INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT OLIVER

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Oliver's home, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start out with your background basically, where you came from and how you became interested and involved in politics.

O: I was born in San Augustine, Texas, which, as people who are familiar with it know, is in very deep East Texas. I was raised in Corpus Christi, went through public schools in Corpus Christi, and during the Depression I went to work in the summertime for the Humble Oil Company in Baytown, Texas, in the research department. I dropped out of the University of Texas, where I had been going to school. I stayed at Baytown, and during the course of my employment there the New Deal came along. Roosevelt was elected, and the right of labor to organize was established under the law. This was a pre-Wagner act; it was under the NRA.

I was sort of drafted into the labor movement, although I'd been slated to go into the public relations department of the Humble Oil Company and actually was offered the job of assistant public relations director for them. But I had become active in the company union in Baytown, and became sort of a local hero to the employees for championing their rights and making the first motion in history to reject a wage increase on the grounds that it was

not adequate. When that got through the plant I became sort of a local hero, and when the bona fide union came into it, even though I was not eligible for membership by virtue of employment in the research department, I was elected head of the union. There, just by an accident of fate, my career was determined.

So I spent most of the rest of my life in the labor movement. Shortly after the Committee for Industrial Organization was formed, I came east and was one of the early organizers working for John L. Lewis. Later on I worked for other unions, at one time was southern director of the Textile Workers Union just before the war, and I forced myself to be drafted. I had a deferment, but I got sick and tired of being insulted everywhere I went for being a citizen who should be in uniform. So I finally sent a telegram asking them when I was going to be drafted, to have it sent to my home address, and naturally I was drafted. I wanted to be. I managed to latch on to an outfit that was going to Europe. So I was in the Army in the latter part of February, and I was overseas in the latter part of June, because I knew a general who managed a transfer to what they call a hot outfit.

After the war Phil Murray asked me what I wanted to do. He was then president of the CIO. Because I had been raised in Texas and had come out of the labor movement in Texas, I wanted to go back to Texas, so he appointed me regional director in Texas. I went back there, and I was the regional director for the CIO in Texas and director of the organizing committee of the CIO in Texas. That

was the position I was in in 1948 when Johnson ran for the Senate. As I recall, Lyndon Johnson ran, and then Jimmie Allred ran by agreement. Then this time in 1948 it was Lyndon's turn to run. I remember that Jimmie Allred told me one day that if Lyndon didn't hurry up and make up his mind and announce, that he was going to announce, even though he had conceded that it was Johnson's turn to run.

Johnson did announce, and Walter Reuther--at the time I didn't know Reuther too well--called me. He had formed a friendship with Lyndon Johnson in Washington when Johnson was a member of the House of Representatives. Some way or other they became acquainted, and Reuther called me and asked me to support Lyndon Johnson for the Senate in his race. The American Federation of Labor state organization had endorsed Coke Stevenson. Coke had a fairly good labor record on straight, narrow labor issues, had a good relationship with the AF of L, and they endorsed him. Some of the people in the CIO wanted to go along with the AF of L, and the best I could do was to get a no-endorsement policy out of them.

I worked very hard in Johnson's election in 1948 and managed to influence a number of the local unions in his support in that very close [race]. He was far behind in the first primary, and then he closed the gap in the second. It was during that second primary that I worked most energetically to get as much support as I could. Then Johnson won. I wasn't then closely associated with Johnson until 1953. I sort of didn't like some of the ways in which he

campaigned in 1948, so we had a little falling-out over it. Fortunately for him he refused my advice, because if he had accepted my advice he wouldn't have won, because as it was it was a very close election.

In the meantime, I had come to Washington to become a part of the Marshall Plan in the early part of 1950. When Reuther became president of the CIO he asked me to come over and be his assistant in the CIO, which I did do, and among my responsibilities was to set up and run an expanded legislative operation. It was during this period of time that I became, in effect, reacquainted with Lyndon Johnson. I worked very closely with him during the period that he was minority leader, and then during the period that he was majority leader and thereafter until he became vice president. During his vice presidency we had an association, but he had no direct legislative responsibility. Then when he became president this area of activity was completely removed. (Interruption)

G: Let me ask you about Reuther's motivation in asking you to support Johnson. Do you think it was more on the basis of their personal friendship, or because he felt that Johnson would be more of a friend to labor than Stevenson would?

O: Actually, Johnson had a record. He was very much of a favorite of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was a national youth administrator, and he had a reputation among people in these circles as being a Roosevelt Democrat. Certainly you couldn't characterize Coke Stevenson as such. There was a friendship plus a belief on Reuther's part that Johnson would make a good senator, dedicated to the public

interest, and that he would be a progressive senator, be a forward-looking senator--a New Deal senator, I think, would be the simplest way to describe it.. It was on that basis that he asked me to do what I could for him.

G: Before we turned on the tape you gave me a breakdown of labor in Texas, the oil workers and the various areas of labor concentration. Can you do that for the record?

O: Yes. The largest union in Texas at that time was the Oil Workers' International Union, which was the union from which I originally came. They were concentrated heavily in the Jefferson County area, the Houston area. A CIO staff person had become president of the state CIO council, and he had come originally from the Ladies Garment Workers' Union. He was more of a liberal than he was a labor man. He was very strongly interested in maintaining a very close relationship with the AF of L. At that time, of course, they were two separate organizations. Because of his efforts to have unified action with the AF of L, he wanted to go along with them on the endorsement of Coke Stevenson, without regard for what the basic differences in political philosophy there were between Johnson and Stevenson.

He had the support of a large portion of the oil workers' union and some other unions, but I had a good relationship with individual unions, local unions of oil. And I had a good relationship with the auto workers, which at that time were not very big in Texas, the steel workers, which at that time were not near as large as they are now, and with the packing house workers, who were concentrated in

the Fort Worth area, and a few other scattered unions. It was on the basis of that relationship and the influence that I had that I was able to overcome the position of the oil union and some others that were supporting the AF of L in their efforts to elect Coke Stevenson.

