

INTERVIEW XII

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- G: Okay. When 1958 began, the preparedness hearings resumed. It seemed that one of the big struggles was to get hold of a copy of the Gaither Report, and the administration refused to give it to the committee.
- R: I only have a dim recollection of that, because the Gaither Report was like so many of those reports in those years. Washington seemed to be flooded with reports; there was a Wedemeyer Report and there was a Gaither Report and there was a Marshall Report. To a great extent, the reason for the heavy interest in them was because the right-wing conservatives were making very much out of the whole business of military reports, all of which they insisted demonstrated that the United States had been weakened, had been sapped by communist spies, things of that nature. As I recall the Gaither Report, I think we finally did get a peek at it and decided that it wasn't worth all the Sturm und Drang, but that's a dim memory on my part. I know that in the long run of history it's not going to make any difference.
- G: There was another report, as I recall, by Johns Hopkins that the committee got hold of during this period.

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R: Yes. There was a study by Johns Hopkins, and again, I don't remember it very clearly because it was a detail, it wasn't decisive.

G: Do you recall details of General [James M.] Gavin's resignation?

R: I do, I recall those very vividly, because it was poorly handled by us. Gavin testified in a closed session of the committee. What he said, in effect, was that it had become apparent to him that he wasn't going to go anywhere in the army, that his ideas were no longer acceptable. And he had some rather far-out ideas, all of which, by the way, have since been proven rather sound. He was thinking of cavalry in terms of air cavalry. Well, that actually happened in Vietnam. He was thinking of individual soldiers who would be much more mobile and have much higher firepower. What happened is that at a certain point he was denied a promotion, and what he did was to interpret the denial as an indication that whatever influence he had had come to an end and he thought he might as well resign.

Well, I briefed the press--I think it was me--on what had happened, right afterward, and I told the thing fairly straight. Now unfortunately, this was one case where Johnson overstressed the Gavin testimony, and what came out to the press was something very unfair to Gavin, a feeling, a tone that he'd resigned in a state of pique because he'd been refused a promotion of some sort. That was not the point at all. He had resigned because of the refusal to promote him, but it was not the promotion that did it, it was the indication that that meant that he was through as an influential figure in the army.

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Now the difficulty with Gavin's testimony, and of course the difficulty with the testimony of all of those military types, is that when one gets into questions of warfare and military strategy, essentially they are matters of opinion. One cannot test the validity of military concepts the way one can test the amount of heat that will be thrown out by one type of furnace as opposed to another. It depends, in a way, upon which general you believe. I don't think Johnson ever fully understood that, and I know that Eddie Weisl didn't. This was one of Eddie's weaknesses. If Eddie got hold of a very vivid, imaginative man to testify, Eddie would take it hook, line and sinker. That was basically the trouble with the [Edward] Teller testimony, it was swallowed hook, line and sinker, without the realization that there were plenty of counterbalancing factors.

I rather regret the manner in which we handled those hearings in retrospect, because I think that an impression was created of weakness on the part of the United States, an impression that was not justified. An impression was created of strength on the part of the Soviet Union, an impression that was not justified. Actually, I believe we were both about on a par at that point. Of course, we were deceived by it. We, meaning the committee staff and the committee members, didn't quite know how to read the figures at that time. We weren't aware of the fact--you know, most Americans have the concept that figures don't lie. Well, of course they don't, but people looking at the figures can lie to themselves if they don't understand how the figures are arrived at. That's what we were doing. I believe it was

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too bad. These were the hearings, by the way, out of which grew Kennedy's missile gap charge during the 1960 campaign, which was not true. There was no missile gap.

G: Did Eisenhower ever confront LBJ directly in an attempt to set the record straight on the position?

R: No, because I don't think Eisenhower understood the inferences that we were drawing. I have a feeling that Eisenhower thought that the hearings in the Senate were totally political, and that therefore there was no point in his trying to set the record straight and he pooh-poohed them. He was supposed to have said at one point, "Let Lyndon Johnson have his head in the clouds. I'm going to keep my feet on the ground." Now you must understand, I don't know whether he actually said that or not, but he was supposed to have said it. I think it was Sherman Adams that talked about Lyndon Johnson playing outer space basketball.

So they pooh-poohed the hearings. But eventually when the bill was put through, Eisenhower did sign it, although he insisted on one change in the bill that essentially was a bad change, and that was that he wanted to be head of the President's space advisory commission himself, which meant, of course, that the commission became a complete nullity. You cannot make somebody chairman of a committee that's set up to advise that somebody. But it was the price of getting the bill through. That was later changed, by the way, when Kennedy became president.

G: Was anything done to correct the implication of the Gavin testimony?

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R: Much too late to do anything, because--see, actually the Gavin testimony had been reported accurately, it's just that the orchestration was wrong.

G: Now there was another testimony that caused some problems, and that was General [Bernard A.] Schriever.

R: Bernie Schriever, yes.

G: There the problem was that the air force evidently released that testimony and LBJ was upset that they did that, felt that it should have gone through the committee.

R: Yes, that was one of those minor things though. I wouldn't pay any attention to it if I were you. It always irritated LBJ to have somebody else release something to the press that affected him. It was no more serious than that.

G: There was also a controversy over General [Nathan F.] Twining's testimony.

R: I don't recall that. Is there any indication of what it was about?

G: Well, again, the Pentagon released his testimony. He took the position that the U.S. was not inferior to the Soviet Union. This was on January 14 [1958]. There was the impression that he criticized the subcommittee for giving the impression of defense weakness.

R: I don't remember it. Twining was correct, although--I'm casting my memory back. I don't believe that he was very persuasive in refuting the concept of weakness. I think what he just said was that the committee was discussing the wrong things or something like that, and he didn't go to the heart of it. In other words, it was the underlying

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reality of the figures on missile production. That's what misled us, misled almost everybody, the figures on missile production.

G: Anything else on Sherman Adams' charges that the Democrats were playing politics with national defense?

R: Not particularly. It was a very, very weak response. It was a mistake on Eisenhower's part, because at that point people were very much concerned about it. It was a bad, very foolish way of handling the situation. It sounded as though--you know, Johnson looked like a tremendous statesman at that point. I think about the only mistake he made from a public relations standpoint during the entire hearings was is overplay of the Gavin testimony. But otherwise they were handled in a very masterful fashion. The picture that was presented to the public was that of this great statesman who had grasped the inner significance of this tremendous challenge to the United States and was proceeding to do something about it, and here's a president in the White House saying, "Ah, lots of politics." That was one of the few times I've ever known Eisenhower to really handle something poorly, I think quite possibly because to some extent he was right.

G: Now General White, Thomas White, the chief of staff of the air force, did seem to support the Johnson position by charging that the administration had refused to accelerate the intercontinental ballistic missile program.

R: He was looking for more appropriations. You know, generally speaking, the military always presents a poor boy picture, that they don't have enough to defend the country. And I suppose in a sense that's very

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understandable. Just put yourself in the picture of being charged with the defense of the United States against devastating attack. Obviously what you would want would be every single thing you could think of that would nullify that attack. Most generals never have enough men, never have enough weapons, never have enough defenses.

G: But wasn't it awkward for him to be in the position of criticizing the administration, or his commander in chief?

R: He could get away with it.

G: There was a proposal at this time to establish a single commander of the military. At the time there was a lot of conflict among the chiefs of staff of the various services.

R: I forget who came up with that proposal. It wasn't taken too seriously. Obviously it was an impossibility. I don't believe that most people would waste much time over it.

G: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about LBJ and the press during this period. He seems to have been more sensitive to what he regarded as negative news stories than he had been before. Was this the case?

R: To him a negative news story was one which did not begin "Sincere, positive, patriotic, compassionate Lyndon Baines Johnson moved today to bring peace and good will to the earth." That was his idea of a newspaper story. I doubt whether he was any more sensitive. I think what was happening is that he was getting more continuing play than he had ever had before and consequently he had more to complain about. He really didn't have anything to complain about; his press during that period was absolutely magnificent. He really did appear like

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Gabriel over the White House. But I don't think there was any higher degree of sensitivity, I think just more exposure, that was all.

G: In one instance Holmes Alexander was preparing to write an unfriendly article about the Preparedness Subcommittee, and you talked to him and turned it around. Do you recall that?

R: I sure do. That one was really rather funny. I didn't know about it, but Holmes Alexander and Sam Houston [Johnson] were very good friends. He'd already filed the copy, by the way. And Sam said, "Look, Holmes, George Reedy has been awful good to you. You've gotten lots of good stories, lots of insights. Are you really going to file that without giving him a chance to answer it?" That was playing on Holmes' conscience, and Holmes finally came over to talk to me about it. I did talk him out of it. He got the column recalled before it was put out.

