INTERVIEWEE: JOHN L. SWEENEY

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

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M: This is an interview with Mr. John L. Sweeney, in his office at the Department of Transportation, in Washington D.C., on November 14, 1968, at seven minutes until four in the afternoon. My name is David McComb.

Now, Mr. Sweeney, to take up your background, I have some information on it from what you have given me and what I was able to get elsewhere--that you were born in Chicago in 1928, educated at Michigan State, got a B.A. degree in 1951. What was that B.A. in?

S: History.

M: Splendid. Also, you got an M.A. at Michigan State in 1954. Is that also history?

S: History, that's right.

M: You've kind of gone afield, haven't you?

S: Very much so. It doesn't show up on there, but I completed the course work for the Ph.D. in Political Science but never--got sucked away into politics and never returned for the dissertation or the language, etc. Instead, [I] went, as you will see there, to go and get a law degree at George Washington.

M: You did finish a law degree, according to my data in 1963, got your LL.B.

S: Yes, that's right.

M: Apparently you had an early interest in politics, as far as your work record is concerned. I have down here that you started off as an assistant to Governor [G. Mennen] Williams of Michigan in 1954.

Is that right?

S: Right.

M: And you worked for him until, what, 1959?

S: '59, that's right.

M: Then you worked as a legislative assistant for Senator [Patrick V.] McNamara from 1959 to 1961.

S: Yes.

M: Then you went to the U.S. Senate as a staff director for the Labor subcommittee. Is that correct?

S: Right.

M: And you worked there from 1961 to 1963. From that point as an assistant to the Undersecretary of Commerce and also apparently at the same time a director of the President's Appalachian Regional Commision.

S: Yes, that's right. Frank Roosevelt was--the main reason I went to work for Frank was because one of the assignments he had been given by President Kennedy was to be chairman of the Appalachian Regional Commission. While I held the title of assistant to him, my primary work was in supervising the staff work that developed the Appalachian program.

M: While at this point in time, I might ask you, up to this point did you have any connection with Lyndon Johnson?

S: Yes. Pat McNamara was, even though somewhat junior in status in the Senate, nevertheless by the fortuitous set of circumstances that resulted in the selection of the right committees when he came in in '54 had already advanced to a considerable position of seniority on several of the major committees. As Pat's legislative assistant,

why, this brought us into constant contact with the Majority Leader at the time. As you will probably recall, Pat was in that wing of the Democratic party in the Senate which was not necessarily overwhelmingly adulatory about the Majority Leader's performance and his accomplishments. So the contact generally was one I think, that would best be described as most times acrimonious, but nevertheless rather constant contact.

M: Do you have any impressions of Lyndon Johnson from that period?

S: I have a very personal one which was very different from my boss's. My boss considered him to be a wheeling, dealing Texan, sharpie who had very little feel for substance, mostly for form and style of the kind of politics that we in Michigan didn't care too much for. I myself had a rather profound respect for the manner in which all kinds of things were done in the Senate during that period of time, facing a Republican president, facing a terribly divided party--which we obviously had. There were just countless occasions when in working with him and even with his colleague Bobby Baker at the time that I found many things being done that were little perceived by the press.

M: Can you give me an example?

S: Yes, I will give you a number. As you will recall, the period from '58 to '60 was a tenuous one in our economy. One of the big thrusts of the liberal wing of the Democratic party was the development of a more responsive unemployment comp system. We had a number of recessions. People were exhausting their normal benefits under unemployment comp. The Majority Leader at the time was among those who thought that it was hopeless to seek a complete reform of

unemployment comp, and that what should be done was the establishment of a system of temporary unemployment compensation that would provide what amounted to a bonus. Each time there was a serious recession that reached a certain point of unemployment you would trigger this temporary unemployment compensation which would in effect be a supplemental to normal eligibility. We won that thing twice in the course of the Eisenhower years over the vigorous opposition of the President and the vigorous opposition of his party in the Senate and a number of southern Democrats. I personally am convinced that the reason it was done was the very skillful way in which the Majority Leader garnered those crucial votes. We always won it by one or two votes every time it came up. He was always voting right and always managed to get enough of his colleagues from the South and the border states to cast what was a throwaway vote for them at just the right moment needed to push it over.

The second area that I dealt with when I was there with Pat was education. There were just countless times when in the Senate we passed bill after bill that was to provide federal aid to education at all levels. They always went down to a crashing defeat in the House once they left the Senate. But here again in every single instance it was, I think, the parliamentary skill of Lyndon Johnson that was mostly responsible for these things coming across.

My boss never could see it that way. Johnson was always forced to be less than ecstatic about these in his public statements, but it was maneuvering that was being done behind the scenes that always resulted in the crucial votes being cast. I became a great fan of this to the point where I was probably the only person from Michigan

that was absolutely overjoyed when he was given the vice presidential nomination by Jack Kennedy. That kind of skill was going to serve Kennedy well. I doubt that it was used as well as it could have been.

M: In garnering these votes, what kind of techniques did he use? Did it vary between man to man?

S: Absolutely. I am convinced that in many instances it was just the traditional pork-barreling type of arrangement where an exchange for past favors, which he obviously had the power to confer time and time again, he would occasionally call those chits in. In others I think it was just the power of persuasion. He obviously was owed very little by southern Democrats. On the contrary it was the reverse. He, I think, was indebted to them far more. But on time and time again he would manage to get, just out of the sake of friendship, loyalty, southern cohesiveness--whatever it might be--a vote from Everett Jordan from North Carolina or a vote from Alan Bible from Nevada, where it was obviously not in their self-interest to vote that way. On the contrary, it was the wrong vote for them to vast.

M: The literature about Johnson is full of reference to what is called the 'Johnson treatment,' which can be kind of rough at times, in which he would come up to a man and stand very close to him and poke him with his finger and that sort of thing. Is that true?

S: I have seen that physical performance, but the words I always heard coming out were soft and sibilant and never went with what might be described as the tough approach. He would do that with Pat McNamara. And when he would be tapping Pat on the chest he would always be saying, "And do you know what that son of a bitch told

me next?" and be reciting really an anecdote. It might look from the gallery like he was saying, "If you don't vote like this, Pat McNamara, you're through." There was none of that. At least I never heard of it. I heard him do it to Pat and I heard him do it to a number of other Senators, and it always struck me that it was a very soft personal approach. That isn't the way he sometimes talked to some of his staff, which I have also overheard with the same gestures. That was considerably harsher, considerably to the point where it convinced me that that would be one man in the world that I'd never want to work for.

M: I've heard this, and I've read about this. It has somewhat intrigued me that apparently with his close staff, the White House staff that he works with all the time, he can be very rough with them, in his language. He loses his temper. And yet beyond that level, at a level where you are, or even with the secretaries, he is much more gentle.

S: I believe so.

M: Is this true?

S: Absolutely. I believe that to a fare-thee-well. I think really it does characterize a whole lot of men in executive positions, that the people closest to them who they regard as their personal staff, who they are paying directly, etc., that there is a different relationship than those whom you have obviously recruited on a different basis to the post that they hold. And I sure never heard it done to anybody that could be regarded as a peer in the Senate. The close fixed stare and the arm around the shoulder and the tapping of the chest, as I said, every time I saw it being done was also

being accompanied by this very, very sonorous presentation that I don't think would offend anyone.

