

INTERVIEW X

DATE: October 14, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE E. REEDY

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Boston Marriott Hotel, Newton, Massachusetts

Tape 1 of 2

G: Now, at the beginning of 1957, [Frank] Lausche voted with the Democrats.

R: Yes.

G: Giving them a two-vote majority.

R: Right.

G: Was there any trick to getting Lausche to do that?

R: No, that was a very interesting phenomenon because somehow the word leaked out he was considering very seriously voting with the Republicans for the organization of the Senate. You know, Lausche had made a lifetime political career out of being a Democrat only in the sense of being on the Democratic side of the ballot. Johnson at that time thought that quite possibly Lausche was holding out to ask for something in return for his vote. And by the way, if Lausche had voted with the Republicans to organize the Senate, I think there might have been a very, very dicey situation because--I'll never forget that Johnson absolutely refused to talk to him, or send any emissary or deal with him in any way. And of course Johnson was quite right. At the last minute Lausche voted with the Democrats. But I can still remember the picture of his sitting--he was sitting in the last desk,

Reedy -- X -- 2

last row, with his head buried in his hands, just a perfect picture of a man who was caught in a very deep-seated dilemma, I think hoping he'd get a last minute offer from Johnson. He didn't.

G: Why was Johnson right?

R: Johnson realized that the pressures upon Lausche would have been incredible if he had voted with the Republicans. You simply cannot do that in Washington. The one issue where the parties really take party affiliation seriously is in the organization of the Congress, and anybody, any Democrat, who votes against the Democrats for organization of Congress might just as well forget any kind of rapport with his colleagues in the future, and he better not look for any from the other side of the aisle, because nobody's going to trust him after that. That is unforgivable.

G: Mike Mansfield was chosen as whip.

R: Yes.

G: How was Mansfield selected?

R: A number of reasons, the most important being that Mansfield held the respect of every single faction in the Senate. When Earle Clements lost, it left them with a rather serious problem because Clements was one of the very few people who had lines both into the southern side of the Senate and into the northern side, the northern liberal side. He was partially a southerner, being from Kentucky, but at the same time Kentucky did have a Republican Party and consequently he understood the dilemmas of a Democratic senator from a northern state where there was genuine Republican opposition. Now, actually there was no

Reedy -- X -- 3

adequate substitute for Clements because Earle was an operator and the whip should be an operator. Now, Mansfield was not an operator. In terms of philosophy, Mansfield was more in the [William] Knowland tradition.

(Interruption)

Back to Mike Mansfield. Mike was not an operator. But on the other hand, all of the people around the Senate that could be classed as operators at that particular point also would have a divisive effect upon the Senate. That's one thing Mike would not have. Mike's concept of the leadership was very much like Bill Knowland's concept, the Republican. Mike thought of the leadership as an office from which one raised a banner around which all good and true men would repair. Whereas Clements had thought of it as an active, working job in which one sought to put together the necessary compromises that made legislation possible. And it wasn't really that--Mike did not fill the bill of the ideal man to replace Earle Clements, but he was still about the best that could be had. You know, Mansfield was a very admirable man; everybody had a very deep respect, and I think it was a justified respect, for him. So at least you didn't get the Senate divided.

(Interruption)

G: Now, I realize that it was the caucus that formally selected Mansfield.

R: Oh, yes.

G: Was it LBJ who in fact put his name forward?

Reedy -- X -- 4

R: Oh, of course. There's no question about that. These things are always worked out in advance. The caucus vote is a pure formality. However, that does not mean that the majority leader has an absolute authority to make any appointments that he wants to. What he really does is to contact all the various leaders of the factions so that when they show up it's all peace and harmony. In effect what happened, Johnson is leader, Mike is the assistant leader, really. Whip is not a very good description of what the Senate assistant leader does. And then Tom Hennings is the chairman of the caucus, which really gave the liberals somebody with a--Mike Mansfield was not regarded as an all-out liberal in the northern liberal sense of the word; Hennings was. But at the same time, being chairman of the conference was sufficiently far removed from the day-to-day operations of the leadership that southerners wouldn't object too much.

G: Now, you had the annual battle over Rule 22 that year.

R: Oh, God, yes.

G: Nixon issued an opinion that the Senate ought to be able to change its rules.

R: That is one of the most dishonest opinions that has ever come down the pike. What he ruled was the Senate can change its rules by a majority vote. Well, of course the Senate can change its rules by a majority vote, the Senate has always been able to change its rules by a majority vote. You see what he was doing was engaging in a very clever bit of misdirection. The issue at that point is not whether the Senate can change the rules; the issue is whether you can shut the Senate up

Reedy -- X -- 5

on a majority vote. But what he kept saying is the Senate can change its rules by a majority vote. That's the same thing as saying the sun can rise every morning. Of course they can change it by a majority vote; that's not the problem. Can you shut people up? He never said that. If he had said that, I don't know what it would have gotten to because I don't know how you'd shut them up. But if he had said that then he would at least have made a significant statement. But he didn't; he said you can change the rules by a majority vote.