G: Was it an inaccurate column when he first filed it?

R: Oh, you say accuracy, in terms of factual material it was accurate enough. You know, the real trouble with the press, everybody talks about whether the press is accurate or inaccurate. The American press is extraordinarily accurate, much more so than most scholarship that I've seen, but the question is always a question of tone, a question of selectivity of facts. So one could say the Holmes column was an accurate column, but it was invalid. It did not present the real situation, which at that time was that LBJ was very, very strong. I wish I could remember the column. You know, Holmes was much further to the right than George Will or any right-wing columnist you can think of. He was just about as far to the right as you could be and

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still remain in the path of sanity. He was a very good writer though, a very colorful writer. And obviously he saw the world through these ultra-right-wing glasses. In my relations with him, I always had to have this very delicate balance. He realized that Lyndon Johnson was not a conservative, but I was able to implant in him the idea that at least Johnson recognized some of the validity of the conservative position. And also I was able to hold up in front of him some of the attacks that were being made on Lyndon Baines Johnson by the ultra-left-wingers, which goaded Holmes into writing columns defending Johnson.

G: The Drew Pearson columns must have been effective.

R: Oh, they were. They were godsend to me at some times.

G: Here's another memo about Paul Healy and a story that he did on LBJ going to San Antonio--

R: Who was [Donald] Farrell?

G: He was the astronaut that stepped out of the space chamber, remember? They had a simulated flight [to the moon].

R: This was really amusing. Paul was a very good character writer, the kind that can do a story on a person and really get to the essence. About the time that I went to work for Lyndon Johnson he wrote an article for Collier's magazine. If I recall correctly, the title was "The Frantic Gentleman from Texas." And one of the things that puzzled me was Johnson's worrying over the word frantic, looking it up in dictionaries, trying to determine what it meant. Well, actually Healy was using it in a rather complimentary sense.

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But in that article one of the things that really fascinated him was the telephone in the back yard down in Austin. Johnson had that house at that point where there was an enormous back yard, and what he had done, he had a telephone out there in a metal box, and the telephone was on the end of about a thirty or thirty-five foot cord that led right into the house. Well, this fascinated Healy. For some reason Johnson thought that Healy was criticizing him. Healy wasn't criticizing him at all. All he was doing was writing this is a quirk of a man. Johnson could do things like that. He had an extraordinary capacity to misinterpret the shadings of the language. A thing like that really made him an interesting person, that he always had to have a telephone right at his fingertips. It's the same sort of thing as what happened with Helen Thomas many years later, when Helen wrote this marvelous story about Cousin Oriole [Bailey]. That story had ten million votes in it easily, and yet he thought that what Helen was saying is, look, this is a bunch of Jukes and Kallikaks families coming down the mountain. He thought that that was what Healy was doing, that Healy was portraying him as a Actually Healy was very much intrigued by him.

G: Now another point that Healy seems to have made was the telephone in the car. You've pointed that out, too.

R: Everybody was making cracks about that, and you know, I don't know how in the hell Johnson thought a thing like that could be kept secret because he was calling all over Washington on it. Gerry Siegel and I had thought that we could talk him out of it. We did not like the

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idea of the telephone in the car, because that meant he could call us, and we thought we could talk him out of it by pointing out that anybody could listen in on his conversations, which they could. It was on a radio frequency. And that didn't deter him.

But there were some marvelous jokes at the time. One is a famous one about Everett Dirksen finally getting a telephone installed in his Senate car. You know, this was the car allocated to the leaders. And Dirksen is supposed to have seen Johnson up ahead and dialed his number, and Dirksen started to say, "Okay, Lyndon, I just wanted you to know I've got a"--just at that point Lyndon said, "Hold it a minute, Everett, I've got to answer my other phone." (Laughter) No, the city was full of jokes about that telephone and the other one.

G: That was apocryphal though, is that right?

R: Oh, it was apocryphal except he did have two lines.

G: Oh, he did, in the car?

R: Yes.

G: I see. Well, when did he get the phone in the car, do you know?

R: Oh, no, I don't know, but it must have been in 1957, 1958, along in there.

G: Soon before this [article]?

R: Oh, yes.

G: Yes. Were you with him often in the limousine when he used it?

R: Yes.

G: Did he use it a lot when he was riding?

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R: Oh and how! He wasn't driving, of course, he had a chauffeur. That was the majority leader's car. Oh, no, he was on that damn phone all the time.

G: What would he use it for?

R: The same thing he used the telephone for in his office. Johnson spent about eighteen hours a day talking. He finally discovered that he could carry on the same thing in the automobile that he carried on in the office; he was always calling people. One of the keys to his success, by the way, is that most people stop and take a rest. He never stopped until the goal was reached, which meant that if he wanted to do something he'd get on the telephone and he'd start calling everyone. His pet trick was to pick up the phone and give the operator about twenty numbers to call. My God, the phone would be ringing for an hour. He'd hang it up and there would be the next one ready. Oh, it was just the same thing in the automobile.

G: Amazing. Well, did this increase his mobility? Did it mean that he would spend more time traveling places and using the phone?

R: No, because--he didn't use the car that much. All it did was enable him to step into the automobile and go on talking.

G: How was the reception? Could you hear him all right when he was calling you from the car?

R: Oh, sure. It was as good as any telephone reception.

G: Could you use it long distance as well as locally?

R: Sure.

G: Okay. Any other stories about it that you remember?

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R: Not particularly. The Dirksen one I remember very well because Everett finally did get a telephone put in his automobile and I think it was obvious that Ev was just--if Johnson had a telephone he was going to have a telephone, too. But I don't think Ev used it as much as Johnson did.

But Healy interpreted this as one of the real keys to Johnson's character, and of course he was right. It was a key to Johnson's character that he had to--although I would interpret it somewhat different than Paul did. You know, I myself, to get a little bit psychiatric for a moment, have a very strong feeling that Johnson was not at all certain that there was a real world out there. So many of the things that he did all of his life were efforts, to some extent pathetic efforts, to try to establish contact with that world. And I think the telephone was to him one of the instruments by which he could actually contact the rest of humanity. Possibly I'm getting too deep there, but I don't think so. It fits a number of aspects of his character. The fact that he was such a marvelous mimic. The reason he was such a marvelous mimic is that he was looking for Lyndon Johnson, and I think he was trying various people on for size to see whether that was Lyndon Johnson.

He could not bear to be alone. Being alone to him was absolutely unendurable, unless he were blind drunk. That was the real reason for those horrible Saturday morning press conferences he was holding in the White House. He was lonesome. I think to a great extent this was one of the reasons for all the women. I think that with a woman he

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was having a type of physical contact, he'd become part of somebody else. But Healy interpreted the telephone as being a man with so many things to do that he had to be in constant touch. I don't think that's right, because I think what he would do would be to generate something to do because he had to be in touch. The need to be in touch with other people was fundamental, and in order to be in touch with other people he would come up with things to do.

G: I wonder if talking on the telephone for long periods of time didn't impede some of the work that he had to get done.

R: At times it did. Although one of his very highly developed skills was the ability to keep a series of balls in the air at one time. John Steele of Time magazine--the next time you're in Washington maybe you ought to talk to him about this one--was with him in San Antonio at one point. I wasn't there. And what Johnson was doing, Johnson had two caucuses going in the hotel in San Antonio at the same time. I don't know what the caucuses were about now, you'd have to talk to John Steele. But John was absolutely flabbergasted because the two groups were meeting in San Antonio on totally unrelated issues, and Johnson was running back and forth between the two getting everything straightened out, never once losing his head, never forgetting which group he was with and what had to be done with them. These were totally unrelated groups. I remember Johnny--Johnny was an old friend of mine; Johnny and I started out working for the United Press at the same time. And John came back, he was in a daze just from watching.

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He said it was the most unbelievable act that he'd ever seen in his life.

I don't know how he could do it. He could compartmentalize his mind, and when he had a real problem in front of him, the way he could bore in on that problem, Lord, you had to see it to credit it. I have never before or since seen such terribly intense concentration. There was only one problem. That meant that every single aspect of Lyndon Johnson was boring in on that problem. If there were two problems, then he'd be divided.

G: Amazing.

R: Oh, he was. He was an amazing man. You know, my statement in the book that this is going to turn out to be the most interesting man that ever occupied the White House, I think that's true.

G: This I guess is a result of Evans' visit to the Ranch late the previous year. This is a memorandum regarding a piece that Rowland Evans did. He refers to Margaret Chase Smith's vote for the [jury trial amendment to the civil rights bill].

