INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 10, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: C. ROBERT PERRIN

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

PLACE: Mr. Perrin's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: This is an interview with Mr. C. Robert Perrin, the Acting Deputy Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Today's date is March 10, 1969.

Mr. Perrin, I'd like to begin this tape by just introducing you with as much background information as I have. I understand you were born in 1925 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 1945 you received a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Minnesota. In 1948 you joined the United Press in Detroit. And in 1949 you joined the Detroit Free Press and became a labor editor. You, at that time, also acted as a correspondent for the New York Times, Business Week, and Newsweek. In 1954 you were awarded a Reed Fellowship to study labor-management relations in western Europe. And then in 1955 you became an administrative assistant to Senator Patrick McNamara of Michigan. And from that time until March 1966 you worked for Senator McNamara. And at that time in '66 you joined OEO as Assistant Director for Governmental Relations. Was it interagency relations or governmental relations?

P: At that time, it was interagency relations.

G: I understand also that at the same time you were appointed a member

of a federal team directed by the President to meet with state governors to strengthen federal-state relations. And I also understand that in 1967 you visited over thirty state capitals on that mission. Then in March, 1968, you were appointed acting Deputy Director. I may be wrong, but it's my understanding that, to this date, you have not with Mr. Harding been confirmed.

P: That's right. Both of us were nominated and the nomination sent to the Senate in the summer of 1968, but that session adjourned before action was taken, which is a story in itself.

G: We'll get to that, I'm sure. First of all, do you have anything that you would like to add to the background material that I've given?

P: No, I think that summarizes it.

G: I'd like to begin by asking you to comment, if you can, on your impressions of Mr. Johnson from 1955 to 1966, for eleven years virtually. For eleven years you worked in the Senate, and for at least five of those years if not eight of those years, you were in some proximity to Mr. Johnson when he was the Senate Majority Leader.

P: That's right. I came to Washington in December, 1955, as an assistant to Senator McNamara to work with his then administrative assistant who was quite ill. Within three months, I think by April, 1956, his assistant died, and the Senator named me as his administrative assistant. I remained in that capacity until I came to OEO in March 1966.

My first impression, or my first observations of Lyndon Johnson

came, I imagine it would be January, 1956, when that particular session of the Senate opened. He had only recently, I think, recovered from his heart attack, and he was the Majority Leader, starting his second year as Majority Leader of the Senate, if I remember my dates correctly. Our relationships with him--and I use the word "our" because I reflect quite a bit, I think, of Senator McNamara's attitudes and relationships with Mr. Johnson--were never what one would call cordial, I think. At the same time there was no animosity. It was somewhat of a strained relationship because Senator McNamara represented a liberal school of thought in terms of legislation that then-Senator Johnson simply did not reflect. I think the years between 1956 and 1961 when President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson became the government were one of trying to press Senator Johnson into a more liberal stance as Majority Leader.

Those years, of course, President Eisenhower was in the White House; therefore, we had a Republican Administration and a Democratic Congress. Senator McNamara and many of his colleagues, such as Senator Douglas and Senator Lehman and Senator Humphrey--I remember later when the large class of 1958 came in, Senator Clark and Senator Hart and others were very eager to use these years in a fashion that was not necessarily political--that is, Democratic versus Republican--but to exercise a more liberal point of view in the Congress in the hopes that this would have its effect upon the Administration and not in small part also build the fortunes of the Democratic Party. But Senator Johnson was playing quite a cozy game, we felt, with

the Administration, not taking a position that was very far out. He claimed at that time, as he has many times since, I think, that he believed in the art of the possible. Well, that argument is all right except that we felt that the art of the possible was what you made possible, not some arbitrary line over which you couldn't cross and accomplish anything. We always felt he defined possible much more narrowly than it needed to be.

In any event, we had this kind of stand-off with him, trying to push him into positions that he didn't really want to take. I think, to a large degree, we were successful perhaps in getting him, since he had to respond to this kind of fire in his rear flank, in probably moving him along farther than he would have gone if he had been left to his own devices. Senator McNamara took to expressing his dissatisfaction with the Majority Leader in letters, which I had quite a bit to do with drafting. Senator Johnson never would reply to these letters in writing; he would always wait until he caught the Senator in the cloakroom and try to respond. And finally he said, "Pat, please don't write me any more letters." He felt that we were bugging him a little too much.

But this became very pronounced, I think, during the efforts to change Rule 22, the filibuster rule, which was a standard fight that took place every two years at the beginning of a new Congress. It took place when we attempted to get some manpower legislation through the Senate. It took place particularly on civil rights. President Johnson, then-Senator Johnson, took credit for getting through the

first Civil Rights Act.

G: The 1957 act?

P: The 1957 act--getting that through, the first such one in a hundred years. Well, that's true. He did, and he deserves a lot of credit for the legislative skill in getting it through. I think in truth, however, he probably wouldn't have had that bill at all if it hadn't been for the kind of pressure that was being built up on his flanks within the Senate, and within the national Democratic party, which was not very happy with the type of leadership that he was giving the party. He and Sam Rayburn, of course, being the two top-ranking Democratic politicians in office in the country. I've forgotten all of the particulars, but Paul Butler was then the Democratic National Chairman, and created outside the Senate a Democratic advisory group, which got considerable support from senators such as Senators McNamara and Douglas and others, and much to, I think, Senator Johnson's unhappiness.

I remember him personally as a rather fascinating person to watch in action as he buttonholed senators in the cloakroom or he towered over them on the floor of the Senate, and tended to lean toward them and stand very close to them. He'd lean toward them and stick his nose practically up against their nose. And as he leaned forward, it was necessary for his target to lean back. And it was quite an amusing sight to see him exercising his persuasive powers on his fellow senators.

G: Would this be the so-called Johnson treatment?

P: Yes, I think that that was his technique. He also had the other techniques that one in power can use of providing assistance to them in some of their pet projects, offering them trips abroad as delegates to various international meetings. This never worked with Senator McNamara, by the way. He never picked up these offers, and thus reserved his total independence.