M: He also has the reputation for crudity in his language. I have wondered whether he is really more crude than any other man, or whether he just gets quoted a lot. Any opinion about that?

S: Yes. I'd say--now, there, I really haven't had that kind of exposure. Other than these times when I have been at a senator's side, I have been with him only in other circumstances maybe four or five times--all of them associated with Appalachia. There isn't any question he's a man of great earthiness. He's never said anything that has offended me as being crude. As a matter of fact, most of the time that I have heard him be earthy it struck me as a rather delightful way to present something and a rather colorful way, filled with an imagery that is passing out of our lexicon in most places. So it has never bothered me.

M: It wasn't an offensive tone?

S: No, not at all, I have heard a number of people tell me what he has told them that does strike me as being crude.

I'm trying to recall a story that I just heard about three weeks ago that the person who told it to me swore that he got directly from the President. I mean, it was told to him by the President. It was about what it was like to be President, like a Texas bitch in heat, and the punch line to it, which I can't exactly recall, obviously was a monumental piece of crudity. But I have never personally heard him tell a story like that. I must say I do place credence in the guy who told it to me. I don't believe he would make it up or that he hadn't heard it directly, but I just have never

about the caliche soil and how he never dreamed he would have a chance to do something about it and now that he did, by God, he was going to use it. I suspect that is Johnson.

In a way, you will have to accept one thing in this interview, and that is that I am a pure unadulterated fan of Lyndon Johnson, so it's hard for me to be very critical.

M: What I am driving at is why are you such a fan?

S: I guess because I consider my own profession to be that of politics, not government--that I consider that the art of politics, the ability to achieve compromise out of the tremendous diversity that characterize any situation I have ever seen, that art is one which I have just the totally highest respect for. I think if it's not practiced and not practiced well we end up as a nation of antagonists and dissidents. I just think he's the past master of it. The difficulty with him, when he moved into the presidency, was that he obviously didn't have the new technique for building of massive public support for your programs. He just lacks that tremendous skill of communication that others have.

M: Is this compromise that you are talking about when he becomes president--this new compromise, still--is this something that is needed by all presidents to be a success or what?

S: I believe it's going to become more so in this tremendous age of mass communication. You know, everything is just so open to public scrutiny today. No matter where you turn, anybody has got access to the tube. Anybody who can document within any degree of reasonableness and logic a point of view is going to get access to the public to express it. It's being done constantly day in and

personally in the room when that has taken place.

M: Do you have any thoughts about Johnson as Majority Leader and his relationship with Eisenhower? Did he have to work closely with Eisenhower?

S: I have assumed always that on anything other than domestic matters, on international matters, the actions that he undertook in the Senate and the international arena were those taken almost always in conjunction with what the President himself was after and that the very few times that they ended up on opposite sides of the fence were ones which I think would naturally be expected. On domestic matters I can't believe there was any real cooperation with the President but so many times we were always, as a result of Johnson's leadership, ending up in a diametrically opposed position, whether it was housing or medical care or education, labor. Time and time again it was Johnson's leadership that managed to carry what was essentially a Democratic position through the Senate--particularly after '58, you know, when he had that big majority to deal with.

M: Can you classify a man like that as liberal or conservative?

S: I can very easily. I am absolutely convinced that he is a total liberal, as a matter of fact, probably more so than he ought to have been in some instances in his presidency. The only trouble with him in the Senate was that he always managed to mask this liberalism behind what he knew, I'm sure, was the secret of getting anything passed--which was to sound somewhat conservative. I think he probably expressed himself exactly what he meant in that marvelous first inaugural--I shouldn't say first inaugural, the second State of the Union speech, the first one after he was elected in '64 when he talked

out. It seems to me more and more the role of the President is going to become the fellow who synthesizes this tremendous diversity and then has the capacity to get on that same tube and document with logic and reasonableness his own synthesis, so that that becomes the national consensus, the national compromise. The President who just doesn't have that capacity--it's just not going to work.

M: You would say he had this capacity as Majority Leader?

S: Where most of the work is done outside this tremendous public scrutiny.

M: And on a person to person basis, working with samll groups, he was a master.

S: That has become to trite that I hate to say it, but he is the most convincing man I know in a private setting. He is just, you know, he has the power of persuasiveness in a private setting that I think is just absolutely mesmerizing to most people. He is obviously one of the hardest working men that has ever held office in this country of any kind. His capacity for detail and fact is just enormous--voracious. As I said, this earthiness with which he presents it, which obviously can't go on the tube, has to be shaded and clouded. And he comes across as a stiff, somewhat pompous gent, or he comes across as a cornball. And both of those are rather difficult images to bring to a national leadership position.

M: So one of his major problems then as President was communication with the public?

S: Overwhelmingly so. I believe that had he had that, all of the press criticism about him being a wheeler-dealer, conniver, less than anxious to deal with the truth at all times would have been just

dissipated. Because if he could have gotten on that screen and brought his own arguments and logic which he can do so well in private to the public, that the press criticism I think would have been largely mitigated, because every President has had that. Even Franklin Roosevelt had a bad press at a whole slug of the times of his existence, but, God, what he could do with that radio. It was, just, you know, enormous.

M: Is this just the converse of the way it was with Kennedy, that Kennedy came over well on television and in private--

S: Yes, absolutely, in private, disaster. I don't mean a disaster, but he was, first of all, ill at ease with men of power. He was really never quite sure of himself when he was talking with them. I was in several meetings with him when--I knew him better as a Senator because, of course, he occupied a key position on this Labor committee when I was doing all my work. In private sessions there--I remember in the famous rump session of 1960 when he and Johnson came back from Los Angeles and tried to get this legislation through, one of the bills that was up then was the minimum wage bill. He was dealing at that time as the chairman of the subcommittee involved, which was a Labor subcommittee, he was dealing with his counterpart in the House which was Graham Barden this tough old arch-conservative from North Carolina. Well, Barden treated him like an absolute baby, even as the nominee of the party, which he was at that time. When twice during those conferences Lyndon Johnson walked into the room to see if he could be of any help, and the difference between the way Barden talked to Johnson and the way he talked to Kennedy was the difference between night and day. Barden respected Johnson.

Johnson knew how to talk to Barden. It was a jovial, back-slapping kind of sons-of-the-soil-together bit. Barden just responded and bloomed with it. It never worked itself out, but, you know, it was a fascinating difference in personalities, the way men handled each other individually as against the--that Jack Kennedy could walk out of that room and get on television and obviously make his case and make Barden look like an idiot, and that was the mass of difference.

M: Are there any other major faults of Lyndon Johnson other than this lack of ability to communicate with the public? How about as an administrator.

S: Oh, God, I think he's probably the very best administrator the federal government's ever seen. It is perfectly apparent no President has ever been on top of the details in his government like that man has.

M: Have you had occasion to deal with him as President where this has come out?

S: Yes, on a number of occasions, mostly, as I said, with Appalachia. On rare occasion, here in the Department of Transportation. Because in Appalachia I was in charge. Here obviously the Secretary is in charge, and most of the conversations that flow back and forth between the President and the Department are conducted through the Secretary. But I do know personally that on three or four occasions memoranda that I have prepared and have been intended for presidential consumption had been consumed, have been retained, have been understood, and have been applied in future conversations in which I sat in on.

