

INTERVIEWEE: SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL (TAPE #1)

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE MC SWEENY

February 27, 1969, Old Senate Office Building 325, Washington, D. C.

M: This interview is with Senator Claiborne Pell. Today is Thursday, February 27, 1969; it's 4:15 in the afternoon. We are in the Old Senate Office Building, Room 325, in the Senator's office. This is Dorothy Pierce McSweeney.

Senator Pell, I'd like to begin the interview with a very general introduction of your background. I think it's mostly well-documented. You were elected as Democrat to the U.S. Senate in 1951 from the State of Rhode Island.

P: In 1960.

M: In 1960, and reelected in 1966. Your Senate committee assignments are on Foreign Relations, Labor and Public Welfare, Rules and Administration, and the Joint Committee on the Library. Previous to your election to the Senate, you were active in Democratic party affairs both in your state and national. Also, in the late '40's and '50's you have had government service in the State Department both in Washington and abroad in Czechoslovakia. You also were the only unendorsed candidate ever to win a statewide primary election in Rhode Island. Is the background information that I have correct?

P: Yes.

M: Have you ever been interviewed before on an oral history project?

P: Yes, I was interviewed in connection with the John F. Kennedy Oral History Project and also, as a matter of interest, my father, who was a

member of Congress and Minister to Portugal and Hungary, etc., was interviewed in connection with the Franklin D. Roosevelt Oral History Project at Columbia University.

M: What period did the interview for the John F. Kennedy Library cover?

P: It covered as much as I knew of John F. Kennedy.

M: From his election as President to--?

P: No. I knew the family before. They were interested in everything I knew and in my relations with President Kennedy.

M: And did they bring up policy questions and legislative questions during his Presidency?

P: No, they seemed more interested in personal relations.

M: I'll bring up just a few.

P: I can't recall, frankly. There may have been some policy considerations but the emphasis was more on my subjective reaction to and relationship with President Kennedy.

M: Are there any changes or corrections?

P: To what?

M: That you would care to make on your previous interview.

P: I thought we were doing the President Johnson interview.

M: We are.

P: Is this one and the same?

M: I don't want to duplicate. All scholars will have access to both because both will be run by the National Archives.

P: I see. No, but I'll just talk about the Johnson side of it now.

M: I wanted to give you an opportunity, so I don't duplicate anything, if you would like to make any changes.

P: I forget now what I said. It was a couple of years ago. I don't forget completely what I said, but I don't remember the specifics of it.

M: Do you recall your first acquaintance with Mr. Johnson?

P: Yes, my first acquaintance was after I was elected but before I took office, when I was very anxious to get on the Foreign Relations Committee. I went to Paris where he was there as the leader of our delegation to the NATO Parliamentarians, and sought to secure his support for this appointment at that time. He was exceedingly receptive and cordial to me. I remember, I thought, he couldn't have been nicer. He called me Senator and was the first person who had ever done so and made me feel very expansive, and was very hospitable. He had a marvelous kind of perfume bomb that was very invigorating, and he showed me how, when you took off your shoes, [it] squirted the perfume at one's foot, and how wonderfully you felt. He did it himself and asked me to emulate him. I did, and I must say it was really very exhilarating. I've always wished I knew what the magic perfume bomb was.

M: Let me just go back to 1950 and just briefly ask you what was your reaction to Lyndon Johnson joining the John F. Kennedy ticket.

P: When I first heard about it, I was a little startled because he did not at that point have the image of a liberal--although he certainly deserved one for a voting record viewpoint, except for civil rights. But I did feel that it was probably a pretty sound choice, and it certainly played a very real role in the Democratic ticket winning in 1960 when there was such a [small] margin of victory.

M: Do you attribute the John F. Kennedy-Lyndon Johnson ticket much to your victory at this time?

P: How do you mean to my victory, because I just ran in one little state?

M: To your own victory in the State of Rhode Island.

P: No, I led the ticket by five percent. I don't know if they contributed much to me because I was ahead of them. I'm sure that the fact that they won obviously meant a big Democratic victory, and that helped me. But I remember President Kennedy used to always be rather surprised in a state such as Rhode Island that I would have led the ticket rather than vice versa.

