INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE REEDY (Tape #3)

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

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B: This is the second session with George Reedy. Sir, last time we carried this through the election of 1960, which brings us now up to the vice presidential years when you were still on Mr. Johnson's staff. The question that seems to arise here is, what did Mr. Johnson do to keep himself busy during the vice presidential years, which really is another way of asking was he happy in that position, or was it an unnatural restraint on him?

R: I wouldn't say the man was happy. And really it's almost impossible for a vice president to be happy. The position is a peculiar one. The only thing that really counts in terms of the vice presidency is the succession. The Constitutional provisions for the vice president, using him as the presiding officer over the Senate and granting him the authority to break ties, is really a rather trivial grant of authority. He must preside over the Senate in terms of the rules of the Senate itself. He can be overruled in any of his decisions, and can only rule in accordance with the clear directives of the Senate. And the power to break tie votes is usually quite meaningless. There are approximately eight to ten tie votes every year; most of those tie votes are on a motion against an Administration position. The motion is lost if it's a tie, so eight of every ten tie votes it doesn't matter whether he votes or not; his side wins anyway.

B: Outside of that formal structure could Mr. Johnson exercise any of the personal kind of influence and leadership over the Senate that he had in the past?

R: Not really. Nobody can exercise leadership and influence over the Senate unless he's a member of the Senate. The structure of the Senate is such that if you don't have a vote in that body, you really have very little to work with. Of course his personal friendships and his personal contacts were useful, and the fact that he could act as a conduit under some circumstances between the Administration and certain members of the Senate was useful. But the Senate can only be led from within the Senate itself. You will have some circumstances of an extraordinarily popular president who for a brief period of time can get pretty much what he wants out of the Senate, but that's only for a brief period of time.

B: Was Mr. Johnson hurt or resentful at the diminishing of his power in that sense?

R: I don't think he was hurt or resentful about it; I think that it required quite a readjustment for him to go from a situation in which he'd had this tremendous influence over the Senate--My own studies of the Senate indicate to me that he was one of the three most powerful leaders of the century; and of the three, I think that he far outshone the other two because they operated under different circumstances.

B: Who were those other two?

R: One was a very interesting man named Kearns, Senator Kearns from Indiana, who was the Majority Leader under Woodrow Wilson, and a man of tremendous ability and force and power. However, it should be pointed out that Kearns was the last Senate leader who operated under the old method of state legislatures selecting Senators, and this did give the party a form of control over the Senators that was lost as soon as the direct election of Senators began to take effect. Well, that began in 1913, which meant that Kearns as

leader dealt with the last class of Senators who had been selected by their legislatures rather than elected directly by the people.

The other was Joe Robinson from Arkansas, who was Franklin D. Roosevelt's leader. And of course Robinson had the very fortunate circumstance of having as his president a man who was so terribly popular that during Robinson's life, he died in '36 or '37 shortly before Roosevelt lost in the Supreme Court Packing Bill--Of course with that kind of influence behind him he had some natural advantages and some natural leverages that Senator Johnson didn't have. Senator Johnson took over this leadership under circumstances where the Democratic party was badly divided; under circumstances where the Republicans had just won a major victory in taking over the White House. And his leadership was really a remarkable thing. I think in this respect any study of the Senate would rate him certainly as the most powerful leader of this century; and I'm not sufficiently familiar with the leaders of the last century because it's difficult even to identify them, you know.

B: But all of that just fades away when Mr. Johnson becomes vice president, the structure just--?

R: I wouldn't say all of it, but a tremendous amount of it does, because the Senate leader has no power other than his vote, and no authority other than the fact that he will be recognized first if he and another Senator stand simultaneously and seek recognition. The power of the Senate leader depends upon his own individual leadership capacity; and the only thing that he really has to play with is his vote.

B: Could you also tell during those years of the vice presidential position whether or not Mr. Johnson actively participated in executive decisions?

R: Very actively. Again, this is one of the frustrating aspects of the vice presidency. A vice president can of course be an extremely active man; but

it's activity at the grace of the President. The only statutory authority or position that a vice president has is that he is a member of the National Security Council--that was an innovation of Harry Truman. Second, he is the chairman of the Space Council--that was an innovation of President Kennedy, who requested Congress to amend the Space Act very early during his term to make the Vice President chairman of the Space Council. Then there were a number of positions that he was granted by the President, the most important of which was the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; that, however, was a presidential commission. Also he was chairman of the Peace Corps Advisory Council.

B: I was thinking more of just the day-to-day decision making process of the Presidency. Did President Kennedy call Mr. Johnson in regularly to sit with him, talk with him, contribute toward decisions?

R: I wouldn't say regularly--I would say frequently. President Kennedy favored the use of the National Security Council and convened it upon almost any major decision in the field of foreign policy; consequently Senator Johnson sat in on all of those sessions, and therefore he was involved in most of the decision-making process.

B: Did he volunteer information, or did he feel that he should wait until he was called upon?

R: I really don't know. There were very few staff members sitting in with the National Security Council during that period; and those few staff members were all members of President Kennedy's staff. Therefore my own picture of it is what has been conveyed to me secondhand. I gather that as a matter of principle the Vice President was very much determined that there would be no situation which could lead to speculation and leaks that there was a split

between him and the President. I have been told both by him and others that he usually sat in on the meetings as a spectator, and then would speak privately to the President afterward, presenting his own views. I do not know that to be a fact. It would not surprise me however, because Senator Johnson, or Vice President Johnson at that point, as a Texan had very much on his mind--the split that developed between Vice President Garner and Franklin D. Roosevelt during Garner's last term as vice president. And I was a newspaperman covering the Hill during that period myself, and I can attest to the fact that the split was of quite serious proportions. And it was a disturbing factor. We used to see Vice President Garner every afternoon at the conclusion of a session--four or five of us that were newspapermen--and he'd pour a drink, or as he called it, "Strike a blow for liberty," and then let his anti-Administration views leak out. And he became one of the major focal centers for opposition to Franklin D. Roosevelt within the Democratic party.

B: And this had made an impression on Mr. Johnson?

R: Yes, who felt that it was definitely no way--who felt definitely that an administration should not have to face this kind of--I don't know what you'd call it, it wasn't precisely sabotage, but this sort of static .

B: How did President Kennedy and Mr. Johnson get along personally?

R: I don't know from personal observation. I would see President Kennedy from time to time myself; I knew him rather well because he had been a member of the House Labor Committee when the Taft-Hartley Act was passed, and I had covered the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act as a newspaperman. But I would usually see him individually in my capacity as the Vice President's advisor on Equal Employment Opportunity. And I only saw the two of them together on one or two occasions--at Hyannisport just before the campaign started in 1960, and at

Hyannisport just before we took off for the Scandinavian tour in 1963. However, to my personal knowledge, they were quite good friends during the period that the two served in the Senate together. I had ample opportunity to observe that. I thought there was genuine liking between the two men.

B: There has been a good deal of speculation, and probably will continue to be a good deal of speculation, about the relationship of the Kennedy staff to Mr. Johnson--Robert Kennedy and President Kennedy's various staff members. There has been a good deal of allegation that they at best condescended to him, and at worst were thinking about trying to dump him from the ticket for '64. Have you any knowledge of the validity of that speculation?