I think Coke had given them a commitment that he would repeal the Taft-Hartley Law, which was just a straight labor issue. My judgment of Coke Stevenson was that he would keep his commitment to labor, but that insofar as all the other programs of the Democratic Party that he would be no better than a Republican. I was able to prevent the CIO State Council from endorsing Coke Stevenson, but I knew I couldn't get an endorsement of Lyndon Johnson. Because this was as much as I could get, just to neutralize them and have no endorsement, which would leave all of us free then to exert our own individual efforts with the various local unions and with the various union groups in behalf of whatever candidate we locally favored. So it was in that way that I was able to work for Johnson.

G: What was your view of the Johnson campaign organization? Was it a pretty well-run operation? Did they seem to know what they were doing?

O: Back in those days, I suppose that my political activity was not such that I was in a position to make any valid judgment on that. I remember that I was impressed by the fact that Johnson covered the state very effectively. I guess he was the first candidate in Texas ever to use a helicopter for campaigning. I thought he

built in a short period of time a fairly good organization for a person whose political background was primarily related to the one congressional district for so many years. Bear in mind that at this time he had been a member of Congress for ten years, so that he hadn't gotten around the state as much as a person would have in the position that Coke was in as a former lieutenant governor and as a governor. I thought he had a fairly good campaign organization. Of course, he was scrambling for money all the time, because he didn't have access to the large campaign funds that were being used, actually, to defeat him.

G: I guess Senator Wirtz was helping him a lot with the strategy.

O: I didn't get too well acquainted with the people in the campaign itself. Jimmie Allred and I were the ones that coordinated most closely. I concentrated on doing what I could do in the areas in which I had influence in the labor movement, and I actually didn't get involved even with the local Johnson organization in those areas. I just devoted myself to the developing the support for him in the unions, and then they, of course, would work with the local people. So I really don't have any basis for judging whether it was particularly good or particularly bad. He had some strong support in various areas.

G: I gather that Roy Hofheinz did a good job for him in Houston. Did you work any with Hofheinz?

O: I had known Roy Hofheinz since he was a freshman member of the state

legislature, when I did my first lobbying work in 1934 in the Texas state legislature when Jimmie Allred first became governor. Roy was a very able, energetic, articulate spokesman, and he did do a good job for him. I think that Jimmie Allred was one of his greatest assets during that period. But there were a lot of people that worked hard for him.

G: Did you work much with the black unions in Houston, say, with Moses LeRoy?

O: No, I didn't work with any of the black leaders. All of my time had been prior to that devoted to organizing. I worked with the black union leaders in the various areas in organizing unions, but I had a very limited involvement with the black leaders politically.

G: Richard Grovey?

O: None of those names do I remember at this time.

G: What insight can you give us on the relationship between Jimmie Allred and Lyndon Johnson?

O: They had had a very close relationship through the years. Jimmie Allred was a very good governor, and to use an overused term, he was what could be characterized as a liberal governor, a New Deal governor. He was a strong supporter of Roosevelt, and naturally he and Johnson had sort of a political affinity. Johnson was close to Roosevelt. He was a New Dealer. Jimmie Allred was a New Dealer. Johnson supported Jimmie Allred very strongly when he ran for the Senate, and Jimmie Allred supported Johnson very strongly in his two races for the Senate. I think during this 1948 election Allred was

spending almost full time on the campaign for Johnson. I used to get a call from him nearly every morning.

G: Were you familiar with Ma Ferguson's support of Johnson in that race?

O: No. You know, Ma went back to a period in which I had no activity whatsoever in politics, but I would think that Ma Ferguson would be inclined to support Johnson. But I didn't know anything about that.

G: You mentioned earlier that Johnson made some anti-labor statements during the campaign, or statements that offended you.

O: They were not so much anti-labor as they were sort of a concession to the ultraconservatives in economic and political philosophy. The occasion that particularly irritated me was a speech that was made in Dallas. Of course, back in those days Dallas was a very poorly organized city and was really the seat of reaction. It was E. B. Germany's home town. Germany was the leader of the conservative faction in the Democratic Party. It was the stronghold of the Texas Regulars, even much more so than Houston or Fort Worth. Dallas was really the seat of power of what we call the Shivercrats through the years and the Texas Regulars that went back to the earlier conventions where there was a split in the Texas delegation. Johnson made a speech that was designed to attract conservative support, and fortunately for him it did. I had encouraged him to base his campaign more on support of the New Deal, and, as I said, fortunately he didn't take my advice.

G: What arguments did he use in talking with you about this?

O: He didn't argue the point. I think he did what he deemed was politically necessary. He did not discuss the [speech], and that I

guess was one of the reasons that I got upset about it. Because here I had been working so hard to get labor's support for him, and then all of a sudden he comes up with a speech that really was a direct affront to the labor movement. I took it rather personally, because here I had been trying to convince all these people that they should go along with me in supporting Lyndon. I almost ceased activity for him. I considered doing it. I think that's one of the reasons that Jimmie Allred called me faithfully every morning to make sure that I didn't quit. I had expressed my dissatisfaction to him about it. But I did not quit; I worked. I guess I sulked for a week, but then I went back and redoubled my efforts, because I knew it was a very tough campaign and that we'd have a hard time winning. Johnson ran a hundred thousand votes behind Coke Stevenson in the first primary.

G: Did you see much of him after he was elected and came to the Senate?

O: No, when he came to the Senate I didn't see anything of him. As a matter of fact, I deliberately avoided him. It was only when I came to Washington and assumed the responsibility of the legislative operation of CIO after Reuther became president that I even renewed the acquaintanceship with Johnson. My first occasion of doing that was a dinner the CIO had for the senators, which was the first time they'd ever done anything like that. We had quite a number of senators present at the dinner, and Johnson was there. For the first time since the 1948 campaign we spoke. This would have been in 1953.