I remember sending him a memo prior to the time that we had the

first meeting of the Appalachian governors together with the President, and as near as I know he had obviously had it memorized just about because key facts, key insights that I tried to put in that memorandum he had and virtually regurgitated to these governors to indicate his familiarity with the program. Whether he had forgotten the next day or not I don't have the foggiest idea, but he was absolutely superb in that kind of performance.

Obviously, he has no difficulty whatsoever making a decision. At least I don't think so. Somebody else may think that, but at no time have I ever--I remember sitting down with him once along with Governor Scranton and Kermit Gordon, when Kermit was Budget director, and just a tiny little knotty problem. Scranton was insisting on more money for coal land reclamation in Pennsylvania, and I was advising the President that he could not take money from another part of the Appalachian program and put in into Bill Scrantons's because that would infuriate the rest of the governors, most of whom were Democrats. And he thought for just about two minutes and he turned to Kermit Gordon and he said, "Kermit, can you get me fifteen million dollars elsewhere?"

Kermit said, "Well, Mr. President, if you say you want fifteen million dollars elsewhere, we will obviously get it for you."

He turned to Bill Scranton and said, "Bill, I will tell you what. We are going to put fifteen million dollars into your program. We don't want you to really do a lot of talking about this until I've got a chance to put it through myself. But that's the way we will work it out. Is that satisfactory?" And of course Scranton, just beaming, walked out of there about three feet off the ground.

And that kind of performance always astonishes me. It obviously was just exactly the right decision. I am absolutely certain that it wasn't taken away from anything else. It was part of the pot of money which always floats around the Budget Bureau which is not quite committed, which is really there for that kind of, you know, contingency, and away they went. But, yes, I think he is a sensational administrator.

M: To back up a little bit and take up your work with Appalachia and the problems therein, when did you get in on that?

S: At the time that the Appalachian governors sought a meeting with Jack Kennedy in the spring of '63, and when they met he agreed to establish a commission which would seek to look at the problems and perhaps recommend solutions that would be then implemented by both the federal and state governments. He appointed Frank Roosevelt as his representative to sit with all the governors in devising these solutions. It was at that stage that I was hired to be the staff director of that operation. We had about one hundred people in various departments of the federal government as the staff. We spent from June '63 until November '63 developing the solutions. We then took them around the region, made a swing of it to each state capitol explaining what we thought the answers would be in getting the unanimous support. The last meeting we had was in Hagerstown on November 22, 1963, when John Kennedy was shot.

We came back to Washington and obviously lived through that horrendous transition period. All of us, of course, wondered as all self-interested bureaucrats will whether the new President would have an equal interest in this program. When it was decided to proceed as if he would, we published the report which was then

withheld until he could accept it because in the report to the President we drafted a bill that would follow it.

It was very interesting because for all kinds of reasons neither his staff nor himself was very interested until one day absolutely without any planning whatsoever he ran into Governor Scranton at some function down here in Washington, and the Governor said to him, "You know, we spent a lot of time on Appalachia, and we sure hope you will give it your attention." That was all he said to him. The next thing I knew, Bill Moyers was on the phone saying "John, the President would like to meet with the governors. Can you set the meeting up either here or in the region?" I said, "Yes." So the meeting was set up in Huntington, West Virginia. This is what was fascinating to me, is that we did prepare a memo for him which outlined what the governors and we had agreed on.

M: Did you review the problem for him?

S: Yes, it was his usual type Johnson memo. One page reviewed the problem and one page proposed the solutions. We got into the session down at Huntington and he said, "Now, I'm here to listen," and Governor Wallace Barren of West Virginia was the spokesman for the group. He outlined why they thought this was a far better program than economic development or anything else. He said, "Thank you very much," and we all climbed on the plane and he called Frank Roosevelt and myself back into his part of the cabin and said, "Can you have the bill ready for me by Monday morning?" Frank reached in his briefcase and pulled out the draft bill and gave it to him. And he said, "Has this been cleared?"

And we said, "Yes, the Budget Bureau has cleared it. It is all

just waiting for your submission."

He said, "All right, I want you both over at the White House (this was on a Friday), I want you both over at the White House tomorrow at ten o'clock because I am going to announce the Appalachias program." And he did. He called a press conference and announced that he was submitting the bill to Congress on Monday and that he was expecting passage. Of course, we didn't get it through the first term in '64.

M: You ran out of time.

S: We got it through the Senate and we ran out of time in the House. He submitted it as his first item in '65. It got in there as Senate Bill 4.

M: Did the election have anything to do with the passage?

S: Well, the election of that overwhelming majority in the House had a great deal to do with it, yes.

M: Now, [Speaker John] McCormack, as I recall, blocked the final vote.

S: He did, and in retrospect it was a very, very correct decision.

M: Why?

S: It had really been beaten in the '64 session.

M: What was the opposition to it?

S: Well, it wasn't so much any opposition to the substance of the program, just that the Congress was dying to get out of there. It was a brand new program. Not too many people understood it, and it would have suffered the same fate that a number of other programs did there at the tail end of '64. They had already passed the Poverty Program in July and August. Then to confront them with another bill aimed again at the poverty question, albeit a limited geographical area--

the real fact was that, you know, we did many many careful, careful canvasses, and we always came up four, five, ten votes short. No matter how Larry O'Brien and Chuck Daley and Henry Hall Wilson and myself were just touring that building day after day and never quite getting to that point where we could say to the Speaker, 'Yes, we've got the votes.' It just wasn't there. But we were still urging him, however, that we thought that in the process of debate that we had managed to get a one or two vote majority. But I think correctly he said, 'Let's not risk it. If you beat it now, you may jeopardize it the next go round. There's really not a hell of a lot you can do between now and January. If we win it as big as we look like we are going to win it, let's just wait.'

M: Well, that bill has been classified as Johnson's major defeat in 1964. Is that a correct judgment? From what you say, it doesn't seem to make much difference.

S: I'm sure that it made no difference.

M: That it passed readily the following year.

S: It was a law by March of the following year. And in the meantime we had a lot of chance, by the way, to reform it.

M: So it really wasn't a contest of his prestige or anything of that nature.

S: I think, you know, had it gone out on the floor and then been defeated then it could be characterized like that, but I think it was a wise decision, one which I think, by the way, both Larry O'Brien and the President himself concurred in, that given the fact that you couldn't guarantee a majority, it is better to let it rest for a while than to take it out and let it defeated. So, of course,

in a way we were all disheartened, but then immediately he--I, as a matter of fact, was getting ready to pack up and pull out. Then all of a sudden the same night after the decision was made he called Kermit Gordon and said, "I want a renewed effort to polish that bill up and to continue to develop support for it. I want John Sweeney to be the guy that's directing it, and let's keep it going. Find him the money to do it so that he doesn't have to get rid of that staff of his." Kermit may have polished that a little bit, but that's what he told me when he called.

So we were back in business the next day, and that was what this biographical sketch refers to as the Federal Development Planning Committee for Appalachia. That was formed the day after the bill was withdrawn in the House. All we did for the next three or four months was in effect do a lobbying educational job--plus we did have a chance to polish that bill. We took a few of the bugs out that the hearings had revealed were of concern to some people, and when we got back there in '65, God, it just breezed. You know, bang, bang, bang, it whipped through the Senate by the end of January and through the House by the end of February, and he signed it into law in March.