G: And LBJ and Knowland did work out some compromise after that, didn't they?

R: Oh, yes. The compromise was not a bad one to work out. You see, Rule 22 had been completely vitiated by the very strange ruling that came in an earlier Congress, I've forgotten when, that cloture did not apply to a motion to take up a bill, which meant that if you really wanted to filibuster a bill, what you did was not filibuster the bill but filibuster the motion to take it up. So what they had to work out, they had to work out some kind of a compromise, and the compromise that they worked out was one whereby they went to a constitutional two-thirds of the Senate instead of two-thirds present and voting, in return for applying cloture to a rule.

I can still recall that one. It was rather interesting. Most of the drafting was done by Gerry Siegel, and Gerry Siegel and I were doing all the negotiations to get it done. I can still remember, Gerry had written out a long series of things as to how you could still only get cloture by a two-thirds vote and et cetera, et cetera,

Reedy -- X -- 6

et cetera. [Richard] Russell looked it over and just crossed out every single thing Gerry had written in and put in "the rules may be changed as provided herein," which we suddenly realized was precisely the same thing as all the long verbiage that Gerry had in there but it didn't raise any red flags. Russell was really a genius when it came to things like that.

G: Now, early in the year you also had the Mideast Resolution.

R: Is that the one in Lebanon?

G: Yes.

R: Yes. It had a number of different names.

G: This was a real controversy in that--

R: Yes, and a very strange one. At that particular point it was never entirely clear whether there genuinely was a threat to the peace in the Middle East at that point. The real problem was that Eisenhower thought there was or at least asked Congress for some sort of backing, some sort of action. Johnson always felt that when a President asked for something like that, he had to have it, because if you turned him down then it looked as though there was genuine division within the United States. But I know there was a considerable amount of skepticism as to the necessity of that kind of a resolution or even for the necessity of taking action in the Middle East. Things were not at a boiling point, or did not seem to be at a boiling point at that time.

G: Do you think that part of it was a distrust of [John Foster] Dulles the Democrats had?

R: You mean the controversy over the Middle Eastern Resolution?

Reedy -- X -- 7

G: Yes, the fact that the Democrats delayed it.

R: It could well be, although I think that the more pressing reason really was that nobody could see a clear-cut need for having it. I think that bothered people. There was no apparent crisis at the moment.

G: Now, the U.N. was threatening to censure Israel.

R: Yes.

G: LBJ seems to have taken a very strong stand behind Israel at this--

R: He did. He wrote a letter to John Foster Dulles, a letter which, when it got into the public domain--how it did is not altogether clear. But he wrote this letter to John Foster Dulles taking a very strong stand on it. You know, I'm under the impression that Jim Rowe was the original inspiration for that letter. I'm not sure of that, but it's worth checking out. If you find the letter, I think the letter first appeared in the New York Herald Tribune.

G: Was Johnson upset about the leak of it?

R: Not really. He said that he was, and of course it was in many respects a rather chancy thing, but I think that the political mileage he got out of that letter was so great that he never regretted having written it.

G: Why would Johnson--I mean, he didn't have a large pro-Israel constituency, did he?

R: He had a very important one, surely.

G: In Texas?

Reedy -- X -- 8

R: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There was not a large Jewish constituency in Texas, but there were some rather important people. Not only that, anti-Semitism has never been the factor in Texas that it has been in a number of other states. One of the strange things--this is true of a number of southern states, by the way--anti-Semitism was not particularly a southern disease, and therefore there were not too many risks. One really didn't have to worry about offending anti-Semites, but at the same time there were people like Eddie Joseph and the Marcuses, Stanley Marcus, there were a number of people of Jewish faith who held rather important positions in Texas. Actually, one of the strange things that developed in 1960 is that Johnson had a much stronger Jewish following than Kennedy did, much stronger. This is one of the major reasons for sending Johnson up to New York to make that famous--well, I don't know if famous--but that speech at the Liberal Party convention which in effect was all Jewish. That was a combination of the ILGWU and the Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers Union. But Johnson had a very good reputation among Jews, whereas Kennedy was somewhat suspect because of his father, who was regarded as anti-Semitic by many Jews.

G: After that, the Senate engaged in a joint hearing with the Armed Services Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee of a total review of our Mideast policy. Do you recall the significance of that?

R: I think it was just done because of all the questions raised by the Mideast Resolution. You know, one of the most disturbing things that you can do is to toss in something like the Middle East Resolution

Reedy -- X -- 9

when there does not seem to be any apparent reason for it to many people. I think that raised an awful lot of questions. If there had been an immediate, overt, apparent threat of something in the Middle East, then I don't think there would have been any difficulty with it at all. I think that it would have gone through the same way so many of the other resolutions that Eisenhower sent up went through. But it just bothered people, you know, why, why, why. That question kept nagging away.

