INTERVIEW IV

DATE: March 3, 1971

INTERVIEWEE: JACK VALENTI

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Jack Valenti's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: This is interview number four with Jack Valenti in his Washington office on March 3, 1971. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Jack, we've been through the convention now. We have our man renominated, we know who the Vice President is. Let's get on with the campaign. First of all, who managed it?

V: There really was not any one single manager of the campaign, unless it would be President Johnson himself. I think that most campaigns are an amalgam of the leader's desires and the peculiarities of the situation. The Democratic National Committee played practically no role at all in the campaign.

The way the campaign structure was organized was probably as follows: The President really made the decisions. I was in charge of scheduling out of the White House; Kenny O'Donnell, who was formerly appointments secretary to President Kennedy, worked out of the national committee office and he and I coordinated all of the scheduling. We worked on where the President would go, etc. Larry O'Brien was handling organization in the country. Bill Moyers and I had set up a speech writing team, headed by Bill Wirtz. Wirtz collected maybe ten or fifteen people to do all of the research and speech writing. The advertising, Bill Moyers and I were in charge of that. We met and decided

on Doyle Dane Bernbach to do the advertising. Bill Bernbach was in charge of that. We met occasionally with them, though Bill had a larger role in that than I did. Marvin Watson was brought in to be in charge of the advance operation. In the early part of the campaign a young man named McCarthy was in charge of the advance team, reporting to Moyers and myself.

F: What McCarthy was this?

V: Wilson McCarthy.

F: Did Walter stay in the White House and do the kind of staff running?

V: Walter was running the White House, he was literally overall everything. He became really the President's alter ego in handling the administration of the presidency.

F: Just the nuts and bolts business.

V: Yes, and talking to congressmen, senators, keeping the work moving while we were working on the campaign.

We brought Marvin Watson in to take over the advance man operation. This was a very key part of the campaign, to get the advance men out, to have them be wise and observant and sensitive. An advance man is a very vital and indispensable part of the campaign. When Marvin came in, he did an excellent job of administering and handling all the advance operation.

Usually Moyers and myself accompanied the President on most of his trips, being with him and handling the actual trip, and Marvin would go along also. This was kind of like a military campaign. The advance men would go out, make all the arrangements, keeping in touch with Marvin, who kept in touch with us and the President about what we should

do. Speeches were fashioned as a result of the issues that we had determined were the ones that we wanted to hit. Clark Clifford and Abe Fortas were involved as allies on the outside, as well as Ed Weisl, Sr. Once a week we had a little meeting of Clifford and Fortas and Ed Weisl, Sr. and a number of the staff in going over the issues of the campaign to make sure that we were on top of them.

F: Has Arthur Krim moved into the financial picture at this time?

V: Not to the degree that he later became involved. He was involved in the financial part of it, but I would say that it was later on that Arthur took a role with President Johnson that really superseded everyone else. And in time, I think it's fair to say that Arthur became the most trusted confidant of President Johnson. At this part of the campaign, in this part of the presidency in 1964, I don't recall Arthur's role being as spacious and as significant as it later became.

The wonder of the Johnson campaign is that it worked so well, because there really was not any major domo, no commander-in-chief other than the President. He was in charge. Each of us had a piece of it; each of us sort of did the best that we could in keeping it together. As I look back on it I am quite amazed that it went so well. But it did go well.

I've often stated that early in September of 1964, or the middle of September--I can't recall the date precisely--the President decided that we would take a trip into New England. It would be a one-day trip, and we made six stops that day. I recall it very vividly. We went into Hartford, Connecticut, and Providence, Rhode Island, and Burlington, Vermont, and Portland, Maine; Manchester, New Hampshire, and Boston, Massachusetts, all in one day.

F: Ostensibly, this is enemy country in the sense, if you're doing a pitting of Kennedy versus Johnson because this is the old Kennedy New England country. Did you find any remnants of antipathy toward Johnson as the successor to President Kennedy?

V: No. By that time Johnson was so firmly positioned as the President, strong, resolute, able, experienced, that the vestiges of that distaste, if it was there at all, simply had been expunged by the time we got there.