M: Can you tell me something about the genesis, the origin, of this idea to attack poverty in Appalachia?

S: Well, it's as old as the New Deal. The first study of Appalachia was done in 1936, by, interestingly enough, the United States Navy Surgeon, who somehow had been appalled by this degrading poverty he had seen and launched a study. It really got its thrust, I think, during the '60 presidential campaign when, because of the primary

in West Virginia, and because of the attention that both Humphrey nad Kennedy focused on this problem, and because of Jack Kennedy's sitting up there in front on this problem, and because of Jack Kennedy's sitting up there in front of the TV set holding up this can of surplus food saying, 'This is what the diet is for 45,000 children in Mingo County, West Virginia.' You know, the public became really aware of it. Then there was a spate of national magazine and television coverage of it. Between the election of '60 and the time this commission was formed, both CBS and NBC did documentaries of Appalachia. You may remember "Christmas in Appalachia" the one that NBC did in December of '62. It was just a real heartrending business.

And then came this alliance of the governors. They met before this meeting and in 1960, they met and established the Conference of Appalachian Governors. It quickly became apparent to them that their own collective efforts were not going to be successful without some federal help. So eventually they pushed for this joint program that the Appalachian thing became.

M: Were the floods in 1963 a factor?

S: I don't really think so. They served to give some real sense of urgency for some temporary help which was soon forthcoming, but it really had nothing to do with the long-range development of an Appalachian effort as such, because after all as you probably know the Appalachian program has nothing to do with flood control. It ignores it as, an arena where so much is being done already. The answer to many of these people is not more dams but to get them out of those vulnerable hollows. And you can't attract them out of

vulnerable hollows unless you've got jobs for them someplace and housing for them someplace.

M: And roads.

S: And roads, yes.

M: Was the idea of treating a region unique?

S: It was unique in America.

M: Does it compare to TVA?

S: Well, it certainly does in terms of the fact that it is regional, that it splits state boundaries, or ignores state boundaries. But it is a much different concept in that TVA is entirely a federal effort. Decisions are all made by Uncle Sam. Appalachia is an area where decisions are primarily made by the states and local communities involved. Secondly, it is not a resource development program as such, except as you consider human resources to be resource development. However, it is quite similar to a number of European efforts. The efforts of the British to develop their north country, the efforts of the Italians to develop the Mezzagiorno, the southern portion of Italy. So, you know, it is a blend of a number of various kinds of programs.

M: Has it been successful?

S: I'll give you a prejudiced answer. Wildly so, yeah. I would tell you that it will be one of the few anti-poverty efforts of the Great Society that will survive through the Nixon Administration simply because of its broad base of political support. In the last go around in the Congress, of the ninety Congressmen who had some interest in it because at least one of their counties or two of their counties were included, we lost four votes of the ninety-two Appalachians of

Republicans and Democrats. We lost one Republican vote out of Pennsylvania. It has the unanimous support of a group of governors that ranged at various times from Nelson Rockefeller to George Wallace. It has the unanimous support of the local communities, which I think contrasts with the number of the other anti-poverty programs which narrowly each year squeak through in their renewal, and I think given a lack of interest of the next President, and I assume that will be his general bent, it probably will not be--this I think has a far greater chance of survival than the others.

M: Is it a problem of coordination in the Appalachian program?

S: Not to my knowledge. As a matter of fact, the vehicle for coordination is so much better than almost anything else that exists. But again I'm prejudiced.

I do have one philosophical bone to pick with the Johnson Administration, and that is the lip service it gave to something that the President coined which we gave him the phrase "Creative Federalism" dispute in which he said, "The Appalachian program was the most shining example of it." Well, it is. It is the one program that the Johnson Administration has pushed through that really decentralizes decision making, not just through regional offices of federal bureaucracies but transferring some decision-making power to a lower level of government. But the reason the coordination is so good is that you automatically force it within the state by casting the basic first decision upon the governor, you in turn get a chance to review it here at the federal level to insure that it is not a pork barrel, that it does conform to the broad guidelines

of the Act itself. And yet the mechanism here in Washington for coordination is absolutely clear because the federal co-chairman, before he casts his vote of approval or rejection, has got to receive the views of the agencies who are involved in its implementation. I was never able as federal co-chairman to cast a vote on highways until I had been assured by the Federal Highway Administrator that this was a sound project.

M: Is there any problem dealing with all of the various agencies involved such as the Highway Administration?

S: There was prior to this last amendment, but as you know the last amendment put the appropriation in to the hands of the President, which he in turn has delegated to the federal co-chairman. Prior to that time the funds went directly to the agencies that were going to be the operating implementors. There, there was a real problem in getting federal support for a number of the programs that were involved because they guy could say, "Look, the money's mine, and I don't give a damn how you recommend it, you are going to spend it my way or it is not going to be spent." It's a lot different now, where you can say to them, "If you guys want to participate in that, If you want some of this money to use in Appalachia, you better begin to understand what we're trying to do here and get with it." Now, I haven't been there since that piece of legislation was passed, but my successor tells me that it has just been wildly successful.

M: But when you were there as a chairman, there was some difficulty.

S: I was going around with my hat in hand a whole lot of the time, and, most unfortunately, having eventually to realize far too much on the staff of the President and the Bureau of the Budget to achieve the

right result because eventually when I would reach an impasse with HUD or Commerce or anybody, I would then have to go to the Bureau of the Budget and the White House and say, "Now, you guys tell them, I've exhausted myself."

M: Well, is it due in part to your trouble that this amendment was made?

S: Oh, yes, we vigorously sought it and managed to convince, I think, Charlie Schultze, who was Director at that time, and Joe Califano that it was a necessary amendment.

M: Were you appointed chairman of that? Is that a presidential appointment?

S: Yes, right.

M: Was that your first presidential appointment?

S: Yes.

M: Your appointment in 1963 as Undersecretary of Commerce, was that presidential?

S: That was just an assistant to the Undersecretary.

M: That was an assistant, so it was not.

S: No. The appointment as the chairman of this planning committee was also a presidential appointment but it didn't require any confirmation of the Senate.

M: Did it surprise you in any way that you were appointed chairman?

S: No.

M: This was almost a natural step from the work that you had done?

S: Yes. I had been nominated for Congress in '64 to run in the eighth District of Michigan. I went to Bill Moyers and said, "I've got this nomination; I think it's time I pulled out and go back there."

He said, "Well, don't make a final decision yet." He talked

to the President and came back and said, "Look, you can't possibly win that district out there, and we'd very much like to see you follow--we know this bill's going to pass next year and we would like to see you stay and do it." So as early as the fall of '64, I think I was told that I would be appointed as the chairman if and when the bill passed.

M: So you stayed to follow throught and be sure the bill was implemented and to iron out what problems might arise?

S: Yes.

M: Incidentally, did you work in any of the campaigns for, say, Jack Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson?

S: Well, you see, in the '60 campaign I was already working ninety hours a week for Pat McNamara's re-election. Now that got us into the Kennedy effort in Michigan.

In '64, because of this planning committee, my whole job was here in Washington working on that to get ready for the passage after the election, except for several speeches I gave in the region on behalf of the Johnson-Humphrey ticket. But those were just really political rallies in various towns and mostly in West Virginia.

