

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 14, 1977

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE SMATHERS

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Senator Smathers' office, Washington, D.C.

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S: With respect to that heart attack, which was the first one, as I remember, Johnson had not been feeling well. Those of us who were close to him and knew him and admired him, of course, knew that he was the kind of fellow who thrived on accolades--not unlike the rest of us, but he was a little more so. Anyway, he had been complaining of problems in his chest. We were all a little nervous about it and we talked about it, because this guy, of course, was an indefatigable worker. He worked from early morning until late at night. I don't quite remember whether this was the year that I became acting whip. I think that was the year that Earle Clements was defeated. Do you remember what year that was?

G: That would have been 1956, I think [1955].

S: 1956, a year later. While Clements was campaigning, I was acting as the whip, and I guess that's why they recognized me from this article. Anyway, the day that he had the heart attack was on a Saturday. I remember that rather well. He had been working hard, and I had been pinch-hitting for Earle Clements, who was down in Kentucky. We finally got through about one o'clock. Johnson had been back in his office. He said, "Come on, go down with me and spend the night at George Brown's house down in Virginia." So I said, "All right."

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We started down, and on the way he complained very much about the fact that he had these pains in his chest. I kept saying, "Oh, Lyndon, it's just because you have been eating so much," and so on. He wanted to go by and see Senator [Walter] George of Georgia, who at that point was in the hospital. We stopped by to see Senator George and visited with him briefly. Then we went on down to Virginia, and I kept saying, "What you ought to do is take some bicarbonate soda." I don't know how I came up with that, but in any event: "That will make you belch, and maybe you'll feel better." So we stopped at a little store and bought some bicarbonate soda, got a paper cup, got some water and stirred it up, and he drank it.

We went on down to George Brown's house. As I recollect, I think Lady Bird was already there. In any event, Clint Anderson, Senator Anderson of New Mexico, was there. Johnson began to feel better with the ministrations of Lady Bird. We played dominoes for quite some time, which is a game he loved to play, an old Texas courthouse game. I didn't know how to play it very well and neither did Clint Anderson, so Johnson was beating us all pretty good, and Lady Bird was holding her own with him.

We went to bed, and I remember early the next morning he was up and walking out in the back of George Brown's house with Lady Bird. He came back in, and Clint Anderson and I were sitting in the study reading the Sunday paper. Clint was lying down on the couch. Johnson said to Clint, "Clint, you've had a heart attack, haven't you?" Clint Anderson had, and he said, "Yes." Johnson said to him, "Well, let me ask you a question: Do you have a pain up your arm?" And he grabbed hold of his left arm. Clint looked up at him and said, "Yes, that's one of the signs." He said, "Well, do you have this crushing pain?" And he began to feel all through here. He said, "Yes." "And do you

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have this kind of a dizzy spell?" He said, "Yes." [Johnson] said, "Does it feel like you want to throw up and faint all at the same time?" Clint Anderson said, "Yes." With that, Johnson said, "Well, for God sakes, get up off that couch and let me lie down, because I'm having a heart attack." With that, Clint Anderson got up and Johnson lay down.

Clint said, "We'd better call a doctor, because this fellow is really, I think, having a heart attack." I went in and saw Lady Bird and told her that I thought Lyndon was sick and that we really ought to get a doctor. I got busy looking in the telephone book. George Brown was not there. The only people that were at the house were just Lady Bird and Lyndon and Clint Anderson and myself, except for the servants who worked there in the house.