M: As a member of the New Frontier, as it was called, of those people entering during this election, did this help in committee assignments?

P: It made absolutely no difference. The committee assignments were based on seniority, and I don't think it made much difference. Although I was lucky in getting on the Foreign Relations Committee in 1964. But again, Kennedy had died by the time I got on it. Actually I think President Kennedy was very kind and made a couple of phone calls in my behalf to get on the Foreign Relations Committee in 1962, but I was not put on it.

M: To go back to your first acquaintance, Senator, with Mr. Johnson--this would be in 1964?

P: No, no, I said it was 1960 that I went to call on him in Paris when he was there as the leader of the NATO Parliamentary Delegation in November or December.

M: Let me get the date down. Did you formulate any early impressions of Mr. Johnson at this point?

P: No. To me he was always a very fascinating, rather attractive man, painted with a broad brush, uninhibited. For me, as a rather square, constrained, perhaps, mindful-of-form New Englander, as I say, I was very struck and rather fascinated with him.

M: Did you have any ideas during your early Senatorial days about what

Mr. Johnson's goals were and his motivations were?

P: No, but I acquired an increasing respect for his fundamental liberalism and his intelligence.

M: Did you have any feeling that Johnson as Vice President attempted to continue to have a dominating role in the Senate as Vice President?

P: Yes. When I first came here, I remember he wanted to stay on the Policy Committee, or something of that sort, and sit in the meetings at the caucus. There was quite a row about it at that time. But I think very soon after that, he saw that he could not continue to exercise that role. I recall no efforts of him seeking to dominate the Senate after some months of the new Administration?

M: What was your feeling on this matter?

P: I think it was probably correct. I think you're going to have to be either fish or fowl. I think when you're Vice President, you really are the Administration more than the Senate.

M: Senator, just some general questions about the Congress. It was said that under John Kennedy that it was rather stagnant, used such adjectives as rebellious and unproductive. What is your view of the Congress and the inability of John Kennedy to get through legislation?

P: I think he was, maybe, a tiny bit ahead of the time. I think his legislation would have gone through eventually. I think the tragedy of his assassination and the trauma that we went through at that time, the air of good feeling that was automatically provoked from it, automatically made it easier to get the legislation through. I still believe the climate and the times were such that legislation would have gone through eventually in any case, though it might have taken substantially longer.

M: And is this what you feel is attributable to the flood of legislation in '64 and '65?

P: I think there was a trauma produced by his assassination, and the era of good feeling, at that point the tremendous popularity of President Johnson.

M: What do you feel Mr. Johnson's foreign policy role was during the John Kennedy Administration?

P: I don't think he played much of a role then.

M: He did, of course, have a couple of trips to Berlin and Viet Nam, and there were several crises, but you feel that as Vice President--

P: I think he was there, as all Ambassadors are--representatives of the United States--carrying out a mission for the President--and doing it for the country, and doing it very effectively. I think sometimes he overwhelmed some of the foreign groups where he found himself. But in general he did it in a very effective way.

M: Senator, coming from New England, did you feel personally more closer to John Kennedy than Mr. Johnson?

P: We were old acquaintances--old friends. I had been a friend of his sister, Kathleen, too so there was a reasonably close and personal relationship there, and great regard on my part. President Johnson also had a relationship with New England, particularly with Rhode Island, with my predecessor Theodore Green--who was responsible, I believe, for getting him an honorary degree from Brown University, and also was the man who nominated Lyndon Johnson for Majority Leader.

M: Do you feel there was any validity in the reported friction between Lyndon Johnson and John F. Kennedy, either personally or through their staffs?

P: I don't think there was any friction between them individually. I think Johnson liked Kennedy very much. I think Kennedy liked and respected Johnson very much and knew what a tough job it was to be Vice President, and went out of his way to help make it a full job. I think the staffs did not get on at all, but that often happens.

M: Why do you think this was so?

P: I think the difference in background of the people. The Johnson people were more fundamentalists, more regionally oriented, more reflective of the old New Deal. I think that the Kennedy people were all more--I won't say sophisticated--but perhaps more imaginative in their views in some regards.