G: He'd just been elected minority leader.

O: Just been elected. He had defeated a little block of liberals that were led by Hubert Humphrey, as a matter of fact.

G: I have some legislative issues for those years. Let me ask you to take a look. We were talking about the Taft-Hartley.

O: One of my major contributions to that vote was that I got Senator Young of North Dakota, to the surprise of everybody. And the way I got Senator Young's support was my support for 90 per cent parity, farm bill. Young had a zero rating on the labor unions' rating of senators. He had a 100 per cent anti-labor voting record. I became acquainted with him on the basis of the farm bill, and from then on he had a fairly good record on labor issues, and particularly on crucial issues such as this one. Of course, Langer was a former labor person and a strongly pro-labor senator, and that made it easier for Young. But my relationship with this bill was that.

G: Did you work with Malone any on that?

O: No. There was a great lobbyist from the building trades named Walter Mason, and he had Senator Malone pretty much under his influence on labor issues. So he was the one who produced Malone on that and on a number of other labor issues. As a matter of fact, on one occasion Walter had told Molly Malone to vote no on all amendments. There was one amendment that Walter Mason wanted, and he sort of abused Malone a little bit for voting no on that issue. Actually, Malone was carrying out his instructions. But Walter Mason had that tenacity.

G: Malone was awfully conservative.

O: On everything but labor issues. On labor issues, he was good. One

of the reasons of that was the personal relationship between Walter Mason of the building trades and Malone, just as Young's vote was a product of my relationship with him.

G: To what extent did Lyndon Johnson himself cultivate the support of a few Republicans, particularly of the maverick type like Langer and Malone?

O: Johnson was probably the greatest legislative strategist, the greatest legislative tactician that ever occupied a position of leadership in the Senate, or the House either for that matter. Particularly do I recall this in connection with the Congress that came in in 1955. You know, in 1954 we had the Congress that Eisenhower had brought in with him. That's the reason that Johnson was minority leader instead of majority leader in that Congress, which was, I guess, the Eighty-Third. But in the Congress that came up after that was when the great leadership qualities and the legislative strategy qualities of Johnson emerged, because we had a 49-47 Senate [Democratic-Republican].

G: He needed all the votes he would get, I suppose.

O: So that every vote didn't happen. It had to be structured. It had to be put together, and in putting it together Johnson had to cultivate conservative Democrats who would have been inclined to vote the other way. He had to cultivate available Republicans from any source that they may come, and he worked very hard on that. His other great asset was that he was a master of timing. He knew exactly when to call up to get a unanimous consent agreementand when to bring a vote.

I never will forget the opening of the Congress in 1955, which

is the one in which Johnson was elected majority leader. Lausche came in that year, and there was a doubt as to which side Lausche would be on. I was up in the gallery, as I recall. I was seated over at the right near the press gallery, about the second or third row up where I got a good view of the floor. I wanted to be able to [see]. I didn't know what the vote [would be], but I watched Lyndon Johnson on the floor and Johnson was very relaxed. I leaned over to whoever was with me, and I said, "Lausche is going to vote with the Democrats." That was all I said. Whoever was with me, I don't remember who it was, asked me how I knew that. I said that Johnson was the only man on the floor besides Lausche that knew it. Johnson was relaxed, and I could always tell when Johnson was working energetically to put together a vote or when he had what he wanted. So I concluded that Lausche would vote to organize the Senate, and that meant voting for Hayden for president pro tempore, which he did do. I remember that the Democrats on the Senate floor broke out in spontaneous applause, because they didn't know how Lausche was going to vote. But Johnson then, of course, became majority leader. Johnson just got up and went over and shook hands with Lausche, just exchanged knowing smiles.

G: Do you remember the employment security legislation in 1954?

O: I remember the vote, but I didn't get too actively involved in that vote. I worked very hard on the farm bill. But again, I'd say that my activity on the farm bill was primarily on the House side, where it was absolutely essential that we get urban votes for it.

That's what I concentrated on doing.

I did know a lot about this McCarthy censure thing. Johnson's office at that time was over where Stan Kimmitt's office later was. As minority leader it was on the third floor of the Senate right by the "Senators Only" elevator. I remember going in there one time and there was nobody there except Lyndon sitting back in the second office back. You know, they had the reception room, then they had the little office, and at that time he didn't have the larger office over on the side. He was sitting up there with one foot, I think, hanging over the edge of the desk, and he told me about the McCarthy censure, how he had locked in Knowland. Although Knowland tried to get out of his commitments. But he had Knowland locked in with a commitment that he would go along. There was a very rigorous effort going on to prevent the establishment of the committee that held the hearings. That's what he had gotten an agreement on, to set up this committee, and he told me about it. That was before there was any public knowledge at all that there was going to be a committee established to investigate McCarthy.

G: How did he get Knowland to make a commitment?

O: He had an uncanny ability to influence Knowland. I sometimes attribute it to the fact that I didn't think Knowland was quite as bright as he should have been. But Johnson did it in his own inimitable way. I used to often say that Lyndon Johnson always had Bill Knowland in his pocket or else he left him standing at the gate with an outmaneuver. He just had a great deal of effectiveness with respect to either getting him to go along with him or running around him with the

legislative strategy that he was able to put together. And part of it was timing, knowing exactly when to ask for unanimous consent agreement, get a vote set for a time specific. He managed to outmaneuver Knowland consistently. He managed to get him to go along on this setting up of the McCarthy committee; he got him committed to it. He was having difficulty holding him, but there was not a whisper of this in public at the time that he told me about it. It seems to me it could have been a Saturday morning. It was some morning that the Senate was not in session. There weren't many people around, not much activity around the Senate, and I just dropped by to visit with him. This was sort of mid-way in my efforts to rebuild a relationship with him.