In any event, I remember well that we finally got a doctor. I told him where we were and what the problem was. He said, "Well, we'd better arrange to get an ambulance right away." I said, "Why don't you do that, but you come on over." So the doctor came on over in about ten minutes. He walked in and saw Lyndon lying on the couch. He took his pulse and listened to him, and he went back out to his car and got his black bag; I remember that very well. Then he came back in and sat down beside Lyndon, and he pulled out a needle that looked like it had to be two foot long. Johnson said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I'm going to give you a shot of nitroglycerin," or something like that. Johnson said, "Wait a minute, will that knock me out?" The doctor said, "It might, but you need this right away. In the meantime, you call the Navy Medical Center"--he said that to Lady Bird or to me, I forget who, just anybody that was standing around--"and tell them that Senator Johnson is on his way to the naval hospital and they had better have somebody there ready to go and take him into the emergency room."

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I recollect that Lyndon Johnson said, "No, don't give it to me right now. There are several things I want to do." He turned to Lady Bird, and he said, "Lady Bird, here's my money." He reached in his pocket and got out his money, handed it to her and gave her a few instructions. He said to me, "Earle Clements will not be back for so many days; here's what I want you to do." And he started listing about fifteen bills that he wanted to get passed while he was in the hospital. He said, "I don't know how long I'll be there, but I want you to take charge and get this done. Just as soon as you can get in touch with me, you do it; as soon as I can get in touch with you, I'll do it." He gave all these instructions for about fifteen minutes while the doctor was there waiting with the needle out. Finally, after he had instructed everybody--he told Clint Anderson several things he wanted him to do--after those instructions had been given, the doctor, I remember, had him take off his shirt and his undershirt, and he gave him a shot right up there just inside of his left shoulder blade on the front. Then he told him that he wanted him to lie down, of course he was lying down, but to stay real still and to be that he stayed there until the ambulance got there.

Well, in about thirty minutes an ambulance got there. I don't know where it came from, but one was there. Johnson got in, Lady Bird got in with him, and off they went. Nobody saw Johnson again as far as I know--nobody from the Senate saw him--except doctors and Lady Bird; of course, she naturally saw him and the family saw him, but I don't think anybody from the Senate saw him for about another thirty-five or forty days. I can't remember how long he was in there, but in any event, he was really very seriously ill. That's what I recollect about that particular heart attack.

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G: Was there an earlier afternoon a week or so before when you were riding in the car with him when he had chest pains?

S: He was complaining of chest pains. You refreshed my memory a little on it; it's gotten a little hazy on me. He was a big eater, and he ate ravenously. He just sort of put his head down close to the table and sort of raked the food off. I must say that while he was the greatest majority leader the Senate ever had or probably ever will have, he did not have the best table manners I ever saw. In any event, he would eat enormously. The way he would eat, you just knew that he had to have a lot of gas and air in his belly.

He was complaining during the period of time because he was actually taken to the hospital. For about six weeks before that, he was complaining a great deal [that] he did not feel good, and he was having these pains. What was happening was I would ride home from the Senate with him, and then he would pick me up in the morning on the way to work. Then he would call me three or four times during the night to see that I was thinking about getting something done, some business, some work in the Senate. He was really quite some kind of guy to work for. Anyway, during this period of time he did have considerable pain, but nobody really paid much attention to it, believing that it was more a type of gastritis rather than any sort of a heart condition. At this point he was considerably overweight, and he used to eat a lot, and he drank a good deal of whiskey at that particular time in his life.

I remember after he had this attack. Some people who have heart conditions, the doctors don't want you to drink any. In his particular attack--I think he had an angina of some kind--they prescribed whiskey. I remember the first trip that he made after he got out of the hospital. He and Lady Bird and I went down to Palm Beach. He stayed at the

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Breakers Hotel, I believe, or one of those hotels. On the way down he was really a frightened man, the first time I had ever seen Lyndon Johnson show any kind of fear of anything. He was a frightened man. He must have drunk a fifth of Johnny Walker Black Label Whiskey, and it didn't affect him the least bit, because he was just so nervous and so worried about it.

He went on down. I stayed with him there in Palm Beach I think overnight, and then I went on down to Miami and came back up two or three days later and hung around. He recuperated there for about, I think, four or five days, maybe a week. I don't remember now just exactly how long that was. In any event, we came on back. Let's see, that was 1956[?].

