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INTERVIEW I

DATE: September 9, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES H. ROWE, JR.

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Mr. Rowe's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Mr. Rowe, tell us very briefly about yourself, where you are from and how you came to be a member of this firm.

R: Well, let me see, I was born in Butte, Montana on June 1, 1909. I grew up there, went to high school there, and then to prep school in California. I then went to college at Harvard, law school at Harvard, and I finished law school in 1934 when the New Deal was really getting under way.

I came to Washington to be law clerk to Mr. Justice Holmes and stayed with him until his death in I think March, 1935. I had hoped to go back west to practice law in Montana or California or somewhere, but I was offered a number of jobs after his death, one of which was working in the R.F.C. [Reconstruction Finance Corporation] for Tommy Corcoran, who is now my partner. At the time Corcoran was in charge of the Public Utility Holding Company act, or bill, which we were trying to get through. There was a very famous fight led in the House by the then Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Committee, who was Sam Rayburn. In the Senate it was led by Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana. I worked as a junior lawyer

on the drafting and writing of speeches and so forth. After that I went to the Labor Department.

F: At this time Wheeler was still considered quite progressive, wasn't he?

R: Yes, and he was a progressive in the domestic sense. The chief problem about Wheeler was--which I think is a common phenomenon we see more and more as the liberals have been out of power, when they come into power they never are able to adjust. They are so used to being "againers" that--

F: They don't quite know how to win, do they?

R: They are not happy as winners. I think this is an oversimplification of Burt Wheeler, but it explains a great deal of his troubles with Roosevelt. My father had been a political enemy of Wheeler's, but I was a supporter of his until the break with Roosevelt.

I was at a number of agencies after working for Corcoran in the R.F.C. I briefly worked a summer in the National Emergency Council, which was the first time to coordinate the government, the first attempt at this. Not successful, but interesting. I worked in the Labor Department, really on problems to do with Aid for Dependent Children. I go that far back. It seems to be the new change--Mr. Nixon is changing the welfare program. Well, that's where it began. That was 1936.

I worked in the Power Division of what was then called the Public Works Administration, in which we were trying municipal and TVA cases against Dean Acheson who was then the lawyer for the

private utilities. I then went to the S.E.C. [Securities and Exchange Commission] for a year, and I started writing speeches for Jimmy Roosevelt, who was then secretary to the President, because Jimmy was handling a great number of matters for the President. But whenever he went out to make a speech he took three days off and tied up a large part of the government.

So after I had written several, he asked me to come over as his assistant in the White House, which I did. My title then was executive assistant to the President. It was an odd job they had lying around. Jimmy left, I think five or six months later. He had an operation and went to California, divorced his first wife, married the second. I stayed on and became the first so-called administrative assistant to the President. They were supposedly the people with the "passion for anonymity."

F: Yes.

R: It was generally true under Roosevelt, and it's never been true since then. Roosevelt liked his staff men quiet, just as Lyndon Johnson did. I think in a way Roosevelt had more success with the process than Johnson did.

F: I can think of several notable exceptions.

R: That's right. We had a variety of assistants. There were six created, but Roosevelt only filled it with four. I stayed there, oh, a number of years, almost four years. Then, as I told President Roosevelt one day, "It is a great job and there are no better jobs, but the only thing it fits you for is to be president of the United States

and I don't think I am going to be, so I would like to get out of here and go to the Department of Justice." He appointed me then to what was then called the assistant to the attorney general, which is now called the deputy attorney general. This is the second job under the attorney general, who was then Francis Biddle, a great friend of mine then and ever since until his death last year. And I arrived, I was appointed then in November 1941, just before Pearl Harbor. In fact, I was on vacation when Pearl Harbor came. I went back to the White House and worked for about a week and then went over to Justice, worked on the war problems, mostly the Japanese evacuation, which Biddle and I tried to stop with no great success.

In 1943 I got into the navy and I went to sea for the rest of the war. I got a commission. I had a terrible time getting a commission because my eyesight is so poor, and Jim Forrestal, who was the under secretary of the navy and had been an old friend of mine, turned me down and suggested that I go to my old boss Roosevelt if I wanted one, which I didn't want to do. But I knew a young congressman named Lyndon Johnson who volunteered to get one some way or the other and he got me a waiver. Even then he knew everybody in the government, particularly at the lower levels. That's how I got into the navy. I spent the rest of the war in the navy.

F: What were you doing in the navy?

R: I was what they call an air combat intelligence officer. I was always on the carriers, the aircraft carriers. I began briefing pilots and interrogating pilots. I eventually ended up as what

they call a ACI, air combat intelligence officer to an admiral. I ended up about twenty miles off Tokyo at the end of the war.

I then quite quickly turned around and went over to the Nuremberg Trials at the request of Francis Biddle, in which I was called technical advisor to the Nuremberg Tribunal. But what I was many years later once again I was a law clerk to a judge with several other good law clerks like Butch [Adrian S.] Fisher and Herbert Wexler, who is now the head of the American Law Institute. I stayed there until the trial was over in October 1946.

I came back to Washington, didn't quite know what I wanted to do, and thought I wanted to leave Washington. I sat around pretty much for a year or so doing very little, except that I became a member of the Hoover Commission. I was appointed by Speaker Rayburn. I think he had two appointments. His Republican appointment was Herbert Hoover and his Democratic appointment was me, and I was quite active on the commission because I wasn't practicing law.

Towards the end of it I started to practice, and I think in 1948 or 1949 I came over here. The law firm was then Corcoran and Youngman, and became Corcoran, Youngman and Rowe. I have been here ever since. I've done some odd jobs for the government on various commissions, but never full time again.

F: Good. Where did you first get acquainted with Lyndon Johnson? Did he just drift in or do you have some specific--?

R: I can't really remember. I have some vague idea--now this [may be] only because I have read it since, it may have been true--that the President, as I am sure you remember, picked him up after he was

elected to Congress, brought him up here and was quite impressed with him. And either the President or--I think the President told Tommy Corcoran to get in touch with him. Then I was part of the Harvard-New Deal crowd, and evidently I got in touch with him or he came and got in touch with me. I knew him very early when he came in. If you ask me specifically the first time I saw him, I can't really remember.