R: I can tell you exactly about that one because it was a source of considerable static.

G: Well now, would Johnson call you in after he had read one of these stories and say find out--?

R: Oh, no, no. Sometimes he would, sometimes I'd read it in advance. This is one that--what had happened originally, Rowlie had written a story about Johnson and it was a very clumsy story. Rowlie is not a deft writer. He thinks he is but he is not. Rowlie is quite good at

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digging up facts and I think he understands them reasonably well, but he does not know how to express them with precision, he's never been very good at that. What had happened here, in the course of the story, Rowlie was trying to explain Johnson's operation in the Senate. He put it on the basis of quid pro quo, which is an accurate description of the way in which the Senate operates. It is a back-scratching deal. But it's not the conscious sort of back-scratching deal that's usually depicted by people that haven't seen it in operation. The unfair part of it is the thought that Lyndon Johnson had traded the Passamaquoddy deal for Margaret Chase Smith's vote on the jury trial amendment of the civil rights bill.

Now, Mike, that's not the way it really works. The way it really works is that the members of the Senate are constantly piling up money in the bank. They will be doing favors for other people whenever they can possibly do that favor. This is the essence of the inner club. I won't say every member of the Senate is like this because they aren't. But they're constantly piling up favors in the belief that at crucial moments the favors will be reciprocated, not necessarily any specific favor, but just the fact, "Well, my God, Ted Jones is a decent guy, he's come through for me a number of times when I needed him badly. He needs me badly right now and I am going to come through for him." That is a much more valid description of what happens.

Now it's rather difficult to make this point because the public is not accustomed to a group of men who are living in this trading atmosphere every day. You know, most of us don't live that way, we

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make trades, we make deals. If you and I sit down to make a deal with a butcher or with the baker, the candlestick maker, then we have to say specifically what we're going to do and specifically what somebody else is going to do. In the Senate what one does is to pick up a reputation as a decent person who will come through in an emergency. Now I have no doubt whatsoever that that was one of the thoughts in Margaret Chase Smith's mind, that, my God, Johnson was a decent man who, when she really needed him, had come through for her. Now in this particular case though, I have a feeling that Margaret Chase Smith might have voted for the jury trial amendment anyway. She was a rather sensible woman, that was her real stock in trade, very sensible.

But no matter how you look at it the Rowland Evans thing was rather unfair. I spotted it first and I told Johnson. He talked to Margaret Chase Smith, and they both raised holy hell with Rowlie. And he did pull that out, but he came back with it later in another story, and this is the one that that refers to. He could not get that off his mind, and I think it was not lack of understanding on Rowlie's part, but just lack of the ability to express a very subtle operation the way it actually is.

G: Evans also indicated that the Hill Country was a source of Johnson's strength and inspiration.

R: I sold him on that one I think.

G: Did you?

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R: Well, it's true though in a way. I think it really is true. Johnson was very much like the Hill Country, impetuous, stormy, a certain loveliness. You know, Johnson did have an aesthetic sense that would show itself in surprising ways.

G: How so?

R: Oh, I remember his calling my attention one evening to the loveliness of--there's a bend in the Pedernales River just above the Ranch. He had a bunch of sheep and in the evening they'd all drift down to the river to drink. It really was, it was a marvelously beautiful scene to watch those sheep just sort of drifting--they didn't walk down, they drifted. He even remarked that it was like a scene out of biblical times, and it was. But he had a very good eye, he could see it. And if you left him in a picture gallery, just to select a picture without anybody standing at his elbow and telling him what was good art and what wasn't good art, he'd do a pretty good job, he'd do a pretty good job. His problem was that he knew that there was something commercial about art and consequently it was not at all difficult to trap him into some incredibly stupid buy of some kind. But left to his own devices the man had a very well developed aesthetic sense. And he also knew how women should dress; he was rather good at that. And he was always dressing that harem of his. He had good taste.

G: I understand he also advised the men on how they should dress.

R: Oh, God, yes. He was an absolute nuisance to me. I am genuinely indifferent to my appearance. It has never bothered me in the

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slightest. I forget to get haircuts, because I don't care. I'm quite likely to put on a brown sock and a black sock. My wife always has to check them out to be sure they're folded correctly. I was the absolute bane of his existence.

I think I've told you about this little deal he had set up with the Secret Service, didn't I? He had a deal set up with the Secret Service in the White House so if I needed a haircut I wouldn't know it, but somebody would tell him. The Secret Service would call him when I'd go down to lunch. Well, I had to go past the barber shop, and invariably Steve Martini would stick his head out and say, "Mr. Secretary, the President wants to talk to you." The only way you could talk in that little cubbyhole that Steve had was to sit in the barber chair, and there would be Johnson saying, "George, get a hair cut."

He was constantly buying me shirts. There was one famous story in which he called Lillian to ask about my shirt size and Lillian didn't have it quite right. He said, "No, that's not right, he takes a size so-and-so, I know," and he went out and bought me some shirts from--he bought me a couple of suits, too. You know, he kept trying to dress me up and he couldn't. I'll never forget, he wanted to say, "Don't you have any pride?" and I said, "Pride? About clothes? Good God!"

G: But the point here also I think is that he drew strength from the Hill Country, that it had sort of a recharging or rejuvenating effect.

R: It very definitely did.

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G: Even then? Even in the fifties?

R: It very definitely did. He went to extraordinary lengths to get that Ranch back. He wanted to get all of his father's land back, which he never did, because the neighbors who had taken it over knew about his desire and, boy, did that price go up! Most of his emotions about it were rather conventional emotions. He liked to talk about three generations of Johnsons on the banks of the Pedernales and hoping there would be a fourth. He liked to travel around and honk at the cows. He used those damn Lincolns as though they were cutting horses, driving them right across the field, breaking axles and everything else. He was at peace down there, about the only place where he was at peace I think.

G: There was a perceptible difference between his behavior there and in Washington?

R: Perceptible, yes.

G: Accordingly, if you had some ideas that you wanted to present to him, would he be more receptive to them there than in Washington?

R: Not necessarily. The key to his receptivity was generally whatever problems were before him at any particular moment. I don't think there was any difference in that department. What I discovered, working for him over the years, is that if I had a memo that I really wanted him to think about a little bit, I always tried to get it inserted into his night reading. He loved to wake up in the morning and have a lot of things there to read. But I wouldn't say that he

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was any more receptive down at the Ranch than he was in Washington, no.

G: Here's another memoranda, this one with regard to Doris Fleeson.

R: Oh, yes. I remember that. I don't remember this specific memo, but. . . . January 8. No. I remember the incident, I don't remember the speech. What in the devil was it? I don't know, but it was when the Senate was out of session and to get something around to the press, about the only way you could do it was take it around to their homes. So Willie Day [Taylor] literally delivered speeches, left it in mailboxes all over the town, and Doris wrote a very nasty column in which she talked about a riding page. But there's no particular need to explain it.

Johnson and Doris did not get along. There would be occasions, especially about the beginning of the hearings on outer space, when Doris would just be looking at him with awe. You know, frankly Doris had had a very unhappy life and I think what she was looking for was a quote "a good man," unquote, in the sense of somebody that had some gentleness and some grace. She'd been married to John O'Donnell and John went absolutely bughouse. He was the one that Roosevelt gave an Iron Cross to during the war and John had it coming, too. I think there was just this basic incompatibility, but that Doris was particularly annoyed at him because she thought she shouldn't be. Here was one of the commanding figures on the scene and he just didn't live up to what she wanted. I know Doris was one of the heaviest crosses I

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had to bear. Doris and I got along all right together, but she was difficult.

G: Did LBJ attempt to win her over?

R: He did a couple of times. I remember once she came in all loaded for bear and I finally took her around to see him. She came out just as tame and docile as a kitten. I can't remember what it was about.

G: Now back to the Paul Healy thing. Do you recall LBJ going to San Antonio to meet that astronaut, Donald Farrell, when he came out?

R: No.

G: Okay. Let me ask you to talk about the economy a little bit. This seems to have been the foremost issue on LBJ's mind, the recession and unemployment situation. First of all, did that detract from his attention to the preparedness hearings?

R: Yes. As I believe I told you yesterday, I don't think he ever fully understood all of the implications of outer space. That was the sort of concept which in his way of thinking was rather fancy Dan. But, God, he sure did understand unemployment and he sure did understand poverty. There was a recession in 1958, and it wasn't as bad as the one we've just gone through or are going through right now, it was fairly mild. It was, however, the only time where Eisenhower's popularity ever dipped in the eight years that he was in office. Now when you start adding up certain things, just for openers he really did have his heart in the cause of getting people jobs. This was one of the most sincere elements of Lyndon Johnson's personality. He hated poverty. He wanted to lick it for himself, and he did. But the man

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must be given credit for a sincere desire to want to lick it for everybody else, too.