At any rate this was probably the most incredible day in all the campaign because the crowds that greeted the President in each of these cities were simply overwhelming. Literally hundreds of thousands of people in each locality. We were mobbed. It was trying to pull your way through a big mass of molasses, it was so thick and friendly, crowded with these throngs that greeted us.

F: There was no more than an ordinary effort to whip out a crowd? This just went on?

V: The kinds of crowds that greeted us are not crowds that can be manufactured by an advance man. You can bring out several thousands of people, you can get the school dismissed, etc., and these are ageless and well-used advance men tricks. But you cannot generate hundreds of thousands of friendly people, thronging every street and every byway the President went down, and in the squares where he spoke. He spoke at the city hall in Portland, he spoke at the square in Hartford, Connecticut, in front of The Hartford Courant. In Providence, Rhode Island, it was an unbelievable mob, etc. You can't get 15,000 people to come to the airport at Burlington, Vermont, more than the population of Burlington.

What we saw, and the reason it was so exciting, was we knew that

this could not be the result of a fine advance operation. This was the people responding to the President. When we saw these crowds and the warmth and rapport that was struck in this one day, everyone, including the President, knew that something big was afoot. This was the first time we realized that we had a landslide in the making as a result of this marvelous, never-to-be-duplicated day. It was quite a day.

But the campaign--

F: Let me ask you one question before you leave that, President Johnson was notorious for fracturing schedules because he would always shake one more hand, see one more person, and so on. How did you keep him going on this full a day?

V: We were behind schedule, 'way behind schedule. I guess that by the time we got to Portland in the evening we were three or four hours behind schedule and stayed that way. But I can't really fault the President on this because we weren't prepared for these kinds of crowds. And the scheduling of moving along was simply stunted; just moving the car was a chore because of the great mass of people. However, the President was exhilarated by this, as I suspect every President is when he's greeted by the warmth of people. So many times the President would stop the motorcade, get out of the car and swarms of people would come to shake his hand. He slowed the motorcade down so that people could throng around the cars. But I would have to say in all honesty that we might have lost a couple of hours by this, but the other two or three hours were lost by simply the overwhelming numbers that disrupted our schedule.

By the time we got to Boston, all the President stopped there for was to go visit Senator Kennedy who, as you know, had been in an air-

plane accident and was in the hospital. We got there at two or three in the morning. And when we returned back to the White House at four or five in the morning we had been gone almost twenty-four hours in this incredible day.

But this set the stage for what looked to be like an election of landslide proportions, and I think this whetted the President's appetite. I think he wanted to win by as large a majority as possible, as he did of course, winning by the greatest percentage of any President in our history. But he, I think, used that day as a stimulus to him so that we did an enormous amount of campaigning, more I think than he had in mind to do. We traversed this country. We didn't visit every state, but we missed darned few, and as a result it was a furious campaign pace.

F: Was there any tendency on the part of the staff to relax as they began to see that victory was almost going to be handed them, or did the President keep the pressure on?

V: Actually pressure was kept on. Hindsight's wonderful and it looked like victory was in sight, but at the time, though the polls showed us increasingly ahead, you'd never want to really believe it. We didn't know that we were that far ahead really; we knew that something was going on, but we weren't quite sure. I don't think we ever really relaxed in that campaign. I know the President didn't. He felt like that anything could go awry. And of course when the Walter Jenkins thing happened we expected them to try to get other scandals--we didn't know what they were, but we felt like the other shoe would drop. We knew that the other side was getting increasingly desperate, and when an opponent is desperate they'll do anything to win, so that worried us a

little bit. But I would say that there was never a real feeling of "Well, we've got it won, we can relax now."

As a matter of fact, just the opposite happened; as any wily, experienced politican knows, you always run scared and Johnson did that. I think he was running scared in the latter part of the campaign not so much because he thought he would lose but because he wanted to win by this enormous vote. So if we increased pressures it was for a perverse reason--not because we thought we might lose but because we thought we might not win as big as we wanted to. So the pressure, instead of easing, I think increased as the campaign went along. We kept up a drum fire of activity.