In those days, too, Senator Johnson's chief deputy in the Senate was Bobby Baker, with whom we also had considerable dealings. Senator McNamara never really--I might say that Senator McNamara had a fantastic ability to come to fast decisions on people which almost uncannily turned out to be accurate. His intuition was something to behold. He quite often was not able to explain why he felt the way he did about a subject or a person, but I learned quickly that the fact that he did feel that way was enough to take it on face value and proceed from that basis because he almost always turned out to be right. Well, he had that kind of a gut reaction about Bobby Baker, as I recall.

G: What was that reaction?

P: That here was a fast operator, a wheeler-dealer, and someone that you didn't give too much of an opportunity to get his claws into you in any way, and not let him do you any favors. And that became our standard operating procedure with both Bobby Baker and Senator Johnson. I'm sure that Senator Johnson had no part in Baker's extracurricular activities; I'm convinced of that, but he trusts people to a large degree, I guess, once they're working for him.

G: Walter Jenkins was also with Senator Johnson's staff at the time. Do you recall what your impressions of him might have been at the same time?

P: My relationships with Walter Jenkins at that time were not very broad. We had little to do, really, with Senator Johnson in any other capacity than as Majority Leader. Our paths seldom crossed on any of the legislative matters or other Senate business except his role as Majority Leader. And in that case it was primarily with him or with Bobby Baker. George Reedy was present, too, during that period. But primarily our relationships were with him through his Majority Leadership office.

My personal relationships were not too great. I was quite young and impressed with the Senate, just really in awe of the Senate, being there in the hallowed quarters, and in my particular position, having access to the Senate cloakrooms and Senate chamber and the backrooms and meeting many of these people. But, to a large degree, I think I tended to reflect Senator McNamara's attitude toward Senator Johnson and held sort of a stand-off position from him. He once complained to Senator McNamara that his administrative assistant, meaning me, never smiled at him. So he apparently is not insensitive to these rather small things. I never refrained from smiling, certainly consciously, and I don't know why that impressed him at the time.

So those were the years until he became the Vice President. And from 1961 until 1963, as far as the Senate was concerned, he pretty

well dropped out of the swing of things, as far as I could determine. I think he tried to maintain a hold of some kind, or continuity, with the Senate, tried to exercise some of his old influence, but I don't think it was really very successful. The senators generally go where the power is, and there was just not much power in the Vice Presidency then.

I remember him as quite a lonely man, as a matter of fact, during those years. One evening, I recall, Senator McNamara and I were seated in the Senate dining room; it was late afternoon, and we were the only ones in there at that time. I think the Senate had adjourned. And Vice President Johnson came in all alone, and so he joined us. He had just returned from his first trip abroad. And just in talking to him, one could sense his feeling cut off not only from the life of the Senate, the business of the Senate, but really the life of the Administration, too. He was in between in this unenviable position that many Vice Presidents find themselves in.

So during those years, we really had very little to do with him, legislatively or otherwise. He presided from time to time over the Senate, but was always mainly busy or occupied elsewhere. He kept his quarters that he commandeered for himself while he was Majority Leader, he hung onto that while he was Vice President.

G: The Taj Mahal?

P: Yes. He had offices all over the Capitol and the Senate office building and bits of staff stuck away in each of them.

G: Going back to his Senate period from '55 until '60, you mentioned that there was a wing of which Senator McNamara was a part. Would this have been what Johnson would have termed the "ultra liberal wing of the Democratic party?"

P: I think he probably would term it that, yes, at least insofar as the Senate was concerned he would call it the ultra liberal wing. And, in that relatively narrow context, he would be right; in terms of the overall Democratic party it probably would be too extreme a phrase. But certainly within the Senate, it was ultra liberal.

G: By the same token, how did Senator McNamara or yourself assess Johnson's own political stance on the spectrum, so to speak? Did you feel that he had an ideological position that he would espouse, or do you feel that in his capacity as Senate Majority Leader that he had to be eclectic and be able to embrace all those elements within the party to bring them together into some sort of reconciliation in order to get measures passed?

P: I don't believe that he had any strong philosophical bent as a legislator. I think he certainly reflected his Southern and Western culture and upbringing. So to that extent, he was conservative. And I think that that probably affected his attitude, not so much as he having philosophical goals, for example, in terms of what he wanted to accomplish, but that he was held back by this Southern-Western bias. Southern more than Western really. I think he was very narrow as a result of that kind of a background; he was a rather narrow man, and he did not really have the great

breadth of vision in terms of what the country needed and what he in the U.S. Senate would be able to do about it. So I think he aimed more at accomplishing the role of the Senate really with the least possible trouble or difficulty, not really going out of his way to enter into controversies simply because these were things that needed to be done. He would take the path of least resistance in many areas, and I think this was one of the reasons that we were able to accomplish some of the things, because we made it hot enough for him and he had to move out of his dead center position.

G: Some writers have suggested that his Southern constituency did limit him while he was in the Senate, and that, by the very fact that he accepted the Vice Presidential nomination, this emancipated him from that constituency and that he was able to make, after he became President, the kind of transition, that he became a much more enlightened man or at least more responsive to national needs and national interests. Do you think this is a fair assessment?

P: I think there's no question about it that he grew in terms of his knowledge and interest in national and world affairs after he became Vice President. It certainly didn't eliminate by any means his Southern heritage, and, I think, his natural conservatism.

When we talk about OEO, I think it comes out during that period, too.

G: He has been called a Populist. Of course, the phrase itself is subject to some misinterpretation, but, from your own understanding of what Populism is, would you put Johnson in that kind of heritage?

P: Oh, I don't know. Huey Long was a Populist, too, and these kind of definitions really don't carry much weight today, I don't think, in the modern context. He was interested in people but if you put it down to what we considered in those days the important things like when you talked about doing something for people, we were talking about doing something for Negroes who had been out of the mainstream of this country's life and benefits for so many years, I don't think he carried it that far. He was one of those who, I imagine, felt that the motivation is always present in people to improve themselves and if you just give them that extra opportunity, that extra push to improve themselves, they'll all grab it. And I don't think he ever has realized till this day that providing that motivation is a key factor in this whole area.

G: I'd like to ask you another couple of questions about Johnson, the man, while he was Senator, while you had some contact with him. Did you feel that he was the political animal that he has often been described, that he lived and breathed politics, and that he wasn't able to enjoy the amenities of leisure that other people would, and so on? That he was obsessed with a kind of political animism.