R: I don't have knowledge, no, although I can make a pretty good guess. Personally I got along rather well with all of the Kennedy staff members. And the Kennedy staff members, and again this is my own judgment and I'm presenting my own categories here, could be divided into two types. You had the straight-out political people such as Ken O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien and Dave Powers; you had the--I don't like to use the word intellectual because it has a certain sectarian connotation to it--but you had the Kennedy people who lived somewhat more fashionably. And I think between the two that the political types got along quite well with the Vice President, because they recognized the fact that they wouldn't be in the White House without him--which they wouldn't have been, it would have been impossible to carry those southern states without Lyndon Johnson on the ticket in '60. And they had many of the same attitudes toward problems that he had. I think that there was a very strong dislike among--again the more intellectual types around Kennedy. There's no doubt in my mind whatsoever, although I couldn't name you dates, times, and places, that the President and Robert Kennedy did not get along well.

B: By the President, you mean the then-Vice President?

R: Yes, the then-Vice President. There's no doubt in my mind whatsoever that there were antagonisms there. Again, I could not document that, but it's one of those things that you simply know when you live in this kind of an atmosphere.

B: Are those antagonisms that arise out of two powerful and ambitious men of strong character, or was it more personal than that?

R: I have a feeling that Robert Kennedy was very strongly imbued with this concept of the family, and that he really regarded the family in the old Irish clan sense, and that the family had captured the White House. And there was only one other man on the American scene that really represented in his mind any possibility, let alone a threat, of taking this control away from the family. And I believe that--again this is my judgment, I have never heard Mr. Johnson say this or any member of the Johnson family, but it is my own judgment that he definitely regarded Lyndon Johnson as a threat to the Kennedy dynasty or clan or whatever you want to call it. And I think he and many of the people around him would have been most happy to have had another vice president on the ticket in 1964. I might add I do not believe--I'm very firmly convinced that President Kennedy had every intention of running in '64 with Vice President Johnson. President Kennedy was a somewhat more pragmatic man than his brother. Bobby Kennedy was not a pragmatic man; he was a man who would lay down a course of action and would follow that course of action through regardless of unexpected developments. President Kennedy was intensely pragmatic; he understood the problems of the South and the West. I think he knew that a great deal of his electoral strength rested upon the Vice President and his popularity in both the South and the West. And also strangely enough after a couple of years, Vice President Johnson began picking up considerable support among Negroes, and I think this was another important factor.

B: Because of his work on the Equal Employment Commission?

R: Yes, and because of Johnson himself. Strangely enough, Mr. Johnson is one of the least prejudiced or biased or intolerant or bigoted man I have ever met. He has many shortcomings and he has many failings, but I don't believe there is any racial prejudice in him whatsoever; and this is the thing that became very, very apparent to most of the Negro leaders when they had a chance to know him personally.

B: Did you accompany Mr. Johnson on the various trips he made as Vice President?

R: Yes, I accompanied him on all except the one to Dakar; that particular trip my wife was very ill, and I couldn't leave. And also the trip to the Dominican Republic.

B: Just from reading the newspaper accounts, he seemed to enjoy those trips immensely. Is that a correct version?

R: Yes, he enjoyed certain parts of the trips, did not enjoy others. There were tremendous crowds on every single one of the trips; and he established a genuine rapport with great masses of the people. I can still recall the article in a Pakistani paper which said, "He reached out to the man who has no shirt." And he did have an ability to communicate, a surprising ability to communicate with very poor peasants. I can recall in India we were visiting a small village which the Indian government said had been improved. We visited one unimproved village and one improved village. Well, quite possibly a group of technicians with litmus paper and calipers and slide rules could have told the difference--I couldn't! They both looked like a collection of mud huts with a wall around them to me.

Nevertheless at one of the villages, the Vice President saw some Indians around a well; and they were pulling water up with a bucket on the end of a

rope. And he got out and deliberately threw the bucket into the well and pulled up a bucket of water, and then turned around and made a little speech which was translated in Hindi. And in this speech he said that this was not an unfamiliar thing to him at all, that as a young boy he had lived in a part of the United States where the average annual cash income was just about what the average annual cash income was in India--and that happens to be true in terms of cash income. Of course in Southwest Texas, they had certain commodities and resources they could draw upon, but in terms of cash income it probably was about the same. And that they had a well from which water had to be drawn in a bucket; and he said sometimes when you were pulling it up, the rope would slip through your hands and when you would finish getting the water up your hands would be burned and part of the skin chafed off. And I could see the faces of these Indian farmers, totally illiterate, living in this weird back-water of the world where they were conducting their affairs in about the same way that their remote ancestors had conducted their affairs--their faces lit up; they actually understood this man. This was one of his greatest strengths. He could go out to tremendously poor people; to people who really were at the end of their rope, who were deprived; and he could establish a channel of communications with them.

I saw this happen in Viet Nam; I saw it happen in Thailand; I saw it happen in India; I saw it happen in Turkey; in Iran; in Greece. He always got a much greater response--and I also saw it happen in Naples, by the way. And that's rather significant because it didn't happen in Rome. On the Middle Eastern trip the crowds in Rome were very, very small, and they paid very, very little attention to him; but Naples turned out with a very tumultuous welcome--a delightful combination of garlic and grease and sweating, screaming,

yelling, smiling, happy people. And I think this may reveal something about him--he does have and did have, as I said, this capacity to reach out to poor people, did not do so well in a somewhat more technical or sophisticated or highly commercialized milieu. He did not do as well in the Scandinavian countries as he did in the Middle East or in Southeast Asia.

B: Did that vary with types of people too? How was he at establishing a rapport with diplomats, government officials, that sort of structure?

R: He would do very well with government officials--not quite so well with diplomats. You know, the diplomat lives in a rather strait-jacketed world in which life must proceed according to the exigences of protocol in which every action must be preplanned and preplotted and predetermined. But with government officials he did extremely well.

B: By the same techniques, or did he adjust his style to--

R: No, I think there was a form of a rapport of understanding. He struck up a tremendous friendship with Ayub Khan, the President of Pakistan, and this thing was very genuine. The two men hadn't been together an hour before they were really quite warm friends. He did not strike up the same rapport with Nehru. I'd say that he did quite well in his conversations with [Ngo Dinh] Diem, who was then President of--or whatever the title was--of South Viet Nam. In countries like Sweden and Norway and Denmark and Finland and Iceland where you had mostly socialist governments or labor governments, he got along extremely well with the prime ministers and with the various cabinet officers. I think the same thing was true in Italy and--he and Karamanlis got along very well in Greece. With the political men, the men who had the problem of getting out and attracting masses of people, he would usually strike quite a rapport. With the more remote, aloof, intellectual, other-worldly types, quite probably the division is between the activists and the contemplative people.

B: Were you involved in the famous episode of bringing the camel driver from--?

R: Oh yes, from beginning to end. And it's really a wonderful story which has never been told quite as it actually happened.

B: Go ahead.