We had various committees working all the time, groups were formed within the White House and without to constantly be monitoring the issues to see what could be done, whether ridicule was the answer, what the issues were, whether or not we should really play up the anti-Social Security stand and the nuclear button stand that we had taken. We finally developed, I think, that the big issue of that campaign was whose finger do you trust on the button and of course the idea that Goldwater was going to dismantle the great social gains that had been stretched over the years. I think this really was the great issue in the campaign, and I thought, if I do say so, we played that issue rather well. You know, we had some problems with advertising. We had put on that famous little spot where the little girl is picking daisies and the mushroom cloud in the background. It was so devastating in its impact that the Goldwater people responded with outcries of pain and chagrin and we withdrew the message from the air, not because we thought it was a low blow but because we didn't believe it was wise

politically to start an issue of conflict, argument going about whether or not we were playing fair. So rather than even bring up the issue, we withdrew the spot from circulation.

But we hit him hard, although I think we hit him fair. But we seized on these issues of the dismantling of the social gains and the trauma of the Goldwater finger on the nuclear button. Those were the two issues I think that really overwhelmed him and just really drove him over the side of the cliff.

F: Did you ever get any reading on the President's own personal relations with Senator Goldwater? They'd known each other for some time.

V: I think President Johnson never had any personal malice toward Goldwater. I think he rather liked him as a human being. But in any campaign you play to win, so you had to go for the jugular even though there was no personal animus involved.

I remember that one time during the campaign they did meet; as I recall the discussion I guess they were going to make a statement about foreign policy. Goldwater came to the White House and I greeted him. It was the first time I had really seen him up close, a very attractive man physically, but he seemed to me to be very nervous, an anxious man. Going in to greet Johnson he was clearly not at ease; he was on guard. There was a source of trembling, almost an imperceptible trembling. And when he met with the President, President Johnson was deliberately open and friendly and warm and totally at ease, whereas I thought Goldwater had a forced smile on his face. I really don't know, I think it's being in the presence of the President, knowing that he was behind. It was an interesting discussion.

F: You spent a lot of time in the Oval Room--this is a slight digression,

but it fits--with every type of person coming in. No matter what sort of power base this particular person represents, actually the mantle of the presidency affects just about everyone, doesn't it?

V: Yes, I think so. No matter how erratic or cynical or sophisticated one is, I am convinced, although I cannot go inside a man's mind and heart to know what he's thinking precisely, but I am of the opinion that everyone is affected by this entrance into the President's office. I've seen it happen to all of them.

I remember clearly when George Wallace came up about the problem in Mississippi when the President was going to federalize the National Guard and send them in. Wallace, supposed to be an aggressive, tough, hard-nosed man, came in to meet with President Johnson and the minute he walked into that room I sensed he was overwhelmed by the immensity of the office and was quite docile and withdrawn and overwhelmed by the President, who took the initiative immediately and started the conversation going and never let up. As a result Wallace was cowed by both the Johnson dominant personality and by the fact that he was in the office of the President. I saw this happen time and time again. It is there. I think the pulse beat becomes stronger, there's a slight perspiration on the brow, no matter how big a man you are. And many times, no matter how often you enter that office it still has a sense of awe and spaciousness about it that causes a man to feel respect, if that's the word, to feel kind of awestruck and important and exciting. I think it happens with almost everyone.

F: Did the President agonize particularly, as far as you know, over the Deep South defection?

V: No. I think he recognized that he was going to lose the South. We took

a lot of soundings during the campaign. Each of these showed with increasing frequency and correlation that the South was going down the drain. We thought we might carry Georgia. The President had some feeling that he might do something in Louisiana. But we knew that Mississippi and Alabama were going down the drain, all along the South. As I recall, Goldwater carried Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and I think we took the rest, didn't we? We took Georgia and Florida, I believe. Arizona, Goldwater carried; he carried five states, as I recall.