G: Now LBJ seems to have been getting advice from Dean Acheson during this time.

R: Oh, certainly. Oh, yes. Acheson became very strongly pro-LBJ during that period.

G: Did he?

R: Yes. To a great extent because of LBJ's masterly handling of the civil rights issue. I remember talking to Acheson, to whom I became reasonably close myself around that point, and Acheson was absolutely awestruck by the way Johnson was able to pick up this very abstruse issue and master it completely and totally. I don't think he was exactly awestruck by LBJ's expertise in the field of foreign policy, but he thought that he was sufficiently sensible a man to be worth the effort of advising him.

G: There was a mild controversy during the middle of this in which Eisenhower, who was apparently on vacation in Georgia, expected the congressional leaders to come down and meet with him in Georgia and they didn't do it. LBJ made the remark that "it's my understanding

Reedy -- X -- 10

that Washington is still the capital" or something. Do you remember that?

R: That was just a minor flap. Actually I think the one that sparked it was more Sam Rayburn than LBJ. But I believe that was one of those things that was done just to make it very clear that the Democratic leadership was independent of Eisenhower. You know, what LBJ had really done was--I've already explained this in previous tapes--this very strong stance that he took in which in effect the Democrats were going to be responsible. If Eisenhower was right, we were going to support him; if he wasn't right, we would at least meet him halfway, we'd bend over backwards. Well, that required a certain number of overt symbols to demonstrate to the northern liberals that it was a position of independent responsibility, that it was not a position of surrender to Eisenhower. You know, both liberals and conservatives in the political world respond very strongly to symbols. I've always been rather amused how very easy it is to get things done quite often merely by manipulating the proper symbols.

G: Now, Price Daniel resigned at midnight to become governor, and Shivers appointed [William] Blakley, who at the last moment indicated he would vote with the Democrats.

R: Right.

G: Did Johnson use any pressure on him to get him to--?

R: No, there wasn't really any need for that. Blakley was a very conservative man, but also he was a reasonable man. I think Blakley understood thoroughly it would have been deadly to have voted Republican.

Reedy -- X -- 11

G: Do you think that this partially explains Johnson's rapprochement with Shivers after that 1956 convention fight, the precinct fight, in order to keep Shivers from naming a Republican or someone who would otherwise--?

R: There wasn't much rapprochement with Shivers, very little, once the thing was there. You know, Johnson was not a man to bear grudges; that must be said about him. I don't know of anybody that could ever forget his animosity toward a political opponent quite as quickly as Johnson could. But I never saw anything that I would call a rapprochement with Shivers. They merely got back together on a courteous basis. But there was never any question of the two dealing with each other or anything of that nature.

G: Well, did Johnson fear that Shivers might appoint a Republican to that?

R: I never heard him express such a fear. I don't think Shivers would have under the circumstances. Don't forget, the whole Shivers tack was not that he was supporting Republicans, but that Democrats were supporting Eisenhower specifically. Shivers always insisted that he was a real Democrat, that the northern Democrats had walked out on the Democratic Party and he was sticking with it. Well, he couldn't take that stance and then go ahead and appoint a Republican. There wouldn't have been any point to it anyway, Shivers was through in politics; that was the end of the road as far as he was concerned. His best bet was to keep all of his ties in with the conservative Democrats of whom Blakley was one. And also with Blakley, what he

Reedy -- X -- 12

had was a man who was very conservative but at the same time was a relatively reasonable man. Blakley was not a wild man, the kind that would come up with all kind of conservative doctrine and insist on inflicting it upon everybody in the Senate.

G: Was Blakley easily influenced by LBJ?

R: No, but at the same time Blakley was the kind of man who would go along with the leadership as far as he possibly could.

G: Okay. Now, right after this you gave LBJ some advice on handling the Democrats of Texas, the liberal group. It consisted of several suggestions: one, that he use his support by national labor leaders to exert some influence on Texas.

R: Right.

G: That he ignore the DOT publicly and that he keep his channels open to Ralph Yarborough--

R: Yes.

G: --and revive the weekly newsletter, and double-checking the list of county men. Now it seems that Johnson did follow a lot of these suggestions.

R: Oh, yes.

G: Can you recall, first of all, how this subject came up, why he felt the need to ask for this advice or to get it?

R: Well, you see, he had a really grave problem in Texas. You had two groups of people in Texas, both of whom were rather weak, the labor group and the so-called liberal group, by that I mean Frankie Randolph and Kathleen Voigt and Creekmore Fath and that whole crew. What they

Reedy -- X -- 13

had to do to have any strength at all was to get together. Now, their strength was a peculiar strength. It was not enough strength to do anything, but it was enough strength to be very, very annoying, and also enough strength to quite possibly have damaged LBJ nationally.