G: Did he ever talk about McCarthy to you?

O: Oh, he told me about what a dangerous man he was and what an evil person he was and how determined he was to put an end to this activity of his. He felt very strongly about the blackmailing tactics of McCarthy and what it was doing to the Senate. He talked with me about that on several occasions, and he was so happy over being able to set up what he considered to be a trap that would put an end to McCarthy's activities. He was telling me that his greatest concern was being able to hold Knowland in line until he could get the actual resolution passed in the Senate. He did succeed in doing it. It was one of his great achievements, and he did that practically [single-handedly]. I mean the legislative maneuvering that brought that about was Johnson's; it was his handiwork.

G: Well now, let's go to 1955. I know you've got a lot of things here.

O: I worked very hard on the tax bill that year. As a matter of fact, we originated in the House a proposal for an increase in the exemptions that we worked very hard on and lost on the House side by four votes, as I recall. We were trying at the time to get the best tax bill that we could. I spent a good deal of time on it.

G: This was a case where he was opposed by Harry Byrd on the Finance Committee.

O: Well, [Byrd opposed him] on nearly every issue. Every improvement in Social Security, every improvement in taxes, any liberalization of taxes was always on a minority report, because Byrd managed to vote out of his committee consistently a conservative bill. Then there had to be a minority report, and the bill out of the committee had to be amended on the floor. So it was not just this tax bill, it was on everything that was ever done in employment compensation, Social Security, lower retirement age for women, the disability provision. All of those over the opposition of Byrd. Any progress that was made was made because of Johnson's ability to put the votes together over Byrd's opposition.

G: You mentioned the highway bill.

O: My activity on the highway bill was primarily directed toward getting Johnson not to vote for the Chavez amendment, which would have knocked out the Davis-Bacon provision that establishes the prevailing rates so that all highway construction wages had to reflect those in the industry. [On] the bill itself, there wasn't a great deal that could be done or had to be done that I was working on, except to make sure

that Johnson didn't cast an anti-labor vote. I spent a number of hours with him discussing the issue and listening to all the reasons he had for opposing the Davis-Bacon provision of the highway bill, most of them relating to the effect that they would have on the construction costs of farm-to-market roads.

My concern with that was not that Johnson's vote was needed, but I did not want Johnson to cast an anti-labor vote. This one particularly would have been a very strong factor with the building trades. We were having enough difficulty, and I was subjected to enough criticism by liberals for being close to Lyndon Johnson during this period. Every anti-labor vote that he cast--and there were very few of them, or none actually, anti-labor votes during this period--that would place him with the conservative Democrats rather than with the liberal Democrats would be a basis for further criticism of me. Some of the ADAers used to say that I was in Lyndon Johnson's vest pocket. Actually, I was trying to get Johnson to vote the way he actually felt, and that was that he was just what Roosevelt thought he was--a good, strong, New Deal Democrat.

On this particular occasion, after trying to persuade Johnson not to vote wrong on this bill, Bobby Baker and I sort of entered into a little conspiracy to get Johnson out of town before the vote. I knew he was going to Mayo's and had scheduled his departure for the afternoon of the vote. I asked Bobby if he could think of any way to get him on an earlier plane, any excuse for getting him on an earlier plane. I told him why, and so he said he would

work on it. Bobby called me the next morning and said, "Well, mission accomplished. I just put Johnson on a plane for Mayo's." Now this is the vote that is reflected here [on your list of issues]. This happened in connection with one of the highway bills.

G: Was this a case where you had talked to him for three or four hours?

O: I talked with him and spent most of the afternoon with him. I left his office and got home about seven o'clock, and a call came [from] Ashton. She said, "The Boss wants to talk to you, wants to see you." I said, "I just left him." She said, "He wants you to come back." So I went back up and spent from seven-thirty until eleven o'clock that night with him, still discussing this issue and outlining all the reasons that I thought he shouldn't vote wrong. And not so much on the issues of the bill, although I did spend a lot of time on those because I wanted to try to convince him of the soundness of the vote, but I was mainly concerned in persuading him it was in his best interest.

G: Could you detect any interest that he might have had then in running for president?

O: No, I don't think that there was any. I suppose that his acceptance of the idea that a good voting record would be in his own best interest might reflect, you know, the hope. He probably had the hope, but he had no expectation. I know that. I am convinced that Johnson didn't think he had a chance at the Democratic nomination in 1960 until just before the convention. So that although he harbored the hope, I don't think that he thought that it was a serious

thing. Because he often had told me that a Texas Democrat just couldn't get the nomination.

G: Do you remember the minimum wage bill that year, when the Democrats supported the increase from seventy-five cents to a dollar? This was a case that looked like the Republicans were going to win, and it seemed almost a surprise when--

O: Yes, I was very active on that on both sides. The big issue came on Eisenhower proposing ninety cents plus escalation. The AF of L did not want to compromise at a dollar. They wanted to still maintain a position for going for more than a dollar. I had examined the votes very carefully--and that was one of the things that I think that Johnson and I learned together, how to count and the importance of counting votes and I concluded that a dollar was the best that we could get; that if we held out for more, Eisenhower's ninety cents plus escalation was going to carry because it had an appeal. As a matter of fact, Paul Douglas was willing to accept escalation for certain portions of the lumber industry down South. He and I had quite a discussion over that, and some of his staffers got upset with me because they thought I had put too much pressure on him to get him to abandon his ninety cents plus escalation.

I was afraid that if you got it in one phase of the law that Eisenhower would win the point. So I had a great deal to do with getting the point of compromise, both in the Labor Committee of the House and on the Senate side. The great danger was in the Eisenhower proposal, and we were fearful that he would be able to carry it.