No, the President didn't agonize over that. As a matter of fact, I think he wanted to show that even though he knew the South was going down the drain that he was not going to disregard or disavow the South. He wanted the South to know that he cared, even though they hated him. Mrs. Johnson's foray in the train through the South; one of the great speeches made by President Johnson was in New Orleans, where he made a fantastically moving pro-civil rights speech in the heart of New Orleans.

F: You were there to meet the train when it came in, that Dixie Flyer?

V: Yes, we met the train at New Orleans there.

F: What was that like?

V: It was quite a moving experience. Mrs. Johnson had been through the South and the President was quite proud of her; he was proud of her courage, he was proud of her poise in the face of assaults and criticism, which incidentally I think was politically valuable because it really backfired. People rather resented, I think, trying to molest and assault a woman. So it was altogether a very satisfying experience for the President. He greeted his wife with great warmth; he was very, very proud of her because it was quite a successful trip, a grueling trip,

and he understood that and appreciated it.

F: This was, except for those Deep South states, a truly national victory. In your campaigning was there any difference in the response from one section to another in just the way in which people greeted him? I'm talking now about your subjective feeling on this.

V: No, as a matter of fact there wasn't. I was struck by just the opposite. I was struck by the similarity of greeting. You know, if you were to obliterate all road signs and marks of identification it would be very difficult to tell which state or city you were in. The setting was always the same. You land at the airport; thousands of people greet you there, that blue and silver plane would land in a moment of great drama and out would come the President. The applause would be deafening. And then you get into the motorcade and you travel through the community.

F: Same local people, just different names.

V: And all sorts of people would be standing on the curb, pushing their babies out toward the limousine so they could see the President. Every street would be the same. It was almost difficult to know where you were because the crowds were the same, thick, friendly, energetic, warm.

F: Just as outgoing?

V: Very outgoing. Every time the President would stop his car or make himself visible or get out, the same kind of reaction would take place. Indeed, I was struck by the absolute resemblance, the similarity one to the other, of almost every town and city. I've often speculated what could happen if you just took down these identifying marks. You really would not be able to tell what part of the country you were in.

I think this was testimony to two things: one, acceptance of Lyndon Johnson as the legitimate President. They were pleased with

him, they felt confident with him. There was no Vietnam to cloud anybody's judgment. Johnson was showing himself to be a strong resolute President, and I think the people responded to this. It was quite evident that this was one of the reasons.

The second was, I believe that the people had decided quite early that in this choice between Goldwater and Johnson that they were quite clear in their own judgments that the Johnson way was the way they thought was most beneficial to the long range best interests for themselves and to the nation at large. This manifested itself in these campaign forays into the various cities that we visited. So, in summary, I must say that I found quite a unity of feeling throughout the country, always expressed in the large, enthusiastic, friendly crowds, eager for a glimpse and a touch of the President.

F: In your planning was there any sort of size town that was too small? Did you have any kind of yardstick on where you would not go?

V: Yes, we didn't go to rural settlements.

F: I'm thinking of some place like Burlington, for instance.

V: You go to Burlington because that's the key place in Vermont. It's a place you could go to for a brief visit; i.e., the airport and see enough people to make an impress and to say that you had been to Vermont, in that sense. Now we went into small towns some times to dramatize something, like going into a small Appalachian village to demonstrate your concern for the poor. But for the most part we tried to go into those states where the people and voters were, although I remember in Illinois we went to a small town on the border of Illinois there, in the south, Bellesville, I think, and then moved on north. But generally speaking unless we were going to dramatize an issue we went to the

larger cities in the various states that we visited.

F: There got to be a saying about the proverbial Johnson luck in weather. You pretty well had this during the campaign, didn't you?

V: Yes, we did. We were very fortunate in the weather. You know, after awhile people on a campaign trail become as superstitious as actors and ball players. You want to try to lay it on the same way you did the last time, so the idea of luck began to become a shibboleth around the campaign plane. It was luck and fortuitous circumstance that kept the weather with us most of the campaign.

F: Did you have any extraordinary snafus? You weren't ever supposed to be two places at once or something?