Really, in a way it was very, very strange, because LBJ by that point had established, largely through me, very good liaison with a number of national labor leaders. He was in very good shape with George Meany. Walter Reuther was a personal friend of mine. And the view of LBJ held by national labor leaders was altogether different from the view held by the Texas labor leaders, the reason being that the national labor leaders were looking upon what LBJ was doing for them in terms of legislation. He was giving them some opportunity to do something about the flat ban on the closed shop, which is a thing that was very much misunderstood by the general public and which was really rather devastating to the building trades unions, the AFL-CIO, the big mass unions. Automobile workers didn't care about it, but it was life and death to the carpenters and the plumbers and the electricians and the machinists. LBJ was giving them a square shake in that. He wasn't giving them what they wanted; he couldn't have given it to them even if they had wanted to, but at least he was seeing to it that they got a hearing. Also he was giving George Meany--Meany was very, very upset about that section of the Taft-Hartley Act which permits the states to enact tougher labor legislation than is contained in the Taft-Hartley Act itself. Well, there's not a chance in the world of that getting repealed. I don't think you could repeal it to this day.

Reedy -- X -- 14

But at least through LBJ, Meany was able to get a hearing on it and get his viewpoint considered.

So to the labor leaders nationally, Johnson began to look pretty good, not somebody they were going to support for the presidency, no, although I think a few of them might. I think Meany would liked to have supported him if he could. But nevertheless, they did not have the jaundiced viewpoint of the Texas labor leader who was looking at Johnson basically from the standpoint of the labor-liberal coalition. In other words, people like Jerry Holleman had actually adopted the Frankie Randolph-Kathleen Voigt attitude, and something had to be done about it because it was very difficult to explain to people outside of Texas the fact that this was fundamentally a sectarian group. You know, labor had very little strength in Texas at that point. The Oil Workers had some strength over around Beaumont and the railroad brotherhoods, of course, were quite strong, but the railroad brotherhoods were not involved in this at all. Jerry Holleman himself, as I recall, was out of the IBEW, which was a union that had very little strength in Texas. Oh, the [United] Automobile Workers had some strength in Texas, but the Automobile Workers, headed by a man named [H. A.] Moon--I never did find out his name, he was just known as Moon. I don't know whether it was a nickname or his last name or what it was. But something definitely had to be done, because it was hurting Johnson on a national scale.

G: I see. It wasn't because it was hurting him in Texas, but because it was hurting him--?

Reedy -- X -- 15

- R: Oh, no. In Texas if anybody wanted to win an election, the easiest way was to come out against the unions in Texas.
- G: But here is Johnson in 1957, he's not only making a pitch to labor, but he's also spending a lot of time revving up his county man organization. You were even with him when he had a dinner for them. He's also opening the channels to Ralph Yarborough and things of this nature, and he's not going to run again until 1960. Why is he doing all this?
- R: I think that this was the period where the LBJ ambivalence toward the presidency began to set in. It became obvious in the course of 1957 that he was bound to become a very serious figure in regard to presidential speculation. There was no way in the world it could be eliminated, because by that time he had become a giant. To the extent that the Democratic Party had any cohesion, it was cohesion through Lyndon Johnson. To the extent that the Democratic Party was a national force on the scene, again, it was through Lyndon Johnson. And I'm not sure that Johnson ever made a conscious decision that "I am going to start becoming a presidential candidate", but I think that his subconscious, his psyche started to fight an internal battle over it at that point. And there's very little doubt in my mind that he was taking some reluctant steps to take a serious shot at the presidency but was not at all certain--definitely not on a conscious level and possibly not on a subconscious level-- that he really wanted to do it. This was Lyndon Baines Johnson versus Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Reedy -- X -- 16

- G: Now, you met with him, or you were with him, when he had these meetings with his county men and his district men. What did he talk to them about? What was the purpose of those occasions?
- R: It was more pep talks than anything else. The county organization had sort of gone to hell. Johnson had an excellent county organization when I first went to work for him. You know how it was organized. [There was] somebody in each county, and then we took state senatorial districts, what were known as the district men, who had a sort of a supervisory role. But during the first years in which he was scrambling to consolidate his position as leader, things had really gone to hell in a handbasket. There were some counties where the county men had even died and we didn't know about it in Washington. Under any circumstances it was prudent to shore up the home base; even if he weren't going to run for the presidency, it was prudent to step in at that point and be sure that he had the necessary organization to take over when 1960 rolled around, any way you looked at it. But I don't think he would have acted quite so early if there were not this totally subconscious a feeling that he had to run for the presidency. And you know, nobody can get a presidential nomination unless their home base is secure. That's rule number one of politics.
- G: Now, another thing he seems to have done was to have several functions for Yarborough, had a luncheon for him or had him at the Ranch and this sort of thing, right after Yarborough's election to the Senate seat. Do you recall anything here?

