

INTERVIEW I

DATE: January 31, 1974
INTERVIEWEE: ELLIOT RICHARDSON
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ
PLACE: Dr. Frantz's office, Sid Richardson Hall, University of Texas, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

F: Why don't you begin this by telling me when you first became aware of Lyndon Johnson.

R: Well, I had of course heard of him in his early career, just as an interested newspaper reader. It perhaps would be hard for me to distinguish between what I really remember from my own younger days, and what I remember of seeing pictures of him since as Youth Administrator and as protege of Senator Connally, and Congressman. At any rate, my own direct awareness of him, that is, by personal observation, came when I joined the staff of Massachusetts Senator Leverett Saltonstall.

F: With whom, incidentally, I had a wonderful interview.

R: Did you? I bet you did.

F: In his Boston office.

R: Yes. Well, he would of course have many memories of the late President. I joined Saltonstall's staff in January, 1953, just as the Eisenhower Administration was coming into office. It was of course the last interval in which the Republicans controlled the Senate. Saltonstall was the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Senator Johnson was a member of the Committee. He had been the

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chairman of the investigating subcommittee in the previous term, and he was the ranking member in that term and still actively interested in Armed Services matters, although he had just become Minority Leader.

Most of my memories of him are on the floor. I was sometimes on the floor beside my boss when things involving Armed Services or appropriations were being debated. What I most vividly remember is the style and flair of Senator Johnson on the floor. He had an air of confidence and alertness and of comradeship which gave an observer the feeling that he was totally at home, that he was in full possession of all that he needed in order to be able to deal with the tactical situations that arose. At that time, of course, Senator Robert Taft was the Majority Leader, giving way later in the term to Senator Knowland. Senator Johnson was a much more vivid personality than both. Anyone looking at LBJ huddled with the Majority Leader, with an arm perhaps draped over the shoulder of Bob Taft, couldn't help noting the contrast between the easygoing, relaxed, drawling Southwesterner and the somewhat up-tight Ohioan. I always thought that Bob Taft looked more like a New Englander than a New Englander; he could have posed for "American Gothic," and this was vivid.

The first face to face contact with Senator Johnson I remember was one day I was striding along trying to keep up with Saltonstall in one of those basement corridors in the old Senator Office Building on the way over to the floor. Senator Johnson was loping along in the opposite direction, and when we came together, Saltonstall

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introduced me to him. I hadn't realized until that moment how tall he was. When I'd seen him on the floor, of course the floor slants downward, so I was looking up to him. I noticed how tall he was.

F: You're not too short yourself.

R: Well, he was at least three or four inches taller than I am, and he was big. I noticed my eyes weren't much above his Silver Star pin which he had in his lapel. I remember noticing that. He said something pleasant in response to the Senator's introduction of me to him, and we started off down the corridor, continuing toward the subway. I remember vividly Saltonstall saying to me that Senator Johnson, he felt, was a very able man. He said, "He badly wants to be President, and he may very well be President someday."

F: Johnson never exhibited any sort of real corn pone qualities in the Senate, did he? He hit people pretty well on their own level.

R: He was crisp and in command. He had clearly done his homework. I remember on the occasions when I was listening to debate or watching him handling the business on the floor--this was a memory really that is better associated with the years when I handled legislation for HEW in the second Eisenhower term when Johnson was Majority Leader--being impressed by the sense he gave of being completely on top of the business of the Senate. He would handle the plans for debate, and when bills would be brought up, and whatever had been the understandings on unanimous consent and so on, crisply and with the sense and impression of being, as he was, fully in charge. I had really very few direct dealings with him in those days. I remember

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once going to his office on some bill. I dealt mostly with Senator Hill, on the Senate side.

F: That's Lister Hill?

R: Lister Hill. But Lister Hill certainly shared the respect. It may be, I don't really remember, that I went in to see the Majority Leader with Senator Hill. The biggest piece of legislation on which I worked during that period, and I worked very closely with Senator Hill, was the National Defense Education Act. Senator Johnson had been interested in education, of course, having been a teacher himself. We were enlisting his interest in something that involved the management of the bill and you had the feeling that you were getting a hearing by somebody who completely and quickly absorbed what you had to say and responded in terms of kind of a clear-cut, practical judgmental reaction to what he thought could be done and how to do it.