R: What really happened is that he was touring Karachi, and the crowds were really tremendous that day--much better than they had been in India. The Indians, the Hindus are a very quiet, almost docile people; and it somewhat breaks your heart. It's the only place I've been anywhere in the world where you can hand a child a candy bar and not get a smile. They just stand there with those tremendous eyes, and their eyes are big because they don't have enough to eat; therefore there's no fat in their faces; and they look at you, and their face doesn't change--the most expression you'll get is what they call a "Wai" where they put their hands together and make the bow.

But Pakistanis are Mohammedans, and they're much more emotional and much more likely to turn out and shout and yell and scream. And in one of those crowds, there was a camel driver in the outskirts--I didn't pay much attention to him at the time other than to note that he was there, you couldn't miss him very well because he was standing in front of the camel, and the camel sort of towered over the crowd. But the Vice President walked over to speak to him, and I walked over with him. I noticed that this man did have an unusual face--this is Bashir [Ahmad]--a very fine face, a sort of a Santa Claus face that looked like a tremendous amount of humanity, and actually it looked like there was wisdom in the face--I don't know whether there was or not because he spoke no English. And the Vice President had a little conversation with him through an interpreter. And in the course of the conversation, he said, "I've enjoyed so much visiting your country and meeting your people; and I hope some day

that you will have the opportunity to visit our country and meet our people." Then he went on about his business.

Well the next day the newspaper, Dawn, came out with a huge article lauding the Vice President to the skies--this was the same article where they used the phrase, "He reaches out to the man with no shirt on his back." And in one of the paragraphs, it said, "And all the bazaars are talking about his invitation to Bashir the camel driver to come to the United States and stay in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City"--how the Waldorf got into it I don't know!

Well, he didn't think too much of it at the time, but later on after we returned to the United States we got an almost panicky cablegram from the American Embassy in Pakistan, saying that this matter of Bashir the camel driver had become a major cause celebre in the country; and that if, by God, Bashir the camel driver wasn't brought to the United States and put up in the Waldorf, the Vice President was going to look like the biggest four-flusher in history. So he kind of groaned and said, "Okay, bring him on."

And the Embassy went out to Bashir's home--he lived in a little mud hut in the center of Karachi under really horrible conditions--went out to find him and he was gone, with no explanation--just that the police had come and taken him away. And the only thing we could guess was that the Pakistani authorities had decided they didn't want their country to be disgraced by having this illiterate camel driver who couldn't even sign his own name receiving so much prominent attention in the United States as a representative of Pakistan.

Well, a few months later, Ayub Khan came to the United States with his daughter, and on the trip visited the ranch. And while he was at the ranch, the President had a little talk with him and said, "We'd better get Bashir the camel driver over here," and explained to Ayub that he would not disgrace

the Pakistani; that he'd probably be very warmly received. And so it was arranged.

Well, we had all sorts of problems with it. In the first place, an airline cannot haul anybody free-for-nothing without all sorts of special permits; and we had to go to the International Aviation Association, or whatever they call it, and get permission for Pan-Am to bring him over. We found the People to People program fortunately had one of those Fairchild planes that goes so very fast, and they donated that to Bashir. The Ford Motor Company volunteered that they'd give him a half-ton pick-up truck so that he could do a little bit better than driving a camel. And the State Department detached a few of its people to handle the trip. You see, there was no money that could be spent; he didn't come under any of the exchange programs. And there was simply no government funds that could be put into this thing. And I think what really made the trip--the State Department had a Pakistani citizen named Ahmed--Lord, I've seen the man a number of times, who worked for them on a contract basis, and a highly intelligent man--very quick, flawless English, flawless Urdu; and he traveled with Bashir and acted as interpreter. And Bashir turned out to be--from a public relations standpoint--a marvelous find, one of those things that you walk into every once in awhile without realizing the gods have been to you.

B: The question was asked at the time, and I don't think I ever saw an answer to it, all of those beautiful little homilies that Bashir gave--were they really his, or were they his interpreter's?

R: I suspect that they were a rendering into highly literate English of statements that meant the same thing, but may not have been expressed so gracefully.

B: Where did you find Bashir, incidentally, when you finally got all the arrangements for the trip?

R: Oh the Vice President had talked to Ayub Khan, and Bashir was suddenly produced. Ayub Khan, by the way, as I understand it, was not aware of the actions that had been taken by the Pakistani authorities.

B: Did you get the Waldorf-Astoria to donate a room too?

R: I think People to People paid for that. The Waldorf-Astoria may have donated it--I don't know, but the People to People program picked up most of his expenses while he was in this country.

B: Actually, it was generally considered except perhaps by Arthur Krock and a few others a most successful episode.

R: It was, because Bashir was a very appealing man. He was extraordinarily gentle; he had this marvelous face, sort of a kindly, wise face. And he was a very devout Mohammedan, and he didn't drink. He was past the age where he would chase women, if he ever had chased women. He really loved small children, and they responded to him. He handled himself with considerable dignity. And then we had this marvelous interpreter who was very quick and, as I said, rendered into highly literate English whatever he was saying.

B: Did Mr. Johnson keep up with Bashir afterwards?

R: Yes. We followed his fortunes--they were rather interesting. He did learn to drive a truck, but that posed something of a problem, because gasoline is very expensive in Pakistan. I think it's about 66¢ a gallon portside in Karachi. And that means that you have to get a somewhat higher class of cargo for a half-ton pick-up truck than you would for a camel. A camel only costs you a couple of bucks a day to feed hay to. The Embassy for awhile put him on the payroll as a driver--I think his son also learned to drive the truck and probably did the actual driving. And later on, as I understand it, he was hired by some oil company to haul things for them in his truck. And he

wrote letters to the Vice President from time to time--I mean, he didn't write because all he could do was sign his own name, and this he had been taught in between the time that the trip had been arranged and when he actually got here. But he would have somebody write letters for him, and they were rather nice letters.

B: I understand that Vice President Johnson was hurt, I guess is the word, by Arthur Krock's satirical column on the camel driver episode.

R: At this point I don't even recall it.

B: I recall it because it's in Mr. Krock's recent memoirs.

R: I don't even recall it at this point. The trip was such an overwhelming success from every standpoint--I mean, from the Vice President's standpoint, I think from the standpoint of Pakistan, I think from the standpoint of building up some warmth and friendship for Pakistan and the United States, that the Krock column made no dent at all.

B: To get back into domestic affairs in that period, it was in those years that the Billie Sol Estes scandal in Texas broke. Did you get involved in that one too?

R: There really wasn't anything to get involved in. The list of charges affecting the Vice President was made up of almost absolutely nothing, and I think that if the Vice President hadn't been quite so secretive about it--if he had laid the facts upon the table a little bit earlier--he wouldn't have been touched by it at all. Billie Sol Estes had never been closely associated with Lyndon Johnson. In fact, his political associations in Texas were with opposition factions; he was very close to the labor-liberal coalition, and was one of the men who financed them repeatedly. And I can recall making a very thorough search of our files to find out what correspondence we'd

had with him, and it was surprisingly slim--very little for a man as prominent as Billie Sol was. I think he'd sent Senator Johnson a crate of canteloupes two Christmases running, which was a very common thing for that part of the state. He'd written a few perfunctory letters. I'm not certain, and I don't think the President himself knows whether he ever met Billie Sol personally. The only man in our office that I could find that knew Billie Sol at all was Clif Carter. I was even unaware of the existence of Billie Sol Estes until the scandal broke, although I discovered I had met him on one occasion--Clif Carter had introduced me to him when Billie Sol was in Washington. And really about the only connection between Lyndon Johnson and Billie Sol Estes was that they were Texans. And also we had a very ambitious attorney general of Texas who I think wanted higher office.