Reedy -- X -- 17

R: Oh, sure. Most of that was at my advice, and I think it worked out very, very well. You see, Yarborough really was not a part of the labor-liberal coalition even though he was their darling. Yarborough at heart was a populist, just like LBJ. The two were so close together in terms of politics that I think if you examined all their votes and all their stands, you couldn't insert a knife-edge in between them. But Yarborough's most important support had come from the labor-liberal coalition. Also Yarborough was a rather combative man. He dearly loved political debate. And what had happened is that there was a rather heavy wedge between Yarborough and Johnson which was very, very uncomfortable. The rapprochement had to take place. You see, once you got a rapprochement between Johnson and Yarborough, then all sorts of consequences flowed from it. For one thing, you had the Drew Pearson columns. Now, Pearson was bitterly anti-Johnson. I don't know why, I think it had something to do with that TVA, REA--

G: Oh, I bet it was Leland Olds.

R: Leland Olds, I think it had something to do with the Leland Olds case. I think Pearson and Olds had been close friends. But Pearson had all of his lines into Texas and was doing everything that he could to get anti-LBJ material out of the labor-liberal coalition, all of which, of course, was very happy to feed him things. That was causing some rather serious difficulties. It was not an unmixed curse, because I'll never forget the time that Spessard Holland, who was probably the most conservative member of the Senate, said to Johnson that he'd get up every morning all determined to go in and raise hell with Johnson

Reedy -- X -- 18

for being so liberal, but then he'd pick up the Drew Pearson column and Drew was so unfair to Johnson that Spessard would call off his attack. He just couldn't do it.

But nevertheless, you had a number of very articulate liberals in the North who were being fed by the labor-liberal coalition in Texas and they had to be put into some sort of perspective. And the reality, I think Johnson in some respects was even more liberal than Yarborough. Certainly he was on labor legislation.

G: Anything in particular on labor legislation?

R: No. We had a number of issues which--the difficulty at that particular time was that all the labor issues were so terribly complex you really could not fight them out in public.

G: Okay. Johnson put Yarborough on the Commerce Committee and Government Operations Committee.

R: Right.

G: Any significance to these appointments?

R: No, except that they're very important committees, especially the Commerce Committee. The Commerce Committee was a Texas committee, you know. Whatever federal controls over oil is through the Commerce Committee. It involves transportation, it involves oil, it involves public lands, all of which were very important factors to Texas even though Texas owned its own public lands. And the Government Operations Committee, well, from a bread and butter standpoint that wasn't so terribly important, but you can't give a man something like the Commerce Committee and then give him another basic fundamental committee.

Reedy -- X -- 19

G: LBJ also that spring hosted a party for fifty-five Texas labor leaders in Washington. Do you remember that?

R: I should, but I don't remember it. Who was there besides Jerry Holleman?

G: Oh, I'm sure people like Fred Schmidt.

R: You know, it's funny, I have no recollection of that at all. Probably it will come to me after you leave. If so, I'll write you a letter. I should remember it, because I would have been deeply involved on that.

G: I'll send you a note on it. I've got some I'm sure, a clipping or something like that.

R: You know, I was the liaison with all of those people, with Fred and with Jerry and the whole crew.

G: You also had the formation of the [John] McClellan labor racketeering investigation.

R: Yes. That was a very, very difficult proposition which had to be handled with a great deal of delicacy. I wrote McClellan's opening statement on that, which if you read it, it was quite a conciliatory statement. It pulled a lot of chestnuts out of the fire. When I say conciliatory, it did not retreat one inch from McClellan's basic principles. McClellan was ultraconservative. McClellan did not like labor in the slightest. McClellan was a very hard-bitten man. He had had a great deal of personal trouble. A son of his had died. But at the same time, McClellan was a scrupulously fair man and a scrupulously honest man. What I did, I wrote a statement for him which in

Reedy -- X -- 20

effect, it didn't compromise any of his feelings on labor, but it made it quite clear he was going to give labor a fair deal and Johnson talked him into using it as an opening statement. That was a very, very tricky proposition which everything had to be watched closely because the--you know, once you get into this field of labor racketeering, your problem with it is that it's so terribly difficult to delineate specifically the line between labor racketeering and ordinary union activities.

What happens in the real world, most of your racketeering unions are usually unions in which the members do not work together. When I was a kid in Chicago, the biggest of all rackets was the flat janitors union because, after all, what kind of economic strength does a flat janitor have? None. And so what happened, they got the kind of union where if an apartment building owner was not dealing with the union, wham, a stink bomb would go off in the front lobby. Or things like the fish peddler's union is run by a man named Maxie Izen [?] in Chicago or the famous Umbrella Mike Boyle [?]. See, racketeering is not the sort of thing that crops up in the great big mass industrial unions. Nobody ever heard of racketeering in the United Automobile Workers or the United Steelworkers or the United Mine Workers or the United Electrical Workers. Usually when they get into problems it's more due to radicalism, to an effort to convert the union into a revolutionary organization. But when you get into the building trades and various other groups, there is a very strong tendency for those unions to go into some form of racketeering because they do not have

Reedy -- X -- 21

the normal types of economic weapons that a mass union has in a basic industry.