I can remember one instance in which I remember calling him about a Texan who was being considered for assistant attorney general of the Criminal Division. One of the things I did in the White House was handle all the appointments for the President, and I wanted to get his opinion about this Texan who was Welly Hopkins. Welly is now a banker, I guess. He was general counsel to the United Mine Workers. What I didn't know was that Johnson was supporting him. I just wanted to get his opinion of him. Johnson said, "I will be right up to talk to you about him." He turned up in my office in fifteen minutes and gave me a great fight talk about Welly. Well, he didn't get that job, but I found they were great friends and I remember that because he came driving in so hard and so fast for his friend, Welly. That must have been--when did he get here?

F: He got here in 1937.

R: This must have been early 1938. I was in the White House, and I didn't get to the White House until January 1938, so this must have been some time, but I also remember that I had known him by this time, by the time of that specific incident.

F: Was he fairly smooth in those days? Was he pretty brash, abrasive or what? Was the so-called Johnson style just about what it is now?

R: I have often thought about that. It seems to me that--well, let's put it this way: he was a young man on the way up, and therefore he was smoother or more sensitive to the moods of the people around him than he later became. I think somewhere or another there was a change.

F: More finely honed in those days.

R: Yes, I think there was a change about the time he became senator. I think--and I have said this before--he made a hardboiled judgment that the power in Washington at the time was in the Executive Branch which it was, not in the Hill. He was one of the few young congressmen that got to know all the young New Dealers, a lot of them through me, I may say, but he cultivated them. He quite early seemed to know where the buttons for power were.

F: In cultivating them what did he do? Just call them, see them with some frequency?

R: Call them, see them, and have lunch, something of that sort, the usual thing he did on the telephone. He turned on a great deal of charm, and to use the word, I think he was a hell of a lot smoother then than he was later. But I would explain this on the basis that he was on his way up. There is a--

F: When he got the power, it sort of blunted his edge a little.

R: Yes, I think so. Which I suppose is interesting. They said that

Roosevelt was always a tough, suspicious fellow on the way up, but once he got it he was all charm and mellowness. So. . . .

F: Right.

R: He was out to make friends. He did it very well. You couldn't help but like him. There were some self-centered qualities. I can remember with great amusement, and I think my wife would bear this out, he used to come to dinner quite often at our house with Lady Bird, and he was a great talker and a great charmer. Let's say we had twelve people for dinner, and sitting around after dinner he would grab them and hold them for a long period. You have been subjected to this, the Johnson monologue when he wishes to impress you; there is nothing better in the world. And you hand this out for a while. He was somewhat of a young congressman and he was interesting, but eventually people would drift off and start having their own conversations. When he saw he had lost his audience, he would just go to sleep, just sit there and go to sleep. Eventually he would wake up and take the conversation over. I think it embarrassed Lady Bird at the time. But it always amused me that once he lost his audience he didn't think anybody else would say anything important so he just slept for a while. But he was a great charmer. I'm sure you've heard about the incident of the hat he gave to Rayburn [Roosevelt]. Maybe you haven't.

F: No.

R: I remember his busting in one day when I was in the White House. And he was very good at this. I don't want to indicate that this is

Johnson taking care of Johnson. He was an excellent liaison as to the sensitivities between the Executive Branch and the Congress. I mean, he was the kind of a fellow that would say, you know, "The President isn't cultivating Rayburn," or "This congressman has his nose out of joint," and so forth. He was a volunteer at this and a lot of stuff, and always right, I might add. And I think it worked the other way. He had a feeling, he said it to me once, he was mad about something, he said, "You New Dealers, you are a bunch of intellectual snobs." Even then you got this thing, if you didn't go to Harvard you were. . .I said, "Lyndon, that's not true at all." He had that feeling. He worked on it. He thought the New Dealer, the young New Dealers, who were an arrogant bunch-- I used to say about the Kennedy crowd, "I've seen nobody as arrogant in Washington since we grew up." And Johnson worked on this. He was a great liaison man. He would, for example, if I would call him and say, "X is having trouble with this bill, do you know Congressman X?" If he didn't know him, he would say, "Never mind, send him down. I'll get it done." So he had done a lot of favors for people.

Now to get back to the hat. He busted into my office one day and said, "You know, Rayburn is having a birthday next Monday," or whatever the day was. You should remember that Johnson was a very junior Texas congressman, and my feeling then was, and probably still is but I haven't followed it, there is more of a hierarchy in Texas than in most states in terms of age and seniority and so forth. He said, "I think that the President ought to have a party for him."

I said, "What do you mean, a party?" "Well," he said, "just get him in the White House and give him a drink and so forth." So I said, "Well, maybe it is a good idea." And he said, "You write the memorandum to the boss. You write better than I do." I don't know what his theory was, maybe that if I wrote it it would seem more impartial. I sent the President a memo, and he [Johnson] also talked to Grace Tully. He was never a man to rely on any one person. I think Grace and I both talked to the President, and he thought it was a great idea. It was supposed to be a surprise party. The interesting thing about it was that Johnson made up the guest list.

F: I see.

R: Said you ought to have these. It was a careful list; he had the right chairmen and so forth. But he invited them and told them it was a secret. Then the day of the party Roosevelt sent word to Rayburn he had to have him immediately. Johnson had the whole dialogue worked out. Rayburn came rushing up in his car and everybody was hiding off somewhere. Rayburn came in and Roosevelt said, "Sam, you are in real trouble and I'm the fellow to tell you." Scared the daylights out of him. Then what was he? The leader, I guess. Then he said, "You are the age of such-and-such," and they all came in singing "Happy Birthday." The thing I noticed when they took the pictures, there was Roosevelt, Rayburn, and the fellow in the middle between them was Lyndon Johnson. I began to think I had really met an operator. And Johnson had bought the hat with his own money, one of these Texas Stetsons, and given it to Roosevelt. I mean, this

same terrific attention to detail. The thing that has amazed me most about Johnson through the years is how every little piece, he has to do. He never trusted anybody else to do it.

F: He showed that he never delegated authority in those early days? Of course, he didn't have as many people to delegate it to.