M: In your work with Appalachia, have you had any trouble gaining cooperation at the grassroots level, the very local level?

S: No.

M: The people cooperate?

S: That's primarily because you really don't have to do much work because the governors themselves were so enthusiastic that all I ever did was to go out and really supplement their own efforts to

develop the grassroots support. All of them at one time or another during the course of the year would have Appalachian conferences out in the regions of their states that were included. Inevitably, I would go down there and talk to those groups about what the administration thought of this program. I'd say there was never any problem in gaining a lot of support.

We had a lot of critics. People like Harry Caudill and Tom Gish down in eastern Kentucky who thought that the program was much too heavily oriented towards economic development and not enough towards human and social development--which we had told them right from the outset it was going to be. There were enough people working on welfare, etc. Sarge Shriver was already in existence. Tony Celebreze and, eventually, John Gardner were doing all they could do in the field of social welfare, etc. We just said simply, "This is a long-range program aimed at long-range economic development."

M: In the carrying out of the program, road building and things like that, were other elements of the war on poverty worked in such as giving employment opportunity to young people? Did you have anything to do with that?

S: To the degree that we could--and it was never in the road building field. It was almost invariably always in the farmland improvement, timber development, etc., where we could work in the Happy Pappy Program in eastern Kentucky, the youth VISTA programs in OEO. The road building we were doing, you know, was major road building.

M: You'd better tell me what the Happy Pappy is. I'm not familiar with that.

S: The Happy Pappy Program was an offshoot of the aid to dependent

children program. It received a rather substantial trial in eastern Kentucky where, in exchange for certain amounts of work that would go for public service, they would increase the ADP budget for the family. In other words, if the family was eligible for $75 a month normally and the guy worked he could boost it up to as much as $200-$250. We ran into enormous problems with the labor unions, you know, because we were buildings walls and playgrounds and shelters using masonry, etc. The building trades didn't care too much for this at all. But in those kinds of programs we did utilize those but for the big arterial roads, which are the bulk of the Appalachian road construction, it really doesn't work. That's all machinery with skilled operators, and there was very little hand labor left in major road construction today.

M: Then you were co-chairman of the regional commission until 1967 and worked with the development of Appalachia and the program, and so forth. Then in 1967 you came to the Department of Transportation. Now, what happened there? Were you called in for a special program?

S: No, I sought the job.

M: Oh, you did.

S: I had, at that stage, as you can see, spent four years on the Appalachian program--two years in developing it and two years in running it. I reached that stage where I found the same problems starting to come back around the horn. And since I couldn't think of any other solutions than the ones that I had already proposed, it struck me that it was time to move on. I happen to feel that about any bureaucratic post, by the way, that's at a major policy level.

M: That turnover is a good thing.

S: Yes. That at the time when you do see youself facing the same old problems again, and you haven't got any other answers for them, it's time to get out. Secondly, I really felt that because of the long-standing staff relationships and long-standing relationships with the people who represented the Appalachian states that I was kind of getting into a rut of easy solution, rote solution, etc. When this new department had been formed, it struck me as another interesting kind of challenge, and one that I thought maybe I could offer something to and actually called up Alan Boyd and John Macy and said, "If you are looking for anybody to give you a hand, keep me in mind."

M: And this is how the job came about?

S: I think it is, yes.

M: Did you have anything to do with the formation of the Department?

S: Nothing whatsoever.

M: That was all done before you came?

S: Right. That was an intensive legislative effort in the summer of '66 that Alan Boyd was in charge of.

M: Right. Did you have anything to do with the passage of highway safety acts or anything like that?

S: No, they were also passed before I came. I was greatly involved in their renewal this year but not their passage.

M: Did you have anything to do with the transference of mass transit from HUD to here?

S: Yes, because that was done this year, and we were deeply involved in that.

M: When DOT was formed, mass transit was left in HUD because, from what

I've heard, they were a new department, too, and did not want to give this up and thought that mass transit was part of an urban probelm--in their bailiwick, so to speak.

S: Right.

M: And yet the Department of Transportation had a good argument, too, and the idea was that this would be transferred after DOT was formed, which has been done.

S: Right.

M: Now, what I would like to know is how was this accomplished?

S: The first method of accomplishment was Alan Boyd gaining both Budget Bureau support--which, by the way, was there to begin with--and White House support. Once the President and his staff and the Bureau of the Budget had decided that that made sense, that it should come over here.

M: Now, the President was for this all along, wasn't he?

S: Yes, very much so.

M: But he didn't want to cause too much internal warfare over it.

S: Right. And that's why, as I say, the support was there in the BOB and the White House. That really is true. The only question was when could you convince them that the support ought to now be translated into a positive step by the President. Once that decision was reached and once the President called in Bob Weaver and Alan Boyd and said, "This is what I am going to propose, and I want you guys to go out and set up the support for it," it really was just a question of time from then on because as long as he was going to make a vigorous effort to do it and, particularly, given the process of reorganization which requires a negative response by the Congress,

it's a much easier means to do something than it is to enact an affirmative piece of legislation.

I will just say without any question that Bob Weaver, good soldier that he is, is far more responsible for the transfer than Alan Boyd or I am, or anybody else in this department that worked on it because he found a step, went out and lobbied it, made the rounds with Alan on the Hill talking to all his key committee people, saying, "This is what ought to be done." A compromise was worked out as to how you maintained part of the planning effort over in HUD, transferring, however, all the major operational parts of it over here to the DOT, so that he was able to say "we still retain what we need to retain to build an effective urban planning system, but the research, the implementation which is so tied to inter-city travel, long-distance travel ought to be over there with the Department."

M: Has the transfer been successful? Is there still hard feeling over it, for example?

S: I think so. I think that's natural. I think it ought to subside with the next changing of the guard when people will be coming in in both places who don't have a vested interest in what went before. Most of the bureaucracy that was associated with the program is already over here. I think they have adapted to their new surroundings and environment. So whatever ill will does still exist I think will be gone after January 20.

M: What will be done with the Maritime people? I mean, it's logical that they should come into DOT, too.

S: Very much so. As you know, that's one of the most powerful blocs in the Congress. It is powerful mostly because of the labor

participation in it. Paul Hall and Joe Curran, the two big maritime leaders, have managed to enlist the entire labor movement, so that you find congressmen from Kansas City, Missouri, absolutely with the strongest views on an independent maritime that you can find. They passed their bill. The President has pocket vetoed it. They will be facing a new President. I don't have any idea whether the new President will be an intense as this one has been.

M: There has been an interpretation about that that says that the unions oppose the putting of the Maritime Administration into DOT merely as sort of a power play, something to bargain with.

S: No question.

M: Is that correct?

S: Sure. If they could get a $300 million a year construction subsidy from the next administration, they wouldn't care whether it was put in the Department of HEW, or not.

M: So it's really not a question of organization, it's a question of politics, bargaining, union power?

S: The simple fact is that the Bureau of the Budget is going to stay over there even with Mr. Nixon. And the Bureau of the Budget is stacked from top to bottom with people who are opposed to the kind of subsidy arrangements that we've had in the past. So, I've always been saying to the Maritime people, "You are just crazy if you think that you are going to get a President who is going to fly in the face in all the evidences there. What is not needed in the Maritime industry is more of the same." They are convinced it is, and if they just had three to four hundred million dollars a year they could pull themselves out of their doldrums and away they

would go, which is just absolute nonsense.