I want to emphasize here that my regard for President Johnson and respect is really tremendous. The odd impression one viewed dealing with President Johnson is that he didn't feel at ease--didn't trust men like myself who came from so-called Ivy League universities, and have certain formalistic attitudes or types of behavior. But we rather wished he could have gotten through to us because we felt we knew him, liked him, respected him, but never felt that he was easy, or at ease, with us. I always had the feeling even though I was ranked far below in the pecking order of the official hierarchy--I always felt I was more at ease with him than he was with me.

M: Do you recall occasions where this had an effect on either the event or the legislation?

P: No, I don't. I was really very unimportant seniority-wise and power-wise at that time. I know that one point where I disagreed very strongly with the President was the Viet Nam Policy. I was reelected as a dove in 1966.

Actually, starting in 1965 I differed with the Administrations view on that. But I wasn't important enough for the President to really concentrate on, and always I disagreed with some of my colleagues who accused him of all kinds of offenses. All it meant in our personal relations, to the best of my recollection, is that once I separated from the Administration in a hard way in this matter of Vietnam. I do not recall going on a social occasion at the White House again except for the general Congressional briefings, or something of that sort. I may be wrong, but that is my recollection. Until that time, I can recall going there on several occasions. But Senators stay and Administrations change. As I say I do have this recollection.

M: Could you tell me briefly what occasions you have been to the White House and seen Mr. Johnson?

P: I can remember going there for a wonderful dinner for the Chancellor of Germany, and another wonderful one for Princess Margaret. There were a couple of others. I really don't recall them at this time. And then I remember my wife going there swimming in the pool with Mrs. Johnson. But I do think that President Johnson thought you either had to be for him a hundred percent, or he did not want you around too much.

M: Immediately after the assassination in 1963, Senator, did you have any close personal talks with Mr. Johnson?

P: Yes, I did because there were two subjects that interested me a great deal. One was the policy with regard to Germany, and the other was the High Speed Railroad Transportation Act. I had a very good talk with President Johnson just a few weeks after the assassination trying to press my policies with regard to Germany; specifically, recognition of the

Oder-Neisse Frontier, acceptance of the fact there are two Germanys, and then having a corridor in Berlin--land corridor--to West Germany. He liked these ideas, and actually discussed them when he went off in a jeep with Chancellor Erhardt. I know that because Jack Valenti called me up in Newport since the only copy of my memo was in the President's pocket. I had to read my copy of the memo to the typist at the Texas White House so they could pass it around on the staff level. President Johnson could not have been more receptive or kind or courteous to me, or given me a better hearing.

Also, about the same time I had another half-hour or twenty minutes with him trying to get him excited about the idea of the high-speed railroad project for the Northeastern Corridor. I even had a map prepared showing how a Corridor was developing in Texas. And, more important, showed him how states representing a quarter of the electoral votes were traversed by the Boston-Washington high speed railroad line. He gave it an excellent hearing and then a push so that it finally was enacted into law. He mentioned at the time he signed the bill the jiggling effect that I had had in getting this going.

M: Senator, one of your major responsibilities has been in foreign relations. I'd like to talk with you about that for a moment--your role and activities and Mr. Johnson's role. I'd like to start with a very broad question. How would you compare John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson's approach and direction of foreign policy?

P: I hate to compare one man to another, particularly when I respect them both. But I think that Kennedy had a very sound education, had done a great deal of reading, and had a fairly long-range view of history--not history in the terms of current events, but history over the decades. I really did not feel that President Johnson had this concept or long-range view of history.

M: Had President Johnson adequately briefed the Foreign Relations Committee and Congressional leaders?

P: We would go down to the White House and have these, what I would call, almost brainwashing sessions. I can remember one time I got so disturbed that I felt compelled, constrained, to get up and say, "Because I've not asked a question does not mean that I agree with the policies or the views that have been expressed here." It is difficult when you are faced with the blackboards and Secretary McNamara and the generals and the President together with all of their duly marshalled statistics. For a few golden minutes you feel that, really, this is quite correct. And in another little while the military victory will be achieved in Viet Nam and all will be well. But then you leave this atmosphere into the cold light of the day you suddenly come back to the conclusion, "Gee whiz, this is not so." It's for that reason that men like myself felt very strongly that we had to change from an escalating policy to a de-escalating policy. I believe that a few of us on the Foreign Relations Committee were really quite responsible in that regard.