R: No, the only fellow that seemed to have some authority, and this is when Johnson went off to war, then he sort of split it between Lady Bird and John Connally. John was still staying before he went to war. And in those days, so far as I could judge, and I was an outsider not looking into the inner office, the only two people over a long time that I ever thought he really trusted too far were Connally and then later Walter Jenkins.

F: When Mr. Johnson says, "Roosevelt was like a daddy to me," is that just sentimental rhetoric, or was there that closeness, do you think?

R: I think he--I have often wondered how much rhetoric it was. Now there was a period that he saw a great deal of Roosevelt when I was away. I went off into the war in 1943 and I really didn't get back until after Roosevelt's death. I think Johnson had been out and been back, and Johnson did see quite a bit of him, I am told, during the period I was away. Now while I was here, Roosevelt was quite fond of Johnson. He liked--this is a colorful fellow. Roosevelt was impressed by the fact that Johnson had taken on his Court plan and won.

F: That was bound to attract a little more attention than if he had been just another congressman.

R: It did. That's why he picked him up, and as time went on--and this is just an impression, I wouldn't swear by it either way--I think Roosevelt began to give a little more weight to Johnson on the struggles of the party in Texas. I think Rayburn was sort of playing a middle position there, and Jesse Jones was giving him trouble. Johnson then was with the liberal crowd against Jesse and whoever they were--I once knew, and you probably still know. Johnson was against Garner and he was against Jesse and he was against that crowd. And the more liberal faction that Roosevelt wanted, he started listening to Johnson as their spokesman.

F: Johnson didn't blanch at the thought of a third term either.

R: No, I think that probably had something to do with it. He got in more and more. I can remember one instance. Johnson was an independent operator. When he first ran for the Senate, Roosevelt did everything he could to help him practically.

F: That's against Pappy O'Daniel in 1941?

R: Yes. Practically gave him the Treasury. I was in charge of feeding all these projects and everything else into helping Johnson. I was the White House man who was supposed to do what Johnson wanted in terms of what Roosevelt wanted. I can remember there was something to do on Social Security, and Johnson wanted some kind of a statement. We got him quite a bit, and as always he was back in about three days saying, "I've got to have this statement," or that statement. I said, "Lyndon, I just can't push the President any more. I mean, God, you got this thing a few days ago and he won't go any farther."

"All right," said Lyndon. Well, about five days later I noticed the President made the statement. He certainly went around me so fast it made my head swim. And I don't know how he got it, but he got it.

F: Well, now, on that sort of thing did he tend to mollify any feelings you might have? I don't know whether you were sensitive about it or not, but you could have been.

R: No, we were good friends, and I just noticed it got done. I can't remember specifically on that. He did have--have you ever heard of his "I Can't Do It Club?"

F: No.

R: Well, this is something he created as a congressman. I think maybe this is where it started, although it may have been something else. He called me about something one day as a congressman, and I said, "Lyndon, you just can't do it." And about a week later I got a plaque, a printed plaque--I don't know what I have done with it, I saw it once in the last few years--on which it said, "Founder member, James H. Rowe, Jr. of the 'I Can't Do It Club,'" signed Lyndon Johnson.

I think probably he would call you up and kid you but that particular battle I was doing so many things to help him that we talked quite often. He might have said, "Well, I got that statement to spite you," or something. He didn't, so far as I could see in those days, ruffle feelings. Now he may have ruffled feelings on the Hill with his colleagues, but he didn't with the White House

crowd and he didn't with Tommy Corcoran and I. I don't think he did it with the New Dealers. The New Dealers were very much his allies. And I'm thinking of all the liberals, all the way.

F: Now Maury Maverick had set up a liberal group about that time, a study group. Did Johnson have any participation at all in that, or was that a little bit too liberal for him?

R: I think Johnson probably lived in both worlds, would be my guess. I can't remember. Maury was a great friend of mine. In fact, his wife was here--

F: Yes, I saw her Sunday.

R: --at Drew Pearson's [funeral], yes, and we were talking about Maury. I just can't remember. I don't think he got over with whatever they called Maury's Young Turks at that time, because the more they went, the more extreme they got, which was somewhat Maury's temperament.

F: Right.

R: But he always had good relations with Maury. He was very careful. He had them with Rayburn, he had them with Maury, he had them with the chairman of the navy committee then. He was very good at this.

F: And worked with the conservatives, too, I would trust?

R: And I would think worked with the conservatives, not really letting the left hand know what the right hand did. But I remember once some years later I was trying to push him into a position, I can't even remember what it was, it was one of those things you remember somehow. It was outside of my house, and since I remember the house it had to be within the last nineteen years. And I was

pushing him into some position which I thought was more liberal. He must have been a senator by then. He wanted to go, and he said, "Now look, don't forget our friend Maury. I can go so far in Texas." And he said, "Maury forgot that and he is not here." He said, "I don't plan to forget that."

F: He lived to a certain extent by the dictum that the first duty of a politician is stay in office.

R: To survive, yes, and he probably made that point. He said, "There's nothing more useless than a dead liberal." I can't remember what the issue was, but it was a valid comment--"You are trying to push me into a position which might be good nationally, and might be good for me for other things, but my people won't take it." Now, I don't think he was this explicit, but this is what we were talking about, and it was true. Maury went too far and just got knocked off.

F: Right. Pappy O'Daniel in 1941 made the charge that Johnson was Washington's candidate and Washington was really underwriting the campaign and so on. Would you say that is reasonably valid?

R: Yes, I would. I don't know so much about the money end of it, but the projects--Roosevelt said, "Whatever Johnson wants in terms of projects to be announced, whatever the government can do, they will do it." And I assume--I probably knew at the time, I don't know--I guess a lot of labor union money went in to help Johnson at that time. We wanted to win it, and almost did.

F: Yes. He may have. Who knows?

R: In fact, I think we did.

F: Who knows?

R: Johnson told me, and he may have told you, that Roosevelt kidded the hell out of him about that. I know when he came back he went in to see him. As you remember, when he went to bed on Saturday night he was ahead by five thousand votes, and when he woke up Sunday he was behind five thousand votes. He said the one thing Roosevelt said was, "Lyndon, up in New York the first thing they taught us was to sit on the ballot boxes."