So first of all you have dumped in his lap an issue that really does arouse his emotions. Secondly, however, he was in bad need of some partisan tangles with Eisenhower, because he was under heavy criticism from many Democrats--a very foolish criticism I think but it doesn't matter whether criticism is foolish or not in the political game--for not opposing Eisenhower enough. Well, really, there hadn't been very much to oppose him on up to that point, which was one thing. Partisan liberals and partisan conservatives both think that if there are no real issues to oppose somebody on, you should go out and find them. But here was one which was made to order because Eisenhower really did not want to do anything about it, not because Eisenhower was mean or anything like that, but just [because] he thought that if you left it alone there would be a comeback.

Third, I think he was getting a little tired of the space hearings. Interest was beginning to fall off, because once all the facts became known, then it was just assumed that the United States was going ahead and was going to try to get the space thing in operation. As I told you yesterday, I don't think he would have pushed it through to a bill if it had not been for me and Gerry Siegel, who realized that it would be deadly for him to make that tremendous splash and then have nothing come of it.

So what he did, he started to call on everybody that might have some ideas on what to do. Jim Rowe because, of course, of Jim's

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association with Roosevelt. Oh, I forget who else. He talked to the labor leaders, he just talked to everybody, and finally came up with a series of things: an increase in appropriations for highways, because of all the money the government appropriates, highway funds go into payroll more than any other single question; then, of course, housing, because in housing you can do quite a bit, put quite a few people back to work without even appropriating any federal money. All you've got to do is start playing games with Fannie May [FNMA] and FHA. He had a couple of others, I've forgotten what they are now.

G: There was a regular public works proposal, wasn't there?

R: Yes, but too much wasn't put into that for the simple reason, as Jim Rowe pointed out, that it just takes so terribly long to get a public works proposal off the ground, and meanwhile you've got a lot of people out of work, a lot of people starving.

G: Albert Gore did propose some sort of re-establishment of the PWA or a PWA.

R: Was it the PWA or WPA?

G: Well, PWA according to this. Of course, I realize--

R: That would be correct then. It's awful easy to get those two mixed up though because of the same initials, and yet tremendously different programs. Well, it doesn't matter. The point is he got some momentum, and here is one where the administration was really caught off its feet. It could do nothing but react to what Johnson was doing. He was really in the saddle at that point. As I said, I don't think that Eisenhower or Sherman Adams or any of those people were really

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mean or Scrooge or anything of that nature, but they were somewhat laissez faire. They did believe that if you left it alone that things would work out. They didn't realize that they were caught unawares; when Johnson started to push these various projects, they really had some trouble.

G: Their approach seems to have been to endorse a tax cut.

R: Yes. And of course the problem with that is that in the long run a tax cut will stimulate the economy, but it's not going to create jobs real quick. I remember at one point Johnson was under very heavy criticism for not having said anything about the unemployment situation, the economic situation, until it had come forward as a political issue. That was one of the fortunate things was that in his speech to the [Democratic] caucus I had put in a line about "we can't ignore the problems of XX unemployed," which saved him there.

G: One of the measures was a three billion dollar housing bill.

R: Yes, but that's not appropriation. There was probably some appropriations in it for public housing or something like that, but the three billion dollar, you're talking about Fannie May or FHA, Fannie May probably.

G: Anything else on the particulars of these? I gather they were all elements of his ten point anti-recession program.

R: I'm trying to remember what the ten points were. I think most of them worked because they created some immediate payrolls. I think by late spring the recession was fairly well over.

G: One element I think was to freeze the farm price supports.

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R: I don't remember that one at all.

G: This was one that Eisenhower vetoed, but Johnson did achieve a measure of cooperation from the Republicans in the Senate, as well as George Meany, in supporting that.

R: I don't remember that at all. You know, one of Eisenhower's early triumphs was the congressional vote which moved from fixed parity price supports to flexible parity price supports. I don't recall that particular one.

G: How about the rivers and harbors bill? This was another thing that Eisenhower vetoed.

R: I don't remember it, but that would be the sort of thing that could go into an anti-recession package because there all the planning has been done already. All that's really necessary is to give the Army Corps of Engineers some money so they can go ahead and do it.

G: Okay. LBJ also supported the acceleration of some of the military construction projects here.

R: Yes. Again, because they were already planned. You see, the difficulty with PWA-type projects is that they sort of start from the beginning, which means that an awful lot of time is wasted in drawing up plans and making feasibility studies. Almost everything that he did there was intended to put people back to work immediately, which rivers and harbors would do and which military construction would do.

G: He also sought a reduction of oil imports, arguing that we would become too dependent on foreign oil.

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- R: Oh, he did that. That was a continuing issue with him. It was a continuing issue with everybody from an oil state. I wouldn't attach too much significance to that.
- G: Do you think he honestly felt that we would become too dependent on imports or do you think he was just representing an interest in the state?
- R: Oh, I think he believed that, because an obvious thing is true. We did become too dependent on imports. Look what happened to us.
- G: The highway bill was one of the big issues that you--
- R: That was one of the most important by far.
- G: Now, there was a fight within that issue over regulating billboards. I think it was states that would agree to regulate billboards would receive some extra per cent.
- R: There was a complicated formula which I have now forgotten. There were incentives in it to regulate billboards.
- G: [Robert] Kerr fought that bill, as I recall.
- R: I don't recall, but I would--well, now I wonder why he would. I don't know. I just don't know.
- G: Anything on that?
- R: No. Anything you need to know out of that you can get out of the papers. There was no hidden significance anywhere.
- G: To what extent was the sponsorship of all of these economic measures, using them as an anti-recession tool, simply taking the opportunity to advance programs that he was interested in anyway?
- R: Not too much.

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G: Really? You think it really was genuinely an anti-recession program rather than--?

R: Yes, but you have to realize that he was always genuinely interested in any kind of a program that would create jobs. The oil thing is the only one that sounds to me--oh, obviously he'd take advantage of the military construction to get some money for Texas; he'd have been a damn fool if he hadn't. But the oil one is the only one that sounds to me as though he's really taking advantage of a program. The others don't.

G: He didn't attempt to override the presidential veto on the rivers and harbors bill.

R: Couldn't have done it, couldn't have overridden it.

G: He didn't have the votes?

R: No.

G: Johnson objected to the Bureau of the Budget withholding some of the funds that Congress had appropriated. Do you recall that, his attitude?

R: No, I don't, I don't recall it, but that's an old, old battle. It's been going on for a long, long period of time. There's never been a satisfactory resolution to it. But Congress and the president are always chivying each other, and one of the weapons of the president is you can't make him spend money.

G: Now, during the middle of all this, Nixon took that trip to South America.

R: Yes. The one to Venezuela?

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G: Right. And was spat on in Caracas. LBJ went to the airport along with [Hubert] Humphrey and [Mike] Mansfield to meet Nixon when he returned and was somewhat criticized for that.

R: Boy!

G: Let me ask you his reaction to Nixon's ill-fated trip and subsequent developments.

R: It was very, very bad. It was very, very bad. The lesson he drew from it was that Nixon was very unpopular in Venezuela, and he did not ever want anything like that to happen to him. He never quite understood that there are periods when the nation can be unpopular in Venezuela, and that what was happening to Nixon was not directed against Nixon but was directed against the United States.

But in many of his foreign trips in later years, he got himself into some absolutely ridiculous positions in which he tried to claim that certain things had not happened, which very obviously had. I remember in Finland, just as he entered the hotel an egg was thrown which splattered all over the glass door of the hotel in Helsinki. Well, I saw the egg. There was a big crowd there. I saw the egg, every newspaperman traveling with us saw the egg, and he was all set to go out and announce them as a bunch of liars and saying he hadn't seen any egg, therefore no egg was thrown.

On another occasion when he was in Cyprus he was boycotted by the Greek community of Cyprus. The reasons for the boycott were very simple. He was boycotted because the Greeks wanted to drive the Turks into the sea, and the only thing that kept them from doing it was the

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presence of the American fleet in the Mediterranean. So what happened is that Johnson was very popular in the Turkish community of Nicosia, which is the capital city of Cyprus, and very unpopular in the Greek section. Nobody turned out to give him any welcome in the Greek section, whereas in the Turkish session there were big celebrations, people dancing in the streets. And when he addressed the Cypriot Parliament, which is a very weird Rube Goldberg-type of thing--they have a constitution which guarantees that twenty members will be Greek and five will be Turkish. Of course, after he'd finished his speech, he walked through the members of the Parliament shaking hands with them--there were twenty-five--and he happened to shake hands with the leader of the Greek communist faction who didn't realize what was happening. As soon as the Greek communist leader realized, he turned his back on Johnson real quickly. Well, every newspaperman there saw it. When Johnson read the stories the next day he wanted me to call the press in so he could denounce them as a bunch of liars, that nothing like that had happened. And I thought, my God, they'd think the man had lost his ever-loving mind.

