifty-two to forty-eight. It was one of the few times that all one hundred Senators were there and voting. Carl Hayden, the Senator from Arizona, voted against it, but he announced that if they needed his vote, he'd vote for it. So my opponent in '62 was able to say that my vote killed Medicare. It became quite a campaign issue here in Kentucky.

F: How did Kentuckians feel about it, do you think?

M: Well, it won the election.

F: Of course, you may have other assets.

M: I got sick and tired of talking about my reasons. Of course, it went through shortly thereafter. But it went through in an entirely different form than the bill that was before us in '62, much broader really. I mean it had Medicaid in it and all of this.

F: What do you think made the difference? You'd had twenty years of various Administrations trying to put it through. Do you think it was the

emotionalism--the surge following Mr. Kennedy's assassination?

M: Yes. I think that following the assassination President Johnson got through more legislation in one year than I suppose any other President has gotten through in five years. This was one of them. I think some of it was the emotionalism that followed the assassination. A lot of it was just the fact that right or wrong--and I'm not saying it's right--that more and more of our problems are being delegated because the States won't do it, or the cities can't do it, it's going to the federal government.

F: In your position on the Finance and Commerce committees, did you have much relationship with the White House after Mr. Johnson became President?

M: Yes, I had very close relationship with the Treasury Department, the Internal Revenue Service--the Treasury Department--and with the Department of Commerce, much more so with the Treasury Department. There were problems that really frightened you that weren't political in the sense of Republican vs. Democratic. But they were balance of payments and things of that kind. I worked very closely with President Johnson's people in Treasury especially--in Commerce also, but more so in Treasury--almost on a day-to-day basis. I was in constant contact with them.

F: This financial crisis that loomed in '67-'68 which finally led to the ten percent surtax, did you get readings from the President on this personally?

M: No, mostly from Mr. Fowler, the Secretary of the Treasury, or Mr. Barr, the Under Secretary of the Treasury. I don't remember talking to the President. His personal contacts with me during his tour of duty as President mostly dealt with foreign affairs. I wasn't on the Foreign Relations Committee, but having been associated with the State Department I had an interest in it. And I had a certain degree of leadership--if

you want to call it that--or influence on the Senate by virtue of the fact that--. For instance if I happened to agree with something that Bill Fulbright was trying to put through, he would always say, "Well, I am glad to have these comments from a former Assistant Secretary of State." He brought that up. With both President Kennedy and President Johnson, the only personal contacts I had in legislation dealt with, for instance, the Consular Treaty--things of that kind. I mean, treaties, or foreign aid bill, or something of that kind.

F: What kind of contact did you have on the Consular Treaty?

M: It looked like it was dead, and I criticized and needled the Administration so that they--they had put it aside--they did bring it up. Then of course it was up to me to deliver the votes on our side of the aisle, and I did that. I got Dirksen over.

F: Do you think they just sort of gave up at the Administrative level?

M: They gave up. Of course, the treaty is just a small step in the direction. I mean, it isn't of great significance--

F: And yet it raised tempers?

M: It raised a lot of tempers, and they just said, "Well, there's no use in getting into this controversy." I kept on needling until finally they did bring it up.

F: Did you have any consultations over the Dominican crisis?

M: No. On the Dominican thing, no.

F: You had no direct contact with the President at all?

M: No. I did with the State Department. I thought it was a tough situation that we got into, and I wanted to be helpful, and I told the State Department any time they thought a Republican speech that supported their

position would be helpful--although I didn't like their position, but I said they were in it now, and we can't get out, so--

F: Do you agree that Mr. Johnson over-reacted?

M: Yes. I think it was over-reaction in that case.

F: What would have been your alternative?

M: I don't know. I think that's a hard thing to say. That's why I don't like to criticize him for it, because if I'd been there and the Ambassador had called me and said, "I'm hiding under my desk" I think it was a tough one. Well, we'll have to wait and see how history judges it.

F: Then you made a famous, noteworthy speech in '67--a so-called hawk to dove speech on Viet Nam. Did you get any reaction out of the White House on that?

M: I certainly did.

F: Tell us about that. Give me a little bit of your background for the record on the whole Viet Nam issue.