So I can remember that time he came back in a very black mood, said his wife had been abused and attacked, and he didn't think he would ever run again, that this was too much and no man should be subjected to this sort of thing and he had just had enough politics. This was the first time I had gone through this business with him. I believed him that time. I never believed him again.

F: So that you heard this as a recurring dirge.

R: This has always been a dirge, yes.

F: The result was that you could join the "Johnson-told-me club" on the March 31, 1968 speech, but you didn't believe him.

R: Have you read Teddy White's book?

F: Yes.

R: Well, as I look back at the conversation, I told Teddy it was something I had been trying to cure for years. The last book, I mean. When we walked out I was afraid of the effect of Johnson's speech on Teddy. I said, "Look, Teddy, this sounds like valedictory, but it just isn't. I have seen this fellow like this before. The whole

thing was, "I have had it. This is what I have accomplished. Now I'm going to go home." I didn't pay a bit of attention to it.

F: Well, I think practically everyone I have talked to about this has felt that somewhere in the previous six months, if they had seen Johnson in that period, he had said something like, "I'm going to get out of this. A man doesn't have to take this kind of thing," but you dismissed it as the mood of the moment.

R: And he had been saying this all of his life. As I say, this time as a congressman running for the Senate. I think it was a sincere move at the time. This was in many ways a very moody, complicated man, as I don't have to tell you. But it started way back running against Pappy.

F: Did you begin to suspect that he might develop into more than just another effective congressman?

R: Yes, I think for some reason this fellow really shone, I mean as a congressman. There were a lot of colorful, young fellows in New Deal days in the Congress and outside the Congress. This fellow was a great operator. He stood out. And as I look back I think more in that period that besides the drive and the energy and the doing favors, which he did for everybody, there was a great deal of charm in this man. This is the kind of man people like to have around. This is why when you think of all the things you hear today, you are so amazed, you know. It is the inside charm, which he always has had but has never shown outside. This was a very bright man, and he was a very charming man, and he was a very ambitious

man. You put them all together, you knew he was going a long way.

F: Could you actually, other than just a generality, be halfway specific in the fact that Johnson was trying not to get too closely identified as a sort of dyed-in-the-wool southerner?

R: I think he always had this complex that the South was discriminated against, the southerners and the Texans, whether it was by the intellectuals or by the rest of the country. Quite early he pointed out--and this is a valid point and Rayburn used to make it--that there is not a hell of a lot of difference between Texans and Montanans.

I always loved Rayburn's story--I was a great Rayburn man, as you see, that picture there. I remember he said to me--I thought I was a well-educated man, but we were sitting somewhere and Rayburn had listed all the Montana congressmen, he knew them all, and so forth, and he said, "Jim, you know, your state reminds me of a great deal of Texas." He said, "I think in about another generation you will be as civilized as we are." This came to me as a shock. I thought we were more civilized.

F: The Johnson-Rayburn intimacy was something that developed. It didn't start out full tilt.

R: No.

F: Rayburn didn't adopt him?

R: No, this is something Johnson created, just as in this sense Roosevelt didn't adopt him. I think most of these things Johnson

did, but quite quickly he was Rayburn's man. I can remember one incident, and this was one of the few times that--we often disagreed, Johnson and I, but he never lost his temper at me. I lost mine at him occasionally. But I can remember as a young congressman our group going up I think to have breakfast with Rayburn when he lived up in the Anchorage--you know, these apartment houses up here on Connecticut. I've forgotten what it was--right above Dupont Circle--Johnson, as a young congressman, was pressing Rayburn to put another young Texas congressman on a particular committee in which there was a vacancy. He brought it right up at breakfast, and I said, in all the wisdom of my years, "My God, Mr. Speaker, you are getting an awful lot of criticism already by putting Texans every place." And the Speaker said, "That's right. I just can't put a Texan on there." When we walked out Johnson quietly said, "Of course, the whole purpose of this breakfast was for me to get that man on. You made a great contribution." I realized it all had been a plan, that he had set the thing up. But he didn't blow his top; in effect, he was saying, "Rowe, you really fouled up this deal for me."

But he did all sorts of things for Rayburn. In a way, although Rayburn always liked the New Dealers and used them, I mean Rayburn was always--the great experts are on tap, not on top. But he liked the young lawyers, Corcoran, Cohen, that crowd, and I was one of their juniors. But I think Johnson went out of his way to make sure Rayburn saw a lot of them. As he got better acquainted with the younger people, he went under the Corcoran-Cohen level. He got down

below, where there are lawyers all over the government, mostly because they could help him, but also because he liked them, and there was an age business, too.

F: I was going to say, you and Johnson are roughly the same age, certainly the same generation.

R: That's right.

F: Corcoran, Cohen and so forth are a political generation preceding you.

R: The eight years--

F: Did that make any difference as far as Johnson was concerned? Did he in a sense--

R: I think he would be blunter and more frank with me, for instance, than he would with Corcoran. We were the same age and, as you know yourself--how old are you?

F: I am fifty-two.

R: As you know, when you are younger, eight years is a big gap. As you get older it is not so important.

F: Right.

R: So I think we were very good friends, as I look back on that period. We used to have lunch fairly often. He would help me, I would help him.

F: Never any small talk, always business?

R: Well, except when he was telling political stories. The small talk was great. He always had a good Texas story that was in point.

F: Did he ever go to anything like baseball games?

R: They would bore him to death. His only real interest, I admit, was politics. Government and politics. I keep remembering with amusement when Kennedy was president and he was vice president, my wife is a ball fan and she someway or another knew the ticket man, so we always used to get tickets along third base. From third base you can see the president's box. I guess it was 1961, the first game, when Johnson and Kennedy were sitting next to each other. I was amused. I am a curious politico, and I had glasses but I was watching Johnson talk incessantly to Kennedy, never bothered to look at the ball field all the time, and Kennedy was trying to watch the game. A year later they had Dave Powers sitting in between them. I always thought Kennedy was making sure that Johnson--

F: Shock absorber.

R: That's right. Johnson wasn't going to sit next to him that time.