B: Who was that at the time?

R: Will Wilson. And who worked rather hard to try to associate Billie Sol Estes and Lyndon Johnson. But there simply was no association.

B: Did you advise Mr. Johnson on the handling of his part in that? Did you attempt to avoid the secretiveness you mentioned?

R: I favored a bit more candor on it, although actually it was rather difficult simply because it's hard to refute something that has no substance to it whatsoever. I was overjoyed when part of the mythology became that Lyndon Johnson had met Billie Sol at an airport in West Texas one day, and had some sort of a secret meeting--that was one of the few real breaks we had because that particular story had a date attached to it; and it happened to be a date that the Vice President was attending a White House luncheon. But the whole Billie Sol Estes thing was entirely a myth--there was no connection whatsoever between Lyndon Johnson and Billie Sol.

B: Does anything else stand out particularly about the Vice Presidential years in your mind?

R: Well, I'd say that from the Vice President's standpoint, the most important events were his trips overseas, particularly the one to Southeast Asia, which was quite substantive. As nearly as I can determine, that was the first occasion in history where a Vice President was ever used for genuinely substantive negotiations. The heart of the trip was South Viet Nam, and the basic purpose of the trip was to convince Diem that he simply had to institute some social reforms, and had to institute some fiscal reforms, if he were to survive. And the Vice President was quite successful in negotiating some concessions out of Diem. Diem was an absolute autocrat, and he'd been holed up in his palace for so many years that he got quite far from the people, and I don't believe he himself realized how shaky his position was.

The rest of the trip was of some importance too, however, because these tremendous crowds were sort of a world demonstration that the Communist cause was not very popular with the people of Southeast Asia. Otherwise, Filipinos would not have turned out to greet the Vice President the way they did; the South Vietnamese certainly would not have turned out; the Thais certainly would not have turned out; the Indians turned out in tremendous numbers--they were quiet because the Indians are a quiet people, but they certainly turned out in tremendous numbers. And of course in Taipei, the crowds were almost uncontrollable with their wild enthusiasm. And this had a psychological effect. Chiang Kai Shek made a statement at one point that this trip reversed the whole tide in Southeast Asia.

B: This may be an almost impossible question to answer, but is it possible that on the trip and particularly in Viet Nam Mr. Johnson formed an opinion which

later shaped his Vietnamese policy--formed a mental commitment to himself in that area?

R: Oh it could have been, but that would involve some psychiatric soul searching--that's a bit too--

B: As I said, it's not an easy question--

R: It's impossible to come up with an answer to a question like that.

B: This brings us up to the fall of 1963--

R: I should add, however, that the importance of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission should not be underestimated, because that was the first time in the history of this government that there was an official federal body which had some authority to enforce anti-discrimination. And it really worked quite well. It was experimental at that time--it had to be because there were no precedents to guide it; we did not actually have to apply enforcement, but the mere fact that the enforcement powers were there made people very reluctant to challenge it. And most of the actual accomplishments of the commission were through voluntary action, through cooperative action, but they were rather sizeable accomplishments.

B: Did you have much trouble in those days with Negro leaders who wanted you to go a good deal faster?

R: No, not with Negro leaders. Most of our trouble consisted of certain white leaders, not that they wanted us to go faster, but that they were anxious to actually see the enforcement powers used; and there were many efforts to bring enforcement powers into situations where I don't think they were particularly appropriate.

B: Who would this have been--Congressmen or figures outside of government, or just who?

R: No, I think a lot of it came from an organization known as NAIRO--the National Association of Inter-racial Officials, I believe was the title. And another organization whose name I can't recall at this point, but an organization which consisted of members of fair employment practice commissions in the cities. And there was quite a split on the staff of the people on the Employment Opportunity Commission which led to a number of unpleasant stories--they put it in terms of hawks and doves and those who wanted to proceed with strong enforcement powers and those who merely wanted to sugarcoat it. Most of it was actually irrelevant, because what the commission was seeking to do was to work out procedures. You know, there are many difficult problems involved in this field--this is not just a question of making a determination that there shall be no discrimination and then going ahead and enforcing it. You have a very practical problem of how you're going to change a society which not only has an intellectual commitment to biracial policies, which our society had up to that point, but which also has established institutions that are based on the assumption that there shall be a biracial society. You can't tear down those institutions overnight. And our chief problems arose out of trying to make some determination of how a factory could hire Negroes when there wasn't a Negro within thirty-five or forty miles of a factory; or what was going to happen--the segregated toilet facilities; things of that character.

B: Did Mr. Johnson take an active day-to-day interest--?

R: Yes, he played a very active role in that commission, and I think a very effective role.

B: Did he have to referee between these varied opinions on the staff and from outside?

R: You couldn't referee between the opinions, because most of this consisted of discussion. On some occasions something would come to a head, then he would have to referee. Of course the staff itself was technically administered by the Secretary of Labor, but both Secretary [Arthur] Goldberg and later Secretary [Willard] Wirtz left it pretty much up to the Vice President--they didn't want to tread in that field. And the executive vice chairman of the commission was first of all Jerry Holleman, and later on Hobart Taylor, who handled the day-to-day routine work.

B: Incidentally, is that a split there between the views of Mr. Holleman, who is associated with the labor-liberal group in Texas, and the views of Mr. Taylor, who is generally regarded somewhat conservative?

R: There was no split there at all. I would say that Mr. Taylor and Mr. Holleman would have seen eye-to-eye; what happened to Jerry Holleman, of course he got into that situation involving some money he took from some--

B: From Billie Sol Estes--

R: From Billie Sol Estes, that's right, and then resigned. But that was not an ideological split at all. No, the split would have been more between Mr. Holleman and Mr. Taylor on one side, and John Feild (CQ), was was the executive director of the commission--John Feild (CQ) was out of one of those organizations, either NAIRO or the other one.

B: Mr. Feild (CQ) was--which side did--?

R: What they would have referred to as a hawk.

B: More use of the enforcement--?

R: Right. Although I saw very few practical proposals for enforcement from him.

B: Just general discussion about it?

R: Yes.

B: As I said a moment ago, this brings us up to the fall of '63, and the trip to Texas that ended in the assassination. What exactly was involved in the political circumstances in Texas that required the President and the Vice President to make the trip?

R: I would say that at that particular point Texas had become rather dissatisfied with the Administration. The conservative forces in Texas were definitely on the rise, and all the indications were that the Adminis tration was heading into real trouble in that state. And it was felt strongly by the Kennedy people that he had to make an appearance in the state in order to recapture lost ground.

B: The initiative for the trip came from the Kennedy people, not from Mr. Johnson?