M: Do you recall the occasion that you're talking of where you stood and said that you did not agree with--?

P: I don't remember the date or the time. I just remember that a couple of my colleagues came up and said something about, "Well done" afterwards. I remember, also President Johnson was exceedingly courteous and nice to me that evening and respected for me having said it, I guess.

M: Was it on Viet Nam?

P: Yes.

M: Is it correct for me to say that you feel that, at that period, Mr. Johnson

was not a force for restraint in Viet Nam?

P: Correct. I think they were then talking in terms of indefinite military forces being used there until we had achieved victory.

M: When do you think that this attitude began to change?

P: I don't think it began to change until we'd set the climate from the Foreign Relations Committee and the President made his abdication speech.

M: Do you think there has been sincerity in the exploration of all the peace feelers? And, also, have we pressed hard enough for negotiations?

P: No. I'm personally aware of instances of which even the President might not have been fully informed or where I feel we did not move as we should have in seizing the opportunities that arose out of ten bombing pauses. There was one pause--I forget at the moment which one it was--where a message came from the North Vietnamese and was relayed in that the withdrawal of American troops need not be in fact, but could be in principle. But by the time the message came, we had resumed the bombing and it was too late. I think there was a delay in acknowledging the message, too, which made the situation more complicated. This was a matter that was kind of forgotten by the Administration. There are other questions. I must ask you, how classified is this?

M: You can place any classification on it, and we've all had full field investigations.

P: I'd rather just not make any--anything I say is open and on the record. I think it's probably better to do it that way, rather than have a little thing that's classified. So I think I'll just let it go at this.

M: We have security classifications that's perfectly all right, and they will be placed on them.

P: I don't want to have any little separate things, so I think--I can afterwards, if you like give you a little separate vignette with a classified rating on it.

M: All right. You've spoken about the effects of the Foreign Relations Committee and the opposition that has come up from that. Are you thinking in terms of this beginning with the 1966 hearings?

P: I forget the date, but, yes, I guess that would be it. I'm sure whether it was '66 or '67--'66, I guess it was, when those hearings were held. I can remember them because I was the one who was questioning the witness, and was cut off the air when President Johnson announced that he was going to the Far East. So the television emphasis was removed from our hearing to this very speedily organized trip to--I think it was the Philippines or Hawaii, I forget which--to meet with General Ky.

M: Do you think that this was an attempt to detract from the hearings?

P: The timing of it gave every indication that that was the case. There's nothing wrong with that. It's just a question of when you're in responsible political office, which the President was, he probably determined that these hearings were not being helpful to his policies--and they certainly were not--and felt that the attention should be diverted.

M: Has the coolness between Senator Fulbright and Mr. Johnson hindered committee operations?

P: I don't know if it has. There was really no relationship for a very long time. Certainly as a committee we were at loggerheads with the Administration on this one question. I'm not sure there was really ever any personal coolness between them. I think both Senator Fulbright and President Johnson respected and had a high regard for each other as individuals.

They just disagreed. But again, I don't know, because I never heard one of them talk about the other to me.

I want to emphasize here that I throughout retained a tremendously high regard and respect for the President, because he was doing what he thought was right. He really believed that he was correct. I think, if he had been permitted, he would have gone on and escalated indefinitely because he was driven by conviction that he had to stand at Viet Nam; that it was like Munich; that if we, in any way, wavered or the Communists took over in Viet Nam, that that would break the dike. I admire, as I say, his conviction and strength of view. I just disagree with his premise and his conclusions.

M: Are the doves, as they are called, formally organized?

P: No. I'd say we are all individuals, each of us feeling one way or another. I myself have spent many years opposing Communism. I was for two years stationed behind the Iron Curtain in Czechoslovakia as a Vice Consul, was arrested--Poland and Hungary, and have been accused of espionage by the Soviet Union. I looked after the refugees from the Hungarian revolution for the International Rescue Committee of which I was vice president. I've spent a good part of my life opposing Communism. But I also recognize that the struggle in Viet Nam is a political struggle. You can't stop something with nothing, and that was what we were trying to do a great deal of the time from a political viewpoint.