He really wasn't interested in anything that I could ever see except politics and manuevers and statutes and legislation. I mean, in the best sense of the word. But I am a little amazed--I haven't been to the Ranch very much, but I am a little amazed at how interested he is in the Ranch. And I think this is a genuine interest.

F: Yes.

R: But it is the only other thing I have ever seen him to be interested in.

F: Were you involved at all in his campaign for the Senate in 1948? Did people up here encourage him to make the race?

R: 1948.

F: 1948 is when he got that eighty-seven votes majority.

R: Somewhat. We were out of the government then. I think Tommy and I raised some money for him and, let me see, 1948, how much help he got out of the Truman crowd, I am not sure. I have never been a Truman man.

F: Truman was making a race of his own in 1948.

R: That's right.

F: Nullifying any help he could have given, to a great extent. In fact, he was fighting for his life.

R: He was pretty unpopular.

F: Right.

R: Of course, Johnson won that one in the primary, didn't he?

F: Yes.

R: In those days, if you won the primary you were in, you know. That was against who--Coke Stevenson?

F: Coke Stevenson.

R: Yes. I can't think of anything. We helped somewhat in that law case that came afterwards, a typical Johnson operation. I can remember, I think, on a Sunday, going over to Thurman Arnold, Abe Fortas' office, and there must have been thirty-five lawyers there, all friends of Johnson's. I'm sure he called us all up and said get in this thing. Finally it got sensible and Abe Fortas and Hugh Cox, who's now down at Covington and Burling, were the two people who really did the work, seeing [Hugo] Black and getting it stayed. Two damn good lawyers.

F: He just wanted a small legal assembly?

R: Well, it is a little bit that he didn't trust anybody completely. And he knew every good lawyer in town. There was the New Deal crowd, they were all--that was the damndest mess I ever saw. Then he had [Alvin] Wirtz down in Texas.

F: Yes. There's another one who had been like a daddy to him.

R: That's right. Well, I think Wirtz was in many ways.

F: Yes, I think more than probably anyone else.

R: He had a quarrel with Wirtz about something, I can't remember what it was.

But to get back to your original question, I strayed all over the lot. I think Roosevelt during the war years probably saw a lot of him. The kind of a job he did for Roosevelt, he saved Walter Winchell's life once. Did you ever hear about this?

F: No.

R: You remember Walter Winchell once was a great columnist and he was very useful to the New Deal.

F: Great navy protagonist, too.

R: That's right. He'd chew up everybody. Well, the navy itself for some reason decided that Winchell was giving them bad publicity. He was floating around as lieutenant commander somewhere or other, and he went down to South America. Then he shot some guns off, he did something, I don't know what it was, but the navy had just had it, and the chairman of the committee decided to get rid of him,

and the navy--Knox wanted to get rid of him. Who was the chairman of the committee then?

F: I don't know.

R: He was an old timer. My heavens, he was a power here for years.

F: That wasn't Vinson?

R: Vinson, yes, Vinson. Carl Vinson was chairman and Johnson was just a minor fellow. Well, Ernest Cuneo, who was around here somewhere, was Winchell's lawyer and really was the conduit by which we fed all our propaganda to Winchell, because I don't think Winchell really understood it. He said, "They are just going to crucify Walter down there." So Roosevelt said to me, "You tell Lyndon just to go down there and protect that fellow." This was an awful spot to put Johnson on. Here was the chairman of his committee and he was in his usual fashion cultivating him and taking him over and in fact later did, because he gave him all those sub-committees, as you remember, as a congressman. And here were orders from the President to protect Winchell. Well, Johnson went down, he did a brilliant job, and finally Vinson started looking at him. He told me this later--finally he said, "Mr. Chairman, I am afraid I am making it too clear I'm not working for you today, I'm working for the President." He saved his neck. Winchell was always grateful. I would guess if you went back and looked at the columns from then on, the great hero was this brilliant young congressman, Lyndon Johnson. He also took care to make sure that Winchell knew he saved him.

F: Yes. You came back, went into private practice so that you don't have the political leverage you had when you went out of the navy. Did Mr. Johnson keep in touch with you?

R: Pretty much. He did sporadically. You often wondered if he had some kind of a mental filing system in the back of his head. He ran for the Senate and then became, at least from the point of view from where the New Dealers sat, more conservative. Then when he came to the Senate, he started cultivating the powerhouses and they were conservative. You know, this is Dick Russell and the rest of them. There was a great deal of criticism among the New Dealers to which he was incredibly sensitive. One of his best friends at the time was Ganson Purcell, who was head of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Mrs. Purcell once made a remark on a vote of Johnson's, it may have been Congress but I think it was the Senate. "My, I wish I could have my political contribution back." Johnson heard that, it wasn't made to him, and he never forgave the Purcells. In fact one of the last times I talked with Johnson when he was president he said, "Do you think I can get Ganson Purcell to do"--a certain job. I said, "Mr. President, Ganson died about six months ago." He said, "I didn't know that."

There was criticism. He got very sensitive, as he always is to criticism. The Purcell thing was an example. The New Dealers started slashing at him. The Joe Rauhs started really working him over. He got quite sensitive and it seems to me in a way he started cutting off, I don't think for Texas political reasons,

these people he had known quite well. But he had a habit, it seems to me looking back, about every six months of calling and saying come out to dinner. I used to do it. I didn't see any rift in our relationship in this period at all.

F: Where did you really re-enter his orbit?

R: Well, he would ask for advice on various things, I think, and on various statutes or something he was doing as a leader; he'd get me down, or Tommy Corcoran down.

F: Was he fairly careful when legislation was being drafted to see that the legal bases were touched?

R: I think if it was important enough, he would go back to the old New Dealers, the ones he thought were good lawyers, and check. Well, there's Fortas, certain things, Dean Acheson, S.E.C. legislation.

F: Varied with the man's strength.

R: He would watch it very carefully. Yes, I used to do various odd things for him. But I didn't really get active again until 1956 after his heart attack.

I tell a story about that which I think is typical of Johnson. He got back to work and he said, "I wish you would come down and help me." I said, "I will give you a day a week." He said, "I don't mean that." I said, "I can't leave my law practice."

(Interruption)

F: He'd asked you to--

R: Come down.

F: Come down, yes.