R: I'm of that very strong impression. I really do not know. It was negotiated out between the President and the Vice President, but I have a very strong impression that the Vice President was somewhat reluctant--very strong impression.

B: A question that comes up here--it's known that John Connally, the then-governor of Texas, and Lyndon Johnson have always been very close, and presumably were still close at that time. The question arises as to why Mr. Johnson couldn't have done something to smooth over the split in Texas through that contact without the necessity of the presidential trip to the state, and so on.

R: I don't know what he could have done, because this was not an organizational question at all. It was a question of popular feeling. John Connally had no control over the type of people who made up the FIA and later the John Birch Societies; and this right wing sentiment in Texas was growing rapidly. This was outside of the official political organizations of the state--they were all rightist.

B: What's the FIA?

R: A group known as Freedom in Action. It was supposed to be a nationwide organization, I believe, but I'm not certain that it ever surfaced anywhere except in Texas. It was supposed to be the right wing answer to ADA.

B: Part of the trouble was the difficulty between Connally and Ralph Yarborough; wasn't there anything that Mr. Johnson could do about that on a personal basis?

R: Well, of course this trip was supposed to help smooth that particular split over. They were going to try to get Connally and Yarborough together in the course of President Kennedy's tour of Texas.

B: All the accounts I've read indicate that even on the trip, that was extremely difficult.

R: I would think so. They were two incompatible personalities. I was amazed that they were able to get together as well as they did during the election this fall. They were two incompatible personalities. Senator Yarborough over the years had become quite closely wedded to the labor-liberal coalition, although most of his voting strength was outside of it. John Connally, who had started out as being mildly anti-labor-liberal, had hardened in his position and had become more and more bitterly opposed to the coalition.

B: Had this involved any separation from Lyndon Johnson on Mr. Connally's part or were they still close personal friends?

R: I think they were close personal friends, but they didn't see each other as much as they'd seen each other before. And then I think it must be recognized that despite their close personal friendship, John Connally has always been much more conservative in his politics than Lyndon Johnson.

B: Did you play any part in advancing the trip?

R: None whatsoever. The trip was advanced almost entirely by the Kennedy people, and arranged by them.

B: I've heard, mostly from Texans, that the advance arrangements could have been made with a good deal more tact and knowledge of Texas politics.

R: They could have been. This is one of the reasons that I believe that the Vice President had a considerable amount of reluctance about the trip.

B: There were things like neither the national committeeman nor national committeewoman were invited to accompany the Presidential--

R: Right.

B: --Party and the kind of thing that you would not expect a sophisticated political organization to do?

R: The trip was very poorly advanced. You see, the Kennedy people really did not have strong Texas connections; most of the people that they were in touch with in the state were members of the labor-liberal coalition. I think it was kind of an unnatural alliance, because most of the Kennedy people were very practical politicians, and I think they thought they were talking to very practical politicians and they weren't. They were talking to a rather small sect. And the trip was not handled well.

B: Did anyone up here in your group before the group have any premonitions of difficulties in Texas, that is, physical difficulties?

R: No, we didn't have any premonitions of the assassination or anything like that. It came as quite a shock, a tremendous surprise. Oh, we thought there might be some nasty episodes; we were confident there would be some pickets out with the very nasty type of sign that can appear in Texas. Texas demonstrations can reach real depths of nastiness.

B: Well, they already had by that time; there was the instance involving the Johnsons in the previous election campaign--

R: That was in '60, yes.

B: Was there any attempt made to head off that kind of thing?

R: Not that I know of. I don't know how you can head it off anyway.

B: Then you were here in Washington on the day of the assassination?

R: Yes.

B: Can you describe what you saw from then on during that weekend and the immediate transition period?

R: Yes, although I don't believe my memory would be too good at this late date; I took no notes or anything like that. I personally first heard of it from a Mrs. Yolanda Boozer, one of the Vice President's secretaries, who called me with a very frantic tone in her voice and said, "George, somebody just stuck his head in the office and said that President Kennedy has been shot." I had a news ticker in my office which was on the west wing of the Capitol, and I dashed out and the flash had just come through. And I started calling around frantically trying to find out something, and of course couldn't get anybody. And then some time later in the afternoon, some of the Kennedy staffers in the White House--I'm not sure who--called Walter Jenkins and asked him to come down to the White House; then Walter called me and asked me to come down to the White House. And we were consulted about the arrangements. Both Walter and I took the position that we didn't want to be issuing orders or making determinations at that particular point. All we really knew, and our information was extremely sketchy, all we really knew was what was on the ticker--we had no other information.

Finally one of the Kennedy staff people did get a call through. I can recall his picking up another telephone and ordering a fork lift to be present at Andrews Air Base to take the casket down. And about that time people started

assembling in the East Wing of the White House to go out to Andrews in a helicopter. I ran into Arthur Schlesinger, and Arthur was talking to me and he suddenly burst into tears and said, "George, this is terrible!" And on the helicopter I sat next to Ted Sorensen, and Ted was his usual self-contained, explosive self. He looks like a man who's always ready to go off like an atomic bomb at any minute; and he suddenly burst out, "George, I wish to hell that God-damned State of Texas of yours had never been invented!" Well, I shrugged that one off; I knew the man was under a tremendous emotional strain.

Then we got out to Andrews, and the plane landed. I can recall only that as the fork lift descended, for some reason Larry O'Brien stood out among the people who were standing on the fork lift going down with the casket. Then President Johnson got off. He had asked that McGeorge Bundy be there because he had thought the immediate problem would have to be some international reassurance. And he stepped up to a microphone that had been placed there just in case, and made that very brief statement to the crowd, then flew to the White House.

B: Weren't you with President Johnson that night in what amounted to about an all-night meeting?

R: No, I wasn't at that meeting. I had been working a number of nights on some equal employment problems that were getting quite serious, and I was just about in a state of collapse myself without this thing. But I was down bright and early the next morning in the E.O.B. [Executive Office Building], and finally I got a call from the President that said, "George, you and Bill come on it." And the two--

B: Who's Bill?

R: Bill Moyers. And so the two of us walked across the street with him to the Cabinet session--I believe that was the next morning. I can recall the Cabinet session opening with a minute of silent prayer. Then after that Adlai Stevenson, describing himself as the senior member there which I guess in a way he was, made a little statement telling the President of the absolute loyalty of the Cabinet and their realization of the tremendous problems before the country. And the President made a very brief speech, very brief, to the effect that he needed their help and wanted them all to stay on. I'm under the impression that Bobby Kennedy--I'm not sure whether he was at that meeting or not--but somehow I have the picture in my mind of Kennedy coming in a bit late, but that may have been another meeting.

B: Did Mr. Johnson seem to be in command of himself in this situation in that chaotic weekend?

R: Totally. There was no doubt about it whatsoever. He realized that he had to be very firm and very much in command because every evidence was that the country was quite hysterical. And of course one event followed another so rapidly that the whole thing seemed like a chaotic nightmare. I can still recall being in an office across the street in the Executive Office Building, and I was on the telephone, and we had a television set at one end of the room. And I really wasn't aware of what was on that television set except that I had an impression that some kind of a soap opera was in the making; and there were a bunch of men gathered around a doorway and suddenly a policeman walked out carrying a man with handcuffs, somebody walked forward and shot him, and a huge detective came forward with his hand like this, saying, "Get back, get back, get back!" And I thought I was seeing a television drama. But Mildred Stegall in the other end of the room said, "My God, they shot him!"