M: Do you feel that the 1966 hearings are a proper committee activity?

P: Absolutely. I feel that one of our jobs is to have a great deal to do with policy, particularly as a committee--and not just as a committee, but as American citizens and sworn to defend the Constitution and carry out our duties--is when we see policy

going one way and we think it's wrong, we first try to change it privately. If we don't change it privately, we try to change it publicly. In fact, I think we'd have been derelict in our duties if we had not done so, thinking as we did.

M: Can you think of the particular event, or the events, that really set up the alignment as to doves and hawks--?

P: There was no event, no jelling of it. There were a few who were 'way out. As time went on the escalation went up; the vision of indefinite escalation became more and more vivid; more and more people joined the so-called doves. Originally, the doves consisted really of Senator Wayne Morse 'way out in front of the committee. And then gradually three others would go on. I think I became convinced about the time when we started losing men and having American men actually fighting on the ground. When we got beyond the stage of advisers, that's when I started to get worried. I think Wayne Morse was worried 'way before then.

M: This is sort of the same area, but do you believe the committee has a role in policy initiation?

P: Maybe it doesn't under the Constitution. But I've always believed in Congressional initiatives. And in all my work, I've worked on this idea. Many of my ideas have become law although the initiative was with me. My Metric Study Bill is now law; the High Speed Railroad ideas which was taken over by the President and became part of not the New Frontier, but the Great Society were another example. The Sea Grant College Act was initiated by me. I've always believed when you have imagination, you have the responsibility to initiate ideas and initiate legislation.

M: Do you think that decisions made, such as in formulations or in these

other areas, are often made because of their domestic political effect?

P: No, I think from a domestic political view, I would hurt myself on it.

I know I was a candidate for reelection in 1966, and my state was much more hawkish than me. So I hurt myself--didn't help myself.

M: Can you think of any examples of, say, other than this trip that you mentioned, that Mr. Johnson has in effect neutralized the criticism from the Foreign Relations Committee?

P: No. I think when the going got difficult he'd bring back the Commanding General from Viet Nam, or he'd have another meeting with General Ky, or there'd be some way of trying to blanket the criticism. I must say one takes off one's hat--doffs it to President Johnson as a very brave man indeed, and a very fine man, because he really believed he was doing what was right, and by gum, he never wavered from that course. The problem we faced was that we didn't agree with him as to what was right.

M: Do you think that this added to the divisiveness in the nation?

P: Certainly. Because if we hadn't divided the nation, we wouldn't have changed his policy. Then we'd be in a much worse war now, much worse position. You can say that President Johnson's error was responsible for the divisiveness, or you can say it was our stimulation of public opinion. But the fact is if you have a Chief Executive determined on a policy that you think is incorrect, you have to divide the nation to force him to change. And this is what we had to do.

M: Do you think that Viet Nam was accurately assessed in terms of cost and material?

P: Yes, underassessed, if anything. Maybe accurate in material and money, but I think in the impact around the world, we lost a good deal.

M: I'd like to ask you for your appraisal and your activities around some other areas of foreign policy such as our Atlantic Alliance and NATO. Could you give me what your activities have been in that area, and what Mr. Johnson's policy has been?

P: I was chairman of the American delegation to the NATO Parliamentarians in '65, and I've always had some interest in this field. But basically, my interest has mainly been in trying to seek a resolution of the German question, as I mentioned earlier. That was where I had my contacts with President Johnson, and he was most helpful and seemed very interested.

M: Have you had any activities on the Alliance for Progress?

P: Very little.

M: The Non-Proliferation Treaty?

P: Just I'm for it--like motherhood.

M: Has this come under the observation of the Subcommittee on Disarmament?

P: I think the full committee is handling it, and we just reported it out yesterday, I think--two days ago. I voted by proxy. I wasn't at the meeting. I was at another meeting then.

M: And, also, any activities on the deployment of anti-ballistic missiles?