G: There's a story, I believe, that he wanted to go to the horse races and that you had decided that it would excite him too much.

S: Yes, and we almost had a fight of some kind, an argument as I recollect, a bad argument. He got very mad at me that afternoon. I distinctly remember that as you talk about that. He wanted to go somewhere like that, to the horse races, and Lady Bird didn't want him to go. She said to me, "George, don't let him go." I said, "Well, Lady Bird, I'll do [what I can]." She had already talked to him, tried to keep him from going. I got out there and said, "You're not going." He said, "Are you going to keep me from going?" I said, "I'm going to keep you from going if I have to do it physically," or something like that. He said, "I don't know that you're man enough to do it." I said, "Well, I don't know, but I'm going to try."

Lady Bird came to my rescue about that time. She said, "Lyndon, for God sakes, you've got to look after yourself. The doctors don't want you to go out and do this sort of

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thing," to get all excited, whooping and hollering around like he would want to do at a horse race. I do [recall], now that you remember that. I remember he got *very* mad at me about that, but he didn't go, as I recollect it. We stopped him from going, and he pouted for about a day and a half and hardly would speak to me. We all loved him and understood him, and this was just the way he was.

G: Why was he such an effective majority leader?

S: The reason he was was because he never let anything happen that he didn't know what the outcome was going to be before it happened. In other words, he worked harder than anybody else in terms of finding out where the votes were. He knew those senators like he knew his own children. He knew their weaknesses; he knew their foibles; he knew their strengths. He knew those men. He would not let us come to a vote unless he pretty well knew what the vote was going to be. Just as soon as he knew what the vote was going to be, why then, he was very anxious to get to a vote. He was effective because he had a personal relationship with every one of those senators. There were just none of them that he didn't know on a first-hand basis and that he didn't cultivate. He knew what different ones liked to do, and he made it possible for them to do that. He had done favors for most every one of them. Lyndon was the kind of a fellow that if he was going to do you a favor, he let you know that it was a favor. He didn't mind saying, "I'm going to put you on a committee. I know you want to be on it, but I want you to remember who put you on that committee."

I think that's why he was really so effective. He worked at it. He put in one hundred per cent of his energy and his life and everything else in to that job. If it hadn't been for him, I don't believe the Eisenhower Administration would have been able to

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operate nearly as effectively or as well as they did. Lyndon Johnson really ran the country in those days, in my judgment.

G: He seemed to give them more support than the Republicans, really.

S: He had a great relationship with Eisenhower. Bill Knowland was a wonderful man and an honorable and brave man in every respect, but he was not a charismatic-type fellow at all. He could not charm anybody, but Johnson could. Eisenhower was very much impressed with Lyndon Johnson, and I'm sure must have stayed in almost constant contact with him. I know I would be with Johnson a lot when President Eisenhower would call him. Johnson was continually advising him about what he ought to do and how he ought to do it.

During those days, as I've said, in my own mind Lyndon Johnson pretty well ran the country because we had a big majority. When Eisenhower first came in we only had a majority of one senator. But Lyndon appointed me as chairman of the Senatorial Reelection Committee, and I served in that capacity for six years under Johnson from 1952 to 1958. By 1956 we had increased the majority to something like twenty-seven, which was almost a mistake. We had almost too many Democrats. Actually, it ran much better, and the Congress really runs better in my judgment, when the two parties are relatively close. Then the parties stay together; you keep the Democrats from fighting with each other when they only have a one or two [seat] majority. In any event, we had a big majority after the 1956 election.

So Johnson really controlled the Congress. Every afternoon at five o'clock he would go over and have a drink with Sam Rayburn and make me or somebody go along with him. I didn't drink very much in those days. In any event, I remember going over



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there and watching them drink a bourbon. Then at least two or three nights a week Johnson would go and eat supper with Sam Rayburn, and I or somebody would go along with him. We'd go up here on Connecticut Avenue. Sam Rayburn had a particular place here around the corner. I forget what street it's on, but I could lead you to it now. It was a restaurant then, and Sam Rayburn loved to eat there. We'd meet there and eat supper.