R: "Well," I said, "no, I can't do that. I can't afford it. I have got three children, I have got this problem and that problem. If I get horsing around"--which I had done in the 1952 campaign--"I would lose a client or two, but I am willing to give you part-time." He said, "No, that won't do." So, through a process of negotiation I said, "I will give you two days or maybe three," and that wouldn't do it. Then I found to my amazement the first thing that happens, Corcoran was in here saying, "You just can't do this to Lyndon Johnson." I said, "What do you mean I can't do it?" He said, "Well, never mind about the clients. We will hold the law firm." I said, "I don't want to do it full-time." And then somebody else would meet me on the street and say, "Why aren't you helping Lyndon? How can you let him down?" Then one night my wife turned on me. You know, this was no accident. He was working on everybody to do it.

F: Everywhere he went--

R: Everywhere I went, and every business. Finally I said, "Well, no, I can't do it." He said, "Don't worry about the clients. I'll call them." I was afraid he would. So finally, I can remember and this is a true story, it was practically our last meeting on the subject, he wept. You know, "I am going to die," and so forth, and "You are an old friend," and of course, "You don't care," and "It's typically selfish." Whatever he was saying, it was a great performance. So finally I said, "Oh, goddamn it, all right." He straightened up and said, "All right, just remember I make the decisions, you don't."

As soon as he got what he wanted. So I stayed down there to the end of the session.

F: Officially, what were you?

R: I was counsel to the Democratic Policy Committee. Gerry Siegel was there. Have you talked to Gerry?

F: Not yet.

R: You should. He can do better on Johnson on the Hill than anybody. He is a pretty objective fellow. Harry McPherson was not there at the time, I think. No, I think Harry came in after me, and then Sol Horowitz was there.

F: We've seen him.

R: I would think in your Senate period Siegel would probably be the most important of any of them. He is bright. He is not political, but he is bright.

And I worked out of that base. I was there only for a few months.

F: Did he really approve of the Policy Committee?

R: You mean approve of it as an instrument?

F: Yes.

R: Well, I think he just regarded it as an appendage of his own. We used to have a lunch meeting once a week. I remember pressing--I was, more or less by habit by this time, sort of doctrinaire liberal. I thought he ought to have more active liberals on. He had [Thomas C.] Hennings on, and Hennings was a very practical liberal. Hennings was one of the great men of this country if he could have left that

bottle alone. He had old Jim Murray, my senior senator, on, but he was not a man to stand up. And he had the nabobs on, Russell and Kerr and those people. But, in general, he used it for his own purposes, I think is the way to put it. It was not a consensus, the way I think Mansfield uses it, or let's say the Republicans use it, other leaders.

F: Did you get the feeling then he was looking over his shoulder at John Kennedy?

R: No, I don't. This is 1956. I don't think anybody took Kennedy seriously. He had been a playboy congressman, and he'd come in in 1952 as a senator. And I don't think Kennedy had any ambitions of his own, except a little for the vice presidency. Until after that famous race, I don't think anybody regarded Kennedy really as even vice presidential caliber.

F: Did Johnson ever really show any enthusiasm for Adlai Stevenson in either the 1952 or 1956 campaigns?

R: None at all.

F: There's various talk on that.

R: No. I was a Stevenson man. I was working on him constantly. He really didn't like Adlai, and I think he tried to like him. He couldn't.

F: Was it mutual? Or was Stevenson too busy to notice?

R: I couldn't tell. Adlai, I think with me, he knew I was a friend of Johnson's, he may have been careful. But he was always deferential in the sense that this man is the leader, and he is a great figure

in the party, and so forth. And some of Adlai's people would cuss him out. Bill Wirtz or Bill Blair or someone, who were also friends of mine. But Adlai was always, I would say, meticulously correct. Johnson was always trying to like him and just not being able to make it. He knew I liked Adlai, so he was a little more careful about the remarks he made, but not too careful.

F: Just two different planes.

R: Yes, and they just never met. In 1952 let's see, Johnson wanted to be vice president, I guess. I was supporting Harriman first. I'm told that Rayburn tried to get the vice presidency for Johnson. I don't know about that, just something he tried.

After the Senate business I said to him, "You need some help out there, and I'm willing to go." He didn't ask me to go, always except for this one incident of the pressure on the Senate thing. He said, "All right, I do need some help," and his whole attitude through that 1956 thing was unusual. I told him quite early he wasn't going anyplace, and he knew this, for the presidency. And I was always pushing him to take Texas into the Stevenson column, and just couldn't get him over there. I was dealing with Finnegan always in seeing him; I mean Jim Finnegan who was the manager. When we got to Chicago there was a moment when he could control the convention. If you go back and look at the headlines, you'll find this is true, because--this is 1956 I am talking about--there was a balance of power. The Michigan and Reuther liberals were holding away from him, and the southerners were holding away from him, except

North Carolina. And Finnegan's job was to break one or the other. Finnegan was the best manager I have ever seen, and I include Farley and [Edward] Flynn, who I worked with in the Roosevelt days.

F: I've seen Jim Farley.

R: Finnegan was telling Reuther and the Michigan crowd that, "If I'm going to Johnson and these Texans, then they will have the say if you fellows don't break over." He was also over saying the same thing to us, "If you want the balance of power to go away, well, go ahead." I never could understand why Johnson didn't. It was obviously wrapped up in Texas and his base of power and the Eisenhower feeling down there. And it may have been just a dislike for Adlai. But Finnegan and Adlai came to see Johnson, sitting in the room when he had the balance of power. I was with him, just the two of us were in the room, just before Harriman, who Truman was backing, came in to see him.

This is the kind of incident that I would not like to get out until after Harriman leaves this earth. But Harriman was saying, "Now, Lyndon, you don't have to worry about me on this civil rights business." He said, "All I have to do to keep my people happy is to make a few speeches. I will make the speech, but I'm not going to do anything about it." And a little more talk and left, and Johnson looked at me and said, "You liberals, you're great!"

