INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 17, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: HERMAN TALMADGE

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

PLACE: Mr. Talmadge's office, New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C.

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B: Sir, to begin at the beginning, do you recall when you first either met or had any knowledge of Mr. Johnson?

T: Well, of course I had knowledge of Mr. Johnson before I met him. I first had knowledge of him, I believe, when he ran for Congress in 1938. It was a by-election and since he was carrying the Roosevelt banner he received considerable nationwide publicity. The first time I ever met former President Johnson, to the best of my recollection, was at the Convention in Chicago in 1952. I was then Governor of Georgia. I was chairman of the Georgia delegation to the National Democratic Convention. We were espousing the candidacy of Senator Russell. Senator Johnson at that time was in the Senate, and he was also active in Senator Russell's campaign. I became acquainted with him at that time, of course not extremely well. Our close relationship didn't begin until I came up to the Senate in 1957.

B: Back in that '52 Convention there was a pretty concerted effort there to get the nomination for Senator Russell.

T: Yes.

B: Was Mr. Johnson working hard on that?

T: Yes, he was working diligently for Senator Russell. As you know, Senator Russell had been somewhat his mentor when he came to the Senate and was instrumental in getting good committee assignments for Senator Johnson as a freshman Senator, was also instrumental in his election first as Minority Whip, I believe, or Minority Leader. And afterwards [Senator Johnson] became the Majority Leader of the Senate as soon as the Democrats had a majority in the Senate.

B: At that '52 Convention, was there any thought that if Senator Russell could not get the nomination maybe another Southerner like Senator Johnson [would be chosen] as the vice presidential nominee?

T: No, I don't recall. Of course, as it wound up, you know, Adlai Stevenson got the nomination for the presidency, and he himself selected John Sparkman as his running mate. He was a Senator from Alabama and still is.

B: Did your father have any acquaintance or working relationship with Mr. Johnson?

T: Not to my knowledge.

B: And while you were Governor, which for the record here was from '48-'55, did Mr. Johnson have any connection with your state or local affairs?

T: I don't recall that he did.

B: Then, sir, as you said a moment ago, you entered the Senate in 1957, when Mr. Johnson was already Senate Leader. Did you get any special welcome or advice?

B: Yes, indeed. He went out of his way to be very kind to me when I was a freshman in the Senate and he was Majority Leader. During lulls in the Senate when nothing much was going on he would come back and sit by me on the back bench there and talk sometimes an hour at a time, so our relationship was extremely personal, pleasant and cordial. Senator Johnson went out of his way to befriend me at every and all occasions and to help me get good committee assignments. My third year in the Senate I went on the Finance Committee, I'm sure primarily at his behest, and also the aid of Senator Russell, who at that time was the dominant force in the Steering Committee. But the Majority Leader in the Senate, particularly when Johnson was Majority Leader, had the dominant voice in virtually all Senate procedure.

B: What sort of things would he talk about in those sessions in the back?

T: We'd talk about everything, farming and politics, Senate procedure, hunting, fishing, just everything under the sun.

B: Just chatting among buddies?

T: Yes, that is correct.

B: Senator Johnson and Senator Russell obviously had a special relationship, as you said a while back, almost as if Senator Russell were Johnson's mentor.

I: That's right.

B: Was this clear and obvious to members of the Senate generally?

T: I think most knowledgeable members of the Senate recognized that

fact. Senator Russell's seat was right behind the Majority Leader's. Frequently, when some issue would arise or some parliamentary question, you'd see Senator Johnson confer with Senator Russell. Senator Russell, of course, has always been recognized as by far the ablest parliamentarian in the Senate. Most senators, regardless of their political philosophy and whether they be Republicans or Democrats, greatly value Senator Russell's sage advice, his wisdom, broad experience, his integrity. Senator Johnson would confer with him frequently when he was Majority Leader.

B: Did Senator Russell ever talk with you about any ambitions he might have had for Senator Johnson?

T: No. Of course Senator Russell supported Senator Johnson for, first, minority whip, and then minority leader and then majority leader, and then for the presidency itself. Senator Russell is not a man who shouts from the roof top his allegiance to other candidates' political ambitions, but he was always exceedingly loyal to former President Johnson, even when they disagreed on a matter of policy.

B: Who else in the Senate in those days was particularly close to Johnson?

T: The late Bob Kerr of Oklahoma was very close to him and so was Senator Clinton Anderson. There were a great number of senators who were close to Senator Johnson. Senator Humphrey was quite close to him. Of course, as Majority Leader, virtually all the senators were more or less close to him, some closer than others.

B: How did the--

T: The only Democratic senator to my knowledge who went out of his way to attack him from time to time was Senator Proxmire of Wisconsin.

B: Yes. It seems to be. Do you know where that originated? Why?