Therefore when people are exercising racketeering as one form of economic coercion, just how are you going to decide what is union activity and what's straight racketeering? You know you know it practically, just like if you're looking at a man with a beard you know when he's got a beard and when he just hasn't shaved carefully. But you can't define the exact point at which those scraggly hairs become a beard.

G: Yes. Now, do you think some of this was aimed at the Teamsters union?

R: No more so than any other unions. Some of it was aimed at the Teamsters union, but there were quite a few others, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, which had been run by Willie Bioff and people like that. The laborers union, run by Willie Mereshi [?], again what you had there, there is one place where you do get a mass union that still has some tendency to run into racketeering simply because the people are generally uneducated. The longshoremen, that was another example. I don't think it was the Teamsters more than any other, but the Teamsters certainly were involved.

G: James Reston had a highly publicized column in April that said that Congress was essentially a do-nothing Congress this year and that LBJ's authority was waning as majority leader. Do you remember that?

R: I don't remember it, but I remember many episodes like that. You know, the whole difficulty, it always had a very unfortunate effect upon LBJ because what he wanted to do then was to prove that Congress

Reedy -- X -- 22

was doing something, and so that would always send me in to do some research and I'd come up with long lists of bills that had been passed, some of which are pretty damn ridiculous. See, there really is no quantitative measurement of whether Congress is doing something or not. Quite often Congress is doing quite a bit when it's not passing a single bill or even getting very much in the floor debate, because Congress is not a manufacturing organization. You might say Carter's is successful because he's turned out ten billion Little Liver Pills, but you can't apply that same measure to Congress.

G: Well, LBJ did say after that that he was going to put the Senate on a three-day work week in order to step up the committee action.

R: Yes. You see, I don't know why newspapermen do not notice this. I think the difficulty is newspapermen live day by day, and every day to them is new, fresh and wonderful. Whenever you go into a Congress, you always have a long period of what looks like inaction. Usually it lasts into March, even into April or May, with a new Congress that is. Now, I think what really happens is that the newspapermen will compare the first session of the new Congress with the last session of the preceding Congress. Well, the last session of the preceding Congress can usually get active pretty quickly, because all the committee work is coming over to them from the previous session of Congress. But when you start out not only a new session but a new Congress, that means everything has to be cranked up again, all of the committee stuff has to be, you've got whole new bills that have to be introduced, you have to have hearings all over again, the whole shooting

Reedy -- X -- 23

works. If newspapermen would ever compare the first session of any Congress with the first session of the preceding Congress, they'd find it's about the same. But they never do that, they always compare it with the second session of the preceding Congress.

G: Now, Johnson did have some bills that he introduced and pushed for. One was a deferred grazing bill that was designed to help the drought-stricken farmers.

R: That was strictly a Texas bill.

G: Yes. Do you recall anything on his parliamentary work to get this passed?

R: No. It's really not worth recalling, Mike. It's not that significant.

G: The other one was a bill to enable veterans to get low interest loans for housing.

R: Oh, yes. That was regarded as an anti-recession measure. You know, economists back in those days said--and I think they would still say the same thing--that some of the quickest ways to restore an economy is to pump a lot of money into highway construction and liberalize loan money for housing. Those two measures put people back to work more quickly than anything else except providing direct federal jobs. The highways because in highway money a much heavier percentage goes into payroll than goes into equipment. And housing because again, if people have any hope--they don't have to have money, they only have to have hope--they're going to go out and contract for houses and get money back in circulation.

Reedy -- X -- 24

G: Was this the motive in pushing this?

R: Basically.

G: Anything again on the efforts to get it passed and LBJ's sponsorship?

R: No, it wasn't difficult to get it passed. It wasn't difficult at all.

G: Another bill that he did support was the bill for former presidents, pension and this sort of thing. It started out very modestly, as you'll recall.

R: Something happened there. What was it? I think that may have been when Harry Truman was starting to get in some rather straitened circumstances. I'm just not clear, but I have a vague memory in the back of my mind that somebody, and it must have been Harry Truman, was really having a tough time with it at a certain point. That's the only thing I really remember about that.

G: Well, I guess Hoover was the only other living former president, wasn't he, at the time?

R: Yes, and he of course had no problems. He was personally wealthy.

G: So I would assume it was [Truman].

R: It was almost certainly Truman. But I don't remember much about it, because there were no great problems.

G: There were efforts to reduce the oil and gas depletion allowance. Johnson fought these successfully.