That was one of the master legislative achievements of Lyndon Johnson. On that I worked very closely with him. I don't remember exactly what the vote was, but it was a very close vote. It was a very close vote. That was one of the legislative achievements in which I worked very closely with him.

G: On something like this would he be able to bring something to a vote as soon as he knew he had the votes, when, let's say, the Republicans weren't quite ready?

O: I would spend a lot of my time during this period in the Senate gallery. Johnson had indicated to me that he wanted me close at hand. Because you can get a sense of what's happening on the floor--whether or not your calculations are going awry, or whether things are going according to the way you expect them to go, or whether you are losing ground, or whether you should go to a vote, or whether you should adjourn or recess the Senate. So I usually sat in the diplomatic gallery, where I could be easily spotted and Johnson knew where I was. I spent a lot of time [there], and I could watch Johnson working. On some of these major battles that went on, Johnson for days on end would sit in his chair sort of looking around completely relaxed, and the debate would go on endlessly. All of a sudden you'd see Johnson get up and start moving around the floor, talking to people, buttonholing people, talking in a very animated fashion with them, and I knew that Johnson was working to put together a vote.

I remember particularly this happened on the civil rights bill

where the debate went on endlessly. I guess this was the first civil rights bill that was passed. Debate went on endlessly until Johnson started working real hard, feverishly. He got a unanimous consent agreement out of Knowland and managed to carry the position. But I could always tell whether he was far away from asking for a unanimous consent agreement. Because that was his technique. Well, that's just the time-worn technique to use in the Senate, of at the proper time getting a unanimous consent agreement limiting debate and setting a vote for a time certain. And so that's what he [did].

G: What arguments would he use with other senators?

O: Oh, he would use every argument there was: it was good for the Democratic Party; that he had to make a record.

G: Were you ever there when he was working on another senator? Did you ever hear him use the Johnson "treatment" on another senator?

O: I've seen him many times use the Johnson "treatment." He would have me only with somebody that he thought might have some respect for my judgment or my opinion. And he would say, "Ask Bob if that's not the case." And I would tell them, "Yes, that's true. Johnson's right about this." But I think mostly he would relate it to what's good for the Democratic Party, the record the Democratic Party had to make. Here we were out during this period of time of his majority leadership. Eisenhower was in power and was the president, and Johnson wanted the Democrats to look good.

G: On some of these labor issues would he sit down and counsel with you and sort of plan strategy and say, "You do this and I'll do this"?

O: Well, on a lot of votes, not just labor issues. We kept close touch with one another on vote counting on nearly everything that we were doing, whether it was Social Security improvements--

G: You probably had a lot of contacts with some other senators that he didn't have.

O: Yes. The Senate was divided. Johnson was a part of the club, and you had the pro-Johnson senators. And you had the anti-Johnson senators, and they were an established, recognizable bloc--people like Paul Douglas, people like Lehman, people like to a lesser extent Wayne Morse, people like--

G: Kefauver?

O: Well, Kefauver, but he was in a different category. He was a loner. What was the senator from Pennsylvania? Liberal senator? Oh, Joe Clark. These senators--Pat McNamara--were not in the Johnson group, and I had influence with them. I would very often be the emissary, and they never did know what the count was. I could persuade them that we should compromise at a certain point because that's all the votes we had. We had this, we had that, we couldn't get any more. It is always easy to crystallize a minority and lose. The art of legislating is to find out how far forward you can go, and you can only go as far as you have the votes to go. Knowing that point is the art of legislating, and Johnson knew that to the nth degree. I learned a great deal from him in that respect. That's what we did; we counted votes.

G: I get the impression that he could also parlay one or two votes

into three or four. It would sort of be "if one senator will vote with me, will you vote with me?" And then he'd go back to the original one and--

O: Yes. That was one of his techniques, but I think that the important thing is that he worked on them individually. You know, Johnson would never have caucuses, and people didn't understand that. Neither did Rayburn have caucuses. They never had caucuses because the Democratic Party was so divided. You wouldn't have had any unified position on anything in a caucus. All you would have had was division. Johnson wanted to keep everybody separated, and get them one at a time; those that we could get. If four or five ever got together, they were harder to get than one at a time. So he would get one; and then he would go tell somebody else, "Look, if you'll vote with me, I can get Joe Clark to vote with me on this issue." And they would say, "All right, you get Joe, and I'll vote with you on this." That's the way he did it. Everyone has their own pet legislation, and he would very often agree that he would further the progress of somebody's pet bill if they would vote with him on some other bill.

G: In this connection, do you think he didn't view individual pieces of legislation so much as packages or quid pro quos, that he understood the relationship of different bills?

O: Oh, there is no question about that.

G: Can you give an example of where he would gain enough support for a major piece of legislation by [using this technique]?

O: One of the issues that I would say was one of the greatest achievements and probably an example of real legislative strategy was in connection with disability and lower retirement age for women. I sort of started that on the House side, just based upon my analysis that that could be done that year [1955] and that the time was right to do it. We passed the bill that came to the Senate out of the House with only twenty-one votes against it in the House. But we got to the Senate and found that the AMA had engaged in a very vigorous activity against it. The great problem there was not just to get a majority for the House bill. The problem was that a lot of people who wanted the bill didn't want the fifty-year cutoff for disability. I wasn't in favor of an age-fifty cutoff, but I knew that we couldn't go any farther than that, that what we had to do was to get something started even if it did have an age-fifty qualification, then later on we could remove that, which is what happened. So the thing to do was to get the principle established and then we could amend it later on.

This was a very close vote. As a matter of fact, we couldn't count a clear majority on that vote. We did not have the votes when we went to the floor. Johnson and I both knew that each of us had to work as hard as we could work with whatever means we had at hand to put together the vote. I never will forget that on the eve of that vote I was walking from Earle Clements'[then assistant majority leader] office with him to the floor, and Earle said to me, "Bob, I'm not with you on this bill." I stopped and looked at him with amazement. I said, "You're not with us?" He said, "No. I gave a commitment back home that I would vote against this bill." I said, "Earle, you can't do that."