T: Oh, I think probably it's part of that old LaFollette populist tradition that a senator is supposed to be on the attack down here all the time. It made news back in Wisconsin. I think it was primarily for home consumption.

B: How did the Johnson leadership technique work? What made it so effective?

T: He was the most effective legislative tactician I ever saw. He didn't have any fixed position on most issues that would come before the Senate, and when some issue was badly divided there, the Senate would be getting nowhere, he would work toward an area of compromise. Then he would normally get some senator who was not broadly identified with either side of the issue [to] offer some conciliatory amendment, which would normally bring the opposing factions together and succeed in getting the consensus of the Senate in passing legislation.

B: Have you ever been involved in this process yourself?

T: Yes, on a few occasions. He would confer with me from time to time about it. It reminded me of a battle commander that would survey the battle from a hill somewhere and see what the situation was developing, and then at the appropriate time he would throw in the troops at the right place and the battle would be resolved. He was

in my judgment the greatest Majority Leader the Senate's ever had from the standpoint of tactics.

B: Can you recall a specific case where you helped him work out one of these arrangements?

T: Oh, as I recall we discussed some strategy on Hell's Canyon on two or three occasions. He discussed with me on many occasions issues involving civil rights. Of course, my views were well known in that area, and we disagreed from time to time, particularly when he became President, on some of his policies in that area. But on several occasions I saw him resolve issues that were badly divided. There was one about TVA funding on one occasion that I was involved in. He worked out a compromise that could resolve the issue along with Senator Kerr and myself.

B: You mentioned civil rights. The year you arrived in the Senate was the year of the '57 Civil Rights bill.

T: Yes.

B: As you say, your views at the time were quite well known on that issue.

T: Yes.

B: What was the impression of men like yourself of what Senator Johnson was trying to do at that time?

T: Well, of course Senator Johnson was instrumental in getting legislation through the Senate; without his help it couldn't have passed. He helped us take out some of the most objectional features of that particular bill in 1957.

B: That was the Part III?

T: That was Part III, and thereafter they had sufficient votes to impose cloture and pass the bill. Of course after he got on the national horizon, where he was not a Senator from Texas, his views on civil rights somewhat hardened and he lost a great many of his political supporters in the South by his positions.

B: Back in the '57 bill, was Senator Russell working with Senator Johnson?

T: Senator Russell was opposed to the bill in its entirety, as I was, but of course he recognized when they got the overwhelming majority of the votes that we couldn't defeat the bill.

B: I've heard that Senator Johnson used the argument that if it were not this somewhat mild bill it might very well be a worse bill from the Southern standpoint.

T: He did. He always knew how to exploit his issue very successfully.

B: And was the main attempt to avoid a filibuster by Southern senators?

T: Yes. The only senator who filibustered that year was Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina.

B: I believe you publicly criticized him for it.

T: I didn't criticize him per se; I stated my reasons for not filibustering.

B: An outsider kind of got the impression that it had been understood that there would not be anything like that.

T: Well, sometimes a senator reads remarks into a statement that are not intended, you know. I had no criticism of Senator Thurmond.

We have a hundred members of the Senate, and it's up to them to conduct themselves as they deem appropriate and in the best interest of the nation and their constituency in their state. Senator Thurmond, or any other senator, was at perfect liberty, of course, to make a speech at any length he wanted to.

B: In connection with that bill, or in the Senate years, did Senator Johnson ever discuss with you civil rights from kind of a philosophical standpoint, about whether it was right or wrong, as opposed to just the tactics of legislation?

T: I'm sure he discussed it with me on many, many occasions. I don't recall any specific conversations in that area.

B: Then, sir, when in this period did you begin to see signs of presidential ambitions in Mr. Johnson?

T: About 1959, as I recall. He started talking to me about how he had made speeches in New York and Philadelphia and others areas of the country outside the South and what fine receptions he had had and so on. I knew of course that the Majority Leader of the United States Senate and a Senator from Texas wouldn't be out making speeches of that nature unless he had national political ambitions.

B: Was he asking your support by implication?

T: Well, he knew he had my support; I had told him I was for him.

B: And you mentioned earlier that Senator Russell was for him, too.

T: Yes. In fact, every one of the Southern senators, as I recall, was for him.

B: Did the Southern senators help advise him on tactics and how to go about things?

T: Oh, I don't know that they did. I'm sure he asked their advice from time to time and probably asked mine. I don't recall any specific details.

B: I asked because there has been some question about whether or not it might have been better for him to enter primaries than apparently relying on his contacts through senators.

T: As I recall, he stated specifically at that time that he had no intention of entering any primaries. He didn't have the time; his primary duty and responsibility was as Majority Leader of the United States Senate, and he couldn't abandon it to go participate in primaries.

B: Did you think prior to the Convention that a Southern senator had a chance for the nomination?