G: Before he had his heart attack there was a lot of speculation that he might run for president in 1956. Did you have any insight into this?

S: No. Was that the year that [Stuart] Symington ran? I think it was 1956. Yes, because in 1960 Kennedy and Johnson ran. That's right.

G: Symington ran in 1960, too.

S: Did he?

G: Yes. Liz Carpenter reported at the time that there was a reporter from Orlando, Florida, who wrote a--

S: Martin Anderson. Martin Anderson was a good friend of mine and a great friend of Lyndon's and supported me very strong. What had happened was that Lyndon had gone down there with me to the dedication of the new causeway that went from the mainland over to what later came to be known as the Kennedy Spacecraft Center, which Johnson subsequently, when he got to be vice president, moved out of Florida over to Houston. While all of us were sitting around twiddling our thumbs, he took it right away from us. I always wondered why, after he got to be vice president, they created a committee called the Space and Aeronautics Committee and he had himself, the Vice President, appointed chairman of it. After we lost that space center it dawned on me what had happened, which was a typical Johnson ploy.

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At this point, Martin Anderson wanted some kind of a road put across there. We went down there, and Martin was so impressed. He and Lyndon knew a fellow named Marsh.

G: Charlie Marsh.

S: Charlie Marsh. They hugged and loved each other up. You know how Johnson would do when he liked some fellow. He'd throw his arms around him and give him a big bear hug. Martin was from Texas, so they just fell all over each other and had a great time. Martin ran and owned the Orlando paper; he had gotten it with Charlie Marsh. Martin came out with a front-page editorial that Lyndon Johnson ought to be the next president. I think that probably got that whole thing started.

G: Were you involved in that at all?

S: In 1956 not particularly, no. In 1956, that was when the convention was in Chicago. I didn't think Johnson was really running. I think Johnson was smart enough to know that nobody was going to beat Eisenhower. I nominated Jack Kennedy for vice president at that convention, and that's about the only thing that I did. I don't remember seeing Johnson at that convention. I know he was there, but we were not thrown together very much during that convention.

G: Let me ask you about that tax bill in 1955. You were on the Finance Committee then. Do you remember that proposal that he made?

S: Frankly, as you refresh my memory on it, it comes back to me that he did have that proposal.

G: Let me show you the outline here on 1955.

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S: The answer is I remember this. I don't remember it well, but I do remember that Johnson had a meeting. He did not like this Republican bill, and some of the others of us did not like it. Bob Kerr was a very, very forceful and brilliant senator. Russell Long, who is now chairman, went on that committee three months before he put me on that committee, and Long is today chairman. That's the reason I'm no longer in the Senate. I could see that I wasn't going to ever be chairman of that committee. Russell Long is my dear, close, personal friend. I went to him and told him, "I don't want anything to happen to you, and I don't want to keep wishing that something does happen to you so that I can be chairman. So I'm going to retire from the Senate just to get out, because I'll never chairman." So Long is chairman. Anyway, Long is a bright, wonderful fellow.

Of course, when you look at these names, [J. Allen] Frear and Clements, these were strong Johnson people. I suspect that Bob Kerr helped put that package together, but I do remember that Johnson came out with it. And we did not like [Hubert] Humphrey's bill--Secretary Humphrey's bill. I see that it lost here, that Harry Byrd and Senator George voted against him, and we lost it on a pretty close vote, 44-50.

G: Reportedly that was the only party vote that the Democrats lost that year. If you'll turn over to page three, there was a reciprocal trade bill that you probably worked with him on, too.

S: Yes, I remember the Reciprocal Trade Bill.

G: It was a three-year extension with flexible tariffs the President could implement.