M: Are there still departmental problems of independence of the various agencies in DOT?

S: Oh, yes. It is still the single greatest problem that we have. It is absolutely natural. It's one of the few departments that has been formed in the manner that is bound to breed that, namely a coalition of previously either independent or relatively powerful forces within their old bureaucracies trying to bring them under one tent. It is comparable only that I know of to be the DOD formation. It's not like HEW which was taking one large major agency, the Federal Security Administration, and grafting several tiny parts onto it. It's not like HUD, which was the old HHFA and grafting several tiny parts onto it--really raising existing units to cabinet status. It really represents a melding of previously diverse units into one hopeful functioning unit and that's tough. It's probably not going to be solved by the next administration.

Nixon himself has said that he questions the reasoning of putting a unit such as the FAA, which he struggled so mightily to get out of Commerce and make independent, back into another layer of bureaucracy. The Bureau of Public Roads is not at all happy about having a new boss who is obviously intensely social about highway construction, as against what they think is standard roads, just fill as many miles with concrete as you can, regardless of what else happens.

M: Is there any difficulty over things like the Highway Trust Fund in the use of it?

S: Yes, I think we were a little bit impolitic at the outset in suggesting to people that maybe some of the trust fund money ought to be

diverted into mass transit. We have since come up with a better solution which is to divert the excise tax on automobiles, which is not now earmarked, into a mass transit fund. That doesn't please the automobile manufacturers very much, but it's a lot less of a lobby to contend with than the Highway Trust Fund lobby, which includes the oil companies and the road builders and so forth.

M: What does a secretary do working with almost independent agency heads to get them to follow the President's program?

S: There's a sort of a convolution here which these agencies understand pretty well, which is that they know that the President's program primarily comes from the Secretary and the people around him, and that when Alan Boyd suggest to the President that he ought to propose a new means of highway construction that takes far more into account aesthetic, social and cultural values--than it does just pure transportation values, and lo and behold the President does make such a recommendation. They know damn well where it comes from, so that they still consider themselves to be dealing with the Secretary. They also know damn well that no matter how diligent the President is and no matter how diligent the staff is, the primary force they are going to have to contend with is going to be the Secretary.

As the President's own popularity waned, as it obviously began to do just about the time this department was formed--the threat of presidential reprisal is something that old line bureaucracies can continue to live with if they are convinced that that President is not going to be around in eighteen months. So that's been a relatively ineffective device. As a matter of fact, probably the best route that Alan has had to induce compliance has been the force

of his own personal pretige and his own personal will and his indomitable nature.

I think that's a candid but nevertheless accurate assessment of how you go about this in such a period. I think if President Johnson had been on an upsweep of popularity at the time we were trying to knit all this together, and you could have been saying to all these people, "Now, look, this isn't going to be just eighteen months. You're going to be living with us a helluva long time," I think it would be a lot different.

M: Did you have anything to do with the Highway Beautification?

S: Yes. God, did I have things to do with it. Boy! I would tell you that probably 50 percent of the time I have spent in legislation matters was on the Highway Beautification Program. And we were really caught in the switches between, you know, this remarkably tenacious distaff side of the White House and an absolutely adamant Congress. Alan Boyd shares the same view of Lyndon Johnson as I do, and we were determined that, by golly, he was not going to be kicked in the teeth on the one thing that he had made for his lady. But, boy, in the process we sure got chewed. I have never had a rougher time in all the time I have ever spent dealing with clearance from Senators than on that beautification program.

M: Why? What's the big objection on beauty?

S: Primarily, the little businessman of the country who were going to be done in--and there isn't any question about it--were going to be done in by the restrictions on billboard advertising. You know, Drew Pearson, when he writes this stuff, always manages to screw it up. And he always manages to talk about the rapacious big city

advertisers who were fighting us. Hell, we had them out of the way within ten minutes, but those little associations of motel owners, tavern keepers, roadside standers, motel operators, and resort operators--you know, the backbone of the middle class of a lot of rural counties and rural congressional districts in this country--did us in.

M: What did they do--write letters, send telegrams?

S: If they would just write letters, that would be great. But they came up here in droves.

M: Did they visit their congressman?

S: The guy would get back to his district, and he would be surrounded by these people saying, "Don't you let them pass the bill that says I've got to take my signs down. How am I going to live? How are people going to know where I am." And they are exactly right. There is no question about it.

M: So what do you do about this?

S: We stuck it out, and it went through by the skinniest of skinny votes. You know, we won it by one vote in the last go-a-round. That's the first time in the whole time I've been on the Hill or around the Hill that I have ever seen a major measure go over by one vote. I understand it happened--the President keeps referring to it about the draft back in 1940. But this is the first one I've ever seen. One single vote, and it was done by the most incredible of sources, Mendel Rivers, who went out and switched four votes on the floor in that last go round, got four of his southern buddies to swing off "No" and onto "Yes." It was just unvelievable.

M: Why did he do this?

S: He apparently likes Lady Bird Johnson.

M: And he did it for Lady Bird?

S: Oh, I'm absolutely convinced of that. He said as much to Johnny Kuzynski who was floor managing the bill for us, who didn't like it either. That was the God-damn problem with this thing. We were sitting up there with a group of sunshine patriots who couldn't have cared less if we had lost that thing, who were willing to go through the motions, but, you know, not one single ounce of floor lobbying or anything. Those guys just sat there stoically and stolidly and let all this thing fly around their heads. You know we lost it the first time when it went through the House. Then it came out of conference. It came up for a vote again when the conference report was there and that's when we won it by one vote.

M: Was the President chomping at the bit.

S: He was madder than hell, too. He called up Alan. He tried to get me first. Luckily I had taken off right after the vote and was on my way up to my farm. So he got ahold of Alan. "What the hell are you guys doing in there with one vote? God-damn it, this is the best bill we've got in the whole lexicon up here and you guys can only get it through by one vote. That's the worst thing I've ever heard of"--which it absolutely astounded me, because, you know, I thought the man would be leaping up and down.

M: You deserved a pat on the back.

S: Yes.

M: Did the President follow this bill all the way through its tortuous way?

S: Absolutely. He didn't always call. It might be Barefoot [Sanders],

Mike Manatos or somebody who called and said, "The President wants to know this" or tells you how to do this or something. Sure, he was right on it.

M: How often would you get a call like this--every day, every other day?

S: When it was up in either house, every day, sometimes four or five times a day. There were countless meetings over there.

M: Of course, you would report back.

S: Yes, sure. I got to know Sharon Francis better than almost anybody else in the White House.

M: Isn't it rather ironic that there should be so much controversy over the billboards when apparently it's that other part of the bill, the Title III with the flowers and the roadside stands, parks, and that sort of thing that is the major portion of the bill.

S: Yes, that' right. That's duck soup, thought. I mean, you see--I'll just tell you that if I had been given my druthers, we would have knocked that billboard thing out to start with. We would have gotten the other part through with just gangbusters.

M: The junkyards didn't give you any trouble?

S: No. The states loved that. It didn't cause me any problem; free money. Plant those thing up and it's wonderful. The nursery people all love it. Gardeners and ladies clubs were just delighted about it. But Lady Bird and Lyndon Baines "wanted them signs down." And, by God, they were going to come down.