Then they tell the other story, how Johnson had come back into--Eisenhower had called him back, Suez or Hungary, I can't remember which was going on. They had all gone back and seen

Eisenhower. Then Johnson persuaded Dick Russell to come out with him. Well, Johnson, although he was running for the presidency--I mean there are people wandering around with buttons "Love that Lyndon"--he was not seeing a delegate. He wouldn't lift a hand. If any delegate wanted to come to see him, he would see him, but he was not out speaking. So it was a very odd performance. He was neither fish nor fowl. But Stevenson and Finnegan came in and asked for support. It was right down at the end, and Johnson for some reason--this is interesting when you look back on all the civil rights business--said, "I have got to have something that will not hurt my people too much." I remember this because of a later Johnson story, which I'll tell you in a minute. Adlai said, "Well, I would like to think about it," and Finnegan just said, "No." Johnson said, "What did you say?" And Finnegan said, "I said no. We are not going to give you anything." And Johnson said, "Why not?" Finnegan said, "Look, all we are asking for"--this is a draft of the platform--"is a shotgun." Then he said, "If we don't give this crowd in the North that, they are going to use machine guns, and you'd better take it. But the answer to you is no. And Johnson said, "All right." And they left.

I later heard him telling the conversation to Dick Russell, who was not in the room; I was. He said, "Well, you know, Dick, I was really making some real progress with Adlai. I took my knife and held it right against him. All of a sudden I felt some steel in my ribs and I looked around and Finnegan had a knife in my ribs." He

laughed, and Russell said, "Finnegan is a pro," and that was it.

But he didn't move and as time went on, and I told him I had some good spies out. I remember waking him at five in the morning and saying, "Reuther is going to break over. Soapy Williams was holding out, and Reuther has told the Stevenson people it will take him a day"--this is most accurate information, I later found out--"to break Soapy." Johnson said, "I don't believe it." I said, "It is absolutely true, it is going to happen. Reuther has given his pledge. You have approximately six hours to deliver Texas and to control the convention." Johnson thought about it and said, "I can't do it." Why he couldn't do this I don't know. But it was back, obviously, if you remember Texas went solidly for Eisenhower in those days, and I guess he was worrying about his base. I know Connally I have always suspected voted for Eisenhower, not Stevenson. John is a great friend of mine. We have always got along very well. We don't agree on anything. But I have always heard that Connally was an Eisenhower man.

F: If you'd ask me to guess--

R: That's right. Well, it is something you have to guess.

F: Right.

R: Now I can't even remember what your original question was at this point. Oh, on the Stevenson relationship.

F: Yes.

R: I never could get. . . In 1956 I became the scheduler and I ran the advance men for Stevenson, which means in effect that Finnegan and

I decided where he would go when he would speak. They were very anxious to get Johnson and Rayburn to have a dinner, a big meeting down in Texas. Johnson ducked this all the time. He said, "I'll do that if we can have a money-raising dinner." We said, "No, we can't." It was too late in the game. And Johnson ducked this. For some reason we never went to Texas. It was made clear by both Rayburn and Johnson that maybe really we shouldn't. In the meanwhile, of course, Stevenson had made it clear that he was for federal ownership of the--

F: Tidelands.

R: Tidelands, which I might add this firm was counsel for the federal ownership. I might also add we advised Stevenson to be quiet about that, but he didn't. Bill--who was that great old fellow who was a friend of Rayburn's? He was a great liberal in Texas and then he worked for the oil people for about three weeks--

F: Out of Dallas?

R: Bill--

F: I will tell you in a minute.

R: Well, he is dead now. But he got hold of Adlai some place and got him to come out publicly in Texas for the federal ownership. He was a great friend of Rayburn's and Johnson always liked him, too. But he was--Bill Kittrell.

F: Bill Kittrell, right.

R: He got Adlai some place and flew on a plane between Houston and Dallas and got Adlai to step out of the plane and announce he was

for federal control. That finished it. That may have been the reason why Johnson and Rayburn wouldn't do it. It was never a good relationship.

F: Was there ever any thought--of course, it was the 1956 convention. The vice president's nomination was thrown open, for what reasons I don't know, which you may.

R: I will give you a very interesting piece of history on that. Before it was thrown open, Russell and Corcoran told Johnson he ought to be vice president. And I had been making so much effort to point out several things to Johnson. One, that I didn't think he had a chance at the nomination, which he agreed. I wrote him a memo on this somewhere. I can remember one of the things I said was you must be careful in this relationship, you don't get yourself where Dick Russell got himself in 1952. What happened was that I wrote the memo and handed it to Johnson as he flew back to see Eisenhower. I remember Earle Clements was on the plane. I left it under his door, because he was getting up early. My point was Dick Russell had been a great leader, a great influence for good, but after he ran for the presidency and got knocked off as a southerner in 1952, I always thought that Dick became a much narrower southerner and was parochial, and I was making the point, don't get yourself in that position, don't get out front, you can't make it, and you'll become an embittered southerner like Dick Russell. Johnson came back and said, "I agree with everything you said in the memo. Earle Clements has read it and thinks it is excellent. Dick Russell has read it and thinks you are

right. I said, "My God, you showed that to Russell?" He said, "Sure!"

But after Stevenson had the nomination, they coked Johnson up about the thing so Johnson said, "Go on and talk to Adlai. Tell him I want it." I was the liaison on this, so I went in to where everyone was churning around at Adlai and I said to Finnegan, "I have got to talk with you and Adlai right away." So they came out of the room and I said, "I have got a candidate for the vice presidency and he says he wants it." Adlai made a very flowery, attractive speech about Johnson right then, right off the top of his head, saying, "I don't know how this is coming out." This is before there was any announcement of the open business. He said, "I am a great admirer of Lyndon Johnson. I don't know what I am going to do. I want you to go back and tell Johnson he is one of the great men,"and so forth. Finnegan just sort of sat there and said something like you can knock me off. You know, he was startled about it. I went back, and I think within an hour--my time was a little confusing here--Johnson said, "Go back and tell Stevenson and Finnegan that no Texan wants to be vice president. Not only Johnson but Rayburn, no Texan wants to be vice president. The only other thing is I want to be in the meeting where the vice president is selected. I don't want to be humiliated by not being called into the meeting."