F: Did he tend to act as the devil's advocate, or did he pretty much listen to what you had to say and just take it in and digest it?

R: I certainly don't have any specific recollection of his behaving as a devil's advocate in that situation, and I didn't have enough direct dealings with him to see that side of him if it existed.

F: Well, now, the impression that the Democrats tried to give, with some justice, during these years was that Eisenhower had a good team going in the Senate and the House, under the leadership of Rayburn and Johnson, that pretty well worked with him on progressive legislation. Is that a Democratic boast, or was that a general Eisenhower Administration feeling that, particularly in HEW, he did not have to

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fight an obstructionist group.

R: That certainly was the feeling we had. You couldn't have had a better illustration of it than the National Defense Education Act itself. We started working in HEW in the summer of 1957, following the defeat of our school construction bill in the previous session, to develop a new education package. We had a committee on education beyond the high school chaired by Devereux Josephs; the staff director was later president of the University of West Virginia and is now president of the National Audubon Society, Elvis Stahr. We began to put together legislative recommendations emerging out of this and emerging out of James B. Conant's studies of the high school in the summer of '57. Then came Sputnik, which gave us a chance to attach a lot of what we wanted to do anyway to the national concerns that this aroused.

About that time I was in touch with Senator Hill and with Carl Elliott on the House side, who was the chairman of the subcommittee that handled this kind of legislation. We agreed that the Administration would be unlikely to submit a bill as comprehensive or as costly as the Democratic side would want to support. But we agreed that the way to get legislation would be for each side to submit legislation of the same essential character and with the same combination of aims tied to mathematical and engineering, scientific education, and aimed at increasing the number of elementary and secondary teachers, improving the capacity of universities to educate Ph.D.'s for the foreseeable requirements of the baby boom moving on into the

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higher levels of education and so on. So when the time came, then, that meant that we had legislation on parallel, or rather converging tracks, and certainly the Leadership in the Senate under Senator Johnson was highly cooperative in this. It's fair to say that we had more trouble with Senator Goldwater on the issue of scholarships than perhaps we did from anybody on the majority side.

F: Did you get the feeling that the Majority Leader shaped the legislation in any way, or was he just interested in tactics, or passage?

R: My impression was that he was more interested personally, and had a greater personal impact subsequently, on matters like defense policy and in kinds of things that involved direct dealings with the President than in a matter like this, in which the principal responsibility in the Senate rested on Senator Hill. Senator Hill was a very impressive, able man. He told me once that he had declined the Majority Leadership because he felt that a man from a Deep South state, who would have to take the positions he would take on civil rights legislation, shouldn't be the Majority Leader. So there was a great deal of mutual respect between him and Senator Johnson.

I did see Senator Johnson along with other members of the Leadership from time to time in meetings in the Cabinet Room in the White House when I was there with my then boss, either Secretary Folsom or Secretary Arthur Flemming, to talk about something, some piece of legislation that involved our Department. Those were obviously cordial, businesslike sessions, in which the impression

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one had was of serious men going about the business of the country. There was no intrusion of partisanship at all that I could see.

F: You're trying to see, in a sense, what was pragmatic, would work.

R: Of course there tends to be even now less partisanship in the Congress than I think most people believe and most political commentators would tell you. In those days it was only on certain types of issues, obviously with considerable visibility and on which the potential candidates were taking divergent positions, where partisanship intruded itself much at all.

F: Well, you had an advantage in one sense, of Sputnik which gave you the kind of emotional springboard you needed to get something done. The bill was later criticized to some extent for weighting in favor of the sciences and mathematics, although in the context of the times, it was the proper bill, I think. Was that a criticism at the time, or were you merely trying to get a principle established?

R: There were some who felt that it was too much weighted, but this was not a strongly--let's see, or I should say, perhaps, vociferously--expressed view.

F: Not really a barrier?