R: Yes. He fought them successfully, but one of the things that was happening and was becoming more and more apparent [was] that oil was losing on each one of those battles, that the strength was draining. I know one of his real problems here was I think an inability to

Reedy -- X -- 25

convince the oil industry just how bad its situation was politically. The oil people didn't understand that themselves, I think mostly because they were too accustomed to dealing with state legislatures. They're very easy to deal with. And also I think that they were counting figures that were valid but were only valid if they had some sense about it.

You know, you have to start with some rather interesting factors, one of which is there are twenty-two states that produce some oil. That means twenty-two states in which there is an oil constituency, and some are pretty important states like Texas and California and others. I think all the oil [inaudible] people were really doing was looking at that and were not seeing the erosion of the image of the oil industry all over the country. The oil industry has always been pretty well hated. When I was a small child, the most hated man in the United States was John D. Rockefeller. Now Ivy Lee took care of that with all this nonsense of passing out nickels and dimes to children and that sort of thing, but that was only after John D. Rockefeller had left the presidency of Standard Oil and moved into a retired position. It's always very easy to get people whopped up against oil. The oil people didn't seem to recognize that fact. I think they thought they were invulnerable.

G: Johnson met with Secretary of the Air Force [Donald] Quarles when there were rumors that some of the Texas air force bases would be closed.

R: Yes.

Reedy -- X -- 26

G: Do you remember that and which ones--?

R: I don't remember the meeting, but I remember the big ones were San Angelo, Bergstrom, obviously, at Austin, which they weren't going to close as long as he was majority leader. There's one down in South Texas. What was it? I know there was Corpus Christi, the naval base, but that wouldn't have been Quarles. But there was another one somewhere in South Texas and I've forgotten which one it was.

G: Another thing, he had a meeting with Arthur Schlesinger during this period to discuss federal aid to public education. I think you maybe even sat in on this meeting.

R: Yes, I did.

G: Rowe was there, too, I think. Do you remember that?

R: I don't remember much about it. It's not worth remembering, very little came of it.

G: What was Johnson's position on the federal aid--?

Tape 2 of 2

R: Let's see. We were talking about Johnson's position on federal aid to education.

G: Right.

R: You could be sure that whenever it came to an aid to education bill, Johnson would vote for it with both hands and both feet, because he was absolutely superstitious about education. He ascribed all kinds of virtues to education that I don't think any educator ever would. He seemed to think it would cure everything from chilblains to ingrown toenails, and he wasn't quite sure what it was, but he was for it.

Reedy -- X -- 27

You know, Johnson was out of the classic mold, the concept of the poor boy who could go to college somehow, get an education, become a wealthy prominent citizen. And he really wanted everybody to have that opportunity. It was rather amusing at times. I don't think he could differentiate really between a business college and a college of business administration, or between a beauty culture college and Harvard. But he still thought it was a great thing and he would be for it no matter what it was.

G: He met with the IRS several times in Austin that April, and you were down at the Ranch at the time.

R: The IRS? What was that on? I don't know anything about that. I have a hunch that had something to do with income tax, about which I would have nothing. You had better ask Walter [Jenkins] about that. Or Mildred Stegall may know something about it.

G: Another thing he was doing down in Texas was looking for a new building site for KTBC. He was spending a lot of time with that.

R: Yes.

G: Tell me what you recall about that.

R: Not too much. That was just a very major project, both for him and Lady Bird. They both wanted a real center for KTBC, something that not only respectable, but a little bit spectacular. I was never involved in it at all, I just knew about it from hearing them discuss it.

G: How active was he in that?

Reedy -- X -- 28

R: About the same way he always was about KTBC. There would be periods of tremendous activity which would last for maybe a couple of days or a week, and then he'd get tired of it and Lady Bird would step in and patch up things. Johnson would have wrecked that station if it hadn't been for Lady Bird, because of these sudden bursts of enthusiasm he got. Johnson was a lousy administrator. Boy, he was the world's worst! When he'd step into that station, within a week about almost everybody was all set to quit.

G: Why was he a lousy administrator?

R: Johnson had no concept of order, none whatsoever. He knew how to handle people as individuals, and if some of those people could bring organizations along with them, well and good. But he would constantly put subordinates in an impossible position in front of their subordinates. He would issue contradictory orders and then never even realize that they were contradictory. He was always embarrassing people, making them look very small, in their own eyes at any rate, in front of other people. And the man just had no realization of the fact that when you're dealing with a structure, you've got to treat it as a structure, that you've got to issue consistent orders, you've got to be consistent. God, he was capable of very brilliant concepts, but then he'd charge right in and put them into effect. He might see an excellent idea on some kind of a program that he'd want KTBC to put on, and he'd charge right out in the middle of the room and bawl out four or five people for not having thought of it earlier and really make them look very bad in front of other people. The result was a

Reedy -- X -- 29

perpetual group of people that were terribly discontented. As I said, thank God he'd always lose interest and Bird would step back in and patch things up. He never realized, for instance, such things as the necessity of putting people on a firm vacation schedule and sticking to it, of setting up a system of rewards in which people got the rewards when they were entitled to it. He wanted to give them the rewards when he felt like it, not give it to them when he didn't feel like it. It was an intensely personal operation.