But in every case he kept referring back to Nixon. His assumption there was that--of course, he might have been partially right, that maybe most Americans did think the spitting and jeering was at Nixon rather than the United States, although I don't think so. But that made a very profound impression on him.

G: It stayed with him?

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- R: Oh and how! He himself did not like Nixon, and expressed himself rather forcefully on the occasion many different times.
- G: Why didn't he like Nixon? What didn't he like about Nixon?
- R: I don't know. He once told me that Nixon was a fascist. I'm not sure why. Of course, I don't think that Johnson had a really good idea of what was meant by the term fascist. I think he just thought that a fascist was any unpleasant person. But that's what he told me.
- G: Now, evidently one of his reactions to Nixon's trip was to propose a re-evaluation of U.S. foreign policy.
- R: Oh, I think he just had to make a speech there. Everybody re-evaluates foreign policy when they don't have anything else to say about it. I can't get too excited about that.
- G: During the middle of this, you wrote two memos dealing with the subject of his possible resignation as majority leader, one in April and one in May. From your memoranda, as well as some of the other documents, it seems that he was really beleaguered at the time, and yet you've just described all the success he was enjoying on the economic issues, on the space issue, things like that.
- R: He wasn't really beleaguered. I don't know what had gotten into him at that particular point. And furthermore, I cannot recall writing the memos or the reasons why I wrote them. I have checked with Horace Busby since I saw those two memos yesterday, and Buzz recalls having the thoughts, and I had them, too. But he doesn't recall any specific incident that led to them either. One of the memos, I remember, stated that I discussed this with Buzz and we were in agreement on it.

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At that particular time I had come to the conclusion--and this I remember very well--somewhere in the course of the debate over the economic issues I realized that we were really engaging in some rather routine politics. That this may be effective, because quite often routine is effective, but nevertheless it was routine. That led me to some thoughts that really he had done everything that could possibly be done with the majority leadership. After all, he had put a civil rights bill through the Congress. He had put the outer space bill through the Congress. He had restored unity to the Democratic Party, and I think to some extent he'd helped restore unity to the nation as a whole. Therefore where in the devil was he going to go as majority leader, unless, unless he was going to use it as a springboard toward the presidency?

Now, I think that to some extent much of my thoughts, many of my thoughts, were sparked by the debate over economics, because about halfway through I realized that the Democrats were going to have some major victories in the following fall. Eisenhower would not be on the ticket, it would be entirely a congressional race. All of the issues would be Democratic issues, so to speak. Unemployment usually favored Democrats because the public, whether rightly or wrongly, was convinced that Democrats would do something about it. One of my rules of thumb in politics, by the way, is that when people are afraid of losing their jobs they vote Democratic, and when they're afraid of kooks they vote Republican. Well, they weren't afraid of kooks that year, they were afraid of losing their jobs. I realized also that

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most of the people that would be elected would come from parts of the country where Johnson was not very popular and where the Democratic Party had an ultraliberal tinge. Looking forward to it, all I could see was that 1959 would be a year of tremendous trouble, which it turned out to be, by the way. Both 1959 and 1960 gave him lots of troubles. And to make it even worse, the press assumed that because of those huge Democratic majorities that he was going to have an easy time of it and could do almost anything in 1959. Well, as it turned out he couldn't do very much, really. Put all that together, and I know my own thinking was that he would do much better just taking over the space program completely, that it might have its ups and downs, but still it had a lot more to do with the future than anything else.

Now I don't know why I wrote either memo. Buzz thinks that it's just that he and I had a discussion on it and discovered that our thinking was parallel and that I probably just put it down on paper. I don't know.

The second memo that you showed me indicates to me that he was thinking very seriously about it. Now, I can only speculate at this point. I do believe that this was the beginning of the period in which he began to question very seriously his whole life, whether it served a purpose, whether he hadn't spent too much time chasing things. He was not a very deep man and I don't think that he could contemplate a question like that with any degree of profundity. But he could be unhappy, he could be dissatisfied. And I think he was getting dissatisfied with his own life. I know that he was having

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some personal problems. It was a period in which--how will I put it?--a period in which he was beginning to look upon his family as being something of a drag, and a period in which he was becoming involved--rather, where he was picking up some personal involvements outside of the family. I think there was just a general, overall feeling of unhappiness on his part, which does not mean that the advice that I was giving him was bad.

Today, re-reading those two memos, I think that I was absolutely right, that as a person he would probably have been much better off had he resigned as majority leader at that time. Of course, I don't think he would ever have become president, although he might have. It was true that he had gotten everything that he could get out of the majority leadership. It was true that the last Congress on which he served as majority leader was just one headache after another with no very satisfactory conclusion to anything. Eisenhower became very dominant, you know, in 1959 and 1960. Part of it was Johnson's own fault; he seemed to have lost a lot of his skill, which to me is significant. I know there was a period in early 1959 where he and I were quite estranged. I was ready to quit at that particular point. When was the civil rights bill? Was that 1959 or 1960?

G: 1960.

R: 1960. 1960 then was a period in which I was ready to quit.

G: Do you think his health had anything to do with it?

R: No, he was strong as a horse.

G: Really?

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R: However, however, one must realize this. Lyndon Johnson was a hypochondriac. I'm not a doctor, but I do not have the faintest hesitancy in making that diagnosis, and I will wager that every doctor that's ever attended to him would agree with me. And I think that he could imagine bad health even when it wasn't there. Basically he did have this heart problem and was ongoing. But at that particular time the doctors told me that any doctor who gave him a physical examination without knowing the history would not be able to detect the fact that he had ever had a heart attack.

G: Really?

R: Yes. I think it was Jim Cain told me that. I'm not sure, but there may have been--well, there are just too many doctors at that point. I feel like Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn, too many Indians.

But what was happening here, he was being moved by personal considerations. I don't know what they were altogether, nobody could ever really fathom Lyndon Johnson completely. But he was in a mood to throw things up there.

G: In your May memorandum you indicated that if he decided to stay on as majority leader, he should turn the floor over to Mansfield more often and delegate a lot of the day-to-day functions to other senators and staff and save himself for the big issues, and increase the staff and let Kerr tangle with John Williams. These suggestions all indicate that he felt he was overworked or that there were too many trivial day-to-day things bothering him.

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R: That's right. That's the way he felt. But it's not necessarily the way that it was, Mike. You see, there's a distinction between what he felt and what was. Really, the situation at that point, in 1958, was no different than it had been at any time during the preceding--well, it was different in the sense that he had more authority. By that time he had established himself as a very powerful figure. But it wasn't any worse in terms of trivial details than it had ever been. It was that he felt differently about them.

G: But should he have delegated more to Mansfield?

R: Of course he should have, but he wouldn't. I mean, I knew that when I wrote that. I don't remember it, but I knew damn well that he wouldn't. He might have been willing to let Bob Kerr tangle with John Williams, that's possible. But delegate the leadership, no. He would never have delegated it to anybody.

G: He wanted to occupy himself with these details?

R: Right.

G: Now, all of these are pretty general except for John Williams. Was John Williams a particular problem for him then?

R: Oh, yes. Not for him. John Williams was a particular problem for everybody. The man had the Puritan conscience developed to the nth degree. Whatever the ultimate was, John Williams had it. He'd made some personal investigations--I forget whether it was Internal Revenue collectors or post offices or what--and he discovered some rather gross defalcations. He'd get up on the Senate floor--you never knew what he was saying, you couldn't hear him five feet away. He'd hold

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the paper right up to his face and mumble into it. The next day the people would pick up the Record and they'd discover the exposure of some rather major criminal activities. But he'd become a real power in the Senate; people had become afraid of him.

G: You mean he would attack other senators and accuse them of criminal--?

R: Not necessarily accuse--oh, no, you can't do that on the Senate floor, that's against the rule of comity. But he could certainly attack their constituents. People walked around him very gingerly.

Now, politically he was an ultraconservative man, which meant that many of the things that Johnson was trying to do were going to run into Williams' opposition, which because of the fact that there was some fear of him become rather formidable. Generally speaking though, it was just that he was a headache, and he was a headache.

G: Kerr evidently had no reluctance to tangle with him.