P: This is a difficult one because originally I came to support the idea when Secretary McNamara said that it was a great defense against the Chinese, and he thought in balance it was to our advantage. Originally I would have opposed it, but he persuaded us to the contrary. I must say since then, I find I think that argument is weak, and I am amongst the opponents of it as of now.

M: And Mr. Johnson's position on this?

P: I think he saw the larger picture. One of his reasons for wanting to

move ahead with it may be as a negotiating point to deal with the Soviets. But I'm not too sold on the idea of using any fifty billion dollar atomic negotiating points.

M: And your activities on foreign aid?

P: I have a set policy, set terms of reference, that I just oppose all military assistance to undeveloped nations. I don't believe we should give them sophisticated weapons, and I don't think we should give weapons to warring nations as we do with India and Pakistan, and Greece and Turkey. I think we ought to have more multilateral aid, and I think we ought to have more economic aid and less military assistance. I voted this way, which sometimes takes me away from the Administration, sometimes along with it.

M: Do you think that Mr. Johnson's policy and direction of foreign aid has differed that much from Mr. Kennedy's?

P: No, I think they're very similar.

M: Have you worked on anything to do with disarmament in general?

P: Not particularly with President Johnson, although I've been getting very interested in this idea of an ocean space treaty and trying to keep the ocean sea bed free from weapons of mass destruction. I must say President Johnson made a very courageous decision, because the Pentagon and State could not agree in this matter--twice they sought to come to a conclusion, and twice they had to refer it to the White House. Finally President Johnson made the decision last summer that the use of the sea bed should be for peaceful purposes only.

M: To what do you attribute the very slow progress in disarmament?

P: To the nature of homo sapiens around the world.

M: In any of these areas of our foreign policy, do you see much changes in policy from John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson?

P: Not very much, no. Don't forget that Viet Nam got started under John Kennedy and even earlier. The problem was, I think, that he might have been more willing to bite the bullet and cut his losses--take the loss at an earlier stage--change policy and de-escalate. With regard to the Santo Dominican affair, I can see the reason why President Johnson did what he did with the information that was given to him. I think that realistically, unfortunately, there's one rule of behavior that applies in general, and another that applies in the relations between big nations and small nations in their border. This rule was applied by Russia against Hungary and Czechoslovakia, applied by us in our relations with the Dominican Republic. I think this is a fact of life, until we have a better world with the true rule under law, it is not necessarily a nice, moral thing, but it's I'm afraid a fact of real politik.

M: Senator, who do you think has really made the foreign policy decisions during Lyndon Johnson's Administration?

P: I think it was mainly in the White House. I was never part of his circle, so I don't quite know who made the decisions within the White House. I think Rostow was, I understand, very active there. I always understood, from the viewpoint of those of us who disagreed with the Administration policy in Viet Nam, that we felt that he exercised much of the hawk influence.

M: Before we leave this area, I want to ask you about your role and activities in the vote on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

P: I was one of those who voted for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Looking back at it, I probably voted hastily. But certainly the President had that vote, and there were only two negative votes cast as I remember at the time. But I do believe that when we cast the vote, we did not think that it was sort of a general blank check for indefinite continuation and escalation of the war.

M: Senator, you've spoken about the rapid transportation legislation and metric study--several others that you've mentioned. I'd like to ask you more of a blanket question on other major legislative acts or legislative battles that you've been involved in that you think are exemplary of Mr. Johnson's relations with Congress during your Senate days.

P: I don't understand the question.

M: Are there other major legislative acts or battles that you have been in that are exemplary of--

P: The Arts and Humanities Foundation was my bill. Senator Javits and I in the Senate, and Congressman Thompson in the House worked together with the Administration very well on it. It worked out nicely.

M: What about closing the VA hospitals in '65?

P: I was not very deeply immersed in that.

M: Did you come in contact much with the Establishment of Housing and Urban Development?

P: Very little.

M: Senator, what areas have you specially been called on to study or to travel and report on during the Johnson Administration?

P: Called on by whom?

M: Either your committee chairman or the President?