T: No, I did not. In fact, I told Senator Johnson that. He kept talking about the great receptions that he was having and how much support he had in states like Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and other areas. I finally told him, "Lyndon, you're not going to get fifty delegates in the five most populous states in the Union." He said, "What do you want to bet?" I said, "I'll bet you a suit of clothes." He said, "Let's make it a hat." I said, "All right." He hasn't paid me the hat yet.

B: Did you ever remind him of that later on?

T: No.

B: Maybe someday you can get your hat from him.

T: No, he's too busy. He's done more for me than buy me a hat.

B: Did anyone among the Johnson supporters at this time offer the suggestion of the vice presidency?

T: Well, just before the Convention began and shortly before the Senate concluded we had only one or two days to wrap up conference reports, and I didn't see any chance of a divisive issue where my vote would be necessary or a record vote. So I walked by and I sat down by Lyndon and I said, "Lyndon, Kennedy's going to be nominated on the first ballot. I'm not going to the convention. I'll be at Lovejoy. I'll be watching it on television. You'll get the unanimous vote of the Georgia delegation. If Kennedy's as smart as I think he is he's going to offer you the vice presidency, and I hope you won't accept it."

B: You hoped that he--

T: Hoped that, "You won't accept it." He said, "Good God, Herman, you know I've got no such idea of doing any such foolish thing!" I said, "Well, that's all I wanted to hear you say. I'll be at Lovejoy watching the Convention." I walked out of the Senate chamber. About two days after the Convention was over,I got a call from Lyndon Johnson in Denver, Colorado. He was at the Brown Palace Hotel. He said, "Herman, I just wanted to tell you why I accepted the vice presidency nomination." I said, "Lyndon, you don't have to explain that to me now, that's water over the dam. I just always hated to see a friend of mine promoted from the

presidency of a corporation to vice chairman of the board." That's the only time we ever mentioned it to each other.

B: Did he go on then to explain to you why he accepted?

T: Yes, he started to explain it to me.

B: What reasons did he give?

T: I didn't listen with any great detail, loyalty to the party, or something like that. I'd given him my views on it, and of course any explanation wasn't necessary. You don't have to explain something you've already done, because you can't countermand it.

B: Why did you recommend that he not take it?

T: Well, I knew he was doing a good job as Majority Leader, and I knew that in most instances vice presidents of the United States were very unhappy people and political eunuchs. I hated to see him put in that position.

B: Did his being on the ticket help the ticket in Georgia?

T: In my judgment it resulted in the election of Kennedy. I think he would have been defeated had not Johnson been on the ticket.

B: He carried, the ticket carried Georgia.

T: He carried Georgia overwhelmingly and all the other Southern states.

B: Did you do any campaigning?

T: Yes. Johnson came down at my request as a matter of fact. They wanted him to speak in Georgia. So he spoke on the campus of Mercer University, which is one of our outstanding Baptist institutions in our state, historic institution. I introduced him there on the campus at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia.

B: Was he well received?

T: Yes, he was extremely well received, and Georgia of course went overwhelmingly for the ticket.

B: Did you see much of him during the years he was Vice President?

T: Yes, I saw a good deal of him, not as much as when he was Majority Leader. From time to time I'd drop by his office and say "Hello" occasionally. When I'd have some distinguished citizen from Georgia that expressed a desire to meet the Vice President I'd take him by, and of course when he presided over the Senate I would always see him there. I wasn't as close to him when he was Vice President as I was when he was in the Senate, and less close still when he was President. Of course, the President had such a multiplicity of duties; he doesn't have time to hang around the Senate, and senators don't have time to hang around the White House even if the doors were always open, which they aren't.

B: As Vice President, did Mr. Johnson seem under unusual restraint? Did he seem--?

T: Yes, he did. He submerged his own views totally to that of the Administration, and I got the impression that he was somewhat of a bull in a cage.

B: There were stories at the time and since of a good deal of rivalry between Johnson and not so much John Kennedy but the rest of the Kennedy group.

T: I've heard that, and I think there's considerable truth in it. I know that Johnson was not their choice for the vice presidential

nomination, and I've heard many reports that some of the so-called Irish Mafia went out of the way to stab him in the back. I'm inclined to think that's correct.

B: If Johnson wasn't their choice, whose choice was he?

T: I have no idea. They didn't ask my advice. I was not at the Convention. I'm sure that President Kennedy made the correct decision from the political standpoint in putting Johnson on his ticket. He recognized it, and the results of the election speak for themselves.

B: Early in the Kennedy Administration at the beginning of '61, the beginning of the Congressional session, there was an effort to have Mr. Johnson elected as head of the caucus, I believe, in the Senate. Did that seem to you at the time like an ill-advised move?

T: I didn't think so at the time, but on reflection I think it was ill-advised, yes.

B: Was it Mr. Johnson's idea or Mansfield's?