And he said, "Did I ever tell you I was going to vote for this bill?" I said, "No, you didn't, but I just assumed you were." He said, "No, I can't do it. I made a commitment." Johnson knew that, but I didn't. But Johnson got Molly Malone on this vote, and the way he got him was promising him that he would support his zinc stockpiling bill, a twenty million dollar fund for stockpiling zinc.

I got Senator Purtell of Connecticut just before the vote. It happened in sort of an interesting way, but it just shows you how things can be influenced in ways that you don't know. Going down to Vice President Barkley's funeral on the senatorial train, I spent a lot of time with Purtell. Purtell had been president of the National Association of Manufacturers. He was a conservative senator from Connecticut but a very reasonable man, intelligent man. We spent a lot of time talking about philosophy of government, and he was expressing his philosophy that he thought that industry should assume responsibility for providing for workers. They should provide housing for them. They should provide hospitalization. Anything that industry does, was willing to do, the government shouldn't do, but if industry wasn't willing to do it the government should do it.

So just before this vote I got Purtell back outside the center door, over there sitting against the wall, and reminded him of the conversation. I said, "Now here you're going to have an opportunity to prove whether you believe that or whether you don't. Because this vote is going to be on that exact issue. Who provides disability

insurance for their workers in industry? Did you? Did your company ever do it?" He said, "No." I said, "All right, that's what we're doing. Industry won't do it. So this is your opportunity." This was on the eve of the vote. In the meantime, Johnson had gotten Malone. Nixon was in the chair. I can't remember whether I told Johnson that Earle Clements wasn't with us. I'm sure that he already knew it, but I did discuss it with him.

Well, we came to the vote. Nixon was in the chair as vice president. The roll call went on. I was up in the gallery, because roll call had started. Johnson was over in the corner. Frear sat on the front row on the Democratic side just to the right of the presiding officer of the Senate. Johnson was over there really giving Frear the treatment, just working on him, waving his arms and talking. Frear was shaking his head. Earle Clements was standing about from here to that chair, about six feet away, watching it in a very interested fashion. Johnson threw up his hands and walked away. Earle Clements' name was called. He didn't respond. Frear's name was called. He voted no. They went through the entire roll call. Johnson would move around a little bit, trying desperately to find a vote. He apparently couldn't. So the last vote cast was with Earle Clements. And he voted aye. The vote was 47-45 with Nixon in the chair. It would have been a 46-46 vote, and Nixon would have broken the tie. That cost Earle Clements, I'm convinced to this day, his Senate seat. He had made a commitment to the AMA back in Kentucky. He was running for election, and he was defeated, and I know that he attributes his defeat to that vote.

(Interruption)

G: We're back on now.

O: There are a number of those. I would like to select about one or two of them.

There is another one I remember relating to public housing where we had a very close vote, a vote in which Bobby Baker and Lyndon had what they considered to be a hard count. They had a 42-38 vote against us on an amendment that would be offered to knock out the public housing portions of the housing bill, and I thought there was a possibility of getting some more Republicans on it. Johnson was going to take it to a vote anyway, even though he figured [he would lose]. He had to go to a vote on it, because this was a bill that was on the floor. It wasn't a matter of avoiding a vote on the issue--you would have to take the whole bill off of the floor to do so. He couldn't stall any longer on this amendment, and Bobby's votes was 42-38 against us. I said, "Bobby, I think that maybe we can find four votes in there. I think there is a possibility of our turning that vote." And actually we did do it. We had a 42-38 favorable vote. Again, as I recall, Purtell was one of the key people on that vote. I got him on that. I got at least one other Republican, and we managed to switch a couple of more Democrats so that we came out with a 42-38 vote the other way from the earlier count.

That was not near as spectacular as the social security amendments, the disability thing, but it was just another one of those products of careful counting and analysis of votes, exchange of vote counts. There's no question about it, Bobby Baker was one of the best vote

counters that ever was around the Senate of the United States. He did an extremely effective job. We worked very closely together on the vote counting. And Johnson so had his vote counts, and they were always right down to the last vote. We always knew what we had and what we needed to get, and so much of our operation consisted of finding the key vote or votes.

I can remember one or two others, but what I'd rather do is pick those out and refresh my memory on them. There was one that was one of the greatest achievements [of] Lyndon Johnson. It involved a bill that had always carried the House number HR1. It always carried the House overwhelmingly. It would have required a pre-emption amendment to every single bill in order for the federal government to pre-empt the legislative field. As it is now, unless there is a specific exclusion or specific delegation of authority to the states, as is the case with the Taft-Hartley Law where the federal law prevails unless the states have a stronger law, the federal law pre-empts the field. The House passed a federal pre-emption bill overwhelmingly that would have required a pre-emption amendment in every single bill. This would have meant that you probably could have passed very few of them because of the states' rights issue that would be used. And one of the greatest legislative achievements of Johnson's career was to defeat that bill in the Senate, primarily by keeping senators off the floor.

G: How did he do that?

O: Counting the votes and knowing what he had. I'd have to refresh my

memory. Because he put two bills together as a part of his strategy. He didn't let the federal pre-emption bill go by itself. He put another bill with it so he'd have a vote on both of them, and he managed to keep a number of senators off the floor that would have voted against him on it. He won by one or two votes, actually.

G: Would he do this by just persuading them--?

O: He'd persuade them [with] his personal persuasion. Johnson in close contact was one of the most persuasive people there ever was, just absolutely almost irresistible. His effectiveness in an office face to face, one on one, or one on two or three was tremendous [because of] his persuasive eloquence, his ability to persuade people.

G: He was hard to say no to.