R: For one thing the people in the field of education broadly recognized that it was important to them, whatever their subfield within education, to be able to score a major breakthrough in the form of substantial federal assistance. We had a massive coalition supporting that legislation. I brought about the creation of a committee which called itself the Emergency Committee for the National Defense

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Education Act, or something like that, and it had at least fifty or a hundred organizations. But besides that, we pointed out that there were a number of aspects of the bill that were not narrowly categorical within education.

This was true of the graduate fellowships program, which was originally a proposal in the Administration bill for institutional aid to graduate schools, including fellowships. It ended up, largely because of Hill's church-state worries, as a fellowship program with a cost of education grant attached. The scholarship program that we originally advocated would have provided scholarships on an achievement basis. A needs test would have been applied only after competitive award of the scholarship, and its aim was to enhance incentives for academic excellence generally, not in the first instance to be a program simply of student assistance. The loan title was added later as a result largely of pressures from the Republican side of the House committee. The two key Congressmen in that were Hal Haskell of Delaware and the present Minority Whip, Bob Griffin.

At any rate, these and other aspects of the bill, the creation for example of support for area studies such as Southeast Asia or the Middle East, went well beyond [mathematics and science]. And for that matter, there was a provision for the creation of institutes for language teaching. So there was really something in it for a lot of people besides the math and science teachers.

F: Yes. [I would like to ask some] a couple of personal questions. This probably all came too early in both yours and Johnson's careers, but

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did you ever hear Felix Frankfurter talk about Johnson?

R: Not when I was his law clerk. I did hear Felix Frankfurter talk about him quite a lot after Felix Frankfurter had had his own stroke, and he was deeply touched by the solicitude and interest and the understanding that had been shown to him by Senator Johnson. Let's see, I don't remember the year that Frankfurter [had his stroke], but it was while Johnson was still Senator.

F: Were they that close, or was Johnson just the sort of a man who looked after people in distress?

R: I don't think they had ever been close. I think Johnson had a great deal of respect for Frankfurter. But after his own heart attack, and when Frankfurter had suffered his stroke, the expression of interest and sympathy by Johnson deeply touched Frankfurter and impressed him. It was much more, I think I quite well remember, than simply an expression of sympathy. It was a communication of help from a man who had been through a massive heart attack that had brought him close to the point of death himself, and he helped Frankfurter in terms of an insight into the experience of recovery from an illness. Frankfurter was poorly prepared for illness; he'd never been sick in his life, I guess. He was a man of boundless and bouncing energy, and incapacity was a hard burden. In that sense he felt that Johnson had helped.

I remember hearing the Senator give a talk to a meeting of, I guess it was, the Washington chapter of the National Heart Association, and he talked about his experience. It was very powerful and

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effective and moving, more so, I think, than any television appearance I ever saw him give. He was very impressive in human terms.

F: Really unburdened himself some?

R: Yes. You probably have records of that talk from other people. So there grew a considerable closeness between Frankfurter and Johnson because of this.

And I'll just end on this: the last time I saw President Johnson was at the State Department. I sat next to him at a luncheon. It was for the distinguished--

F: This is when he was President, or after?

R: No, it was afterwards. I don't think I was Under Secretary of State any more; I think it was after I'd gone to HEW. But I was invited to the lunch. It was for a foreign visitor. I'm not sure now who, but I sat next to him. He was working on his book. Foremost in his mind was the issue of exactly what had been said and to whom on a critical stage of the U.S. engagement in Vietnam, and he told me something about this. I was struck again by the encompassing quality of the man. He was older and gentler and quieter and grayer, and in a sense subdued, but still an enormous personality. I was also struck by the directness of his communication with me and the sense he gave me of an interest in who I was and what I thought.

F: You had no relationship with him during your Lieutenant Governorship?

R: No.

F: He didn't . . . Okay--(Interruption).

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

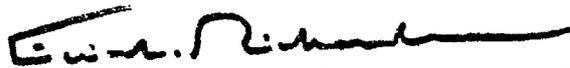
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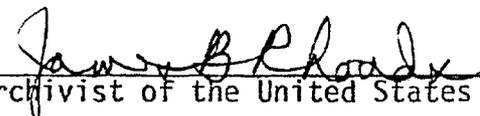
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