

INTERVIEW II

DATE: November 28, 1977
INTERVIEWEE: STUART SYMINGTON
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Senator Symington's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Now, you were going to tell me about the tin smelter?

S: My mind is somewhat hazy about it. When I ran the RFC in 1950 there was desire not to sell the tin in order to keep the price up. The cost of producing Bolivian tin was relatively very high, the cost of Singapore tin relatively very low. We worked on it, recommended an adjustment of the price down. It's a complicated story. Control of tin was through the smelters more than in the mining. That made the Texas smelter very important.

G: Do you recall what LBJ did to keep the Republican administration--?

S: I was with the RFC just before the Senate. There was no politics in it I can remember. In fact, the State Department, under Dean Acheson, and with the support of Averell Harriman, was much for maintaining the status quo because it was a source of tremendous income to the failing British economy. In Malaysia they had dredge mining as they call it; cost about twenty-three cents a pound. The Bolivian cost was over a dollar a pound. So a price of \$1.20, say, gave the Bolivians a little profit, but the British in Malaysia a tremendous profit.

G: Do you recall in particular what Lyndon Johnson did on this?

Symington -- II -- 2

- S: No, except he supported our recommendation. I was running the NSRB, reported the problem to him, and he thought we were right. We were right. You could find a paper he put out as chairman of the Armed Services Military Preparedness Subcommittee in which he said we'd saved a lot of money for the taxpayer.
- G: Did you ever get any insight on his relations with Jesse Jones?
- S: No.
- G: He never talked about Jones?
- S: Not much. I remember once he and Lady Bird and I visited Mr. Jones in Houston, who was most gracious.
- G: How about the tidelands issue? I understand that you had some discussions with Adlai Stevenson about his position on this in 1952?
- S: I don't remember.
- G: During the campaign.
- S: Not that I remember.
- G: Now, you were in Dallas in 1948 I think when he had the kidney stone attack. In the earlier interview you were going to talk about that but I don't think got back to it.
- S: Well, it's pretty personal. The best people to talk about it would be Warren Woodward, John Connally and of course Lady Bird.
- G: Lyndon Johnson didn't want to have the operation publicized, as I recall.
- S: As I got the story, John Connally wisely persuaded him to publish he was going to Mayo's; and Lady Bird persuaded him to stay in the race.

Symington -- II -- 3

G: Let me ask you generally, what were Lyndon Johnson's attributes that made him an effective majority leader?

S: He was an extremely hard worker, and perceptive to the matters that could persuade senators to see things his way.

G: For example?

S: Well, if he knew somebody wanted a dam badly, or a new military installation he would tell him he would do his best to help him get it; and later would say, "I would like you to help me" He was a master inside negotiator with his colleagues on such matters.

G: I notice that you went on the Armed Services Committee right away. Was this part of his Johnson rule, getting freshmen senators on key committees?

S: Actually, he and Senator George wanted me to go on Finance. I knew Senator Walter George well--he was chairman--but I didn't want to do it. So they persuaded Senator Russell Long to go off Armed Services in order that I could get on, then put him on Finance.

G: Did LBJ have much problem with the older members, the more senior members, in getting freshmen on these good committees?

S: I don't think so. He was a protege in every sense of the word of the senator he admired the most, Senator [Richard] Russell. Anything Senator Russell decided on automatically brought in the southern bloc. There may be exceptions to that. I don't remember any.

G: Do you think he was a moderating influence on Senator Russell?

S: I think Senator Russell was a moderating influence on him.

G: Is that right? How so?

Symington -- II -- 4

S: What I did not know about Lyndon Johnson in the years I knew him well was his intense desire for the presidency. It's a great credit to him and to Russell that the liberalism he began to display as he apparently set his eyes on the presidency did not affect his friendship with Russell or Russell's friendship with him. But if he had gone too far in his innate liberalism he would not have had the degree of support of all the South that appealed to Kennedy and his backers.

G: Before we turned on the tape I was asking you about this Marine Corps appropriation where you helped restore money in the appropriation that was going to be cut.

S: Yes.

G: You said you worked with Russell Long on that.

S: I had an agreement with Russell if the vote was even he would vote to restore the money. It appeared to be even, so he voted to restore. You had better get the full story from Russell. I did not work directly with the Majority Leader on that.

G: How about the farm bills at the time, back in the fifties? The Democrats favored complete parity, I guess, and the Republicans more of a flexible price supports. I noticed that you were keenly interested in helping the farmers.