M: First, let me say that I went along on Viet Nam as the thing grew and grew and grew like Topsy, and we got more and more involved.

F: Did this begin before you left the State Department?

M: What, Viet Nam?

F: Yes, the sort of advising, or did this come after you became a Senator?

M: I was in the State Department 'way back when the French lost Dien Bien Phu. And I was in on all those conferences at that time that had to do with what should we do! There were those, especially in the military, that wanted to actively go in. I mean, they wanted to send the planes in from the carriers and support the French. Well, President Eisenhower refused to do this. Even though many people would say Secretary Dulles

wanted to do it, he didn't want to do it either.

As this thing built up, I realized that Southeast Asia--it's important that it doesn't become dominated by the Communists. I more or less supported the position that we had taken. I voted for all the appropriations for it, and everything of that kind.

F: This was part of the sort of SEATO obligation?

M: Yes. I didn't care so much about the SEATO obligation as I did the facts of life--that this peninsula just should not become. I mean, I always regretted the fact that the Chinese went Communist, and I didn't want to see this Southeast Asia become Communist. Then I realized that I thought we were on a very bad wicket. We had gotten ourselves in an absolutely hopeless situation. Two wars--North Viet Nam versus South Viet Nam, and then a civil war within South Viet Nam; and there's no front there. I don't have to go into all those reasons.

So I came out for some sort of a disengagement--how to honorably achieve it. There are many things you can do. But I came out for getting out. This upset President Johnson because of the fact--not that Thruston Morton was just saying this--but because of the fact that I represented a segment of our party which was perhaps a little to the right of center. I mean, if Jack Javits had done this or if George Aiken had done it, or something, it wouldn't have had the impact that it had when I did it. He was very much disturbed about it. He called me about it, and I said, "I'm sorry. This is the way I feel, and I've got to speak out on it."

F: Did you talk over the telephone about it, or did you go see him?

M: Both. He talked to me on the telephone. Then he asked me to come down and visit with him, and I did.

F: How did he take your explanation?

M: He didn't agree with me.

F: Did he argue, or did he mainly listen?

M: No, he did most of the talking; he always does. But he tried to persuade me to change my position. In fifteen minutes he saw that he couldn't, and we departed as friends. But it's just one of those matters on which we disagreed.

F: Something like this, though, did not become a personal issue?

M: No, it didn't. And when I announced that I was not going to seek reelection, he called me up, and said, "Come on down, I want to talk to you." I thought then that he was going to say, "Now that you're not running again get off my back on this Viet Nam thing." But he didn't at all. He talked about the things that I've been discussing here--our days in the House together, our days in the Senate together. It was a purely personal thing.

And then I had one person on my staff--my top man. He could have gotten a job all right, but I wanted to see him find something appropriate. He doesn't have any independent means. His children are in college. He's at an expensive period of his life. And a vacancy came up on the Federal Power Commission where a Republican had to be appointed, and the President very generously and kindly put him on there. He's a good man, he's eminently qualified. I had been on the Commerce Committee, which has legislative oversight. He'd done the work on that for me, and he's eminently qualified. But it was a nice thing for him to do. He didn't have to do this for me. I mean, if there had been any personal friction as a result of my breaking with him on supporting the Viet Nam policy, he wouldn't have had to do that. But he did it, and he called me back to the White House to tell me about that.

F: Who was this man?

M: Bush Brooke.

F: Did you get the feeling in the 1960's that a sort of leadership vacuum developed among the Democrats in Congress?

M: Yes. It was very unfortunate that a situation developed where the Democratic chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee should so completely break with the Administration. I mean, in our form of government it seems to me that you've got to have sort of a relationship between Legislative and the Executive branch to really get anything done. And the animosities that developed between the White House under President Johnson and the State Department under Secretary Rusk vis-a-vis Mr. Fulbright and other members of the Foreign Relations Committee were very unfortunate.

F: Do you think that a stronger leadership--Majority Leader Mansfield could have prevented this?