Now, the practice had been, right after the man had been elected for president[ial nominee], to get some of the leaders and sit down and talk. I am sure Johnson would have been called in, but he wanted to make damn sure he was invited. Well, I ran back in and gave the

message. I said, "I don't understand what I am doing, gentlemen, but I now have a new message." About two hours later it was announced they were throwing it open. I don't know why Johnson changed his mind or who talked to him, or whether he had heard it was going to be thrown open or what. It was Phil Graham's idea, by the way, to throw it open. All politicians thought it was absolute madness.

That about takes care of the relationship. The only other thing I can say about the relationship between Adlai and Johnson is, after Humphrey was licked in West Virginia--I was for Humphrey in 1960--and Johnson would not run, said he would not run, Johnson called me after West Virginia and said, "What are the possibilities? Are any left?" I said, "There is only one possibility: stop Kennedy. I don't think he can be stopped. If he won Wisconsin and West Virginia, he couldn't be. I don't think he can. But the only possibility is for Adlai to give the signal that he is available. It doesn't have to be an obvious signal. You just put Bill Blair in the headquarters or someone like that, and you have got to back him." Johnson said, "Well, Adlai is coming in to see me in about three days, and I will talk with him." And he did talk with him along that line, and Adlai called me and I made the same speech, and Adlai said, "Well, I have given a commitment I won't do it, so I won't do it." I don't know if you held a gun to Johnson's head who would he have backed, Kennedy or Adlai. I don't know.

F: In 1956 in the vice presidential nomination race, why did Johnson go with Kennedy instead of Kefauver?

R: There was first of all--

F: Did that give him any trouble with the Texas delegation?

R: No. I was in the caucus, so I remember that pretty well. I think Johnson made the decision. I think almost alone. He had to handle it. He had Wright Patman, he had Rayburn and so forth. But I remember him saying, "What can we do?" I said, "First ballot"--I think that was my contribution--"why don't you vote for Clements just as a holding operation, just to see where this is going?" I didn't realize how well the Kennedy people had done their work with the machines. And Kefauver had great strength. It was--the short answer to your question--definitely anti-Kefauver. Southerners didn't like Kefauver; they thought he was a traitor, to the region not to his class. And Johnson quite early decided he would push the delegation to Humphrey. He and Humphrey talked. I was there in the corridor somewhere, and he said, "If I can get this delegation for you, I'm going to get it." This was his plan, to go to Clements first and see what could be coked up as time went on. The first thing that happened was Clements said, "I have made a deal with Gore that I am not going to go, Gore is going to go." So he had to switch to Gore. In the first ballot, if you look back, Texas did vote for Gore, with Johnson trying to manuever all the time to Humphrey. He had Rayburn make a speech about these fine young men; there was Kennedy, there was Kefauver, there was Humphrey. The caucus was between the first and second round. They had all served under Rayburn. He knew them all well and he said very good things about them. But by this time

it was clear that Humphrey wasn't going to move, Humphrey just didn't get going. So the choice was between Kennedy and Kefauver. Johnson said, "I think we've just got to go to Kennedy," and he got Rayburn to make a speech about these fine young men. There was something wrong from the point of view of Texas with all of them, but we had to think nationally and so forth. As Rayburn went on more and more, you sort of got the impression the old man was putting the hand on Kennedy. Then Johnson, who arranged this--God knows how he did it--then had, what do you call the Latin Americans down there, a Mexican get up, one of the delegates, and say, "I must speak for John Kennedy," and so forth. Finally you could see all the leaders moving except Wright Patman, who fought right down to the end for Kefauver. They all moved toward Kennedy, and we came out of the caucus knowing that Texas was going to vote Kennedy.

F: This was without enthusiasm, it was just the practical thing.

R: Well, it was the problem that Kennedy was a Catholic, and they didn't like that, and he was a New Englander and so forth. I think it was just the lesser evil. I can remember Johnson moving over. Right across the aisle from Texans were the Oklahomans, and Johnson moved over to Governor Gary who was still voting for Gore or someone at this point. He didn't know him, but he started putting the heat right on him. He said, "I just think we are going to go for Kennedy. I don't know why you can't go for Kennedy." Gary looked at him and said, "My God, man, have you lost your mind? A Catholic and a fellow

with a farm vote like he's got!" So Oklahoma went for Gore, but Texas went for Kennedy. And Johnson did that.

F: Now, philosophically Johnson would have been closer to Kefauver than the other southerners. Was there no warmth between the two men?

R: No, never was.

F: Mutual.

R: I don't know enough about Kefauver. I guess it was mutual, yes. Kefauver was over with Paul Douglas and the way over crowd.

F: Kennedy really didn't look on him as a member of the club?

R: Yes, and he sort of offended Johnson, and I think he was irresponsible. Johnson never could forgive a senator who wasn't there. Kefauver was always out making speeches. He was always cross that Humphrey was out making speeches. It was an active dislike.

Johnson has a great story which you may have heard about--I have forgotten my Texas geography--he was traveling with Kefauver down to Waco from where he would travel?

F: Probably from Austin.

R: Campaigning, maybe it was from Austin.

F: Or Dallas.

R: But he came down the valley. He tells this story, and if you ever get him--do you still interview Johnson?

F: Once in a while.

R: Yes. Ask him about this. It is one of the best Johnson stories, about, by God, you never could figure out what the hell Kefauver

had that he didn't have. This had puzzled him all his life. He said he just knew when he, Johnson, walked in the room, he said, "I can see everybody put his hand on their wallet because they are afraid I'm going to take it. I am a Texas gambler. What the hell do they trust this bird for?" But he tells the story, and you have to know the towns like Waxahachie and so forth, campaigning down through that country with Kefauver. Kept them an hour waiting and then they started, and in every Texas town Kefauver made some fool mistake. Like he said, "The greatest senator we ever have had from Texas had been Sam Rayburn." Or he would say, "Lyndon Johnson is a great speaker," and he would say, "Wixahoochie." He went all through that, every town, he said, insulting my people, and they all just looked at him with the greatest admiration. He simply ended up down there, he was a great success. Then he said, "I remember we went to bed in Waco, and in the middle of the night I woke up." And he said, "I woke up Bird, and I said, 'Bird, I finally figured out what it was.' I told her that everybody looked at Kefauver and said, 'He is running for vice president. By God, if he can be vice president, I can.'"

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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