S: I come from a farm state.

G: Right. Did you work with Johnson on many of these?

S: I wasn't on the Agriculture Committee until later. I was one of Johnson's inner circle up until about 1955, for the first two years: then no longer of his inner circle.

Symington -- II -- 5

- G: Do you think it had to do with your more outspoken opposition to Joe McCarthy?
- S: An interesting question. Only Lyndon Johnson could answer that.
- G: Yes. So you never talked to Johnson about that?
- S: No. Never.
- G: Did you feel at the time that he wasn't doing enough as leader to oppose McCarthy?
- S: I think he thought it was the kind of an issue the minority leader of the Senate could well stay out of. Now he might have felt the same way I did, and I might have felt the same way he did, if our positions were reversed. I was in there every day listening to McCarthy talk and act, making the record the way he thought it should be, and I just couldn't agree.
- G: Did you have any talks with LBJ about how it should be handled?
- S: No.
- G: One gets the impression that he was working behind the scenes and trying to prevent it from becoming an issue of McCarthy versus the Democrats so that the Republicans would not line up behind McCarthy.
- S: Possibly. It really would be McCarthy against Eisenhower. The people hurt the most--the hearings were in 1954 and Eisenhower was president and the Republicans controlled the Senate.
- G: Johnson's strategy then seemed to have been to rely heavily on the advice of John McClellan since I guess he was the senior [Democratic] member on that [committee].
- S: I believe so.

Symington -- II -- 6

G: You were in a unique position as a close friend of President Truman to gauge the relationship between Lyndon Johnson and Harry Truman. How would you characterize it?

S: Johnson was not majority leader when Truman was president. Very possibly the greatest asset Lyndon Johnson had with Harry Truman was Sam Rayburn; because they both were devoted to Sam Rayburn and Sam was very devoted to Lyndon and Lyndon was very devoted to Sam. But Johnson was not particularly close to Truman, a long way from any inner circle position.

G: Do you remember the Eisenhower program, atoms for peace?

S: Yes.

G: And do you recall anything here that sheds light on Johnson's majority leadership?

S: Everybody thought then it was a good idea, but it's turned out to be very questionable. The thought was "spread it around to promote peace," but what they actually were doing was spreading around the capacity of any country to make atomic weapons. I didn't go on the Joint Committee [for Atomic Energy] for some years, so Scoop Jackson or Albert Gore would know more about that.

G: How about the atomic peace ship? Do you remember that? The first year that that came up for a vote the Democrats opposed it.

S: I don't remember.

I think the closest friend LBJ had from the standpoint of legislation, as I look back on it, could well have been Bob Kerr, second to Russell, of course. Unfortunately both of them have passed away.

Symington -- II -- 7

He no doubt consulted heavily such people as Walter George when the latter was there. Senator Johnson revered him; also older members like Senator McClellan. Another person who could shed light on this would be Warren Magnuson. Magnuson had more seniority than Johnson and was very popular among senators. The time when I knew LBJ well was before I went to the Senate. After I went, I was a freshman senator, he was the majority leader.

G: You went down to the Ranch I think one time after his heart attack, was that right?

S: 1955. After his attack I went to see him at the hospital, can remember seeing there Lady Bird and his mother, Mrs. Johnson. Then I went down that summer to visit him at the Ranch.

G: Did the heart attack seem to change him much?

S: No.

G: It didn't mellow him or slow him down any?

S: If anything I'd say the reverse. He was always anxious to prove it had not disabled him permanently. He used to carry around a cardiogram to verify his recovery.

G: Do you know why he put you on the Public Works Committee?

S: No.

G: Did he talk to you about that when he did? The reasons for it?

S: No.

G: Senator, can you recall any case where he would try to persuade you to go along with a certain bill or to help him get a piece of legislation passed?