M: I don't know whether it could have been prevented or not, because this Viet Nam thing has just become such an emotional issue. But undoubtedly the contrast between Senator Mansfield and Senator Johnson as leaders might have been a contributing factor. Now, in the last two years, I'd say, Senator Mansfield has gotten a lot tougher, and a leader has to be tough. I think that Senator Mansfield is one of the most intelligent, one of the most gentle men that I've ever known--and a wonderful man. But everybody knows he doesn't want to be leader, and he has to force himself to be. It's hard for Mike to be tough, and you have to be tough. I think that probably a more aggressive--I mean, when these fellows got out of line, if President Johnson had been the Majority Leader, he'd have probably seen that they got some pretty poor committee assignments--

those that got out of line.

F: I had the feeling once or twice that he would have been very happy to have had him and Sam Rayburn back in the Congress.

M: Yes.

F: You have been quite articulate on the matter of Senate ethics and general public ethics. Do you think that there has been any particular change in ethical standards, or are we just fighting a continuing problem that involves human beings?

M: I think that the steps that have been taken are all right, but I don't think that they solve the problem. I've always maintained, and I still maintain, that a man in that job ought to just make a full disclosure of his income, its sources, on an annual basis. Now you can say, "All right, when you've got to stand for election, if your opponent questions you and you don't answer him and you still get elected, whose business is it?" I think that we'd be better off, and this is especially true in the Senate--more so than in the House where they run every second year--it's especially true there that I think a full disclosure of your sources of income, and a balance sheet, if you will, a statement of income and expenses, if you will, would be in the best interest of the country.

F: So far as you know, did President Johnson tip his hand at all in the Senator Dodd investigation?

M: Not that I know of. From my side of the aisle, I wouldn't know. He maybe did, but I don't know.

F: It didn't filter over to--?

M: No, it didn't get over to me.

F: Do you agree that there's a certain sacredness about Defense spending that perhaps hampers other arms of the government?

M: Oh yes. I think that this sacred cow business of the Defense appropriation is something that we've got to break up. It's so big; it's so enormous!. It's awfully easy for the members of the Armed Services Committee or Senator Stennis' Subcommittee of Appropriations to get up there and say, "We can't touch this now; our boys need this and that." Certainly with a budget of some eighty billion dollars, we could find some cuts. I for one have always thought that we should separate the Defense appropriation from the sacred cow mantle that it now bears.

F: You had an opportunity over a considerable period of time to observe Mr. Nixon and Mr. Johnson's relationship. Superficially at least, they seem to be quite pleasant. I mean, they've taken on each other as opponents, but the transition has looked smooth, and things have on the surface been quite amicable. Can you throw any light on this?

M: All I can say is they're both pragmatic and successful politicians, and I think they have a great respect for each other in that field. President Johnson was in a somewhat unique position in this turnover, because he wasn't the man that had run against Mr. Nixon. I think if President Johnson had run instead of Mr. Humphrey--and let's say Mr. Nixon had won a close race, as close as this one was--it might have been a little bit different. But since he wasn't running and he held himself out of the campaign--I mean, President Johnson did work for Mr. Humphrey, but it wasn't the same thing as if he had personally run against him--

F: He wasn't the defeated candidate.

M: No, he wasn't the defeated candidate. As I say, they both respect each

other as not just competent, but I think rather brilliant political pragmatists.

F: Were you surprised by the March 31 announcement?

M: Yes, I certainly way. I had seen him before then--just two weeks before, I think, about mid-March--alone. We had a chat. This was after I had announced that I wasn't going to run, He said, "You know, I haven't made up my mind what I'm going to do." I thought anybody in his position would have said that. I didn't give it a second thought.

F: Every President has been coy about running again.

M: Oh, sure. So I gave it no significance, and I was watching the March 31 show--the television interview, or the statement he made. Of course he went on and on and on and talked about a lot of things. I was just about to turn it off, saying "I've heard all this before," when of course he dropped the bombshell.

Senator Talmadge of Georgia, who was an early to bed, early to rise country boy--who's smart as he can be incidentally, one of the smartest men in the Senate--he did turn it off. He went to bed, and some reporter who was just holding down the beat because it was Sunday night and there weren't a lot of people around the newspaper from the Atlanta Constitution, called him and said, "Senator, what do you think about the President's announcement that he's not going to run again?"