R: Oh, no. Kerr was the most savage, formidable debater that has ever appeared in the Senate. Well, maybe Tom Connally was on a par with him, but Kerr was deadly in debate! He could make a fool out of almost anybody.

G: Especially Homer Capehart, I guess.

R: Oh, both he and Tom Connally enjoyed beating Capehart over the head. Poor Homer, he never realized when he was getting pounded, he and Ken Wherry of Nebraska, the Republican leader.

G: Now, as part of your argument that Johnson should resign, you indicated that he would have to face some legislation that was unpopular in Texas, reciprocal trade, foreign aid and labor legislation.

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R: All of them had become very unpopular, which I think surprised many northerners who had always regarded Texas as being a very internationally-minded state, and at one time it was. I think when the reciprocal trade legislation first came along it was very popular in Texas. Now, of course labor legislation was never popular in Texas. The only unions that ever enjoyed real popularity in Texas were the railroad brotherhoods. The oil field workers eventually got some standing, but generally speaking, anybody that wanted to describe Texas as an anti-union state would be quite correct.

But reciprocal trade had gone out the window with the collapse of Nationalist China and with the embargoes that cut off the export of Texas cotton to China. I think cotton had more to do with it than anything else, that plus the oil imports. The Texas oil producers were getting very uneasy about the imports from Venezuela more than anywhere else, but they were worried about the Middle East, too. But you see the cotton thing was the key to the whole deal. Sixty per cent of the Texas cotton crop went to China before the fall of Chiang Kai-shek. You know, the Texas cotton crop all by itself was the equivalent to the entire American production of cotton today. The Texas cotton crop was about four million bales at one point. Be that as it may, Texas just overnight found that it did not have a decent export market for its cotton because the European markets were taken up by the eastern cotton producers. Therefore Texas started to turn inward and try to find internal markets, and at the same time the

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question of extra-long staple cotton appeared on the scene. Now, are you familiar with extra-long staple cotton?

G: No.

R: It's very complex. It's grown only in four counties: two counties in Texas and two in New Mexico, and on Sea Island, Georgia. It's a marvelous cotton. If you ever get hold of a cotton shirt that feels just like silk it's this extra-long staple stuff. Now, we had some sort of an agreement with England that involved limitations on how much we could produce, because England at that time had rather extensive extra-long staple cotton interests in Egypt, and of course the Egyptians were part of this deal, too. And it became quite a cause celebre in Texas, this idea of the extra-long staple cotton. They made it into a much more important thing than it was; it was not a really major contribution to the Texas economy. But nevertheless it was sufficiently dramatic that many Texans begin to think that the future of Texas depended upon the production of extra-long staple cotton. That meant in their minds that we had to cut off these international agreements and put up tariff barriers and abrogate the agreements that we had, I think it was with England and I know it was with Egypt, on selling this stuff on the international market. At the same time they began to get worried about the oil imports, although there mostly from Venezuela.

So Texas within a couple of years changed from being a highly internationalist state to rather intense protectionism. That was one of the issues. Labor, of course obviously labor's just unpopular in

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Texas. There was one other issue if I remember correctly. What was it? Reciprocal trade.

G: Foreign aid.

R: Oh, foreign aid. Foreign aid had become terribly unpopular in Texas. That was one of the right-wing causes. I've always felt that that was pretty national. That was because foreign aid was sold on the wrong basis. When Harry Truman first started the foreign aid programs, the overall thrust of the explanation to the American people is that we had to have friends and this was the way to buy them. Well, you certainly aren't going to buy any friends with foreign aid. Anytime you help a man, what you do is make nineteen enemies and one ingrate. Well, the same thing is true of foreign aid. The real explanation for foreign aid is much more valid, would not have gotten anybody in trouble, but it doesn't explain things very easily. The real explanation for foreign aid is that we needed an independent Europe. That was important to us, whether the Europeans were friends of ours or not. But, boy, try to explain that to the American people.

All of these issues were going to come up in the coming Congress and all of them were headachy issues. They weren't big and dramatic the way civil rights was or the way the outer space issue was, or even for that matter the way the anti-recession issue was. They were important issues, he had to take certain stands on them, and the stands were just going to be stripping his skin off an inch at a time.

G: Do you think he ever felt that he might not be re-elected in 1960 if--?

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R: No. He may have had the kind of worries that every politician has, but I don't think there was any possibility of his being defeated in 1960.

G: There was increased discussion this year, 1958, that LBJ might be the party's nominee for president in 1960. Did this enter into the thinking at all?

R: I think so.

G: Did he ever talk to you about it?

R: No. No, except to deny that he wanted to be president, which didn't impress me, and I think he was smart enough to know that it wouldn't impress me. You see what happened, you have to realize one thing, and that is that he was aware of the utility to him of the discussion that he might be a president, because it kept the southerners in line. As long as the southerners operated on the assumption that, my God, Lyndon Baines Johnson might become president of the United States, they were willing to stand back and give him elbowroom that they would not have given to him if he were just another senator from Texas. They did not attack him savagely in civil rights, they didn't attack him at all on many other issues which normally would have had the senators up on their feet screaming and yelling and pounding on the desks. So I think for a long period of time what he actually did was just to let the talk go on unchecked and give it an occasional nudge as a tactical maneuver.

My belief is at some point he began to realize that there was a serious basis for the belief that he might become president, and I

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think that added to his lack of ease because I really don't believe that he knew whether he wanted to be president or not. Everybody is very confused on that. You get a group of people that will say he definitely did not want to become president, and another group that will say of course he wanted to become president, but he had to hide the fact that he wanted to become president. I think the truth was that he didn't know himself, that he'd wake up in the morning wanting to be president, by the time the afternoon came along I think he'd have changed his mind again. Because I believe he realized, he had this--oh, what's that term the psychologists are so fond of, midlife crisis. I think he was going through what we now know as the midlife crisis, in which I believe he sort of wanted to get out of the track and start all over again, and yet at the same time the presidency was a very glittering prize and nobody with the intense ambition that Lyndon Johnson had--and it was intense--could totally divorce himself from a desire to be president. This may have been one of the things that added to the Sturm und Drang in the spring of 1958.

G: Do you think that he thought he had a chance to be president, knowing the southern--?

R: Of course he did. He had a chance to be president. However, the chance began to fade fairly rapidly because he waited too long to really make a move. If he had made certain moves in 1958 and in early 1959 I think that he would have had a very good chance. But he didn't make those moves. I can recall on one occasion when somebody, I forget who it was, called Dean Acheson and asked him if he'd support

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Johnson for president. Acheson was flabbergasted and so he said, "I'd love to support him. I think he's the best man around. But the difficulty is that I was assured so many times that he wouldn't run that I finally pledged my support to Stu Symington and I can't withdraw it now."

I think that happened in many places. I can remember going into Wyoming and meeting the state chairman, Teno Roncalio, who did not know who I was. He'd just picked up a busload of newspapermen, and I think he assumed I was one of the newspapermen. And as we were driving into whatever the town was, Cheyenne or Laramie, one of the newsmen asked him about Johnson's chances. He said, "Not a chance out here in Wyoming." He said, "Why not?" And he said, "Well, it's the first time we've seen him. The Kennedy people have been here for six months." He waited too long.

But you see the point was that the Democratic Party was in a very peculiar state at that particular moment. Johnson actually represented the center of gravity of the party. Kennedy was coming up on a sort of an end run, which he made because he got there firstest with the mostest, in the words of Nathan Bedford Forrest. But if one were to add up the New Dealers, of whom quite a few were still around, most of the labor people--I think George Meany would have gone for Johnson--and of course Jews would have gone for Johnson, because they were very suspicious of Kennedy. And Johnson would not have had much trouble with the black vote, which would surprise many northern people. But fundamentally a sort of a Harry Truman-type Democrat, a kind of a

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Carmin DeSapio-type Democrat, all of those people I think would have supported him, and I think if he'd moved early and consolidated that support he would have had a real chance. But he let too much of it slip by him.

G: The labor bill was a big issue this year.

R: Yes.

G: And LBJ had a big battle with [William] Knowland I gather over the Knowland proposal for an omnibus labor bill.

R: Oh, God, yes, that was complex. You see, your biggest single problem--and, God, it was a terrible problem--is that most of the labor issues at that particular time were very complex labor issues. It really wasn't quite like the Taft-Hartley Act at that point. It had become apparent by then that the Taft-Hartley Act was going to remain the basic law of the land. But there were all kinds of complex, nit-picking things that had to be picked up somehow: situs picketing, which hasn't been solved to this day; the Taft-Hartley ban on the closed shop was making all kinds of problems that were highly technical and had to be solved, and they were all in the construction trades. And in the construction trades, the labor-management relations are the most intricate. It takes years of very careful study to even begin to comprehend them.