Symington -- II -- 8

- S: Well, naturally he was for preserving the oil depletion allowance. He might talk about that. But as I say, after 1954 I did not know him as well as before, did not see as much of him. I did want to go on Armed Services because I thought I could make a contribution, having spent some five years in the Pentagon. And he put me on that committee, for which I was very grateful.
- G: I gather that he and Senator [Thomas] Hennings was very close.
- S: Very.
- G: Do you have any insight on their friendship?
- S: Not really. Hennings was difficult to work with. My other colleagues, [Edward V.] Long and [Thomas] Eagleton, were pleasant to work with, not Hennings. People said he was jealous. I don't know. I do know he hurt me with Johnson.
- G: Did you sense that Lyndon Johnson had presidential ambitions back in the fifties?
- S: Not for a long time. If I had known, I would have really gone to work for him from the start; but he never showed it in any way until the late fifties. Everybody was saying no southerner could be elected. "We can't have a southerner. We can't have a Catholic." Plenty wrong.
- G: My impression was that the relations between you two cooled a bit because he sensed in you a competitor for the nomination.
- S: Well, you'd have to ask him about that. I do know, after he became vice president that at a stag dinner given by Senator George Smathers he volunteered that Hennings had hurt our friendship. Before that he

Symington -- II -- 9

had said, "Al Smith showed no Catholic can be president." I think Sam Rayburn had the same feeling, as did a lot of people. A lot of other people felt no southerner could ever be president. So it went.

G: What were he and Sam Rayburn like together?

S: Very close. Very close.

G: What was the atmosphere? Were they joking a lot?

S: Very pleasant, very pleasant. Lyndon had the greatest respect for Sam Rayburn, personally and politically; and it was reciprocated.

G: Do you recall any particulars here?

S: No. Mr. Rayburn was very fond of Lady Bird, and very fond of the children, Lynda and Luci. He was a bachelor and led a somewhat lonely life. He spent a lot of time around the Johnsons, as did Dick Russell, another somewhat lonely bachelor. I would guess those two had more to do with LBJ's fantastic success than any two men; and that a major reason was the affection and respect they had for his wife.

G: Do you recall working with him to get the space act passed, to set up NASA?

S: No. I was on the committee but had little to do with setting it up. I wanted to go on it, wish I hadn't done so looking back on it.

G: Why is that?

S: Once the gigantic contracts were awarded, the committee went steadily down in importance. I thought it would help my state. There was a big company in my state doing much of the work.

G: There was a conscious effort, though, to make sure that it was civilian controlled rather than military controlled, wasn't there?

Symington -- II -- 10

S: Well, you know how those things go. It's a question of personalities on both sides.

(Interruption)

G: You say that you felt that McClellan was very firm about McCarthy.

S: McClellan, Jackson and I were the three on the committee. We were in the minority. I felt confidence in the capacity of both McClellan and Jackson. At first [Everett] Dirksen was on the committee, as I remember it. One time I said something against Dirksen, who was sort of working, I thought, with McCarthy, and Johnson didn't like that. That is the only time I remember us talking about it.

G: Who, Johnson didn't like that?

S: Right.

G: The three Democratic senators, you and Senator Jackson and Senator McClellan, walked out, didn't you, and refused to continue the hearings at one point?

S: Yes. But that was temporary.

G: Who made that decision?

S: Senator McClellan would have.

G: Did he?

S: Yes.

No, I don't know why he selected [Edwin] Johnson, [John] Stennis, and [Sam] Ervin. This is something interesting (reading an outline): "Senator [Arthur] Watkins wrote that LBJ urged the senators to delete from the censure resolution the charge that Senator McCarthy had

Symington -- II -- 11

abused General [Ralph] Zwicker." I don't remember anything about that. I would be surprised he wouldn't want to clear the record, because Zwicker was much abused by McCarthy.

I felt no differently about McCarthy than did McClellan. We both felt--if what you say here is correct about Watkins and so forth--that McCarthy was damaging the country. We knew it, based on the testimony. Now whether the Majority Leader, who was a very astute politician, felt we should let the Republicans handle it or not, I don't know.

G: He was certainly able to command a strong Democratic vote to censure McCarthy after he became leader.

S: Well, by that time it was a great national scandal; no problem then. My major problem with McCarthy started after he tried to destroy someone he did not know that I knew well, in the State Department.

G: Who was this?

S: I would rather not say. The man is dead and McCarthy's dead. He was very rough against me when visiting Missouri in my first campaign for the Senate, called me a communist and a crook; typical. He called everybody anything he wanted to if they didn't agree with him. When I came back to the Senate he did his best to sort of straighten it out. Even though I was then in the minority party he offered me the chairmanship of an important subcommittee. I thought it best not to take it after talking to Senator [Leverett] Saltonstall. The committee was investigating the cost of airplanes and other items.

G: Why did you decide not to take it?