He said, "I don't know who you are, or how drunk you are, but hang up this phone and let me sleep." That was the end of that, and then he turned of f the bell on the phone. So the next morning when he got the newspaper--I suppose this happened to thousands of people. It was a complete surprise to me. I think Mrs. Johnson had a lot to do with his decision.

F: On your basis--and I know there's a tendency to rationalize after the fact--but did you have an idea that he would lose Kentucky, that he was losing Kentucky prior to March 31, or do you think he--?

M: I think as of March 31 he was in real trouble politically, not just in Kentucky, but in a lot of states. I think that he would have certainly lost Kentucky. Now maybe he could have pulled it out of the fire if he had decided to run, but at that point I've never seen a President's popularity go as low as his did at about that point. And that's true in this state--Kentucky.

F: Do you think that the law and order issue which was used against him and the Democrats was a legitimate issue, when basically law and order is a state and local matter?

M: I don't know whether it's a legitimate issue or not, but I think it was--

F: It was effective, I know.

M: It was somewhat effective.

F: Do you think--and you don't have to answer this of course--there's much that can be done about law and order on a national scale?

M: Yes, I think there is. The basic answer is of course local, not national. But I think, frankly, that we could get a few people that are a little bit tougher in the federal judiciary, that might do something. Some of these decisions have made it difficult for the police. There's no doubt about it.

F: Like every other state, your state has some problems, particularly over in the East. Has the federal aid to education improved the situation? Had it worked?

M: In the education field, I'd say that sixty percent--I'm just taking that

figure--but I'd say that sixty percent of it is effective. I think to some it's boondoggling, but in that area, especially in a poor state like Kentucky--I mean by poor, your per capita income is among the bottom five in the United States, and this means your tax base is low--that is has been helpful. I think that in other areas the so-called War on Poverty, I'd say it's about eighty percent boondoggling so far as my state is concerned. This is true in the mountains of Kentucky, too, where this has caused all kinds of problems.

F: Have the people in that area been receptive? Have they been used as sort of an intellectual test tube? In other words, how pragmatic has the poverty program been?

M: It hasn't been. It gets into local politics. I mean, one family against another--not Republicans versus Democrats.

F: In what way?

M: Well, you come in and you set somebody up as chairman of this thing, and he gets more money than the county judge gets. It just causes more infighting. It's sort of like these fights they have up there for who's going to be rural carrier, who's going to be postmaster. Until ten years ago, the janitor in a post office in some of these towns in rural Kentucky got more money than the principal of the high school. So this is a sought-after job. This same thing permeates this War on Poverty in these areas.

F: Has there been a tendency to use local people in the supervisory positions, or have they imported your--?

M: They've brought them in. Some local ones are used. As soon as one guy gets the job, then you've got ten people mad. But then they've brought in this VISTA, these volunteers; they've brought in these hippies

and these long-haired kids; and it has caused a lot of trouble in this area where the people are fundamentally traditional. It's a simple society. Their church means a lot to them; and they bring in these people with all these, as they say, these outgoing ideas, and it just hasn't paid off.

F: They haven't tended to accept the mores of the area the way they've found them, but have tried to--

M: Tried to change it. Here you've got your old Anglo-Saxon stock up there in the mountains, been there for seven or eight generations--and you come in there and try to upset their customs and traditions and tell them that this is the way that they've got to live. And they just resent it. Whether they're hungry or whether they're poor, they still resent it.

F: So that quite apart from--we won't argue whether it's successful or not--but quite apart from the success or lack of success of the poverty programs in eastern Kentucky, you've got the fact that you haven't made much political headway with the people themselves.

M: You haven't made any, I don't think.

F: If this is improvement, they don't want it.

M: Yes. Regardless of the merits, it's just that they're going at it the wrong way. That's true to a degree in the metropolitan areas here in Kentucky. Here in the city of Louisville there's more infighting that goes on within these committees that are being set up than they accomplish. The thing has just been ridden with all kinds of corruption--at least here it has.

F: Has this been a failure to utilize experienced personnel? This matter, you know, of self-help and letting the people--

M: No. I think the trouble of it is we put through all this legislation in '64-'65, and we just went too rapidly. We just don't have the competent people to administer these many programs that we've set up.