As I remember, the labor issue arose basically out of the feeling that some of the pension funds and the health and welfare funds were being plundered and were being misused. That was largely due to the fact that the United Mine Workers fund was close to collapse if I

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remember rightly. The United Mine Workers fund was close to collapse simply because they provided too many benefits, more benefits than the fund could stand. There was also a growing fear of the Teamsters who were in the process of acquiring tremendous power at that particular time, simply because they could make or break any strike. You know, with the Teamsters you've got your strike won; without the Teamsters your chances of winning a strike are reduced by at least 75 per cent. There was no simple answer, no easy way of getting any kind of a bill through. Almost everything that anybody tried collapsed sooner or later.

(Interruption)

--were the issue. But then with the pension fund issue before Congress, everybody that had an idea jumped in to try to get it put through under the aegis of the pension fund bill. That led to all this incredible confusion. I remember Kennedy was holding some hearings, [John] McClellan was holding some hearings. I would really have to go back and plow through an awful lot of things to reconstruct it for you, but I can give you the general, overall pitch of what happened.

The general, overall thing was that the pension fund issue had really had become major and I think largely because of what happened to the United Mine Workers fund. But also there were [others], the musicians had their health and welfare fund, which looked to many people like a shakedown. I think the most important thing that had happened was that the American economy had changed so drastically that

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the funds were not properly adapted to the realities. For example, I remember Walter Reuther had one proposal which was to just have a central point at which all health and welfare funds would be paid in, because, as Walter pointed out, suppose that a man had worked for a number of years for General Motors, then he left General Motors and he went over to Chrysler. Well, in Chrysler he was not covered by the General Motors fund, so he would lose what he had in the General Motors fund. Then if he went to Ford, he'd lose what he had in the Chrysler fund. A man who had worked twenty or twenty-five years might wind up with only a couple of years' fund.

There were a lot of problems like that. But then there were many other problems that were arising solely out of lack of expert management. I believe the Teamsters had made some loans out of their funds that were causing an awful lot of problems. Now, if they had just stuck to the pension fund this would not have been such a big issue. It would have been an important issue, but it would have been disposed of easily. What happened is everybody started to try to tie anti-racketeering bills onto it. Labor was trying to get a situs picketing bill. That was one of George Meany's--Meany was out of the construction trades, you know, he was a plumber. That was one of Meany's pet projects, getting the situs picketing bill. Oh, Lord, that was a headache! I was the only one on the staff that understood it. I won't even say I understood it. I was the only one on the staff that at least knew the vocabulary.

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G: Johnson seems to have been moving much closer to organized labor in Texas during this period, mending his fences there.

R: Yes. You see, what had happened is that labor was very weak in Texas, and therefore what it had done was to make an alliance with a liberal group centered around Frankie Randolph and Kathleen Voigt, mostly the ultra-Texas liberals who could be very, very liberal simply because they almost lived an underground existence. As long as they had what they called the labor-liberal coalition, the liberals disliked LBJ so much that labor sort of had to go along with them. It was almost impossible not to. The labor leaders were Fred Schmidt and Jerry Holleman. Jerry Holleman [was] out of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and Schmidt was out of--what the devil union was Schmidt from? A man named [H. A.] Moon was out of the Steelworkers.

G: I think Schmidt was out of the Steelworkers, too, wasn't he?

R: Maybe both of them were, could well be. Moon may have just represented the Steelworkers up at Lone Star Steel Company. But he was always rather friendly with Johnson.

I think at a certain point, the alliance with the liberals began to get a little bit wearing on the labor people. Also at the same time, Johnson had established a real rapprochement with George Meany and was getting along reasonably well with Walter Reuther, although that was always through me. Walter and I were very good friends. I think in a sense that what was really happening, though, is that you had a coincidence here: Johnson setting up good relations with labor nationally at the same time that Texas labor was beginning to pick up

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a little bit of strength and becoming a little bit tired of its alliance with the liberals.

One of the strange things about it, I never fully understood it myself, is that probably the most important union in Texas at that standpoint, at that time, certainly the largest, were the oil workers, and yet the oil workers did not seem to dabble in Texas politics at all.

G: You indicated that Ralph Yarborough seems to have lost some prestige among the Texas labor--

R: No, not Yarborough. No, no, not Yarborough. Yarborough was a liberal and he had the support of the labor-liberal coalition, but it would not be accurate to put him in the same category as the Frankie Randolph, Kathleen Voigt, Ronnie Dugger coalition or axis.

(Interruption)

That was a different thing than the disillusionment with the liberals. Yarborough was not in that group.

Oh, I'll never forget that idiotic fight over Jim Sewell.

Yes, Fred Schmidt was much further to the left than Jerry Holleman.

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R: You see, when I was talking to you about the disillusionment with the liberals before, I was thinking basically about Frankie Randolph.

G: But you describe here a disillusionment with Yarborough.

R: But that was out of the convention itself, in which there was quite a fight. The big fight was over the chairmanship between Frank Ikard

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and Jim Sewell. On that particular occasion, Yarborough had gone way out of his way to get Jim Sewell appointed chairman of the convention. Now when the whole thing was over, the labor people realized that Frank Ikard had really been quite a boon to them because he'd given the convention respectability. He won, of course. And at that particular point, quite a few of the labor leaders that I was talking to were a little bit mad at Yarborough for having gotten them into this rather silly business of fighting with Ikard, which didn't do them any tood and didn't do anybody else any good.

I think at that point there was disillusionment with Yarborough, the realization that he was not very good tactically, but nevertheless it was not the same thing as the kind of disillusionment they finally got with Frankie Randolph. They finally came to the conclusion that there was no way in the world they could deal with Frankie Randolph or Kathleen Voigt, or Ronnie Dugger for that matter, that those were people who would only go along with labor as long as labor was going along with them. See, the labor people were interested in all sorts of issues that the liberals really were not interested in.

G: What, for example?

R: Well, the labor people, what they cared about was wage-hour and situs picketing and Section 12B [14B] of the Taft-Hartley Act, you know, real bread-and-butter issues. The so-called liberals, they were a very peculiar group. I doubt if they still exist in Texas. Maybe they do. What you have to realize is that the state was so overwhelmingly conservative at that particular point that people who thought of

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themselves as liberals began to exaggerate liberalism. It wasn't just a question of being on the right side of the issues; it was almost a question of getting up early in the morning and bowing ten times toward whatever the god of liberalism and saying, "Today I am going out and I am going to do battle for the liberal cause." They were much more interested in civil rights, for instance. They were much more interested in--oh, I've forgotten what the other liberal issues of that period were. Liberals and conservatives both have issues that come and go. They're both faddists. The labor people are not faddists. The labor people have a solid constituency. They've got to do something for that constituency. You don't stay a labor leader very long unless you can get some wage increases and get some fringe benefits, things of that nature.

I think many of the labor people finally came to the conclusion that their alliance with the liberals was putting them in too many impossible positions where they couldn't get what they wanted. It eventually broke up pretty completely. I don't know whatever happened to the old liberal coalition in Texas. You'd know better than I would. But in those days it was high, wide and handsome. I think some of those Texas liberals would have scared the voters in Vito Marcantonio's district in New York, they were so far to the left.

G: Were you down at the convention representing LBJ? Was that the purpose--?

R: I don't know that I was publicly representing him, but I wrote all of

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Frank Ikard's speeches while I was there. I was doing quite a bit at that convention, yes.

G: Anything else on the convention that's significant?

R: No. It was a very successful convention, because in effect, it really did quite a bit to consolidate LBJ's position not only with labor but let's say with some of the more sensible leaders.

Oh, I remember that, August 5, 1958.

G: This is an example where a national labor leader, George Meany, talks to a state leader, Holleman, about LBJ.

R: Right. That's the way it went, too. Andy Biemiller told me about it. The next day Holleman did call on both of us; I had lunch with him.

G: Did LBJ or you get Meany to lean on Holleman?

R: No, not that I remember. LBJ might have. I didn't. You know, I just don't remember. I think what may have happened is that Andy Biemiller may have called me and said Jerry Holleman was coming up, and I may have had a heart-to-heart talk with Andy, who in turn might have had a talk with Meany. I would never have suggested anything like that to Meany, but I would have to Biemiller. You don't suggest things like that to the top man, you suggest it to somebody who will suggest it to him. That way he's not embarrassed if he has to turn you down. That could well have been because Biemiller and I had a very close relationship.

G: Okay.

(Interruption)

R: --when Kennedy was opening hearings.

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G: This was on the Kennedy-Ives bill?