And I realized at that moment that I had more or less lost consciousness of what was real and what was not real, but the whole thing was like a cops and robbers deal on television that I had witnessed the actual assassination of Oswald, and didn't know that I was watching a genuine killing. And to me, I think that feeling that I had, watching that thing, ran through all of those days. I wasn't quite sure whether I was an actor in a television drama, or whether genuine events were being played out.

B: Was there much strain between the Kennedy staff people and the Johnson staff people in that period?

R: Not in the staff, no. Walter and I had already established quite good relationships with Ken O'Donnell, and with Larry O'Brien, and I'd always been on good terms with Ted Sorensen; there were no real staff problems at that point.

B: You said not on the staff as if it might have existed elsewhere at the time.

R: It might have--I just didn't know. All I can testify to from direct knowledge is the staff problems. In fact, I remember that that next morning Pierre Salinger called me and wanted me to come over to the press office. He was quite warm and quite cordial about it, and I refused to do it.

B: On the grounds that he was still--

R: He was the press secretary. I knew that the President wanted to keep on as many of the Kennedy staff people as he possibly could, because he wanted to sustain the concept of continuity.

B: What were the circumstances of your becoming press secretary in '64?

R: Early in the year, I had become quite ill with what the doctor was afraid might be gallstones, and so he put me in the hospital--this was my private doctor--for an exhaustive series of tests; it developed that I didn't have gallstones--I did have something minor that could be handled very easily

without surgery. But I had picked up an awful lot of weight which was something that always bothered the President. So he called my doctor and talked him into talking me into staying in the hospital and losing the weight. The President said he himself would pay the difference between my hospitalization and whatever the hospital and medical charges were.

B: I gather you don't refuse when Mr. Johnson--

R: It wasn't a bad idea really. I was extremely overweight at that point--even more than I am now. So I spent two or three easy weeks in the hospital, did lose quite a bit of weight. And one afternoon I got a call from Walter Jenkins asking me to come over to the White House. And I walked into the White House and ran into Bill Moyers, and Bill made some inane remark like, "Congratulations!" I didn't know what he was congratulating me on, but the tone of it sounded to me like I was being led to the Last Supper. And I remember my response was something equally inane like, "If it weren't for the honor, I'd just as soon walk." And I was led into the little anteroom off of the President's oval office--the main office--and there was the President and Pierre. And I was asked whether I would take over the job of press secretary--you know one of those requests like you get if you're an Army lieutenant and the colonel calls you in and says, "Will you take such-and-such?" And I really didn't want the job--very definitely did not want the job.

B: Why not?

R: I knew the President quite well, was strongly devoted to him and still am. But I felt that this was one of his great weaknesses. And you know when a really strong man has a weakness, that weakness is going to cause him a lot of trouble, because he will apply his strengths to the weaknesses; and a considerable amount of confusion can be created thereby. And I had come to

the conclusion many years previously that if he ever did become President, one of his greatest problems was going to be his handling of the press simply because he would want the press to do things that it would not do and could not do, and I didn't want to be the man caught in the middle on it. But really you can't say no in a situation like that. Pierre Salinger had just received a legal opinion that he could file for the Senate in California; he very desperately wanted to run for the Senate; he had one or two members of the press office staff who were quite outspokenly unfavorable to the incoming President, and Pierre said he'd solve that problem by taking them with him to help in the campaign. And so a few minutes later, Pierre and I appeared together and the change was announced.

B: There was some speculation at the time that Mr. Johnson had in effect forced Mr. Salinger out.

R: I would doubt that--I would doubt it. I think that he had found Mr. Salinger not to be what he had thought he had been, but this is not at all to Pierre's discredit. I think one of the President's troubles is that he has always suffered under some rather extraordinary illusions as to what public relations can do for a man. And I believe for awhile he labored under the belief that Pierre Salinger had actually elected John Kennedy to the presidency. And when he came into the office, he expected Pierre to employ the same magic for him. Well in reality, of course, the standard techniques of public relations are of no use whatsoever to a president, because the standard techniques of public relations depend upon a man who can appear or disappear at will; who can step off the stage when he doesn't want to be on the stage. And a president can't do that--he's on stage twenty-four hours a day. I think it may well have been that he came to the conclusion that Pierre had done one thing

for President Kennedy and was not doing the same thing for him, which would have been very unfair to Pierre, but nevertheless I can well see that as part of the process going through the President's mind.

B: But it was based on his misapprehension of what Salinger had done?

R: What could be done. Yes. The President unfortunately always regarded the press secretary and the press office as a public relations office. And I think most of the major problems that I had arose from the fact that I tried to disillusion him and that couldn't be done.

B: I was going to ask--did you try to talk to him after you became press secretary, to explain what could and could not be done with the press?

R: Oh yes. We had quite a stormy relationship during that period.

B: Would he listen?

R: He would listen--I don't think he ever understood. I think that he had so many preconceptions that it was impossible to dislodge them from his mind. And I doubt that to this day he has ever really comprehended the relationship of the President to the press. He assigns almost mystical significance to the press office. And also I think he has the belief that what a President does as President, that is in terms of negotiating treaties and leading the country and forming legislative programs and directing the affairs of the government, I think he believes that's one thing, and that press relations are something else. And that press relations consist of supplying the press with material quite unrelated to his functions as President; and that the function of the press really is to entertain the public. This is a tremendous weakness in a man who otherwise is very shrewd, possessed of tremendous insights. I frequently tried to put it to him on the basis of his relationships with the other Senators when he was the leader of the Senate; I said that if he had tried to handle the

Senate the same way he tried to handle the press he would not have been leader very long, which is an accurate statement. But I don't believe he ever understood it.

B: Is this attitutde the origin of what some called his passion for secrecy?

R: Yes. Because he regards the press largely as a disturbing factor in the transaction of business. I think the only way he relates the press to the function of the President, or the function of any political leader, is insofar as the press can build up a favorable or an unfavorable image. And he also regards the objective of press relations as winning over the press, which of course is utterly irrelevant--it doesn't matter whether the press likes or dislikes you; it does matter whether they respect you, but not whether they like or dislike you. They're still going to report what you do, and what you do is what's going to make up public opinion.

B: Are the stories true to the effect that he occasionally would decide on, say, an appointment, it would somehow or another get out, and he for that reason would retract the appointment?

R: I really don't know. I don't think--He's really not a petty man. And I can well see him in a moment of exasperation postponing an appointment for a reason like that. But I really don't believe that he would make up his mind to do something and then not do it just because of a press leak. However, his problem here was that if he would postpone action for a few days or for a week or so, the worst interpretation would be put upon it by the press simply because of his extreme secrecy.

B: When things happened in the press that he considered unfavorable, did he take it out on you?

R: No, he'd take it out on the press.

B: Directly?

R: Oh, very directly!

B: Dealing with the individual reporters and commentators?

R: With the individual reporters--he'd tell them what he thought about it, that sort of thing.