Symington -- II -- 12

S: Senator Saltonstall thought it would not react favorably with the rest of my colleagues. He said it would sort of look as if I was accepting something because of the fact that McCarthy had been a great friend of my opponent, the incumbent, [James P.] Kem, K-E-M, and now he wanted me on his side when necessary.

It got to a point with McCarthy where everybody was afraid of him. Eisenhower took the praise of [General George] Marshall out of his speech during the campaign. One day McCarthy had an investigation all set up. I had become pretty close to him, nothing profound. But this time I said, "Joe, this is no good." He wanted to frame my friend. "So I'm going to have to take you on." He said, "Don't do it, Stu. If you do I'll destroy you, and I'm fond of you." I said, "Well, that rather increases my interest." So from then on we were opponents in every sense of the word.

Ray Kiermas was McCarthy's administrative assistant. McCarthy later felt badly about the way he had attacked me. I had never taken him on in the Senate despite the fact that he was pretty rough on me in my first campaign, so rough it reacted against him. But later, after his censure, he'd call up the house and my wife would answer the phone. He would tell her that he was all for me for president and so forth. Then one day Ray Kiermas, his AA, came to see me and said, "Senator McCarthy is sicker than anybody knows, and he sends you his best." This was just before he died. After the censure everybody pretty much deserted him, including the Republicans. He'd come over and sit down by me and put his arm around me. He'd get loaded by eleven o'clock in the morning. I thought, "He's a lost human being,

Symington -- II -- 13

with a soul," and I would not get up and leave him. For this I got a bad column from Doris Fleenon, asking, "What's this all about?" She'd been in the press gallery. It was sad, this destruction of a human being, no pleasure, regardless of anything else, to see a man just fall apart; and watch his friends desert him.

G: Do you think his alcoholism was part of the problem in the early days or was this only after the censure?

S: I don't know. He was unfair to the army, very unfair to Zwicker. "Who promoted [Irving] Peress," and all that kind of nonsense. He was also unfair to the State Department. It was not Dulles' finest hour. The fellow who stood up to him the most in State in my opinion was Bedell Smith.

G: What did Smith do?

S: He prevented him from destroying at least one person that I knew of. They would argue about whether they should let a man go because McCarthy said he was a communist.

G: And Smith refused to release the man?

S: He would persuade Dulles not to let him go.

G: Did you have any input here? Were you working with Bedell Smith?

S: I knew Smith well and was high on him, a good man.

G: What do you think the turning point was in McCarthy's downfall?

S: I think what destroyed him was the television, and especially after the dialogue with [Joseph N.] Welch, the counsel; and then there was Ed Murrow.

G: But you wanted Johnson to talk about it?

Symington -- II -- 14

S: Not necessarily. I was satisfied with my chairman, McClellan, a great man, meticulous. Bobby had some sympathy for McCarthy, but he was our counsel for the minority, and did well.

G: He left the committee when you did, though, didn't he?

S: The committee was disbanded. A new committee came up. Kennedy and Roy Cohn didn't get along. Bobby was very anti-communist, a devoted Catholic. He had discovered some things for McCarthy, about Chinese-British ships helping the North Koreans or something. They had a relationship.

After the situation got really serious, a new select committee was formed. But McClellan and Jackson deserve a lot of credit for calling this fellow's hand.

G: I bet you got a lot of hate mail at that point.

S: In one day six or seven hundred telegrams, plus baskets of mail, big baskets. There was a woman named Annie Lee Moss, who worked for the army. At McCarthy's insistence they withdrew her clearance. I asked her if she was a communist in the committee. She said no. She had taken the Daily Worker, but that didn't necessarily mean she was a communist. The army took her job away from her, [took] her clearance away from her. At one hearing I said, "If you can't get a job in the government, I'll see you get a job," then got not less than ten thousand postcards saying, "Have you given a job to Annie Lee Moss?" Later on she was reinstated by the Secretary of Defense, who overruled the army and put her back on her regular job. Messy business. People were afraid of McCarthy for reasons I could never quite understand.

Symington -- II -- 15

G: Do you think President Eisenhower was afraid of him?

S: I don't know. I think he was nervoused up by him. McCarthy would leak anything, anytime, anyplace, anywhere. He was attractive to most men. Most women did not like him. He wasn't immoral, rather amoral.

G: Did you ever talk to him about that?

S: Not really. He had a peculiar kind of approach to life, was tremendously ambitious. He made that speech in West Virginia. Dean Acheson picked it up. If Acheson had just let it go, there would have been no problem. But the Secretary thought it was important enough to answer when he declared, "I hold in my hand. . ." and all that. Remember?