P: I think in those years the Senate was his life; there's no question about it. I can't really speak of what he did in his off hours, if he really had any off hours. He worked tremendously hard. He was an extremely effective man. Once he got his mind on where he wanted to go, it usually came out that way. I have never doubted his skill as a legislator. I think he's a tremendous man in that regard. He has the ability to bring people together and to judge a political

situation, see which way the wind is blowing at any given time and heading generally in that direction. His parliamentary skill was very good.

G: But he would never lead--

P: No, he was not a leader in that sense. He was an excellent Majority Leader, I think, in terms of what the Senate needed. The Senate has never been the same, I might say, after he left. And after Rayburn left the House, in my estimation, the Congress took quite a downturn in the sense that it fell apart in many ways. The discipline that Johnson and Rayburn were able to instill collapsed. It became aimless to an unfortunate degree. The ability to really keep their feet to the fire and nose to the grindstone and so forth was lacking under the subsequent leaderships. And so in that regard, I found that their departure--Johnson's departure--had real adverse effects on the Congress. We always, and I speak like Senator McNamara too, never had any question about Johnson's ability. We just hoped and wished that it was a little more in the direction that we thought it should be. Had it been, I think he'd have been really a fantastic person as Majority Leader.

G: What was the discipline that you talked about? Was it a matter of patronage or favors, obligations, debts, and that sort of thing?

P: Well, he used all of those to good advantage. But there was also the day-to-day operations of the Senate, seeing to it that it kept on the track and did not get sidetracked with a lot of extraneous statements and long wrangles over matters that had no particular

germaneness to what was the pending business. He was able, through his parliamentary skill and his ability to influence his colleagues, to keep the place on a fairly short leash. The Senate has never been a disciplined body anyway. And by its very rules and nature, it becomes a debating society or just simply a forum for anyone who wants to make noise. But he was able to minimize that as much as it could be and keep it on the track. And he did use these other little weapons that a person in power has to use. He wasn't at all hesitant about using them.

G: I'm sort of curious. On the basis of your own experience, to what extent does a Senator exercise independent judgment as opposed to voting on the basis of party loyalty or that he owes something to somebody else?

P: I think you left out one key element, and that's his constituency. I think that most often a senator will either be voting his personal conscience or his constituency's attitude. And quite often those are the same. I don't mean to suggest that they have to be different. And I think the majority of his votes will be cast on that basis. When it becomes a matter of party discipline or party position or as a favor to someone else, he has to weigh the consequences of his vote on both his conscience and his constituency in that light. Quite often Johnson, and it was a mark of his parliamentary skill, would have several votes waiting in the wings that would go either way he wanted them to. These would be votes of senators from states where the particular issue at hand was of no consequence and the

senator could vote either way without any problem back home. So he would keep these votes handy in the cloakroom, or within short call, to come in if he needed them to carry the vote in the direction he wanted it to go. He did this quite often on close votes. And if he didn't need them, they could just come in and vote the way that they particularly felt like voting. But he would do this. Some of those, I suppose, were cast either in return for favors or to get Johnson in theirdebt perhaps for some favor that they were going to ask, or just because a number of these people were members of the Senate and wanted to help their party and their position in that particular vote. So this was just one of the techniques that he would use, and to good advantage.

G: May I ask whether you attended the 1960 convention?

P: No. I intended to go with Senator McNamara, but he was up for re-election himself that year, and he was ill; had to undergo an operation about the time that the convention was taking place. So I stayed in Detroit with him.

G: Could you say what his response was at the news that Johnson was selected as the Vice Presidential candidate?

P: I don't think that he--as I recall, he did not express any shock particularly, certainly not the same kind of shock that was expressed by some of our state party leaders at that convention who went off the track a bit, I feel. But Senator McNamara was not particularly aghast at this. He did question, how are we now going to support Johnson as Vice Presidential candidate when much of Michigan, or

certainly the Michigan Democratic party, knew Senator McNamara's problems with Johnson over the previous years. Because there was no secret about this. Senator McNamara solved this very easily in the speeches that he gave and his willingness to support Johnson by saying that "Senator Johnson has accepted the Democratic platform and is campaigning on that platform and promises to help carry it out, and that's good enough for me. Therefore, I am for Senator Johnson." So this was his response to that. He never had any personal problems with Johnson. In fact, this was true of Senator McNamara, I think, throughout his Senate years. He had a very sharp tongue and no one was ever in much doubt as to what his position was. He was personally respected a great deal, and always maintained friendly relationships with even those he was criticizing, and that includes Johnson. But he had no trouble campaigning for the ticket certainly. Johnson refused to come to Michigan during the campaign because of the activities of some of our state party leadership at the convention. He felt he was not welcome. He was very sensitive on these matters.

G: And yet I think he even had a man from Michigan as his own personal aide, Hobart Taylor.

P: Well, yes. Of course, Hobart was never considered a "in" person as far as the Michigan Democratic party was concerned.

G: I think he was originally from Texas.

P: His father was from Texas.

G: Could you comment on whether or not you felt that Johnson regretted

his decision? You talked earlier about after he became Vice President and after his first trip he had dinner that time with you and Senator McNamara. Did he seem as though he regretted, or did he just seem sort of out of power?

P: He seemed out of power. I wasn't that close to him personally, but my guess would be that he probably at that time regretted very much that he had taken on the Vice Presidency. He was just used to being a big man and a big fish in a big pond, and he liked it very much. And now he was still in the big pond, but the Vice President just didn't have much influence.

G: I'd like to move now to 1966 when you came to OEO. What were the circumstances of your having done so. I know as Senator McNamara's assistant you had the opportunity to review the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Perhaps you could start there and say something about your own familiarity with the program, with the bill, your own interpretations of it, and so on, and then go to 1966.

P: In 1964 the anti-poverty bill was drafted primarily by the Johnson Administration. We were not involved at that stage in the actual drafting of the bill. Our first connection with it, really, was when Senator McNamara was asked by the White House to be the Senate sponsor of the bill.

G: Do you know the reason for that request?