T: I've forgotten. I think it was Senator Mansfield's idea. I don't know whether he and the Vice President conferred about it or not.

B: In the Vice Presidential years, did Mr. Johnson work pretty hard here on the Hill in advocating the Administration's legislation?

T: Not to my knowledge. He never approached me that I recall, urging me to vote for or against any measure while he was Vice President.

B: During the entire period?

T: That is my recollection at the moment.

B: Then, sir, at the time of President Kennedy's assassination, Mr.

Johnson is known to have called a number of people immediately after and in the next few weeks. Do you remember when you first heard from him after he became President?

T: I don't recall. It was not immediate. I had various conversations with him from time to time, but I knew he was extremely busy and I made no effort to contact him. And I don't recall that he contacted me immediately after the assassination.

B: When he became President did you have any thought that perhaps the tenor of the Administration might change, that the programs that the Kennedys had been advocating might not be advocated so strenuously?

T: I had hoped that it would not be.

B: Then, of course, Mr. Johnson immediately continued to push the civil rights proposal that was in Congress.

T: That is correct.

B: You mentioned earlier that his position seemed to harden on civil rights.

T: Yes.

B: Did you view this as a kind of political expediency?

T: Of course, he was President of all the fifty states of the Union and not a senator from Texas. Knowing how the President operates, I think he thought he could take over the element within the Democratic Party that had opposed him so strongly when he sought the Presidency and also when he sought the Vice Presidency; that was the extreme elements in labor and the extreme liberal elements. I

think he went all-out to pacify them, to try to placate them and take them over. It didn't work as it developed.

B: Did he discuss with you his civil rights ideas, either specifically on the bill of '64 or at any other time?

T: I don't recall. We discussed it after the act was passed once, when I went to the White House when the people in HEW started assigning students to classrooms they didn't want to attend and teachers to schools they didn't want to attend. I called up the White House one time and asked for an appointment. They wanted to know what I wanted to discuss. I told them. I carried Senator Sam Ervin with me because I thought he was the best constitutional authority we had in the Senate. When I got there, the President and the Vice President and the Attorney General were there and some people from HEW. We had a conversation well over an hour. I told him the civil rights bill, of course, required that no state could classify children by race for assignments to schools. We recognized that. That was an accomplished fact and the law of the land.

But they were going further than that. They were compelling people to mix in schools where they didn't want to mix, teachers to teach in schools where they didn't want to teach, just the opposite from what we had had, enforced segregation by law. They were compelling integration by decisions in the departments. I got the impression that he wasn't going to permit that, and we discussed it all the way around. Senator Ervin and I came out congratulating

each other about how well the situation went, but there was no change whatever after our conference.

B: Did Mr. Johnson do most of the talking on his side, or did the other people?

T: We all did some talking. I did some talking, the President did some, Senator Ervin did some, the Vice President, the Attorney General, Califano was there. I've forgotten who else. We spent over an hour down there. Everyone talked. I thought it went extremely well. Senator Ervin and I left very happy with the progress that we had made, but the results continued the same and remained that way until this good day.

B: Did you ever try again to talk to him about it?

T: No.

B: Just on the grounds that it perhaps wouldn't do any good?

T: I had assumed that when a fellow tells you that he is going to do something that he's going to do it. If he doesn't, there's no need in calling his attention to that fact again.

B: And you and Senator Ervin both had the impression that changes were going to be made?

T: Yes. We felt very happy about our conversation.

B: Back when the bill of '64 was in the Senate in the spring of '64, what was Senator Russell's reaction to it?

T: He was opposed to it.

B: Apparently the passage was assured when Republicans, particularly Senator Dirksen, decided to support it.

T: I think Dirksen switching his position resulted in the bill passing,

yes.

B: Did people like yourself ever figure out why Senator Dirksen switched?

T: You'd have to ask Senator Dirksen that.

B: We intend to, sir, but we thought we'd kind of like to ask--

T: I have no idea why he switched.

B: --what it seemed like at the time.

T: I've served with Senator Dirksen in the Senate long enough to know that he sometimes switches his position.

B: What about some of the other programs that Senator Johnson continued or offered that year and the following year, Medicare, the Poverty Program?

T: Well, he was responsible for passing the legislative program which President Kennedy had espoused with poor results. Of course, I think there was a combination of circumstances that made its passage easy. First, the country felt like they ought to honor a martyred president. There was a tremendous reaction after he was assassinated there. And then of course the President was right at the height of his power and prestige, and he knew how to use power more effectively than President Kennedy did, particularly legislative power. He was a legislative wizard, as I've tried to point out in my previous remarks.

B: On these other bills, did he contact you directly to influence you?

T: Oh, he called me a few times on the telephone. I don't remember the specific legislative propositions, but from time to time he'd

call me about various matters of government, not necessarily legislation.

B: What other kinds of things would he--?