G: Yes. Now, you attended a series of meetings with him in San Antonio that spring, breakfast with the South Texas county men, meetings with the Fiesta group and with the Petroleum Landsmen, a meeting with the Texas Press Association at the Gunter Hotel.

R: Some of those were just meetings because they happened to be held in San Antonio. In other words, the only significance of San Antonio is that's where the Texas Press Association met that year. I think that this was just normal base touching. I wouldn't read any great significance into it.

G: Do you recall anything memorable that happened here?

R: There wasn't much that was memorable; this is the sort of thing he handled very well.

G: That evening you all returned to the Ranch and had dinner for a group of county men and their wives. Bill Brammer was there.

R: Yes.

G: What role did Brammer play in the Johnson organization?

Reedy -- X -- 30

R: A rather strange one. Bill Brammer was rather brought into the organization by the younger people, people like Harry McPherson and Mary Margaret [Wiley Valenti]. Oh, I'm trying to think of the name of that man who later became Cliff Carter's assistant. Johnson was rather impressed by the fact that Bill had worked for Ronnie Dugger and had worked for the Texas Observer, and I think he thought that through Bill he could get Ronnie Dugger to soften some of his attacks upon Johnson. That really worried Johnson, because Johnson at heart very much approved of the Dugger style of operation, but since it was directed against him he could never quite admit it. I think he thought he might get some of that out of Bill Brammer. Well, he couldn't. Bill was not that kind of a person. Bill was an extraordinarily acute observer. You could send Bill through a convention and he could come back and tell you just about what everybody was thinking, mostly because they didn't notice him. He could sit in a room and nobody would be aware of his presence, and he'd listen to everything that was going on and he would record it mentally. But he and Johnson were really rather incompatible in all sorts of ways. Bill was a strange man, very much of a loner. I think Johnson was also very much attracted by Bill's wife, who was a rather spectacular girl also.

G: Nadine.

R: Nadine, yes. Nadine Brammer. She was very cute. She's now married to what's his name from Houston, the congressman [Bob Eckhardt].

G: Not any more.

Reedy -- X -- 31

R: That's split, too?

G: Okay, let's see. Another development on the liberal side of things, Frankie Randolph and Woodrow Bean came to Washington and met with John F. Kennedy.

R: Yes.

G: Told him that they thought LBJ would not get the nomination and he would even have difficulty getting re-elected to the Senate from Texas. Do you remember that, what kind of impact this had on Johnson?

R: Oh, it was just what he expected out of them. He was awfully mad about it, and of course they were grossly overestimating their own power. They could not have withheld the Texas Senate nomination from Johnson and they couldn't have defeated them. Frankie Randolph was a woman who could see things that certainly were not there. So could Woody Bean for that matter. I think Woody was a little bit afraid of Frankie. Woody I thought basically had more sense than that, but Frankie was a rather domineering type of woman. It was just an annoyance. I wouldn't spend much time on it, Mike.

G: LBJ's brother, Sam Houston, broke his leg right after that and he [LBJ] flew back to Washington.

R; Yes.

G: Do you remember anything connected with that at all?

R: Well, not in particular. It was just one of those things. I don't know, Sam had some physical problem, I don't know what it was; I think his bones were terribly brittle. Was that the occasion upon which the

Reedy -- X -- 32

leg was so badly set that Sam wound up with one leg shorter than the other?

G: I think so.

R: Yes. No, that was just Sam. He probably had a couple of drinks under his belt or something, skidded on the floor. I think he was actually-- he living in that apartment on Virginia Avenue then?

G: He was married, of course, to Mary Fish.

R: Mary Fish, yes.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview X]

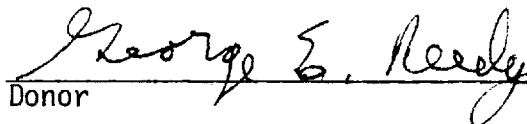
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

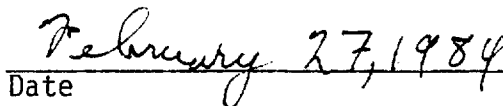
Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of George E. Reedy

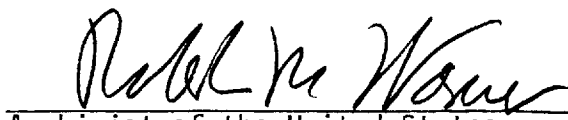
In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, George E. Reedy of Milwaukee, Wisconsin do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on August 16 and 17, 1983 at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 14, 1983 at Newton, Massachusetts, and December 20 and 21, 1983 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.


This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.
- (3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter, the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States government. During my lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcripts and tape recordings without my express consent in each case.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.


Donor


Date


Archivist of the United States


Date