F: Are you saying in effect that the Johnson domestic program in this field would have been more effective if he had done less and digested more?

M: Yes, if we had taken it slower.

F: Not to butter you, but you are young and vigorous. Why did you quit?

M: I'm in my sixty-second year. Counting my Navy tour, I've crowded an awful lot into the last twenty-five or twenty-six years. I just got to the point--I didn't get to see my own children grow up, what with the war and then with politics, and I just wanted to see my grandchildren grow up. I figured that too many that I had seen around Washington stay there until they outlive their usefulness. I still want to continue my interest in Kentucky and its problems. I'm trying to do that now. I'm probably busier than I was when I was in Congress. But it wasn't a question of the election. I would have had the easiest election I have ever had in my life, but I couldn't envisage six more years of that pressure and grind. I felt that I could still contribute to my country, to my state, to my neighbors, and someone else could do a better job in Washington.

F: You had the experience of being a Republican National Chairman. Now then, looking at it from the other side of the fence, is Mr. Johnson at present guilty of the charge that he let the Democratic national machinery go to pieces?

M: It went to pieces, I think. Bailey was just a figurehead. I don't know whether--

F: Do you think there was any interest on Bailey's part or--?

M: I don't know whether the President could have done much about it. What has happened is, the Democratic strength--a lot of it. Going back to Mr. Roosevelt's time, it was a strange coalition, and it really had to be maintained, and it began to break down. Your city machines, largely Democratic, began to break down--as indeed did the Republican city machines at the early years of the century. I mean, we had a machine in Philadelphia. It wasn't anything to be proud of, and of course Joe Clark broke that up when he got elected mayor. Now the Democratic machine in Philadelphia has had its problems. I think that your city machines are just beginning to break down, and that was one of the sources of strength that the Democratic party had.

The old Southern base is of course--I think between General Eisenhower and Mr. Nixon and Mr. Goldwater that we have carried every Southern state once, and most of them twice--some of them three or four times like Florida and Virginia and Tennessee.

F: No one has used "the solid South" except as a historic term in a long time.

M: That's right. Just a historic term. And this thing began to get into disarray. Whether you could have put a national chairman in and given him the support from the White House that he might have needed, and that would have offset this disarray or not, I don't know. But I think certainly there was no effort made to offset the disarray through support, by the White House, of party structure.

F: Are you suggesting that we may have come to the end of an era and that we're going to have new organizational directions?

M: I think that both parties have got to sharpen up their national organizations

and procedures and the way they go about things in this computer age in which we live today. I don't think you can run a national committee the way you ran it twenty years ago--or even ten years ago when I had the chairmanship. I think that you've got to use every possible vehicle that you can to sharpen up and strengthen your organization.

That's one reason why I hope my brother takes this job, because I know from experience that he and Mack Mathias, who is now the Senator from Maryland, have worked on this whole problem. They had an operation up there that if they wanted to write a personalized letter to every trained nurse in Maryland, they could push a button and they'd have it out in about forty hours. The communication facilities are available to you today. You've got to use them and you've got to sharpen them up. You just can't sit around and say, "Well, I'll go see old Pete down here in the Third Ward and see what Pete thinks." Because it isn't what old Pete in the Third Ward thinks, it's what the voters in the Third Ward think, and you've got ways today of communicating with them that you've got to make use of.

F: Now, your party was in a bit of a shambles itself right up to the '64 election.

M: Yes.

F: And Mr. Bliss and others put it together with rather astounding results, in a way. Do you think this is a result of Republican intelligence, or do you think it's a result of Democratic ineptness?

M: I think Ray Bliss did a good job in putting together a structure. I think he was aided and abetted by the fact that it was a period in which there was so much disaffection. So many people were concerned. Whether it

was Viet Nam or whether it was the riots on the campuses, or whatever it was, they just didn't like what was going on. And the party that's out always benefits by that. Now this isn't to detract from Ray Bliss' techniques or his knowledge or his ability. But this helped him.

F: Thank you, Senator.

M: You bet.

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By Thruston Morton

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