P: I knew that they weren't about to get Senator Lister Hill, of Alabama, who was the chairman of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee to be the sponsor of it. And I don't know that they asked anyone else

before they came to Senator McNamara, but he seemed like a logical person to do it. There may have been more to it that I've either forgotten about or don't know about, but in any event we were asked to sponsor the bill. I think my first connection, my first real knowledge of it came when Adam Yarmolinsky and a couple of other people came by my office to give us a draft of the bill and discuss it.

G: When would this have been?

P: My guess would be about June '64, but I may be off on that. I don't really remember the--

G: What I'm getting at, I think it was in April that the bill was introduced.

P: Was it April? All right, then I stand corrected. It was of course before the bill was introduced that they came by, but I really have forgotten the specific time.

Senator McNamara then introduced the legislation, and we, along with the House sponsor, who I believe was Congressman Landrum, of all people.

G: That's what prompted my original question as to why Landrum in the House and McNamara in the Senate, when they seemed to be at different poles.

P: That was part of the strategy, to have people of this nature being the sponsors of the bill. Then they could point to the Southern conservative and the Northern liberal as the sponsors; ergo, the bill must be a great one. It's rather a juvenile strategy, I guess,

but nevertheless somebody dreamed this up.

I don't have a timetable in front of me of the legislative process that then took place, but we conducted rather short hearings on it in the Senate. The bill was generally pretty straightforward as to what was to be expected except for community action, which I don't believe anyone really fully understood then except for some ideas that were floating around. I've always thought with some interest of the impact that the phrase "maximum feasible participation of the poor" has had over the years, and I've thought back as to what it meant to us at that time. It never really became a subject of much discussion during the legislative process. In my own recollection, the word "feasible" was the key word. Every time you use the word "feasible", you have the option of going as far as you want to or stopping as short as you want to. And I always considered it in that context, that the idea was good--participation obviously was good, but feasible would control how far you had to go. So I think this was one of the reasons that we never really considered it an all-powerful tail that was going to start to wag a dog one of these years.

The most distressing part about those days, I think, was the successful effort to dump Yarmolinsky, who was generally known to be slated to be the Deputy Director.

G: Do you have personal knowledge of this incident?

P: Yes. The bill had already left the Senate confines when this took place. It happened in the House. And during those days when it was taking

place, we got information that it was happening; that for political reasons because of the particular delegation in the House that was objecting to Yarmolinsky and therefore threatened to vote against the bill, that he was dropped. I have never, I guess, quite forgiven Shriver and Johnson for that. I thought it was a very low political maneuver that was not only, as it turned out, I think unnecessary, but just going a little too far. There's a point in politics where one has to stop and say, "I'm just not going to do it." And I think that was a point. At least that would have been a point with me if I had been in a position to have to make the decision.

G: Was Shriver pressured in this, or did he go along with it? Do you know what his reaction to all of this was?

P: As I recall, he was reflecting the pressure. He was very concerned naturally about getting the votes. And Sarge has always had somewhat of a tendency to react to pressure, to take the easy course or the expedient course in matters of this kind. In any event, I felt that it was a very unfortunate occurrence that Yarmolinsky was dropped. And I didn't feel that the President or Shriver should have acquiesced.

G: Apparently, from what I have been able to gather, the nature of the opposition was such that it focused about his background, his parentage, his role in the Defense Department in the desegregating facilities outside military bases, and so on. Is this the case?

P: Yes. That was it. He had quite a reputation going for him in this

area. And he was of course being held to account for things his parents had been involved in. The whole thing was rather messy and extremely unpleasant, and I think that it had quite a bearing over the years on the direction of OEO was to take.

G: What do you mean by that?

P: I think somebody like Adam, had he become the Deputy Director initially, would have exercised a certain influence on OEO that Sarge needed. Sarge at that time was not only without a deputy, but he was also still head of the Peace Corps. And as a result, many things, many policies, became imbedded in concrete as far as OEO was concerned, and many directions were taken that probably caused us some difficulty over the years that I think a strong deputy such as Adam would have been able to influence.

Is there anything further on the legislative end that you are interested in?

G: You had mentioned that you didn't think that there was going to be any problem insofar as the maximum feasible participation of the poor was concerned, and that there was not that much attention given to it. Were there any, from your memory now, objections to any part of this bill when it went through the Senate? For example, either in terms of what was included or what was omitted?

P: Thinking back, one of the hottest issues in the next couple of years was the governor's veto proposition. There was that school of thought that the governor should be able to provide an absolute veto on any section of the bill. There was the counter-school that

thought he shouldn't be involved at all. That was a very emotional issue as far as the Senate was concerned, and really was a forecast of troubles to come in terms of our relationships with the states. But without reviewing some of that now, I don't remember all of the fights that took place. It was not an easy bill to get through, but it was easier than might be expected because no one really knew too much about it.

G: Was it a surprise package, the fact that it was Johnson's bill, his first major piece of legislation, or did you think that this was consistent with what you had known about him?

P: I think we were surprised. I think the feeling was that he was picking up a Kennedy ball here and running with it. But the fact that he did run with it, whether he picked it up from Kennedy or had come up on it on his own, was, I think, greeted with some interest, certainly in the Senate. And of course [this] helped its passage, too, because the feeling [was] that if President Johnson was for this bill, it was probably all right. So, yes, there was a degree of awe, I think.

G: And that would have been in the same period that the Civil Rights Act was going through the Congress as well.

P: Right.

G: Which might even have been more of a shocker.

P: I'm sure that there were those who thought he had sold out to the liberals, but in our feeling, he had become a national President at this stage.

G: From 1964, I think August was the date the bill was passed, until March, 1966, when you came here, what did you, in Senator McNamara's office, see happening to OEO? I'm wondering--in that period, it seems to me, that OEO went through most of its serious troubles, didn't end in 1966, but certainly in that first year, it was a hot year. I was wondering what you could see from the Senate perspective, and then what you brought over here.