M: Well, now, from what I understand, the signs have not come down.

S: There's not enough money to get them down, but we maintained the principle that they ought to come down. Someday--you know, it's going to be five, eight, ten years from now--we'll manage to crank up enough

support laboriously and we'll get the money to pay the people to take them down. I don't think they ought to come down until you can pay those people for them. And we'll eventually work out means whereby we can provide advertising differently.

M: In judging the beautification bill now, it would seem that Title III is the most successful part of it, is it not?

S: Sure it is.

M: The billboards have practically--well, they have foundered, not defeated perhaps.

S: We should have gone for standardization of them, for a subdued presentation. We should have gone for clustering of them, leaving broad expanses open with good planting and good shrubery, etc., clearing of scenic vistas so that there can be observed turnout points etc. We picked this fight with those folks and, by golly, we stayed at it.

M: Just for the record, there is no doubt that this was Lady Bird's project.

S: Not at all. The President never left that doubt in anybody's mind.

M: And that the main motivation of the President was the interest of his wife in this and the interest that she gave to him.

S: I think you can go even deeper than that. I really think that, by God, no group of bastards is going to kick his wife around. I mean it. It got to the stage where it became a matter of personal honor to him. There were times I know when she was willing to draw back from some things, and I know damn well he was saying, "Not on your tintype. We are going to stick with this. Ain't nobody going to be able to write a headline saying that Congress administers defeat to Lady Bird."

I believe that.

M: Have you had anything to do with problems of, say, auto safety?

S: Oh, yes.

M: Ralph Nader?

S: I don't know if you know it. I'm a constant target for Drew Pearson, and all of it comes from Ralph Nader. He considers me to be the anti-people person over here because I'm always urging Alan Boyd to take a few steps that won't get us into outright confrontations with the industry which we are going to lose, either in court or in the press. I'm just a great fan of Ralph Nader's in the terms of his ability to goad people into necessary steps, but I have no respect whatsoever for his tolerance or his humility or his basic humanity. I don't, by the way, think he is out for personal power or personal gain. I think he's got a savanarola complex which I'm delighted to see around. You need it, but that doesn't mean that I have to acknowledge that he's one of the saviours of the world. I just think he's sometimes a hip-shooter, and I have told him that on about five occasions--that I'm just not going to tell Jim Roche or have Alan Boyd tell Jim Roche that he's a liar and a thief and a scoundrel without the slightest bit of evidence to back it up. "Our evidence proves to the contrary. If you want to come in with some evidence other than your own personal opinion, bring it in, and we'll do something with it. But on the basis of your simple charge, we're not going to write a letter like you want us to write."

It gets to be a tough business, because he has got access. He hashed far better access to the press than I could ever dream of getting. There's not a guy in this town that won't write a story

that Ralph give him. And that makes it very difficult to combat because, you know, by the time you do your own work and research in order to counteract one of these charges, you've lost all the time span, and his story sticks.

M: Is he a major factor in the drive for auto safety?

S: No question of it. I'd say its damn near single-handed. If you combine it with the stupidity of the top management of General Motors who put a gumshoe on his tail to find out whether he was clear or not, you've got the solution as to why there's an auto safety problem.

M: So on that point you really don't disagree with him.

S: Oh, hell no. We just passed a pipeline safety bill this year which is solely his doing, I mean, his bringing it to public attention, getting that article in the Saturday Evening Post--totally responsible for it.

M: You would agree that this is necessary?

S: Absolutely. No question about it.

M: In that sense he's done a public service?

S: Absolutely--meat inspection, no question about it. Just a phenomenal guy. As I say, the problem comes in the--you know, you get something through and then, you know, the Congress responds, the public responds, they take the steps but it is inevitably left to a bureaucracy then to do something about it. You can't violate due process. You can't try people in the press. You can't make false accusations. It's got to go the route of the normal democratic procedures, and it's there that Ralph and I have our problems.

M: Is it basically that he wants you to move and do things that you can't do?

S: Absolutely. There's a fire but there that just, you know, "I demand that you do this, I demand that you do that, I demand that you do this." And we tell Ralph, "We can't do it. We are first going to have to run a test to see if what you say about this particular piece of that automobile is true, and if it is then we'll do something about it. But we aren't going to stop them from putting out just on your say-so or the fact that you've got some consulting engineer who has told you. We aren't going to write a letter to General Motors saying that their are charging twelve bucks for seat belts and you say they only cost $1.50 until we find out what they cost." Well, we since did find out what they cost, and they cost about $10.25. Now, that's still a hell of a good markup, but I don't think the public's going to be outraged by the fact that GM is getting twelve bucks for a $10.25 cost. There's a lot of difference between that and the other.

M: Yes.

S: So it's that kind of dialogue that permeates our relationship.

M: Do you have any reservations about the federal government's setting auto safety standards?

S: None at all. Absolutely not.

M: You think this is necessary?

S: I think it's the only way. You certainly couldn't depend on fifty states to do it and not drive the manufacturers out of their minds. When they start making cars that are made to comply with a differing--well, it would be impossible in interstate commerce. We obviously have to have them. There isn't any question that those cars are safer today than they were three years ago, and they are going to

be as safe as modern technology and human ingenuity can make them, but what will suffer is speed and efficiency. No plane takes off that isn't taking off safely, and no plane lands that isn't landing safely. But what that means is that then you start building up four hour delays at various airports.

M: Has the President expressed any concern over this?

S: Oh, yes. Very much so. You know, during this last fiasco in August when they had those enormous delays up in New York and here in Washington, etc., the Hill was on phone almost at once saying, "What the hell is going on? What can we do about it?" And I'm sure that was partially the result of some presidential proding.

M: Have you had any dealings with Betty Furness?

S: Yes, mostly on pipeline safety and auto safety. There are dealings that I would not characterize as amicable. I had a real knock-down drag-out with her at one stage when I read a draft of the speech she was about to give on pipeline safety. First of all, it was dead wrong in its facts, and, secondly, it was about to castigate the entire industry as being unresponsive and unwilling to react. I talked her out of giving that speech.

M: Is her position a valuable one in government?

S: I believe it is.

M: My understanding is that she is mainly a salesman for the consumer and works with people on the Hill and within the Executive Branch.

S: Very effective. The position has to be retained. There is no other real place. The Federal Trade Commission is too large, too unwieldy to be responsive quickly--and with real force. I think it's a great spot, and I think she has done a great job in it.

M: She has no authority, does she, other than championing a certain type of legislation?

S: Public opinion is the authority she has. I think she has used it rather well.

M: Does she cooperate with people like you on legislation?

S: Yes. Our trouble, as I said, is to keep her from cooperating too much. She's really a gung ho lady. She has a gung ho staff. There were times when we were just at the verge of working out the compromise on a given little section of the Pipeline Safety Bill and all of a sudden this roar would come from over at the Executive Office Building and there would be Betty with her megaphone out. We'd have to say, you know, "God, keep quiet, or you'll ruin this thing. You say that in public and we'll never get the bill through." But that's normal. You know, she's supposed to be an advocate, a tough champion, and it's our job on the other hand to say, "OK, but not so much and not so loud. Just wait a minute and after it's all over you can say what you want. But let's see if we can't get this thing through first."

M: But she operates almost independently.