T: He called me a time or two about the Dominican Crisis. Tap Bennett was a Georgian, and he knew that I knew Tap well. As a matter of fact, we'd attended the University of Georgia together. And before he appointed him Ambassador to the Dominican Republic he checked it out with me, and I recommended him very highly. Of course, the President sent troops to Dominica largely on the recommendation of the American Ambassador. Some of the anti-interventionists, such as Senator Fulbright and others, were highly caustic and critical of that action, and it concerned the President somewhat. He called me and talked to me about it at least twice.

B: Did he call you before or after the troops were sent in?

T: Afterwards.

B: Was he calling you just to reinforce his opinion--?

T: Well, he was telling me how they were trying to cut him up and how they were after him and Bennett. He was critical about some articles that appeared in the New York Times; he thought they were treating him unfairly.

B: Sir, is a call like that from the President to a senator, particularly on legislation, effective?

T: Oh, yes. I don't know how effective it is in changing votes. I don't think it ever changed one of my votes. The President knew me well enough to know that once I took a position it was my own decision, and no amount of pressure from any source could change me. But

anyone is flattered with a call from the President of the United States, including U.S. senators.

B: Does it help you understand the problems from his point of view?

T: Undoubtedly, sometimes. You read something in the paper, you know, that's not entirely accurate, and you don't know the background. Sometimes it's not full, not complete.

B: In the presidential election of 1964 did you campaign for the ticket?

T: No. I voted for the Democratic ticket and I announced my position, but I made no political speeches.

B: What had happened in the four years that had passed to put the Democratic Party in the position it was a National Democratic Party--

T: The national Democratic Party had taken positions that were repugnant to many of the Southern states, and our people were in rebellion about it. Georgia went for the Republican candidate in the 1964 election for the first time in history. Goldwater carried the state by about 97 or 98,000 votes. Georgia was the last state in the Union to vote for a Republican candidate for president; prior to that time it never had. No amount of activity on anyone's behalf could have carried Georgia for Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

I say I didn't campaign; I did appear with the President in Macon, Georgia, and Augusta, Georgia, when he spoke in the state at that time. I didn't ask him to come into the state. I thought coming was a mistake, and the results of the election subsequently proved that I was correct. We were seated in his plane flying from Macon, Georgia, to Augusta, and Governor Sanders was then Governor of Georgia.

He was very active in Mr. Johnson's campaign, stumping the state to try to carry the state for him, and he was telling the President that Georgia was going for the Democratic ticket. I think he stated by a 100,000 majority, as I recall. The President listened to the Governor, and then he turned to me and said, "Herman, what do you think about it?" I said, "Mr. President, I think you may well lose the state."

B: Which of you did Mr. Johnson seem to believe?

T: He didn't express an opinion one way or another, but of course the results of the election bore out my prediction.

B: I believe it was about 54 per cent Republican that year?

T: About that ratio. It was about 97,000 majority for Goldwater,as I recall.

B: Prior to the Convention, did you discuss with Mr. Johnson the possibility of arranging the platform or choosing a vice presidential candidate?

T: No, he didn't ask my advice and I didn't volunteer.

B: Did you participate when Mrs. Johnson's train came through?

T: No. Mrs. Talmadge did. I had other engagements and couldn't go.

B: I don't mean this to be rude or impertinent, but were the other engagements arranged so that you wouldn't have to ?

T: No. I had them previously, and I didn't think it necessary that I cancel them. I didn't think it was of sufficient importance to do so.

B: I was asking because I was wondering if the situation put you in an awkward political position in Georgia?

T: Oh, they were booed from one end of the state to the other. I knew that was going to happen beforehand, but Mrs. Johnson asked Betty to go. She asked me, and I said, "Mrs. Johnson is the First Lady of the Land. I'd go."

B: Someone said that although probably nothing could have allowed Mr. Johnson to carry the Deep South in those years, in some places Mrs. Johnson was a rather effective campaigner.

T: Oh, she was very effective. If there was any doubt they resolved it in her favor. But at that time the electorate was polarized; they wouldn't have voted for Johnson if he'd had a halo around his head.

B: Then, sir, in the rest of the term, to take some aspects of Mr. Johnson's policies, you serve also on the Agriculture and Forestry Committee.

T: Yes.

B: What did you think of his agricultural program?

T: Well, he essentially adopted mine, and we put it through the Senate after Johnson became President. I had advocated it in the Senate when he was Majority Leader, and that was pretty much the policies the Administration adopted. We had had, as you know, very high price supports, and it resulted in pricing our commodities out of the world market. Also, the government became the purchasing agent for the farmer. They would deposit their farm commodities in the government warehouse with non-recourse loans. The government would wind up owning the commodity; they would have to transport the commodity, store the commodity, sell the commodity, or give it away

or whatever they were going to do with it. It was an inordinately high cost. I conceived the idea--I don't say it was original with me, others has probably espoused it also--of reducing the price supports to make the commodities more competitive at home and abroad, and also to make up the loss of the farmer's income by direct payments. That was the policy the Administration adopted.