P: We had one more crack at it while I was still there. That would be in 1965, authorization legislation. It wasn't too difficult then because OEO still was somewhat of an unknown factor. The incidents were starting to pop up about somebody publishing a newspaper here, or doing some other dastardly deed there with federal money. And these had to be answered on the floor in 1965. But, by and large, it was not a terribly difficult year for the legislation. I didn't spend a lot of my time on OEO during those months after--except for the legislative bouts with it, except I had the feeling that it was a pretty confused operation, and that it was administratively in rather a serious predicament. I had no fault to find with the directions that it was taking or, of course, its overall goal. That still was very good. But I did feel that, administratively, there were some problems that seemed to me quite serious.

As to why I came here, knowing this, I sometimes question my own sanity, really, in making that move. I guess it really goes back to the fact that as far back as 1964, Senator McNamara had confided to me that he did not intend to run for re-election in 1966.

At that time I think he would have been 74 years old in 1966, and he just wasn't interested in becoming one of those doddering old senators such as he had seen. And (he) felt that there was a time to get out, and he wasn't going to run for re-election again. So I knew that he was not going to run, and I, of course, began to give some thought to my own future, as one does under those conditions. I wasn't in any particular hurry about it, but as 1965 wore on, I stepped up my search a bit. And early in 1966, Bernie Boutin, who was then the--let me go back.

I was talking with the people at the White House, Bill Moyers and several others, about possible courses that I might take to stay in government. Moyers suggested the OEO position and as a result of that, Bernie Boutin, who was then the Deputy Director of OEO, called me up and asked me if I were interested in the interagency relations job here. I gave it some thought, talked to Bernie, and talked to Sarge, and neither of them really had much of an idea what the job was all about. It was vacant at that time. My predecessor was Lyle Carter who had gone over to HEW as an Assistant Secretary. No one really knew much about the job or what it was supposed to do, but it covered a lot of bases, and it was what we called a high visibility job in terms of being able to move around the government. So I figured that I didn't have much to lose in trying it. I hadn't worked in the Executive branch, and I thought that I should. I found the Senate was a fascinating place; I don't think I'll ever enjoy another ten years of my life as much as I enjoyed that, but it

was a very insular place too. You do not get really a feeling of what's going on in the world and in the country if you stay around the Senate too long, or around Capitol Hill. You get all tied up in that little world, and it is quite a small one.

G: Excuse me for interrupting. You mentioned that you were talking to Bill Moyers. Could you describe your contact with the White House at that time? How was it that you happened to be talking to Moyers?

P: Of course, as a senator's administrative assistant, I was his chief link with the Democratic White House and with the Administration at that time. I was the one that passed along his comments or fielded the calls or requests that came in from the White House.

He was in a rather influential position in the Senate; he was chairman of the Public Works Committee and chairman of the Labor Subcommittee; handled the Poverty Bill, and was chairman of the group on aging, and a member of the Education Subcommittee. And he had a number of key slots, so he was in a rather influential position, and we had quite a bit of contact with the White House.

I got to know Moyers through some of the backstage legislative work that was taking place, and the passage, I guess, of the Poverty Bill, for one thing.

G: Could you go into that a little bit?

P: I'm trying to remember the--

G: This is, by the way, one area we never really were able to satisfactorily explain in the history, that is,the role of the White House during the legislation. Who were the people responsible for its passage, and

how were the ways in which they operated and so on?

P: That gets a little difficult to assess or to put in perspective, because the backstage handling of a piece of legislation is really fascinating, but it's awfully hard to make any rational sense out of because a lot of it is done on a spot basis. As a vote approaches on a hot issue, an amendment can sink the bill or make it swim or alter it drastically, and you see that it's going to be close. To watch then the pressures go to work backstage is really extremely interesting. People come over from the White House and camp out in the Majority Leader's office and make the telephone calls and buttonhole, call key senators in and try to put the arm on them to vote this way or that way. It's done pretty much on an ad hoc basis really as the issue comes up. There's no really overall strategy except you want to get the bill through. But then as the particular issues become hot within that overall framework, that's when you have to go to work. And quite often it involves a compromise right on the spur of the moment. You have to decide, well, we'll go this far, but no farther. So the word goes back to the floor to your floor leader to give in up to this point, or accept this particular compromise, or to get another senator to get up on the floor with the compromise and present it as if he just happened to be standing there thinking about it and this occurred to him. Then the floor leader says, "My, that's a good idea. I'll accept that." And this cuts the ground out from under the opposition. These are all the little tricks of the trade that make

it a real wild place to be in on a hot bill. And I was a party to a lot of that, especially on bills in which the Senator was the floor leader. While he was on the floor handling the legislation, I would be back working in these quarters with people from the White House.

G: Who were the people from the White House? [Mike] Manatos or--?

P: Mike Manatos was the Senate liaison man full-time.

G: Was Larry O'Brien involved?

P: Oh, yes. Larry was over usually when the going was the toughest and close. Moyers sometimes was there. But Larry and Mike Manatos, I think, were probably the two most directly involved. They'd pull all kinds of maneuvers to get a vote, to keep a vote, to get rid of a vote. I recall one time that some senator was scheduled--had a flight out of town. He had to go make a speech some place. This was the kind of thing that always infuriated me about the Senate: how the Senate was run on the basis of what somebody's personal plans are, quite often. Bills will be postponed because some senator has got some personal business some place, that he can't be there. Schedules are altered in this way. This particular senator had a flight out so one of the White House representatives called the Vice President of the airline and he got him to hold this particular plane at the airport until the senator could get there. These are the kind of things that happen. Certainly you don't find them in the civics textbooks, but they're things that made the world go around as far as legislation is concerned.

G: Were you at all impressed one way or the other with the White House staff, people like Moyers, Jenkins, O'Brien, and so on?

P: Yes, I was impressed. There were those that I didn't think very much of. The White House is a very strange place--the White House staff. There were those who were infatuated with their positions and their ability to pick up a telephone and get anybody they want to on the other end of it. There were others who recognized the influence that they have, but are able to curb it or to accept the fact that they aren't the final arbiter of everything that's going on, and they're willing to listen. Larry O'Brien was certainly one of those who respected the integrity and the ability of members of Congress, and was not one who threw his weight around, but knew how to get things done, too. And he was a very, very professional and capable spokesman for the White House in these sessions.

G: I interrupted you. You were talking about after having talked to Bill Moyers, who referred you to Boutin, in the context of your coming over to OEO.