P: None by the President. I accompanied Senator Mansfield on an around-the-world trip under President Kennedy. On my own, I've made many trips under the Foreign Relations Committee sponsorship--many trips, and sometimes I'd make trips and pay for them myself. For instance, I just came back from a trip that I took to Europe where the Department of Commerce sent me over, second-class, to England to make a speech and to preside at an oceanology meeting. Then I went on my own to Czechoslovakia and to France. I find if I travel privately or quietly by bus and by train and mosey around, you can really get a feeling for the place. It's very good sometimes.

M: Do you think that foreign travel generally has a value to our diplomacy abroad?

P: Tremendous. I think the more Americans we can get to go abroad, particularly the more members of Congress--the more responsible Americans--the better off we are.

M: I have, again, some very general questions about the Congress. Before I leave your area of legislation, have we briefly, I know, touched on all aspects?

P: Pretty well. I was on that highly disagreeable Bobby Baker case for two years. I don't know if that's of any interest to you.

M: Oh, yes.

P: Or to the Johnson project.

M: Please tell me your role and activity in it.

P: It was just about the two most disagreeable years of my life. And we did our best in that committee. We felt very strongly that members of the

President's immediate household such as Mr. Jenkins should not be called on the witness stand. There was some partisanship involved. The Republicans went after it very hard. We, as Democrats, did our best to both follow our conscience and also not embarrass the President. Personally, I found Bobby Baker a very efficient and likeable man, whose standards were a little different from us in New England. But this is one of the things that came out in the hearing. I remember somewhere along it was developed that Vice President Johnson as Majority Leader had given Bobby Baker out of sheer generosity--a color television set--or a television set. In my mind, that's very startling. I don't think I've ever given a business associate much more than a necktie or received much more than a necktie. But this is the difference, because in the South-west I gather they paint with a broader brush, do things in a broader way. I think they have perhaps different standards than we do.

M: Did you receive any calls from the White House staff regarding this investigation?

P: No, not from the staff.

M: Anyone connected with the White House?

P: I followed my own conscience of course. But I do recall there was some interest from those who were close to the President in the whole affair.

M: Is there anything else such as this Bobby Baker investigation that we haven't touched on?

P: No. No, I think--As I say, I felt sorry for the President in the Bobby Baker case because I was used as a way of embarrassing him. The fact is

he was President of the United States at the time, and I feel that anything that is derogatory to the President was derogatory to the United States. I think many of us in the committee felt the same way.

M: Do you think that during the Johnson Administration the power or prestige of Congress has declined?

P: Yes.

M: Would you explain that?

P: I think that what usually happens is that with strong executives and strong presidents, the play is around the White House and not the Congress. I think that may be the reason. I think President Johnson was certainly always very generous in giving credit and having people come up and sign bills and giving us pens when he did sign them, or photographs, things of that sort.

M: In your 1966 reelection, you've mentioned that your state was more hawkish than you were.

P: Oh yes.

M: But did you feel it was necessary to maintain a separate identity from Mr. Johnson?

P: No, I just went along my own path and didn't ask anybody to come in to help me except for Senator Edward Kennedy from the neighboring State of Massachusetts. My state is a wonderful state with considerable forbearance and considerable free thinking and familiarity with independence of thought and mind.

M: Why do you think Mr. Johnson lost his consensus?

P: Because, really, of Viet Nam more than any other single reason. Because one saw that the path he was on was bound for calamity, was bound for

calamity, was bound for greater war, probably ending up in nuclear war, and certainly war with China if he had carried on the way he was moving upwards.

M: Were you surprised at his withdrawal in 1968?

P: Not tremendously, but I was surprised, yes.

M: Do you think he could have won?

P: No. Not unless he changed his policy. If he changed his policy, yes.

M: What would you say were the chief strengths and weaknesses of Mr. Johnson?

P: His principal strength was his courage, his tremendous intelligence, and really his idealism. When he believed something was right, he wouldn't waiver from it. I think his weaknesses were his lack of historical perspective, maybe broad education, and reading--here, I don't speak with knowledge because I have no idea what his reading background was, what he'd read--and his belief that you either had to be a hundred percent with him or you were against him. That's about it. You can see, there are tremendous strengths for any man to have. The weaknesses are not too important.

M: How do you think history will rate the Lyndon Johnson Administration?