B: Was Mr. Johnson himself particularly interested in agricultural programs?

T: Yes, he was. He was from an agricultural area, and of course Texas is still a great agricultural state, so he was oriented politically toward agriculture and very much interested in it.

B: What was your opinion of Mr. Freeman as Secretary of Agriculture?

T: Of course Mr. Freeman didn't grow up on a farm, but he was highly intelligent and he could learn fast. I think he made a good Secretary of Agriculture. Of course our people in this country are so badly divided now, even farmers themselves, that no one can be very successful as Secretary of Agriculture at the present time.

B: Some said that his major success was in surviving.

T: That's right. Anyone that can survive as Secretary of Agriculture now has been quite successful.

B: He seems to have gotten along with Congress extremely well.

T: Yes, he got along extremely well, not only with the Democrats but with the Republicans also, even if they disagreed with his program.

B: Did he just do his work thoroughly--

T: He was articulate, intelligent and diplomatic, worked hard at his

job. He tried to brief senators and congressmen on what he was doing, explain his programs, why he wanted them and so on, and was quite successful in getting them passed.

B: And I assume that work is principally with the committees--?

T: Yes, primarily. Of course, it goes beyond committees now. You see, agriculture represents only about 6 per cent of the American population now, and about 94 per cent is non-agriculturally oriented. Sometimes some of our congressmen that don't have any agricultural interests in their districts want farmers to raise their commodities free and give them away to their constituency.

B: I know people say that nowadays congressmen from farm districts just aren't enough to pass a farm bill unless they have the support of congressmen from metropolitan districts.

T: Well, that's absolutely true. I read an article just this week, that less than 10 per cent of the members of the House at the present time have as much as 25 per cent of their electorate that is essentially agricultural. You can see what a phenomenal burden it is.

B: This must be one of the major considerations for both the administration, the secretary, and the congressmen involved.

T: It is, it is. You have to deal with political realities. They read these huge stories about so-and-so getting payments of a million dollars a year for not farming and things like that, and they head for the storm cellars and get out the knives and start attacking the program without knowing what they are talking about. Of course, you must realize that only 17.6 per cent of the average American's take home

pay goes for food. That's the lowest of any country in the world, and it's lower in the United States than it was even during the Depression days. You talk about poverty, we have more of it on farms in this country today than we have anywhere else. There is twice as much rural poverty as there is urban poverty, even though the farm areas represent only 6 per cent of the population.

B: I believe one of Secretary Freeman's proposals, or it may have originated in Congress, was a kind of rural poverty program.

T: That's true.

B: Did the food stamp issue occupy much of your time during the Johnson Administration?

T: Yes. We considered it in the Committee on Agriculture, and it was adopted during his Administration. My recollection is Senator Aiken of Vermont was the original sponsor of the food stamp program. My recollection is that we reported it out of the Senate committee unanimously and had no opposition that I recall on the Senate floor. At that time it was a pilot program. Since then it has expanded substantially. Of course, the commodity program was devised before that. Of course, the school lunchroom program dates back to the early forties. I believe Senator Ellender and Senator Russell were the principal sponsors of that.

B: Did you ever consider a food stamp program that would either have free food stamps or would not require the county cooperation?

T: Only this year has been the first time. I offered a food stamp bill myself in the Senate this time, with the proviso for free food stamps

to families with incomes of less than forty dollars a month. Of course, the Secretary I think made his recommendation based on thirty dollars a month. Senator McGovern made his recommendation based on eighty dollars a month, as I recall. And by a vote of something like seven to five in the Committee, they opposed free food stamps per se. But there is a provision in it that makes the minimum cost two dollars a month for a family of four and also provides that states and local entities may be required to pay for it. So it's virtually free.

B: To shift gears a little, you generally oppose the foreign aid program. Do you feel that the Johnson Administration made any important changes in this?

T: Yes. They reduced it to some degree, and I think it could be reduced still further. I became alarmed a good many years ago about the problem of our balance of budgets, the tremendous burden the dollar was carrying and our gold drain. And I have consistently opposed the foreign aid program since I've been in the Senate. When I first came here it would run six or seven billion dollars a year. It's cut down now to about two billion, to my recollection, and I think it will be reduced further this year.

B: In connection with Vietnam, the major foreign policy problem of the Johnson Administration, do you feel that Mr. Johnson adequately consulted Congress on his Vietnamese policy?