P: Yes. Apparently they had been trying to fill this job for a couple of months and hadn't found anyone for it particularly that they wanted. So I was interested. As I say, I did want to come to the Executive Branch, I didn't really particularly want to do it to OEO, because I didn't have a very high opinion of it as a place to work at that time.

G: Why is that? Because of the troubles they were undergoing?

P: Yes. It just struck me as being a rather oddball establishment.

And while Sarge was certainly a colorful character and, in many ways, fun to be around, work for, I just felt that OEO was not long for this world. It was just under too much continual pressure.

G: Let me stop on this for a moment. Had you met Shriver?

P: Yes, I had met him during the course of the legislative fights.

G: Of course, you may have seen him when he was at the Peace Corps.

P: No, we never really had much to do with him at that stage. My first contact with him was in behalf of the OEO legislation initially.

G: What were your impressions of Shriver?

P: I think the general impression that most people have on their first meetings with him is that he is very glib and persuasive, very persuasive. He's a good salesman, and energetic, and ambitious, can throw his all into a subject like this.

My impression, as I've heard from other people or as I saw over the ensuing months, was that you questioned his judgment at times in terms of some of the directions that OEO--some of the problems that OEO was getting into.

G: Was this a question of mal-administration, or was it the question of a kind of internal contradiction of a program? I may be misinterpreting you, but when you talked about OEO's being in trouble and that you didn't think it had long for the world at that time in late '65 and early '66, would this have been because of Shriver and the kind of sloppy administration of OEO? Or was it because of the programs that it was administering?

P: I think it's a combination. The programs certainly were such that

made this kind of a condition ripe. The flexibility of the OEO charter was such that you could do practically anything and justify it under the law. Now whether you could justify it politically or through common sense was something else again.

G: Excuse me again. Are you talking about Community Action now?

P: Primarily Community Action, yes. Although it was reflected to an extent in, say, the Neighborhood Youth Corps at that time or the Work Experience Program and things that we delegated to other departments to run, we didn't administer those, but we had something to do with the policy of them. Mal-administration may be too harsh a phrase. I think Shriver just wasn't interested in administration. He wanted to be out there swinging with these tools that had been given to him in this legislation and try different things. The whole approach, of course, the fantastic speed with which they moved to get this program started and the political implications of that, to have this huge package of announcements ready by November, 1964, and so forth, the chartering of these Community Action agencies all over the country before anyone really knew what the Community Action Agency was or all of the pitfalls that they were heading into, all of these things we've lived with ever since. But because of all of this, I was just rather--I think OEO would have been about the last place I would have chosen. But as I got to thinking about it, my interest in getting into the Executive Branch and really an abhorrence of going down to one of the old line federal agencies with those endless halls and doors, I just couldn't see that either. And

I realized that for all its flakiness, OEO was still probably the most action there was in town, and maybe the most fun to work for. And certainly Shriver was interesting to work for, and that entered into my consideration at the time. So I said okay, and I came aboard.

Just as a matter of historical note, Senator McNamara at just about that time got ill again and was out at the Betheseda Naval Hospital. I came to OEO at the end of March, and he died a month later. I attended his funeral; well, of course I attended the funeral, but Mrs. McNamara asked me to come out and handle all the arrangements for the funeral. So I went out to Detroit and set up the funeral arrangements, got the church organized--the floor plan of the church, and placing the various distinguished groups that were to come. I remember we got that all completed, and we were driving back to the hotel after a strenuous day of this kind of activity, and we had the car radio on, and there was the announcement from Washington that President Johnson was coming to the funeral the next day. So I tore up all my plans because I knew that this was a new event. I think it was midnight that night before I finally made contact with the Secret Service who were already in town, and began working with them immediately on redrafting all of the plans for seating and what have you. They made it clear that the President did not want a front pew; he wanted to be back behind the family. So that was taken care of. There was some question as to whether he was going to go to the cemetery after the church services, and that was unknown. I was asked--of course, the news was out then, and it

was a relatively small church, and there was going to be difficulty with all the people who would want to come just to see the President. The Secret Service asked me to stand at the door and determine those who would be permitted to enter. So, really, my function at that stage was guarding the portals. I knew, of course, from my experience in the state, most of the politicians and others of note who were coming, and who would be permitted in. So I had to guard the portals on that. Then it was determined that when the funeral ended that the President would go to the cemetery. And the Secret Service asked me to introduce the members of the Senator's family to the President at the grave site, which I did. By this time the whole thing was getting rather nervous, but they told me to stick close to the President as he wended his way to the cemetery, which I did, and I presided over this rather bizarre introductory process beside the grave. I don't know whether he heard a thing I said, and I don't know whether I got a single name right, but anyway, it was quite an experience.

And then I flew back to Washington with him on Air Force One that afternoon. That completed that assignment.

I don't know if you want to get into OEO now in terms of kinds of questions you have.

G: Feel free. I was going to start out by asking you just generally what your duties in the Office of Interagency or Governmental Relations as it became, and the problems and so on that you faced. Before I ask you that, can I ask you what did the President talk

about on that flight on Air Force One? Did you see him at all; did you talk to him and so on?

P: No. He stopped by and shook hands and asked where I was at that point. But I didn't sit with him. He was up in his quarters in the plane, and I was in the back with the regular other passengers on that particular trip. So I didn't have any particular conversations with him then.

G: We've gotten you to OEO in 1966, and I'd like to ask you then what kinds of problems did you face? You might like to begin by just stating very briefly the functions
you understood them. You said earlier that it wasn't known precisely what the job would be.

P: That's right. I had a difficult time those first months, and it really pretty much convinced me that I had been right the first time about whether I should come to OEO or not; because the job had a high-sounding name, but no one really knew what it was supposed to do. Theoretically, we had these programs that were delegated to the other departments, as I mentioned. The Neighborhood Youth Corps and the Adult Basic Education--the Neighborhood Youth Corps was delegated to Labor, Adult Basic Education to HEW, the Work Experience Program to HEW, the Rural Loan Program to Agriculture, the Economic Loan Program to SBA. We had five programs at that time. My office was responsible at that stage for relationships with the other departments on those programs. We were the conduit for information from OEO to them concerning the programs and vice

versa. We held regular meetings with representatives from those offices.