P: A strong and excellent President, particularly in domestic affairs, who had one great weakness of judgment in foreign policy.

I also think perhaps another weakness is that the people who were around him usually, as I understand it, gave him affirmative or "yes, yes" comments. If they didn't give him "yes, yes," they were not around him for very long.

M: That is generally all I have to ask you about, Senator, unless you have anything further to add regarding personal relations or anecdotes or

anything else that exemplifies--or what you know about the President.

P: No. I would just like to close by saying--I'm repeating myself, and I probably shouldn't--but I don't think the President ever realized how much I personally respected, liked, and had a regard for him. I always felt he distrusted me because he maybe didn't understand me. And I admire greatly his character in moving ahead in a single direction in the course he thought was correct.

M: Let me ask you one quick one. Were you ever the recipient of what is called the Johnson treatment?

P: Not really. One time I'd started a Brouhaha on the Senate floor at the time McNamara was leaving. I happened to go to the White House with my colleague Senator Pastore to a bill signing or something. And later on the President asked me to step aside with Senator Pastore, and he talked really for nearly an hour, very strongly, about how awful it was that he was criticized for McNamara's leaving and how few people--

INTERVIEWEE: Senator Claiborne Pell (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: Dorothy Pierce McSweeney

February 27, 1969

M: We were discussing the Johnson treatment.

P: He talked very strongly for an hour along this line, saying how he'd not had an opportunity to put any of his own people in, that his appointees were all Kennedy appointees. He seemed really quite disturbed and upset at what I had started, although he was talking theoretically to Senator Pastore as much as me. But the amazing thing was that one would have thought that as a relatively junior Senator I would have been very sweaty at being criticized by my President. But I found myself standing there in kind of amazement and not as upset as I thought I would be if my President was critical of me. I was surprised at myself in fact. I don't quite know what the reason for it was, because I know I continued to have very real respect for the President. I think sometimes he would overstate.

Now to get into that classified thing.

M: Please.

P: Right. This should be classified--and you're cleared for top secret?

M: Yes, sir.

P: Right. This I would think should be classified.

M: I just get all confused but--

P: This should be classified unless released by me.

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(pp 2-3)

One time I felt very strongly we weren't getting enough in communications with the North Vietnamese. So I took it on myself--through an old friend in France, who was in the French foreign office and with whom I'd served in Czechoslovakia and who arranged for me--to go to Paris to talk with Mai Van Bo who is the chief North Vietnamese delegate there. I spent an hour-and-a-half alone with him in his house talking. I took the plane one night at my own expense--I couldn't even deduct it, I found out afterwards--and came back the next day, and then made a full--this was summer before last, I think, I could look it up if it's necessary, about June--then made a full report on this matter to the President, spoke with him personally about it. The gist of my conclusion was that the North Vietnamese would not sit down and talk with us until not only had there been a cessation of the bombing, but we had agreed in principle to withdraw completely. At that point they wouldn't talk to any member of the Executive Branch of government. However, as a result of my visit, efforts were made to get the Executive Branch of government in touch with Mai Van Bo, and he wouldn't talk with them. He would talk with me because I was a member of the Legislative Branch. This report, when I came back, I put in writing and told the Secretary of State. I put it in writing to him, and to the President. With regard to the President, Walt Rostow said the President asked him to receive the report from me. I went down and saw him and said that I knew we disagreed, and I really would not wish to discuss it with him but wanted to discuss it with the President. I insisted on my right of access to the President, whom I saw a day or two later.

M: What was the final resolution on that?

P: There was no resolution. The President appreciated what I said and heard

me out. I think he was not always getting the straight dope from his own people. I think my report became one of the facts that might have gone into his decision-making process. Once both sides were in contact, there was not much more that could be done by me. While I didn't succeed in this effort at the time, I do believe my report was one of many factors in helping eventually to bring this out. My effort was to try to get the two sides in contact with each other.

M: Thank you very much, Senator.

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Gift of Personal Statement

By Senator Claiborne Pell

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
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4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed *CLP*

Date *30 Dec '70*

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

Date _____

*Tape 2 specified, "Confidential" in
Pell's handwriting until 1973.*