S: Yes. We have no other way to keep her from doing this except to try and argue with her. I suppose if it had gotten serious enough, we could have gone to the President and said, "You've got your choice. You either get the bill or you get an issue. You can take your choice on it."

M: Are people like this, in a position like that, useful to the bureaucracy? Does it keep you honest?

S: Absolutely. No question about it. There ought to be somebody prodding

at all times. It's sort of an ombudsman's role, and that I've always thought is a good idea.

M: This is somewhat similar to the role of the National Transportation Safety Board, is it not?

S: Yes, except that they really have some powers.

M: Yes. What is it, aviation safety?

S: Well, the whole ball park. They can run across any modal cause that's a major accident. They can get into trains, boats, or anything else.

M: But is it correct that theirs is mainly an oversight function, an auditing function?

S: Yes.

M: To be sure they can say that highway safety in being carried out.

S: Right, it is.

M: Now, are those kinds of things, those kinds of agencies, useful?

S: I am mesmerized that the press has not given more attention to the NTSB. It is one of the most exciting units in town, completely free and independent. All we do is provide them with administrative services. They have complete carte blanche to look at anything that is going on in these fields and make recommendations according to their findings. I think this is extremely useful, extremely necessary. There ought to be sort of that with every agency in town.

M: Are there any particular acts or bills that you've worked with since you've been in this position that stand out in your mind that I have not touched on?

S: I suppose the only other one is the renewal of the Highway Act that took place this year.

M: The safety--

S: It was a potpourri. You see, part of the strategy of the Highway Beautification Program--I managed to talk Lady Bird and Sharon Francis and Liz Carpenter into not going last year for a fight when the bill was up all by itself, highway beautification, letting it slide by. It got through the Senate but not even bringing it up on the floor of the House. Instead, including it in the overall highway bill this year which had many goodies in it for the rest of the Congress. We had highway beautification, highway safety, relocation provisions, advance acquisition of right-of-way provisions, a new program called TOPICS, which allows you to use highway trust funds to upgrade existing streets rather than buy new ones--you know, put in the channels and new lighting systems, etc. All of these were in there. And the bill itself became an absolute cause célébre. You know, the pressure on the President to veto was just severe; the New York Times, Life Magazine, etc., all urging a veto because of one thing, the District highway program. Alan Boyd said he God damned well wasn't going to build the Three Sisters Bridge and Congress said "Yes, you are." And, you know, an impasse. And they passed a law directing the District and the Department to build the Three Sisters Bridge, and that's still up in the air. But that bill was by all odds, the most harried because it had all of these other things in with it, you know, the highway beautification, etc.

M: Did you have to work with congressional committees and congressmen?

S: Yes. As I say, it took virtually about two solid months of nothing but that to get that bill through.

M: Was there any key change or event that brought about the passage of this, or was it a number of events?

S: Well, the key event was when we caved on the District Highway Program. We just said, "We aren't going to fight any longer. You go ahead and write it and pass it through and then we'll see what we are going to do with it afterwards." Up to that stage, it was a total impasse with the Senate holding out for our position and the House holding out for its own position. It was really kind of a fascinating period. You know, it encapsulated every major issue that you find in the country today--the conflict between modern America, fast transportation, come what may--and some ancient values of beauty and conservation and social integrity, etc., and--

M: Did it bring up all the old problems?

S: Oh, no sooner did you get past the Highway Beautification Program in that bill than you faced the District Highway Program and no sooner than you get past the District Highway Program than you face the question of whether or not public funds should be spent in any way for mass transit. Part of this bill, by the way, was a provision to build fringe parking lots on the outskirts of the areas that were served by mass transit so that people could park and ride. And, you know, that in itself was a whole battle as to whether any funds were going to be diverted for this kind of purpose out of that sacrosanct trust fund that might in any way enhance mass transit. It was just a fascinating two-month period.

M: As you moved from one provision of the bill to the other, did the personnel that you had to deal with and the problems with various committees shift so that you would go from beautification--

S: Yes, and you would face a whole new set of people.

M: A whole new set of people.

S: Yes.

M: And you had, in other words, to work out a solution with them?

S: That's exactly right. When you got past beautification where were dealing with people like Bill Kramer and Sam Stratton and we moved into this question of the District Highway Program and face Johnny Kuzynski and George Fallon. And by the way your own champions would change. John Sherman Cooper would be our champion on the District Highway Program and Jennings Randolph, who also has a strong affinity for Lady Bird, would be our champion of beautification. We never had any solid set of heroes and villans on this thing.

M: Then I suppose you might offend a person on one fact of the bill and he'd be a champion for you on another, and you would somehow have to reconcile that.

S: No question about it.

M: Which would add to the complexity. Nonetheless, an omnibus bill like this is useful, is it not?

S: One of the great secrets--you know, it's the way the Aid to Education Bill finally got through. It really makes a great deal of sense to put all those titles in where people can't risk too much rifle opposition for fear that they will suffer the same thing themselves. I think it has a very effective place.

M: So it does help to balance one faction against another?

S: We would have never gotten the Highway Beautification Program through had it been out there on the floor by itself. It would have just been deader than last year's roses. No question about it. The same thing is true with the TOPICS program. Had that been out there alone, the highway lobby would have just kicked our teeth in.

M: One last question for you. Now that you have been working here for a while, does the idea of a Department of Transportation still make sense?

S: Very much so, yes. I am convinced that not only does it make sense but I am convinced that it's got to be substantially expanded.

M: Expanded to include what?

S: A number of the so-called economic regulatory functions. There is so much that goes on in the regulatory agencies that really isn't related to the economic well-being of the industry involved.

M: Such as the CAB--

S: Yes, CAB, ICC, Federal Maritime Commission. Their influence is by far more pervasive in the long run of transportation than is this Department which is primarily systems-oriented and primarily safety-oriented.

And yet neither of them can exist independently of the economic realities in the industries that are involved. There is no way to develop, for example, an inter-modal system as long as you've got this gragmented rate-making, route-award protectionist performance in the regulatory agencies. They really have become champions of the status quo, and that is the last damned thing this country needs when it comes to transportation. So those are going to have to be nibbled away at. There's never going to be any sudden and total shift of responsibilities but some of their powers are going to have to be modified and probably placed here to make them consistent with the long-range planning that's going to be done here. I'm so convinced that without that, that we are just not going to survive--why, I shouldn't say that--but we're going to have such a hopeless,

jumbled transportation system in the future that it just isn't going to be at all workable, and we're going to decline because of it. It's not a doomsday statement. You get over to Europe and look at the very sophisticated ways in which they are now arranging their systems of transportation and look at the archaic restrictions we have--

M: Is the inter-modal approach the key to the future in transportation?

S: It is the key. Yes. Absolutely. No question about it. Inter-modal and common ownership. We are just going to have to have companies that run barges and trucks and rail cars and airplanes.

M: So a railroad can own a truck line?

S: That's right.

M: And transport its goods to an outlying town.

S: Right. All of it with a great deal more efficiency than we've now got. We are just going to have to pay people off. It's going to have to be sort of a quasi-condemnation process that moves inefficient, tiny carriers out of this field or consolidates them with major carriers.

M: I see. Well, I've covered all the questions I have. I wish to thank you for the interview and for taking your time.

S: You're welcome.

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By John L. Sweeney

to the

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