I also was the point of contact in OEO for any information or any ideas that popped up in other departments that they wanted to express to us; or if we had things that we wanted to get them to cooperate on, it would usually come through me from the program office within OEO.

G: Was this a unique arrangement in government, the delegation of programs to other agencies?

P: Yes. I think it's the first time that it has ever really been done, on any scale at all.

G: What was the rationale behind it?

P: Part of it was political and part of it was experimental. I think politically a number of programs that made up the OEO legislation, as you know, were really on somebody's drawing board before OEO came into being. So they were all tossed into this particular pot. But part of the political understandings that went into the legislation, it was known that these were to be delegated to the other departments for actual operation.

G: Was this political in the sense that, for example, if the Job Corps were going to be run and administered by OEO then Labor would get the Neighborhood Youth Corps because Labor originally wanted the Job Corps--that sort of thing?

P: Yes, that's part of it. Labor never did like the idea of OEO at that time. The leadership of the Labor Department didn't like OEO, and

didn't think we should have any manpower job. So as sort of the quid pro quo for our running Job Corps, they were, by God, going to head Neighborhood Youth Corps. And the education program, Adult Basic Education, went to HEW. I think it should have. We shouldn't have been running a broad program like that. Although the idea was that we would influence the direction, try to make sure that they involved poor people, and to the extent we could, coordinate them with Community Action and the other activities in which we were engaging.

G: So the guidelines would be written at OEO, the money would come through OEO appropriations. Is that right?

P: That's right.

G: Does this give OEO the kind of control that it needed to supervise these programs?

P: Well, it didn't then. It did and it didn't. It worked to a limited degree. An agency like ours was one that had the kind of influence it could bring to bear on an established department of the government. We probably were too busy taking care of Community Action and the programs that we were running to spend as much time as we should have spent on establishing a very sound basis of coordination and influence in terms of these other programs. It got out of hand. I think Shriver's view was: well, just let Labor and HEW run those things, and don't both me with that; we've got enough problems of our own. And consequently, and given the political realities of Willard Wirtz and his desire to handle all manpower programs with a minimum of interference, we didn't exercise as great a control as I think we should have.

Of course, I wasn't in on that part of it. I came in after the relationship had pretty well been nailed down, and, in fact was starting to disintegrate or become quite altered. Because about that time legislation was starting to take various programs away and altering them, such as the NYC, for example. It just became a part of a series of manpower programs which were being financed under our act and administered by Labor. And with the role of Community Action agencies being the sponsor of these programs, I finally got to the point where I turned over the relationship I had with NYC to Community Action in OEO because it just didn't make any sense for me to continue to try to--

G: You sort of had to try to coordinate vertically as well as horizontally.

P: That's right.

G: With the old line agencies that were administering them, but from within OEO and Community Action, it might involve several of these delegated programs as well.

P: That's right. It got quite confusing and difficult to handle. Adult Basic Education eventually was by legislation transferred fully to HEW. The Work Experience Program was being started to be phased out, so it was diminishing. The SBA program was similarly being legislatively altered. So that particular part of my responsibilities was starting to decrease.

I was also at this time executive secretary to the Economic Opportunity Council, which was called for in our legislation. It

had its first meeting in December, 1964, at which time President Johnson, according to the minutes which I read, held that meeting in the White House and gave it a very ornate mandate to coordinate this and study that and advise him on the other thing; he called it his "Domestic National Security Council," a lot of rhetoric like that, which never came to pass. The EOC subsequently held twenty meetings, the final one being in December, 1967, at which time our legislation was changed--at our request incidentally--to give it a new role. But President Johnson, for reasons which I know not, never implemented it. I don't know how deeply you want to get into the EOC because--

G: I have a separate question about that. Why don't I just reserve it for later on?

P: All right. During those months, a couple of years there, my function in Interagency Relations began to alter. I think, as a historical note, it's interesting that Bert Harding was at the time I came here conducting a management survey of OEO. And it was the very day that I got back from Senator McNamara's funeral, I flew back on Air Force One and walked into the office; it was late afternoon, I believe, and I was walking down the eighth floor corridor, still rather bemused by my experiences of the previous few days. And Chris Weeks, who was one of Shriver's assistants and was also working with Harding on the management survey, came up to me and said, "Have you heard about the recommendations the Harding report is going to have about your Interagency Relations?" And I said,

"No." And he said, "Well, you'd better take a look at it. They're going to propose that your office be abolished." Well, at this time I'd been at OEO about six weeks.

G: You knew Harding, didn't you? Hadn't your paths crossed in an IRS-- I'm not sure what the circumstances are. He mentioned this in the interview.

P: Yes. That had come about while I was with Senator McNamara. We had a little dust-up over a data computing center that IRS was supposed to put up in Detroit.

G: So, at one point, you were adversaries on the other side of the table.

P: That's right.

G: And again now, if he's going to abolish your position and your office.

P: Yes. Of course, nothing of a personal nature in that. Our relationships on that previous controversy had come out all right with no bad blood by any means. So I looked into this and found out that this was to be one of the recommendations. I got a little upset about that and fired off a memo to Shriver to the extent that I found it rather unusual to have my job abolished only six weeks after I had taken it. And I sent a copy of that over to Harding.

The recommendation did occur, appear. Of course, Harding became Deputy Director then in June, the following month. I guess that my performance over the months then persuaded him that there was a need for the kind of job I was doing, and I guess the recommendation was one of the first that was ultimately scratched from

his report.

G: I have not seen the report, but what was the reasoning behind the abolition of your office?

P: That the coordination role should probably really be spread to the program offices; that they should be handling their relationships with other departments in terms of their particular functions rather than having a headquarters staff office. The vertical problem that you mentioned was part of it, too. And I recognized that, but I think I felt that there needed to be an office that could cut across a lot of lines. Program people would tend to get pretty parochial, and CAP would be doing something that affected Job Corps and not know it, or VISTA. You needed somebody to try to oversee everything that was going on, keep track of the agreements that were being negotiated, help negotiate them; have a place that, as it ultimately turned out, jobs that they didn't know where else to put in the scheme of things would be given to my office quite often to start. When somebody created a task force to do something in the White House or another department and they needed an OEO representative and there was no one in that particular program who would logically fit because nobody knew how it was going to turn out, I was quite often selected. And I would sit in on these matters in the organizational stages until they got to a point where if they did fly, then they would be turned over to one of our operating units. So this was the kind of thing I got into.