S: Yes. This was one of Johnson's miracle-type operations where he got Senator [George] Malone, who was a Republican from out west somewhere--I've forgotten, Nevada, I think--[to go along with him]. He was a pretty hard-headed guy and very difficult. He

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would filibuster by himself for four or five days at a time. I see Johnson got him to agree to have a vote at the end of the third day. And then again Johnson, as it says here, "ramrodded it through with only thirteen opposed." Johnson was definitely a believer in low tariffs and free trade. That was a democratic principle with him that he always stuck to.

G: But he had to deal with a lot of protectionists there, like Harry Byrd.

S: Lots of them. Harry Byrd, of course, was more conservative and a type of protectionist. In any event, this was the kind of thing that Johnson knew where the votes were, he knew how to get it through, and, of course, he had the Republicans and Eisenhower working for him.

G: Do you recall where he came up with the idea of flexible tariff supports there?

S: I don't recall where he came up with that, but I'm sure that it made sense. One thing about Johnson, he was not what you would call a particularly learned or brilliant man in a scholarly sense, but when it came to just the practical operations of anything Johnson was a genius, a common-sense genius. He was particularly a genius when it came to reading people and knowing just about what they could take and what they couldn't take.

G: Can you give me an example of how he was able to work this on someone?

S: The answer is I really can't except that we had filibusters while Johnson was [majority] leader. We had a series of filibusters, and Johnson was a veritable genius at knowing just about how long it would be possible to keep guys there while they were mad, aggrieved, irritated beyond belief. They would come and say, "I'm going to leave. I'm going to go home, and to hell with you, Johnson," and so on. Johnson would say, "No, I want you to stay," or he would have his whip do it. A couple of times I happened to be the

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unfortunate fellow who had to sit out there and take all that abuse. He knew just about how long those people would stand it before they would just actually rebel. Of course, if enough of them walked out, he wouldn't have been able to get a quorum; if the majority just decided to leave and say, "To hell with it." But he knew very well, as I say, his people. He knew what they would take and how long he could pursue it.

G: Do you recall occasions when he would persuade you to compromise or vote for a particular bill or support an amendment that he was interested in?

S: I know that he did it all the time. The only thing that he never got me to vote for was statehood for Hawaii and Alaska. He never did forgive me for that. Johnson was a funny fellow. If you disagreed with him he would get mad at you and stay mad at you. He would pout just like a girl. He would be mad at you for a couple of weeks, and you'd know it.

G: It's been reported that when asked why you voted for Medicare--much later, of course--you said, "Because Lyndon Johnson asked me to." Is there a story behind that?

S: That I voted for Medicare?

G: Yes.

S: Well, I don't remember that the reason that I voted for Medicare finally . . . Russell Long and I were in exactly the same position. Neither one of us at the outset believed that we ought to have Medicare. We thought it would get out of hand and that it would be better to try to run it through insurance companies and doctors and hopefully keep it in hand. We were afraid that the government would let it go. Of course, we were pictured as inhumane and all that sort of thing. Actually, we kept it out of the bill for quite some time.

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I'm sure Johnson talked to me about it, because we talked every day at great length about something. So I'm sure he talked to me about it. I do recall that when Russell Long and I both voted, it was our votes that finally got it out. We changed on that vote. Both Long and I were very close to Johnson. We both liked Johnson and Johnson liked us. If anybody did persuade us to change our mind--but as I recollect, I went to Russell or he came to me. We just thought, "You know, this is going to pass anyway. We're not going to be able to design it like we would like to design it." We wanted a bill. We did not want to stop a bill, but we wanted a bill that was designed along the lines that we thought would be practical, [would] be more [a] private-enterprise-type of a bill.

It became quite evident as we sat at conference with the House on this thing that it was going to pass sooner or later. It was just a case of time and whether it was going to be that day or the next day or that session or possibly the next session, but it wasn't far away. We decided at that particular point to vote for the best bill we could get at that point. Johnson, I'm sure, had something to do with convincing us that we ought to vote for that particular bill.