O: He was hard to say no to. And many of the southern senators were extremely capable people. A guy like Dick Russell was one of the really ablest men in the Senate. As Johnson said to me one time that if Dick Russell had been from any other section of the country he would have been president of the United States, because he was one of the ablest and most dedicated people that Johnson had ever known.

So a man like Dick Russell didn't really need to vote on that issue. He didn't want to vote in such a way as to defeat the legislation that would have required a pre-emption clause, but he wasn't particularly interested in voting for it, you know. He was willing not to vote. He didn't feel strongly about it. That was true of a number of very able men, like Senator Stennis of

Mississippi. Stennis is a very able senator. Walter George of Georgia, who was there during that period of time--or maybe George wasn't during that period, but you had some very able people.

G: If Lyndon Johnson was good at keeping people away, I guess he was also good at getting them there.

O: Oh, well of course, that was an important thing.

I remember on one occasion he was going to get a unanimous consent agreement to get a vote on a Monday on some bill that was coming up. I can't remember what the bill was. I probably could go back and refresh my memory on it. But I happened to know that a couple of senators were going to be away on Monday. and I said, "You know, you can't have that vote Monday because we'll lose it if you do. Because I know--" And I named the senators at the time. He wanted a unanimous consent agreement to vote on Monday or Tuesday, on Monday I think it was. I said, "Look, you'd better have that vote on Friday, because I know that some senators are going to be away next week." That's the way it happened. He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Absolutely. You check it, but I do know that two of your votes are not going to be here, at least two." We said, "Well, I'll talk to you later on."

He got hold of me later on, and he said, "I'm ready to go for a vote on Friday if I can get a unanimous consent agreement. I can't find Wayne Morse. Wayne Morse has put me on notice that he wants to be present for anything affecting this bill, and I can't find Wayne." Nobody could locate him. I talked to his administrative

assistant, asked him where Wayne Morse was, and he said, "Morse has just flown in overnight from Oregon, and he's not going to be available." "Can you get him?" "No, I can't get him." This was Mert Bernstein, his administrative assistant. I think he's now a law professor out at the University of Iowa or the University of Nebraska. He said, "No, I can't reach him."

So I got Lyndon and said, "Lyndon, we can't find Senator Morse. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll agree for him." That was a labor bill. "I'll agree for him." He said, "Well, do you know what you're doing?" I said, "I know what I'm doing." He said, "I'll tell him that you agreed. If we lose, you know what he'll do. He'll shoot you." I said, "I can't help it. We've got to vote. We cannot go over until Monday on this thing, so you have got to have the vote on Friday." He said, "Okay, it's your responsibility. Wayne Morse is going to jump on you. He's not going to jump on me, because I'll tell him." I said, "All right. I'll assume the responsibility for it." So he got the unanimous consent agreement to vote Friday.

Then just before the vote Mert Bernstein came in and said, "What the hell is going on? What the hell is going on with this unanimous consent agreement that just passed?" I told him what happened, and he said, "Morse will hang you." I said, "I can't help it. If we win, then he'll have no complaint. If we lose, then he can hang me." We carried the vote by a very narrow margin on Friday, where we would have lost it, I'm convinced on Monday

due to absentees. That is just another indication of timing, how important it is. You said he always knew where his troops were, and that's exactly the case.

I remember one time when we were on the eve of an important vote they were trying to get Sparkman. Sparkman was traveling by car across Georgia on his way to Florida from Alabama, and Johnson said, "We've got to have him back here for this vote." I found out where he was, and I told Bobby. They had the state police in Georgia intercept Sparkman's car and put him in the police car and take him to the airport in Atlanta and flew him to Washington.

G: Do you remember what the issue was?

O: No, I can't remember, but it was something involving the Banking and Currency Committee. It could have been housing; it could have been something else. But it was a vote upon which Sparkman was needed. They got him back.

G: I've gotten the impression that on one occasion he got Hubert Humphrey's plane to land when the air traffic controller--

O: I'll tell you what happened. This was a civil rights vote. This was a vote on which his vote was not needed, but on which he wanted to vote. He had told Lyndon that he wanted to vote on this. He was flying in, and he got stacked up. So what happened was that they delayed the Senate by this old device: "Mr. President," "The Senator from Louisiana." "Mr. President, on this vote, am I recorded?" "The Senator is recorded." "Mr. President, how is the Senator

from Louisiana recorded?" "The Senator from Louisiana is recorded as voting in the negative." "Thank you, Mr. President." Another senator: "Mr. President." "Yes, Senator from Texas." "On this vote, am I recorded?" "Yes." So they'd go over the same thing. You've seen it happen time and time again, unless someone moves the regular order and then that cuts it off. I've seen the regular order moved on several occasions, but if they know what's going on--and everybody knew that the purpose of this stalling was to let Hubert Humphrey vote, so there was no objection to it. They delayed the vote for fifty-five minutes. Johnson put pressure on to get his plane down and landing and had a police escort for him back to the Capitol.

G: Could that have been with regard to the Capehart Amendment to the housing bill?

O: The Capehart amendment was the housing bill that I was telling you about where we won by 42-38. No, this Humphrey thing was related to a civil rights bill on which Humphrey wanted to vote.

Now this other thing of Sparkman was not related to the Capehart Amendment either. As a matter of fact, it probably wasn't even related to a housing bill. It was probably something else of very great interest to the Democratic Party and to Lyndon Johnson.

G: I wish I knew what it was. I have a couple of memos I wanted to show you.

That's an interesting concept. I never thought of it that way. [reading memo]

O: I don't remember this particular conversation, but I can understand why I would make such an observation. Because this is true. You take the Congress that came in in 1955, that 49-47 Congress that I was describing about Lausche. You had a nominal forty-nine Democrats and forty-seven Republicans, but just off the top you would give the Republicans four Democrats, just four that consistently voted with the Republicans. That made the composition not 49-47, it made it actually at that point 51-45. If you take away four Democrats from forty-nine it would give you forty-five, and that was only taking away the most extreme votes. But actually you could go down and you had eight conservative senators of that Congress. If you could get your losses down to four it was an achievement. So that was leadership. The House more closely reflected the majority composition. It was better in composition, as I said, than here in the Senate, but it still was not really good.