I also got involved in this Presidential team that was being

sent around to talk to governors.

G: Could you hold that off a minute? What were the kinds of obstacles in the ease with which OEO coordinated these programs with these other old line agencies, as you call them? Was it a question if the program were not run by OEO and were delegated off, that that agency simply couldn't run this program for the benefit of the people for whom it was intended, or was it something more than that?

P: No. There were several things involved: one was the very parochial attitude that a lot of departments had. They had been running their programs for all these years; they didn't want this upstart agency involved. There was the difficulty of Shriver dealing with members of the Cabinet in terms of who influences whom. But, programmatically, there was the tendency of many agencies and departments to run their programs on behalf of those who were not the poorest of the poor. And this was the way they had been operating for years. Our charter said very specifically that we deal with the very poor. So to turn an agency around so that it was even thinking about these people was quite a feat. The Labor Department was a good case in point where the manpower--

G: I wanted to let you volunteer that.

P: Well, I think that's one of the areas we've had probably our greatest influence in, in how their programs are being operated. The Manpower Training and Development Act, for example, the years that it had in existence was directed mainly to helping people upgrade themselves, those who had jobs get better jobs, to get more training.

Well, I think through our influence, MTDA began to take in the unskilled needs, the unemployed hard core, jobless, and bring them into the circuit. The Employment Service traditionally waited for people to come into the office and look down the list of jobs that were available, or those who were on unemployment compensation which meant they had been working and had some kind of a job record. They had never paid any attention to those who had no job record. Now it does, limited though it may be,but it meant quite a change in it.

G: I've seen the remark that the Employment Service is the tail that wags the dog in the Labor Department. In fact, I have heard the comment that due to OEO and the kind of impact that it has had, it has improved Employment Service in this connection.

P: That's right. By using them as recruiters, say, for the Job Corps--for one thing it has brought them into contact with a lot of people they wouldn't ordinarily see, forcing them to get out of their offices to go into the ghettos to set up an office in a neighborhood center, for example. These have had tremendous impact on a number of state employment services. Of course, they're all different. They're all creatures of their individual states, and this is a long battle that isn't restricted to OEO, by any means.

Another trouble that we had with the old line departments was getting them to work with Community Action Agencies. And it has been a continuing effort and struggle to see to it that the Community Action Agency was the presumptive sponsor of many of these programs as they were implemented in the field. And we've been quite successful in that.

But all of these things made it very difficult to work with the other departments, but I think none of this was unexpected, and I think a great amount of progress has been made.

G: At that time did your office have the responsibility for establishing communications with state and local officials as well?

P: No. That role at that time was in the Office of National Councils, of which Hy Bookbinder was the director. But in 1967, when the President directed that a specific effort be made to improve relationships with the states, I was tapped by Sarge to go on some of these trips. At the beginning they were going to go to about five or six states, that was all. As it turned out, they went to forty within the next year. So that the success of the early trips and the fact that many of the other governors that were being bypassed were complaining, led to the expansion of the program. So I went on about thirty of the trips, I guess. Fascinating experience, I enjoyed it. I've forgotten now--I saw so many state capitals that I can't pin one capital down to a specific state any more. They all tended to blend.

G: Like taking a European tour and seeing thirty countries in five days.

P: Yes. But about that time, as that trip got well underway, Bookie left OEO. And we'd had some discussions previously about whether the relationships with public officials should stay in that office, or perhaps be moved to mine because of the kind of work that I was doing. I was also beginning to establish a relationship with

the state offices of Economic Opportunity.

G: This was before the regional division of OEO?

P: No.

G: Did that occur in '66?

P: Yes, that had already occurred. So I was building up a relationship with these state offices. It was felt that perhaps Bookie's departure--and he concurred in this completely--was a good opportunity to move that function from his old office to mine. And that was done, and that was the time the name was changed to Office of Governmental Relations when we took over the relationships with the public officials generally.

G: Would you have had contact with mayors after you assumed this new function?

P: Yes.

G: This seems to be the period between the first mayors' conference in '65 at which there was some displeasure, a great deal of displeasure, as I understand it, at the operations of Community Action Agencies. In fact, taking Moynihan's book, one learns that mayors approached Vice President Humphrey in this regard. It's between this period and the 1967 Greene amendment where the structure of Community Action was somewhat altered by law by the Congress. I'm wondering in 1967 and '66, during which time you did talk to state representatives and state officials, and also assumed this new function in your division of contacting local people, what attitude was there, if you can generalize in thisway, about, say, the Community Action

Agencies? Had there been a change?

P: I think the mayors, by and large, had gotten over their antagonism, and while many of them weren't completely happy with what they had, they had come around to accept this as a price really for new federal money, new federal emphasis on the city problems; and they had agreed generally that the Community Action Agencies were a going thing and a necessary thing. That doesn't mean, as I say, that they were uniformly happy with the ones they had in their cities. In fact, I feel that that's the lesson we have from the outcome of the Greene amendment exercise where very few mayors actually exercised the rights that they had to alter the sponsorhip of the CAA's and make them public agencies. Some of our people like to hold this up as proof that CAA's have demonstrated their acceptability, and the mayors and CAA's are getting along just fine. I don't think that's necessarily true. But I think what it does prove is that most mayors, despite their troubles with CAA's, have learned to get along with them and recognize that there's a need for them, and will exercise their influence in a more quiet way rather than taking them over or destroying them. And then they also recognized the challenge from the states that was beginning to mount. The governors were beginning to try to press their point that all of these programs should be run through the state house. There's nothing that scares a mayor more than that. So there were those kinds of forces going for us, too, in this battle: the antagonism among the public officials

themselves.

G: It does raise the question: was there a grassroots demand for the kind of amendment that was passed in 1967 on the part of those people most concerned--the mayors?

P: I don't think it was as great as one might expect.

G: I think this tape is going to run out. Let's continue on another.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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