G: Do you remember any details of his mastery of parliamentary procedure in the Senate, his ever using this?

S: Let me put it this way: Dick Russell was the acknowledged parliamentarian in the Senate. He knew more about it than anybody else. Johnson would defer to Dick on most parliamentary issues. Now, when there was a difference between the two of them--which of course there always was on the matter of civil rights and things of that nature, even

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though they were intimate friends--Dick knew more about it than anybody, and the parliamentarian would even listen to Russell.

Now, I never thought of Lyndon Johnson as particularly a great parliamentarian; I didn't think that. To me that wasn't his bag. He knew what the parliamentarian was going to do. This was to me the genius of Lyndon Johnson. He wouldn't raise a point of order if he didn't know he could be sustained. He would suggest the absence of a quorum, and he would spend forty-five minutes talking with the parliamentarian first as to what was going to be his rule before he would make a point of order. This was his method of operation. He knew in advance pretty well all the time what was going to happen.

G: Did you get any insight into his role in the Joe McCarthy censure?

S: No. The answer is I really know very little about that.

G: How about the Minimum Wage Bill in 1955? Here was the case where it was raised from seventy-five cents to a dollar.

S: Yes. Well, I've even forgotten how I voted on it, so I don't know. I think that most all Democrats voted for it. We tried to exclude--and [they] still ought to be excluded, you know--college students, injured people, that sort of thing, so that an employer would not throw them on what amounted to welfare in those days where they could not get a job below the minimum wage. I think Johnson accepted that, and I think that's why the bill finally went through. There were a lot of caveats in it. It couldn't apply to certain small businesses who were unable, obviously, [to pay minimum wage], the country "ma and pa" grocery stores and things like that. We eliminated all that from the coverage of the minimum wage.

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G: You were a close friend of both President Kennedy and President Johnson. I'm wondering if, through either one of these friendships, you had any insight into the situation in 1960 at the convention when LBJ got the vice presidential nomination.

S: Somebody asked me that the other day. As I remember it, and I remember it very well, Kennedy had wanted to run in Florida and Johnson had wanted to run, so I ran. To keep them from dividing the state and to keep them from having a head-on fight, I ran as favorite son in Florida that year. So I was the favorite son from Florida at the 1960 convention. Kennedy had wanted to run and actually had a poll in his desk which he showed me after the deadline had passed. He had asked me to come over to his office the morning that was the final day of filing. He said, "I want you to withdraw and get out of the race, because I'm going to go into Florida and win." I said, "I want to tell you something. I don't think that you can, really." He said, "I can win if you will get out." I said, "Well, I don't think that you and Johnson ought to divide the state and tear up the Democratic Party with a fight in Florida." In addition to that, none of the congressional delegation wanted to have to choose between those two.

In any event, after the deadline had passed at twelve o'clock, Kennedy opened his drawer and said, "I want to show you something." And he had a poll. He was the first guy to make big use of polls, and he had a poll there which showed that I would have beaten him had he run in Florida. That's about the only reason he didn't run, which wasn't very flattering to me in one sense.

G: Did you talk to Senator Johnson about this, too?



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S: I told Johnson that I was going to be favorite son and that he just wouldn't have to think about it. Of course, he kind of wanted me to be favorite son, because that way he knew he had a chance to get some of the delegates and he didn't have to run in the state. I don't know how this meshes with what these other fellows remember, but the day after Kennedy was nominated we were in the Biltmore Hotel and I got a call to come to Johnson's room. As I recollect it, Lady Bird was there, Sam Rayburn was there, John Connally was there, Bob Kerr was there, I was there, and maybe somebody else. I don't remember. But there it was just that group. Maybe Earle Clements was there. I had been, all this period of time, very close to Kennedy. As I told you, I nominated him in 1956, I had been to his wedding, and all this sort of thing. We had traveled around together and we were very close personal friends, although I didn't agree with his philosophy as much as I did with Johnson's philosophy.