B: Did he do this well?

R: No, he did it very poorly. His initial contacts with newspapermen are always extremely good; but down the line when he starts getting into arguments with them, they become extremely bad. You see, for one thing, he has a tendency--this is true of all politicians when they read a newspaper story, for some reason everything they don't like in the story stands out as though it were chiseled in letters thirty feet high on Mount Rushmore. Everything they would like in a story sort of opaques out. This is not just characteristic of President Johnson; that's a characteristic of almost every politician I've ever known. And therefore the press to them is a hostile thing. No politician really gets along with the press--oh, a few do, there are philosophers in politics. But as a general rule no politician is ever satisfied with what he reads; it's always a hostile world. He always regards the press as being presumptuous, and the press is presumptuous. What has to be understood is the public is presumptuous, for that matter, and the public is constantly passing judgment upon the plans and the designs and the schemes of a president; and so the press does too. And it is a terribly annoying thing to read misconceptions and pick up stories which misstate your goals, misstate your objectives, but nevertheless this is the way the world works. He never understood that. And also I remember his becoming highly outraged one day when he discovered a newspaperman had called me at three o'clock in the morning. He thought they had no business calling me at three o'clock in the morning.

His attitude toward me was that I was being grossly abused by the press, and I think he really meant it. And I would try to explain to him that I had no problems at all that he wasn't creating for me, but that didn't help any.

B: Did he keep you adequately informed?

R: No. No, because he thought--again, this goes back to his concept that press relations are one thing, and that what you do is another thing, which I think was kind of unfortunate because I have been an extremely close adviser of his for many years on political problems and any other types of problems. And in a sense the mere fact that I was press secretary placed me in a category that in his mind took me outside his problems.

B: Then this put you in this almost impossible position of being unable to answer questions, or occasionally I guess having to answer them wrong?

R: No, I never answered them wrong. I just refused to answer. And I'd either take the position that I wasn't commenting on it, or that I didn't know, and I'd drop it at that.

B: Did you ever tell him that to do your job correctly you had to have total access?

R: I don't think in those words. I made it clear on a number of occasions. But again, you see, he was thinking of the press office as a place that produces stories for the press. I thought of the press office as a point of contact between the press and the White House. There has to be some regular point of contact. And the two concepts just didn't jell. He thought, and I was never able to disabuse him of this, that my whole strategy was to make the press happy by seeing that their bags were carried and that they had adequate airplane space and adequate hotel space--he thought I was pampering the press. I wasn't. I was just trying to set up rational procedures so that the press could cover him. And what he really wanted was a man who could come up with

ideas such as taking the press for a walk around the White House grounds; such as having his picture taken with the crippled child of the year. And he really thought that that was the function of a press secretary.

B: Did you do that kind of thing? For example, the strolls around the White House grounds with the reporters--was that his idea or yours?

R: The stroll around the White House grounds was originally my idea, not the continued strolls. But the only reason I had come up with it was to solve a specific situation. He just had to have some contact with the press on an issue--I've forgotten what it was--but in my judgment it was absolutely vital that he himself explain a particular policy or a particular program to the press, and I could not get him to hold a press conference, which is what I wanted. He simply would not hold a press conference at that point. But for some reason, even though he was not willing to hold a press conference, the idea of taking the press for a walk around the White House grounds and talking to them about this particular problem appealed to him. I think maybe because it was a little bit gimmicky. And rather than letting a situation develop, which I saw as being very bad and was going to be very bad if the press didn't get a specific explanation, I advanced this proposal and he accepted it. Unfortunately he adopted this as his format for dealing with the press for quite a few days. But most of the ideas like that he got from other people around the White House.

B: There were also tried in those days several other formats for a press conference, ranging from the strolls around the ground to formal press conferences at the State Department auditorium. Was that your trying to figure out an acceptable format for contact with the press, or were those his ideas?

R: Oh, they came from a number of different sources. He got more ideas like this from other people than he ever got from me. Jack Valenti, Bill Moyers, Horace Busby, because all of those people actually believe in this gimmicky form of press relations and I don't. My own attitude, which I expressed to him very early and which I still believe is the proper way for a president to handle the press, is to have two types of press conferences. I think that if I could absolutely regulate the press relations of the White House I would have one televised press conference a month, which would be announced well in advance--even three or four weeks in advance--and would be held in a rather large auditorium where the whole press could come. You know, in conferences like that you can get as many as 450 newspapermen, and I think this is essential for two reasons. One, I believe that the American people are entitled to see how their president reacts under questioning; two, I think that every newspaperman in Washington who has press credentials is entitled to have at least one crack at asking the President a question. But the difficulty with that format is that you will find that the questions are very poor. And they're thought of in advance; the newspapermen sit up nights; the questions become highly rhetorical because they're intended to put the newspapermen on television more than they are to elicit information. Furthermore, there's no follow-up. At the conclusion of a press conference like that, the reporters can usually run out and dictate the first paragraph for twenty different stories, but have absolutely nothing to put underneath it--you can't explore the thinking of a president. So then I think there should be three press conferences--two or three press conferences a month, which are called unexpectedly, and in which no one participates except whatever press is out in the White House lobby and they're called in without preparation, and they

stand around his desk. That way there'll be no more than twenty or twenty-five of them.

B: Even though this tends to give a distinct advantage to the regular hands?

R: That doesn't matter. Because they have a distinct advantage at the big formal press conferences too. The President knows their faces, and he's more likely to call upon them than he is to call upon people he doesn't know. But the more important thing is if they don't understand something and they need further clarification, they'll ask more questions; and out of a press conference like that you'll find that only two or three stories may emerge, but they'll genuinely be stories in which the President's thinking has been explored. Furthermore, I think the President in one of these big televised news conference has too much of an advantage over the press. You know, there's something almost intimidating about the President standing up there behind that podium with the seal of the President of the United States, and the flag of the United States on one side and the Presidential flag on the other side; they're sitting down; he's towering over them. In a room that big nobody is going to be so presumptuous as to ask more than one question; whereas at these small things in his office without any cameras grinding, they'll ask quick sharp questions. If they don't like the answer, they'll press for another answer. I think you get more news out of the informal press conference; I think on the other hand, however, the American people should see how the President reacts under questioning; and that the newspapermen who can't be here by accident do get an opportunity to ask at least one question. That was my idea of a format.

B: I gather Mr. Johnson either never accepted this or never thought it through thoroughly.

R: Oh, it was a combination of both. Meanwhile, he was being bombarded by Valenti and Busby and Moyers and all the rest with these various suggestions for taking them on strolls around the White House grounds, and haystack press conferences and what have you. And furthermore, I became rather exhausted trying to get these things on a rational basis. He became very fond of the Saturday morning press conference, simply because when he'd wake up on Sunday morning he'd pick up the New York Times and the Washington Post, and there would be nothing in the papers except his press conference. This was an idea that came to him from Jack Valenti.