V: No, we didn't have any of that. I think that many times there were the minor snafus of the motorcade not being ready, rostrums not being prepared, schedules being too tight and getting behind schedule. But for the most part there was a miraculous lack of large blundering that will infest any campaign, no matter how efficient. I think we were just fortunate in that, that we did not have any of that. It could have happened to us.

F: President Johnson stands up pretty well over running behind and being pressured. It's when he has to wait for something to get ready that he gets irascible, isn't it?

V: I think it's an axiom of the President that when there's a crisis on, where there's deep desperate trouble, he's a very cool, calm man in total command of himself, a disciplined man in a crisis. I think the President becomes cantankerous and irritable at the smaller things, as you point out, when he's supposed to be doing something and somebody else is late, he has to wait. If the arrangements weren't the way he

wanted them to be, if somebody did some inconsequential thing, some little nit-picking, he could sometimes become fairly angry. I found this a little strange and sometimes amusing that the President--this extraordinary man, so totally disciplined in things that counted, so disposed to take a calm, clear-headed, unhurried look at a crisis--would spill over with frustration and sometimes anger and impatience at some very minor thing that really didn't amount to a damn, but it would annoy him.

But that's the genius of the man. I've often found that every extraordinary human being I've ever met, a leader, has eccentricities of various kinds. I think that normality, as we know it, is simply not a synonym for a leader. A leader is not a normal man. He is infested with drives and passions and compulsions that the normal fellow is simply not heir to. And my judgment is that a man of the ability and dimension of Johnson, with this occult knowledge of people, this sensitivity to human character, this absolute fanaticism for perfection and this enormous energy, obviously a man of these large specifications is going to have some eccentricities, idiosyncrasies that set him apart.

F: In planning, how do you keep the local person--it's his day, he's up there with the President--how do you keep him from just being in a sense too long-winded or having too long a period before the TV camera?

V: This is advance planning. This is the work of the advance man, to make sure that the local chairman understands that the spotlight is on the President and the elected officials that are on that ticket. Now what's important is, is that whoever is running with the President--the senator, the congressman, the governor, the mayor, the councilmen, the legislator--that we have him close by the President; that he get photo-

graphed with the President; that he is seen in close rapport with the President; and that any people making speeches, and very few people make speeches when the President is there, must be brief and to the point. This, again, is a case of advance planning, where the advance man makes it damn clear that we're not going to have this fouled up by some filibustering on the part of the local chairman or the mayor or somebody like that. So the advance man stands guard over this and goes over it in great detail.

Many times we would fly into a community with the local congressman or senator aboard the plane with the President, so he gets off the plane with the President and arm-in-arm they disembark. This is very powerful medicine and it's a normal standard operating procedure, to let the dazzle and the power and the prestige of the presidency rub off on the man who's on the ticket with him.

F: Did you have any difficulty in trying to get sort of local references? How did you handle that so that when you came into an area the President was good at this--making some--

V: Again, the advance man would be in charge of that, and sometimes we've sent in an advance speech writer. One of the best local color men, as we called them, is Ambassador John Bartlow Martin. He did this for Kennedy in 1960 and on a smaller scale for Johnson in '64--to go in and advance for the President, to meet with the local leaders and the press and the opinion makers to find out what would move an audience, what they wanted to hear, what they did not want to hear; to stitch into the speech part of the local color; to individualize and to personalize the President's remarks. John Martin was one of the best in ferreting out this sort of thing. But we would send in advance speech writers,

or if we didn't send any in advance, the advance man himself would be responsible for gathering this kind of what we called personalized local color.

F: On the plane going from one place to the next, were you always tinkering with the next speech?

V: Oh, sure. Moyers and I and other staff members who would be aboard Air Force One would be working on the speeches, we'd be in telephonic contact with both the Washington headquarters speech writers, as well as the local people, so that we could put in new material if we had to have it, and most of the time the speeches were rewritten, mainly for length, to cut them down. Most of the speeches that would come out of the Wirtz operation were a little long, not because that that's wrong, but because they put in a lot of things that they thought ought to be in the speech and then you would have to model them and reshape them on the spot. But we had secretaries, of course, and typewriters and that sort of thing and we were able to make quick repairs of any speech that needed some overhaul.