In any event, we talked. Johnson said he'd been offered the vice presidency by Kennedy, and what did we think of it. I recollect [that] every one of us at that meeting said that he shouldn't take it. When we left--I guess we did not leave in a body, as I recollect--I went on to my room. Pretty soon I was called up to Kennedy's room. We had all agreed that we advised Johnson not to take it, because that was, we felt, a step down for him. As majority leader, Kennedy would have to deal with him. This is where Kennedy was smart. Kennedy did *not* want to have to deal with Johnson as the leader of the Congress, because that's what he was, the House *and* the Senate. Kennedy also figured that he could help him, and correctly so, get some southern votes which Kennedy, being a Catholic and from Massachusetts, didn't know how well he would do. So Kennedy was very, very smart about that.

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I went upstairs back to my own quarters, and I hadn't been there but about five or ten minutes when I got a call to go to the Kennedy's quarters. I went up there. Bobby Kennedy was there, and a fellow named Grant Stockdale whom Kennedy later appointed ambassador to Ireland, who used to work for me but he had gone to work for Kennedy. Bobby, I remember, met me at the door. I didn't particularly care for Bobby. I liked Jack and voted for Jack, but Bobby was not my cup of tea. Jack said to me, "We asked Lyndon to be vice president. Do you think he's going to take it?" I said, "Not a chance. Not a chance. We just had a meeting down in his quarters, and he's not going to take it." Jack loved the sunshine. He was sitting on a little balcony trying to get some sun. He always loved to sit in the sun. He and I were sitting on a little balcony. Bobby came out and said, "Johnson's going to take it." I said, "Bobby, you're crazier than hell. He's not going to take it." He said, "I know he's going to take it. He's on his way over to the television room now to announce it." I said, "No, I can't believe it." We sat there, and he said, "Well, turn the television set on." We waited about thirty minutes. Down in the bottom of the Biltmore Hotel they had a little television room. Sure enough, here came the announcement. Lyndon Johnson said, "I have decided to accept and become the vice president[ial] nominee[ia]." So then they sent for Kennedy immediately, and Kennedy went on down.

G: What was President Kennedy's reaction when he saw that on the set?

S: He was jubilant.

G: JFK was?

S: JFK, not Bobby.

G: What was Bobby's reaction?

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- S: Bobby didn't really like Lyndon at all. It was mutual. I mean, I don't think any of Johnson's type people liked Bobby.
- G: Is there anything else in your association with Lyndon Johnson that you would like to talk about?
- S: Well, not particularly.
- G: [We're] focusing largely on the Senate years, now. If there's anything else from that period . . .
- S: The typical story of Johnson--Johnson was so funny. I'll tell you one story, and then I'll stop, because it's getting late.

While Johnson was vice president he moved the offices all around. He had an office right off the Senate floor. It's a little different situation than it was later, or ever prior to that. Johnson was a fellow who believed in appropriating whatever rooms he felt were necessary to operate it, and he liked a lot of room. He had a lot of rooms.

In any event, this one day I had up a fellow from Florida that wanted to meet Johnson. His name was L. K. Edwards, and he was a great big, robust cattleman from Ocala, Florida. He raised Angus cattle. I brought him in, and I called Juanita Roberts. I said, "Juanita, I would like to take this fellow in and introduce him to the Vice President." She said, "Okay." She called in to the Vice President, and he said, "Come on in." So I went on in, and, oh, he liked this guy. This fellow from Florida had on a big cowboy hat, and he was a typical good old country boy--a very, very wealthy fellow. Johnson stood up, and they hugged, and Johnson gave him a pen and a picture, autographed everything he had, and just loved him up like you couldn't believe. "Write me a letter and come down to my ranch." You raise those little bitty cattle down there. I've got some big cattle.