And so he went on for about three or four weeks; and meanwhile I was getting terrible howls from the press because a press conference like that would cost the New York Times around $600,000. You know, from a mechanical standpoint, newspapers are really not geared to handle a large influx of unexpected news for the Sunday morning paper--about 85 percent of the Sunday paper is printed on Thursday. And from the President's standpoint, I also have a theory that front-page news is of very little value on Sunday morning. I think what happens on Sunday morning, the average American takes one quick look at the headlines, then turns to the travel section or the news of the week in review, or the sports page, or what have you. And I finally managed to kill that, but it took me about a month to knock it off. What I did was do some research in newspaper readership and discovered that a conference held on Thursday afternoon would give an exposure to something like a hundred and ten million people--that's a little phony because that's putting together radio and AM's and PM's, and obviously some of those are going to be the same people reading two different newspapers and then watching a television program. But he could count at least upon a hundred and ten million audience, even if

some were duplications on a weekday, whereas Sunday morning--your Sunday morning circulation, your total only goes to about fifty million or so. And of course all of your stories are dead; there's no follow-up to a Sunday morning story. So I finally knocked that one off that way.

B: Is that the kind of thing that impresses Mr. Johnson? Statistical count?

R: Yes. I had to do an awful lot of research, research which I shouldn't have had to do because what I had to do was to go out and get facts and demonstrate something that I already knew anyway. About the only gimmick I ever came up with at all was the famous children's press conference, which I thought would--I think I did that more than anything else to get him to hold a full dress press conference.

B: What were the circumstances of that one?

R: We invited all of the press to bring their wives and their children to a press conference; we held it out on the South Lawn, and it was quite a day--had the Marine band there playing for the kids; had the lemonade and cookies. And that was one occasion when he really held a full dress televised press conference which was highly successful. And afterward, of course, all of the kids came up on the stage and they had their picture taken with him. And he enjoyed it hugely because of all of the pictures with the kids, and it was quite a gimmick. I enjoyed it hugely too because I was able to get one real honest-to-God televised press conference out of it.

B: Is it possible that some of Mr. Johnson's hostility toward and suspicion of the press is justified?

R: Of course.

B: Are there individuals within the press who, in your opinion, are out to get him?

R: Of course. Naturally. This is true of any segment of society that you deal with. If he's dealing with labor leaders, there are certain labor leaders who would be out to get him at any time; if you're dealing with farm leaders, there are certain farm leaders that are out to get him at any time. There's no question about that.

B: Would you say though that on the balance the majority of the members of the press who deal with the President are fair?

R: Oh, I wouldn't say fair, because I think that's asking newspapermen to observe standards that we ask of nobody else--very few people are actually fair. I would say they're reasonably professional, and that's what counts. I would say that the White House press corps per se, that is the regulars that actually cover it on a full-time basis, are about as objective and fair as any group of people that you will get. Your problems arise more with the people that come in and out of the White House on an occasional basis, you know, the sort of hit-and-run types. And I think this is simply due to the fact that the people that work here fulltime recognize that their bread and butter is dependent upon the White House. If they're frozen out in the cold, they're really out of luck. And you will find if you analyze most of the President's complaints about the press, that very few of them, when they are traced back to the source, really refer to the regulars that are up in that lobby day after day.

B: Does he have particular likes and dislikes among newspapermen and columnists?

R: You mean, does he himself like--Oh, yes, quite a few.

B: Who would be some of the favorites?

R: Oh, Jack Horner of the Star; Bill [William S.] White; John Goldsmith, although I think that's because he hasn't dealt with John for a number of years.

B: For whom does Mr. Goldsmith work?

R: He's with one of the syndicates now doing a column. Probably his best friend in the press corps is Phil Potter, the Baltimore Sun; but he and the President have a very explosive relationship. When Phil thinks he has done something stupid, Phil will walk in and say, "You were stupid."

B: He says it privately, not publicly.

R: Right. And Phil is a very moody, very stormy, very tempestuous man. And when he's mad at the President, which is frequent, he will blow-up--Phil would never make a good courtier, because he'll always blow up in the face of the King.

B: Who are some of the particular dislikes?

R: Oh, Clark Mollenhoff, obviously; Tad Sczulcz; Walter Lippmann; [Rowland] Evans and [Robert] Novak, although he used to be very fond of both of them.

B: What made the difference?

R: When they became columnists. He disliked Doug Cornell at the time he was with the White House. Doug wrote the story about his pulling the dogs' ears; but he later came to the conclusion that story actually helped him, which I think it did. And I believe he and Doug get along reasonably well now.

B: Does Mr. Johnson understand the distinction between a reporter and a columnist?

R: No, not really. He reads every statement as an expression of opinion. Again, you have to realize that he regards newspapers to some extent as being scripted. And also I think he has a psychological preconception of--He's sort of a victim of word magic. He has always been under the impression that if you get a news story saying that you're dedicated and sincere, that this means that you have the qualities of dedication and sincerity; or that at least people will think you have the qualities of dedication and sincerity. I know time after time I've tried to explain to him that when a newspaperman describes somebody as dedicated

and sincere, they're really saying that he's a dope, and they don't want to be nasty about it, so they reach into the grab bag and pull out the two most meaningless adjectives in the English language and apply them to this particular person; or at least, when they say a man is dedicated and sincere, that's almost a code word meaning that he's ineffectual.

B: You said he regards newspapers as being scripted--what does that mean?

R: Well, not the newspapers so much, but the events that lead to newspaper stories. Again, I think he believes that the only relevance of the press to governmental process is the extent to which it creates favorable or unfavorable images. And therefore the way to handle it is to script certain events so that when they're reported in the press, they'll create favorable images. And I've never been able to get across to him the concept that the adjectives and the descriptive language used in the press really has very little impact upon the people whatsoever. What really counts is the manner in which newspapermen report what you're doing. You know, it's not at all accidental that the most prominent newspaper in Chicago, the Chicago Tribune, can't really claim that it has won an election in about forty years. And there's a newspaper that is openly and admittedly biased, makes no pretentions to objectivity; and yet year after year after year, the people of Chicago vote against the recommendations of the Chicago Tribune. Or on the occasional periods when their votes happen to coincide with the biases of the Chicago Tribune, it's quite clear that the Chicago Tribune had nothing to do with creating those votes.

B: Does Mr. Johnson ever get the idea that he can solve his problems with reporters by going to their bosses--the publishers?

R: I don't think so. He has that reputation, but again, this is not a mean and petty man. I don't think--I'm quite convinced of this--that he would ever

go to a publisher and say, "Look, you've got to fire that no good SOB; he's cutting my throat every day." In fact, most of the contacts I know that he has had with publishers about reporters, he usually tries to build them up. And I can recall a number of years ago, for instance, when he went out and really got Sarah McLendon a couple of extra clients when she was in bad need of extra clients. And God knows that Sarah has never been a very friendly reporter! But what he will try to do is to impress the reporter as to his friendship with the publisher, and also impress the reporter with how he buttered up the publisher concerning this reporter; and then he has the belief that there's a sort of quid pro quo involved, and he's entitled to something from the reporter because he spoke so kindly of him to his publisher. He will do that. But from an economic standpoint, no, this is not a mean man.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
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Gift of Personal Statement

By George Reedy

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, GEORGE E. REEDY, 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:

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Signed George E. Reedy

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Accepted Harry J. Middleton for
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Date October 18, 1974