T: Oh, I guess he did. He consulted everyone about his Vietnamese policy. Every time I was around him he was talking about it. My

own view was that we made a mistake by going in there. We were involved before Mr. Johnson became President. I think once we got involved in large-scale shooting we should have placed our country on a wartime basis. He should have let the people know that we were at war; he should have wrapped the flag around himself and thrown every resource our country had to conclude the war. I think had he done that he would have survived.

B; Did you offer this advice to him directly?

T: We have an old saying down in south Georgia: "You don't draw a pistol on a man unless you intend to use it, because if you do he might kill you." That's what we did with Vietnam, and it's destroyed everyone that's been connected with it to date. Our people have gotten sadly disillusioned when they see their sons being drafted, sent over to Vietnam to fight and maybe to die and to be shot up, and know that the full resources of our country are not placed behind them. They tend to become chagrined, and I am too.

B: What was Mr. Johnson's reaction when you suggested an all-out effort?

T: I think he thought that he was trying to follow a moderate middle course and probably avoid a conflict with Red China and Russia, but we assumed that risk when we went to battle. There's no way to fight a war except to fight it with everything you have. If you're not going to do it, you oughtn't to get involved.

B: There were several times when there was talk of calling up the reserves and economic measures that would do what you were suggesting. What do you suppose happened to the idea?

T: I have no idea. You'd have to ask someone in higher authority than one Senator.

B: Did the war appear to frustrate Mr. Johnson?

T: Yes. I think it was his greatest burden during the Presidency.

B: To the extent that it limited his effectiveness in other areas?

T: Oh, no doubt about that.

B: Domestic policy?

T: People felt very strongly about the war one way or another, and he succeeded in alienating, to use the very trite phrase, most of the hawks and most of the doves. The doves wanted to flee and the hawks wanted to fight, and he did neither.

B: Did it leave the same kind of frustration in Congress?

T: Yes.

B: I was just wondering, you just mentioned the phrase "so far as one Senator can see," which must be an even more frustrating position than--

T: It is.

B: --perhaps Mr. Johnson was in.

T: That's one of the big problems of being in the Senate. You think sometimes maybe you have the answers, and yet you're completely powerless to execute them.

B: You said you had been around Mr. Johnson several times when this came up. Could you talk to him about it, or did you just listen to him talk about it?

T: Oh, we exchanged ideas freely. I don't know that he ever sought my

advice as to how he ought to handle the Vietnam War, but when we were together there were certainly no inhibitions on our conversation. I talked to him as easily as I could talk to a member of my family.

B: What do you think generally of Mr. Johnson's appointments in the Executive Branch, the people who carry out the government?

T: I think he made some very unwise choices on the Supreme Court.

B: That would be Justice Marshall and Justice Fortas.

T: Yes.

B: I would assume that's because of their libertarian views?

T: Yes, sir. They had the idea that the Court was supposed to change the Constitution to suit their own notions as to what it ought to be. I think that is one of the great problems of our country right now.

B: What about--?

T: I think our people are badly divided at the present time, more badly divided, I think, than they've ever been in the history of our Republic on a great many issues. I think our Supreme Court by some of its decisions has aided and encouraged that division. Of course, the war has compounded it.

B: What about his appointments in the administrative branch?

T: Which ones specifically? If you'll name them I'll give you my views on them.

B: We'll start with the Cabinet, Rusk, McNamara.

T: Rusk is originally a Georgian. I don't know him too well. In most

things our relations were very cordial and pleasant. I don't know what Rusk's advice was. I think Johnson was his own Secretary of State, and that's been the trend recently in our Republic.

B: How about Mr. McNamara? Particularly in his--?

T: I was not a great admirer of McNamara's policies. I thought he had a wonderful mind, but I don't think he handled himself well with the Congress, and I think that some of his actions as Secretary of Defense were great mistakes.

B: And the Attorneys General?

T: I think Ramsey Clark's the poorest one we've had in the history of the country.

B: Because of his views on the law and order issue?

T: And a great many other views. I just think he's the poorest excuse for a cabinet officer the nation's ever had.

B: Speaking of Attorney Generals, Mr. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, was Attorney General for a while and then here in the Senate. There are continuing stories of the relationship between Mr. Johnson and Robert Kennedy. Did you see anything of it?

T: No. I was never around them much except an occasional social function. But I don't know what their relations were.

B: Did you ever toward the end of his Administration discuss with Mr. Johnson generally the condition his Administration was in?

T: No. He never asked my advice about it. I think he knew what the situation was with reference to Georgia.

B: Did he ever ask you about specific Georgians, such as, say, on one

hand Martin Luther King or on the other hand Lester Maddox?

T: I don't recall that we ever conferred about either of them.

B: One of the things I'm getting at is, one of the questions toward the end of the Administration was of course the reasons for Mr. Johnson's withdrawal. Do you have any light to shed on that?