G: Are there any other votes that you want to talk about, any particular legislative issues that you recall his maneuvering on or molding of a majority?

O: There were so many, many of them; some were major, and some were minor.

G: How about the Lewis Strauss nomination, do you remember that?

O: I remember the Lewis Strauss nomination, but it's one on which I didn't work very closely. I didn't spend any time or effort at all on that. I agreed with the position that was taken, that Strauss should not be confirmed. But I really didn't work closely on that.

G: Here's another memo concerning electoral politics, do you remember talking to Rayburn about that?

O: Yes, I talked to Rayburn. I spent a great deal of time with Mr. Rayburn during this entire period. Going clear back to 1944, when we had the Texas Regulars, you had a battle at all the state conventions of the Democratic Party in Texas. In 1952 there was a battle. In 1956 there was a battle. Every time we had a meeting there was a battle. The date doesn't seem to be consistent. I was just wondering why we would have had this conversation September 24, because the state convention was held in Dallas in 1956, as I recall. No, the national convention would be in 1956. Yes, I suppose that this was the time that they were electing delegates. Yes, they would be getting ready for the 1956 convention, wouldn't they? That's what it was. We had a big battle over that. Rayburn was the nominal leader of the move to oust the Shivercrats at that time. There was a big battle. Shivers was stumping the state, and Johnson was stumping the state. Johnson was raising money for it.

G: But it appears that it was your suggestion that Johnson run as favorite son?

O: I guess it was.

G: It was evidently Rayburn who made the first public proposals.

O: Yes.

G: So you may have generated the whole movement.

O: No, see, this was way back. He was a candidate for president in [1960]. He was nominated by John Connally in 1956. I don't recall

this specific incident but it well could have happened, because I was working very closely with Rayburn at the time, and Johnson did go to the convention as a candidate but not really as a serious candidate.*

G: But I get the impression that the favorite son candidacy was not something that Lyndon Johnson was initially in favor of, that that was something Rayburn talked him into doing.

O: Right. He wasn't because he just absolutely said there's no chance for him ever being nominated for president of the United States. He just didn't want to make it appear that he did have the delusion that he could be nominated. But actually this was the purpose, in part, for solidifying the party, for getting the party on a unified basis, the delegation to the Chicago convention, and giving them some maneuverability and also beating the Shivercrats, as we called them. But no, Johnson didn't want to publicly become a candidate, and he was reluctantly pushed into it. He didn't consider that Stevenson was a very strong candidate, never did, and neither did Mr. Rayburn. Although Mr. Rayburn, I think, took more kindly to it than Lyndon did. So this all was related to the Texas Democratic Party.

Of course Johnson was nominated for the presidency, and I was sitting in his suite in the Blackstone Hotel with him and Dick Russell when it took place. You know, Dick Russell had been a candidate in 1952. We were up there in that penthouse suite watching John Connally nominate Lyndon Johnson for the presidency

* I have refreshed my memory on this incident and I now recall it well. I had gone to Texas to meet with Mr. Rayburn on the problem. I also had discussions with a number of other people. I did conclude and suggested that the best way to rally our forces was behind such a favorite son candidacy.

of the United States. I never will forget that Dick Russell said to Lyndon, "Lyndon, don't ever let yourself be in the position of being a sectional candidate as I was." That's what Russell had been in 1952.

G: What was LBJ's response to this?

O: I don't think it occasioned any specific response. He, as anyone would do, agreed to it. We were listening to the nominating speech.

G: How could he keep from being a sectional candidate unless he adopted more liberal positions?

O: That's the only way he could be.

G: And this, in effect, is what Russell was suggesting?

O: That's right. He was suggesting that. In other words, "Just don't let yourself be identified as a southern candidate. You've got to be a national candidate," is what Russell was saying.

G: Does this explain some of Russell's less than total opposition to some of the liberal measures that came later?

O: Dick Russell was an extremely able person who represented a very conservative constituency. He only voted with his constituents because he felt an obligation to reflect to the extent he had to their viewpoint. That's what led Johnson to the observation that if Russell had been from any other part of the country he would have been president of the United States, because of his ability and his dedication and his whole outlook. Dick Russell was a very strong supporter of all New Deal legislation, as the South was, and he was a very able man. He was no Eastland or

no Bilbo or no demagogue. He was an extremely dedicated, able senator.

G: Many people feel that he could have defeated that 1957 civil rights bill if he [wished].

O: Oh, I think he could have. He was one of the greatest parliamentarians the Senate ever had. He probably could have. But Johnson was very persuasive. There was a very warm relationship between Johnson and Russell. And he got many of these people to temper their opposition to things.

G: I suppose Russell was one of his closest friends in the Senate.

O: He was.

G: Almost a mentor.

O: Yes, and Johnson had tremendous respect for Russell. Russell was a bachelor. "You can go in the Mayflower Hotel"--Johnson told me this--"most any time, and you'll find Dick Russell by himself reading." He said, "He is very well informed, very well read. He's really a great man." He had a very high regard, a tremendous amount of respect, probably had more respect for Dick Russell than any other senator in the Senate, not excluding Carl Hayden, to whom he was deeply indebted. Dick Russell and Carl Hayden made him minority leader, which led to his becoming majority leader, no question about that.

G: That's fascinating. Would you like to talk a little more about electoral politics and moving up to 1960, or do you feel like you're getting tired?

O: I tell you, I've got to get a plane is my problem.

G: Shall we stop here?

O: Let's stop here.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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