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Come out to my place and see some real honest-to-God big cattle." He loved to tease you; a great teaser.

Anyway, the meeting went off great. L. K. and I walked out, and boy, L. K. was five miles high; he had just met the greatest man that ever was. About twenty minutes later, I bumped into another fellow from Florida, a good friend of mine, who said, "I've got a fellow that I'd appreciate you taking in there." This guy was one of the rich guys of America. I didn't know it. His name is John MacArthur. He is alive today, so be careful with this story. Maybe don't use it. John MacArthur isn't going to live too much longer, I don't think.

We went in, and I had never met the fellow. Radle, the fellow who brought him, was one of my big supporters. He said, "This is one of the richest guys in America. He wants to meet the Vice President." So I called poor Juanita Roberts or Mary or whoever was there, and they said okay, and he said, "Okay, bring him in." They didn't ask who it was.

So I brought him in, and Johnson took a look at him. When Johnson didn't like anybody, he let you know it without ever saying anything. He would put his hand under his chin and sort of screw his face all up, drop his head down, and just sort of glare at you. He wouldn't say anything, just look--maybe nod his head a little bit, just look right at you and never say anything. Well, I wondered what happened. Here we were, and five minutes before he was loving up this [other] guy. Mr. MacArthur got the message pretty quick. He said, "Obviously the Vice President's very busy. Gentlemen, I appreciate the chance to meet the Vice President, and so on, but we had better go. He's busy."

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We got up, and we started out. As I got about halfway out, he said, "George"--Lyndon Johnson did--"come here a minute. Come back here a minute." So I walked back, and he said, "Don't you ever bring a son of a bitch like that in here again." I said, "What are you talking about? Who are you talking about?" He said, "That guy that you brought in here. Don't you know that we ran him out of Texas?" I said, "I never *heard* of this guy before." He said, "He owns this big insurance company in Chicago now, but he was down there and he was a no good son of a bitch." Anyway, that's just the way he was. He said, "Don't ever do that again. If you do, you're on my list."

G: That's a great story.

S: But that was something. That was Johnson.

G: You had an opportunity to observe his relationship with Richard Nixon when Nixon was vice president. They'd come down to Florida, wouldn't they, at the same time?

S: Yes.

G: How did they get along?

S: They would get along very well.

G: Did they? Do you think they understood each other?

S: Yes. Johnson understood him; I don't know how well he understood Johnson. Actually, during the campaign of 1968, when Johnson did not run again, I was one of the guys who had Johnson and Nixon talk with each other during that campaign about the problem going on in Vietnam. They worked through me on that. I mean, they may have worked through other people, too. I'm sure they did. I recall very well riding down the Florida Turnpike with my son Bruce, who is now secretary of state of Florida. He was just a youngster at that time. I remember the highway patrol stopped me and said, "The

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President wants to talk to you." So I pulled into one of those islands there and got him on the phone. He wanted me to get word to Nixon that Nixon had said some things that he shouldn't have said.

G: Did he indicate what they were?

S: I'd have to think about that a little bit. Anyway, I recall that he was pretty put out about it. He didn't want Nixon to say anything like that again. Nixon liked Johnson and Johnson liked him. Johnson said, "If he doesn't stop saying what he's saying now, I'm going to really open up on him. He shouldn't be saying these things." I got [Bebe] Rebozo, and Rebozo got hold of Nixon and told me where to call Nixon. I called Nixon and told him that. He said, "Could I talk to Johnson?" I said, "Yes, here's where he is," and I gave him Johnson's number down in Texas. Apparently they talked after that.

Then I got called by Johnson again to get hold of Nixon during that campaign.

G: Was it with regard to Vietnam?

S: With regard again to a couple of things he was saying.

G: That's fascinating. Well, Senator, I certainly do thank you for your time.

S: All right, sir.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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