T: No. I can only give you my own personal conclusions. I think he felt our country was so badly divided that it would remain divided even if he were re-elected as President, and there was probably a limited opportunity to conclude hostilities and a limited opportunity for him to be elected. I think it was a combination of all of those things that caused him to withdraw. I must say that I was quite surprised about it, because I would have morgaged everything I had and bet that he would run for re-election.

B: On the theory that he was just not the kind of man to give up?

T: A hundred per cent political animal. They don't usually retire.

B: And he's been awfully quiet since then.

T: That's right.

B: Did it make a difference in your campaign for re-election in '68 that Mr. Johnson was not heading the ticket?

T: I don't think so. My identity and views in Georgia are pretty well known, and I think I would have run about the same whether he retired or whether he didn't.

B: Did you participate in the '68 Democratic Convention?

T: No. I haven't been to a convention since '52.

B: Sir, finally we're nearing the end here. First of all, is there

anything we haven't covered that you think should be that you'd like to add?

T: Only this. Johnson, I think, had the closest personal relations with members of the Senate of probably any President in the history of the country. Of course, he came up, you know, through the legislative branch. First on House patronage, then as an aide to a congressman, then a Congressman hismelf, and then as a Senator, Minority Whip, Minority Leader, Majority Leader, Vice President of the United States, ultimately the President. I think he was more legislative oriented than any President perhaps in the history of the country. I think probably he was better trained for the presidency than any President in the history of this country.

And I think also that contributed perhaps to some of his weaknesses. As a legislator you have to seek out areas of compromise and conciliation, because the whole process of legislation is a compromise. I don't think there's one bill in a thousand that's offered that has any moment that passes in exactly the form that the author of the bill offered it. It's the imprint of the various committees and the legislative body. The President adopted that policy as President. A chief executive can't do that with great success. He has to be a leader and take positions forthright and lead, whether he can achieve results or not. In that way he attracts a large following that remains loyal to him right or wrong, win or lose. I think a big mistake the President made in his Presidency was that attitude of trying to conciliate and compromise and have

opposite poles working together, which can't be done.

B: Does it make a difference when you're operating out of the White House, [where] it's just bathed in publicity, as opposed to the Senate where much of that kind of thing can go on [quietly]?

T: Oh, yes indeed, sure. The President can make a statement and it will be headlines in all the papers of the country and be carried right on television and radio, and a hundred million people will see it within a matter of hours. A senator can make a speech on the floor of the Senate, and it might not be printed in his home town newspaper. There's a vast difference. He has the perfect forum to lead.

B: But as you said, not a forum for arranging compromises.

T: Not a forum for conciliation.

B: What do you figure are Mr. Johnson's major strengths as a man, as opposed to being a Senator or a President?

T: I think his major strength was demonstrated as Majority Leader, when he could see the ebb and flow of a hundred strong personalities with different views, and this one pulling this way and the other one pulling the other way and this little group that way and this little group neutral. He could see what it would take to effect a compromise to achieve a given fact. He was the greatest parliamentary tactician I ever saw; that was his greatest strength in my judgment.

B: And what about his greatest personal weakness, again, as opposed to the political weakness?

T: I would say his greatest personal weakness was fear of criticism,

of not being loved, of being disliked.

B: Were those characteristics present in the Senate years, too?

T: I don't know that they were so obvious when he was in the Senate, because he could wield the stick in the Senate pretty well, and he knew that the Senator that didn't like him on this issue would stand with him on the next. You have no given patterns in the Senate that are going to stand pat on every issue. Always in the area of legislation the man who opposes you strongest today may be the man who will be your strongest ally on the next bill. Johnson knew that.

B: One last question that may be just impossible to answer; if so please tell me. If it hadn't been for the Vietnam War, do you suppose the people of Georgia in any significant numbers would have ever come around to support Mr. Johnson's domestic policies?

T: I don't know. I don't know. All of them are compounding and effecting each other. The main problem with the war in Georgia was they didn't want to go in there. But Georgians follow the flag, and when they see American blood spilled they rally to the cause in a hurry, right or wrong. They were ready to go if the President would unfurl the banner and call out the troops and send them in there with the resources to do the job. They would have supported him to the nth degree in that regard.

B: I was really just wondering if the civil rights issue is ever going to be settled, if not settled, at least calmed?

T: Well, I suppose one of these days it will. Sometimes I think it

gets worse instead of better. It's splendid now, you know, they're demanding that churches pay reparations and Black Panthers are making a business of trying to assassinate policemen, if you want to call that civil rights, it's all part of the same pattern. It grew out of this era of permissiveness, where the Court said you can take possession of private property and do with it as you see fit. The President was encouraging it and addressed a joint of session of Congress and shouted, "We shall overcome." When they hear the President shout, "We shall overcome," they think they can take over the town square with impunity if they want to.

B: Is there anything else you feel should be added?

T: I think that about covers it.

B: All right, sir, thank you very much.

T: Thank you, and good to see you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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