G: Yes.

S: I'd hit him hard at the end if I thought it important, but always directly in front. It may be LBJ did not approve of the way I operated. One time he took me down plenty for being rough on Dirksen. He didn't like that.

G: Why not?

S: He worked with Dirksen.

G: Did you get the feeling that he was closer to Dirksen than he had been to [William] Knowland?

S: Much, much closer.

G: Why was this?

S: Dirksen was the Republican leader and could deliver him a lot of votes if they reached agreement.

G: I see. Do you think they had a better rapport or understood each other better?

Symington -- II -- 16

- S: Dirksen was a very powerful man, when Johnson was president; was of great service to LBJ in the clutch. That great asset of LBJ, "let's reason together," he worked especially well with Dirksen.
- G: Dirksen was more of an ally than Knowland had been?
- S: In every way.
- G: I get the impression that he was always outsmarting Knowland.
- S: I would think so.
- G: Even though Knowland had a narrow majority.
- S: Well, Bill wasn't too bright. Bob Taft was very bright, but died the first few months I was in the Senate. Dirksen and Johnson, that was a great team.
- G: I gather also that Johnson had a way of getting a few Republicans to vote with the Democrats, under Knowland.
- S: Under Knowland?
- G: Yes.
- S: I don't know about that, but he sure got a lot of them under Dirksen.
- G: Was this primarily through Dirksen?
- S: I would think so. Kerr, of course, is gone. Bobby Baker was very clever and a good nose counter.
- G: He could count votes though, I understand.
- S: Yes. And Johnson was high on Walter Jenkins, as was I. John Connally, of course, was one of the brightest and most able people I've known. He'd be president of the United States today if he hadn't switched parties, in my opinion. I first got to know him through LBJ. That crowd LBJ first had up here, like that beloved Mary Rather, and John

Symington -- II -- 17

Connally, quite a group.

G: I guess he had a reputation for having one of the hardest working staffs.

S: He sure did.

G: Senator, how much of it was timing, knowing when to bring up a particular bill or when not to?

S: I had been a businessman, never really got into the details of government until I ran for the Senate. When I ran the Air Force or the National Security Resources Board, or Surplus Property, or the RFC, it was like running a business. You say, "Do it or get out." As Al Smith once said, "In business you can tell them, in politics you have to sell them." In a sense that is a summary in the Senate of Johnson's capacity. He was a great salesman of his ideas. Unfortunately it didn't carry over into the presidency as much as he had hoped and all of us would have hoped. But he was a tremendous negotiator to get done what he thought should be done. Too bad he got bogged down in the Vietnam War.

G: Was it more a question of the art of the possible or did he have a philosophical range that he stayed within?

S: I'm no psychologist.

G: Well, let me rephrase it. Do you think he had his own legislative programs that he wanted to advance or was he merely trying to pass the legislation that he could get a majority on?

S: I think he wanted to get the legislation through he thought was right. I did not know, nor do I think most of his friends knew, that for some time probably before I met him, he had his eyes on the

Symington -- II -- 18

presidency. That's no criticism of him, but it unquestionably influenced his approach to various problems. He would be more parochial when he was representing Texas, and he would be more national on issues like civil rights. But he had a very deep feeling of pity and affection, even respect, for the less fortunate people, no question. That was deep in his nature. Some of the things he said about his cook, Zephyr [Wright] couldn't be surpassed.

His wife, as mentioned, is one of the truly great ladies, universally respected, universally beloved. She and Mrs. Truman could be the two most respected women that ever hit this town. Mrs. Truman did not like to get in it all, but Lady Bird was in it, all the way. I had a letter from Chuck Robb this morning, was supporting him out in Virginia, where half of my family come from. There's a fellow who could go far, a fine man.

G: He hasn't done badly today.

S: He's done well. That's a rough state. I told Lady Bird some months ago that Harry Byrd said, "I think he's going to win." He did.

That's all for now. If you want to come back, any time.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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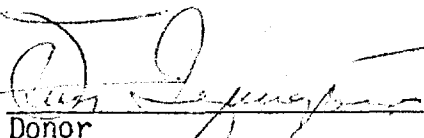
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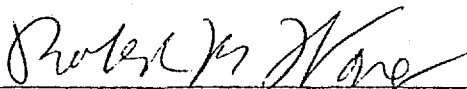
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