R: Right. Kennedy was holding the hearings. I went over to the committee room to listen. When Kennedy saw me in the back, he beckoned me up and he said, "George, does Lyndon want to testify?" and I said, "No, Jack--" I was on a first name with Kennedy at that point--"he just wanted me to come over and take a look and tell him how things were going. He has no reason to want to testify." Well, then I went on back and I ran into somebody from the Associated Press, I've forgotten whom. We'd been at a party at his house, one of those community things where the wives all brought food. He said, "Hey, George"--whatever his wife was--"we've still got that pot of yours. Does Lillian need it?" and I made some remark to him about no, I'll pick it up sometime next week.

Then I went in the back of the room and there was Bob Oliver, and Bob Oliver was flabbergasted because he had hold of a copy of the testimony that McClellan was going to give as the first witness, and the testimony was very placatory toward labor. I didn't tell him I'd written it, which I had. Bob handed it to me and I pretended to read it, and I said, "This is pretty good, Bob," and gave it back to him. Thirty minutes later Sarah McClendon went storming into Johnson's office: "Senator, you can't do that to a Texas reporter. Senator, here you had George Reedy, he goes into the committee room and he whispers to Kennedy and they cook up something. Then he comes back and he whispers to an AP reporter and they cook up something. Then he

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comes back and he whispers to the UAW lobbyist and they cook up something. And you don't tell a Texas reporter!" Oh, Sarah was mad! (Laughter)

G: That's great. What was Johnson's reaction?

R: I think he was amused by it. I can realize now how it must have looked from Sarah's viewpoint, all these completely, totally innocent conversations, but between people that might be cooking up something.

G: Okay. LBJ went on a long, unannounced vacation that summer. I guess he spent some time at the Ranch--

R: Almost all of his time.

G: --and traveling around Texas, reportedly to give Mansfield a chance to test his own leadership. Do you recall if this was the case?

R: I'm trying to remember. Would your notes show you that that was the period in which there was very extensive remodeling of the offices in the Capitol?

G: I tell you, it was right at the time of the San Antonio convention, if that helps you.

R: I have a feeling that that's when I--did the notes show that I stayed in Washington?

G: No.

R: There was a long period when he went down to Texas.

G: Homer Thornberry's mother died about this time. His own mother was sick. I think you were in Washington then, but I'm not [sure].

R: I think that that was when the personal crisis that I've been talking about was really bubbling up. I think that was once in his life when

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he really wanted to go off and be by himself. But he wasn't giving Mansfield a chance to show what he could do or anything like that. He had Mansfield pretty well sized up; he knew what Mansfield could do. There wasn't anything like that. Even though I don't recall it specifically, I do remember that there was a very long period in which he just left Washington, left us all there to kind of take care of things for him, which we did without any trouble. That was really when he wanted to go away and think by himself.

G: The Alaskan statehood bill came up this year.

R: Yes.

G: Do you recall that, his role in--?

R: Oh, sure. See, there was a real complexity. Alaska was a Democratic state; Hawaii at that particular point was Republican. So what it amounted to is you couldn't get one in without the other. And you had the extra problem of civil rights. So many of the southerners were very uneasy about Hawaii because of all the racial mingling out there. You could not possibly have gotten that bill through before 1957, but at least the passage of the Civil Rights Act had made it possible.

Johnson had a hell of a lot to do with getting them through. In the first place the delegate from Hawaii, Jack Burns, made a very strong--Burns I think recognized that Johnson could be key to the whole thing. He really went out of his way. I think he also liked Johnson. I don't think it was entirely selfish. But nevertheless he operated on Johnson. And of course I knew Bob Bartlett very well, he was then the delegate from Alaska. It really was just a very

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elaborate trade that Johnson finally put through. And Johnson did put it through; you could not have gotten it through without his skill. That's one of those tricky pieces of legislation where you can't do A unless B is done at the same time, but you can't do B unless A is done at the same time. The two had to go through together.

G: But they ultimately ended up separating them and sending Alaska through first.

R: Yes. But that was after the agreement had been made that both were going to go through.

G: Well, could the Hawaii people be assured that statehood would come up for Hawaii after--?

R: Oh, sure. You can make deals like that. That's not hard to do in the Senate. It's a little more difficult to do in the House because of the large number of people involved. But a deal like that in the Senate can be ironclad, providing that you have enough votes.

G: Sure. Was the fact that Hawaii was not part of the continental United States a problem?

R: It was an argument, and I think that it did influence some people, but it wasn't the basic problem. I think really the basic problem was civil rights.

G: Did [Richard] Russell play a role in the passage of them?

R: Oh, of course he did, but I couldn't tell you what it was. You could not have gotten that through without Russell's acquiescence.

G: Okay. Now, there were some flaps about the FCC and television stations in about three separate issues here. One was the Waco station

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that Johnson was involved with or Mrs. Johnson was.

R: Mrs. Johnson. Johnson, it really is true that he never owned a share of stock in any television or radio station. The fact that he would take over Mrs. Johnson's properties does not mean that he owned or he had a legal right to do so; he'd just take over.

G: But this had happened sometime earlier.

R: Yes.

G: I think 1953 or so. There was a flap in the press about it.

R: Very little. There wasn't that much of an issue. The person who could tell you the best about that would be Walter Jenkins.

G: Okay. There were also accusations--

R: Wait a minute. Just hold on a second while I think back. That had something to do with his friends on the Waco paper.

G: Rhea Howard?

R: No, Rhea Howard wasn't on the Waco [paper]. Rhea Howard was up in Wichita Falls. No, Harry Provence. That was a Harlon Fentress paper--no, not Harlon Fentress. Huntress, Frank Huntress. There was something peculiar about the deal. By peculiar I don't mean illegal or anything like that, but it was a UHF station or it was--you'd better talk to Walter about that. He would know.

G: There were also some accusations that Senator Kerr had intervened with the FCC in stations that he himself had interest in.

R: I don't recall that, but I wouldn't be terribly surprised.

G: And then Bernard Schwartz, who was the counsel for this House investigating committee I guess, resigned, charging that the FCC members had

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been taking gifts from people in the broadcast industry. Johnson was urged to investigate this while the House committee was investigating. Do you recall that issue?

R: I recall it, not very well. He didn't want to investigate it, I remember that. But the reason that he didn't want to investigate it was because you could get yourself into some real problems if you looked like you were usurping an investigation that was already under way. My memory of it is very vague. I remember the incident. But I know the big issue here in Johnson's mind was he'd get himself into one hell of a tough fight with members of the House over what essentially was a side issue and that it would work against him later on when he really had something important he wanted to get out of the House.

G: Did he and Rayburn at this time, in 1958, have a good working relationship?

R: Oh, yes. Very good. There was no problem there. But you know, one of the things though, I myself have a feeling, I can't quite put my finger on it, that Rayburn always had a few reservations about Johnson. I don't know. And I can't tell you why I have that feeling. It could be wrong. My hunches usually have some basis. I know that Johnson was always very, very careful not to get in any fights with Sam Rayburn, very careful.

G: Was he deferential toward Rayburn when they were together?

R: Oh, sure. Sure. But so was everybody else. You know, Rayburn was one of the few people I have known in Washington to whom everyone

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deferred. If Rayburn stepped out on the floor of the House--have you ever been in the House of Representatives?

G: Yes.

R: That noise that's going on all the time. When Rayburn stepped in the well of the House to make a speech, that House quieted down all by itself. Didn't need a gavel or anything else. You could hear a pin drop. Even though they weren't willing to support Rayburn on votes or things like that, the respect, almost adoration, that they had for Rayburn was incredible.

But I don't think you'll find very much there. Those are passing incidents really.

G: Okay. Now we have talked some about the space bill. I think it would probably be better to save that for next time with the labor bill.
(Interruption)

R: --liaison with the Space Committee. He was a rather nice guy but one of the most humorless men I've ever come across. I remember one day some imp of mischief took hold of me and I started to spin an elaborate deal, how the committee was considering very seriously turning the whole development of space over to the navy. I said, "You know, this is very, very simple. After all, it's quite logical. What's the essential difference between the air force and the navy? The essential difference is that the navy can operate at long distances from a home base for many months. On the other hand, what's essential about the air force is it must have bases. In outer space what we're going to need are military vehicles that can operate for long, long periods.

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You know, I can just see some future Nelson crossing the T off the Coalsack." The poor devil. Some member of my staff who knew me overheard him on the telephone reporting this very straight and very sincerely to the air force back in the Pentagon. (Laughter) I had to call the poor devil in and explain to him the whole thing was a gag.

G: Amazing.

R: I don't know why I got into things like that.

G: Okay.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview XII

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