F: The President can adjust to that pretty quickly?

V: Oh, sure, he adjusts to it very well. As a matter of fact, in a campaign when you're at an airport or speaking to large crowds the President would ad lib a good deal. He would use his text as a kind of guide and you'd need a text in order for the press to have their stories, but the President would many times only use it as a guide and veer from it, stray from the text to entwine within that speech his own specific passions and desires of that particular moment about that particular setting.

F: Every local, state and regional candidate in the place feels his standing

would be enhanced by getting off Air Force One. How did you control the population of Air Force One?

V: Obviously you wouldn't have state legislators. Congressmen and senators and governor candidates were the ones who got special treatment. Now ofttimes the governor of course is in the state; he's there to greet the President. But as I said, particularly incumbent senators and congressmen would be aboard Air Force One, and oftentimes the candidates would join us at the town preceding their own particular locality so that they would get aboard. If we were going from, say, Des Moines to Chicago, the Chicago congressman would get aboard at Des Moines and fly from Des Moines to Chicago with the President so he would get off with the President. We thought this was very useful. There was too much of a traffic jam.

F: Who made those decisions?

V: The decisions were made by myself and--

F: You did a preliminary screening?

V: Oh, sure, we would not have to take everything to the President. We understood what the general strategy was and so these were decisions to be made by the aides to the President. We didn't try to bring everything to him because that was not needed. Most of us knew what he wanted, understood what his needs and desires were, and we were able to make command decisions on the spot to fit in with his general overall desires.

F: Going 'way back, did he ever talk in your presence about his attitude toward presidential primaries?

V: No, I never had any such discussion with him. I was not aware that he gave it a great deal of thought.

F: You've had a campaign and it's all very intoxicating, so you finally

wind the thing up. Now then it seems to me that you actually wound down right there at the end, almost purposely slowed the action and came back to Austin, which was a big rally, in a sense, but it was just homefolks. Was this a conscious decision, or was this just a way of getting off the road?

V: I think the campaign is over. On election day if you haven't done all you needed to do before then, it's too late to make any repairs. So the President did what was natural for him, he went back home. We watched the returns in the Driskill Hotel that night, in the Jim Hogg Room. There were about ten or twenty people I suppose there, not many. The President watched the returns come in, rather impassively, I thought.

F: Were you around him all that day?

V: Most of that day, yes.

F: What did he do on election day just to kill time, because that's about all he can do?

V: As I recall, he flew back to the Ranch election eve.

F: That's right. It was the night before and they had that big thing in front of the Capitol.

V: He got up early and voted, then really was just relaxing and talking to the White House and his old friends in Texas. And that night we journeyed to the Driskill Hotel where, as I said, we watched the returns. It became quite clear quite soon that he was going to win; the question was how big. As the night wore on, it became increasingly evident that it was going to be really big. He won by 16 million plus votes, 61 percent of the total.

F: But it was more a calm acceptance though than a sort of outgoing election?

V: Yes, he was relaxed and not at all anxious but he didn't jump up with

glee or turn around to say, "Look, we did this or that." He watched it, very calmly I thought, and would engage in conversations with various people there, whose names escape me. I believe John Connally was there.

F: Was he on the phone much to people in other states?

V: Not much. Toward the evening he took a number of phone calls from important people around the country that were congratulatory. I know he was keyed up, I could tell that, but not so visibly keyed up that you could tell it. I think only someone who knew him very well would know that there was an intenseness. But otherwise he was very calm about it. I think it's normal for the President, in a moment like this where the dice were rolling and you had to see what numbers were coming up, that he would be very calm. This was typical of Johnson, to steel himself, to command himself to be as calm as he knew how.

F: Let's shift this topic now. Jack, you have between the convention and the election a period of time in which the President's focus is getting back in office, but in this case President Johnson kept the pressure on Congress. How did he manage the two jobs?

V: There was no letdown after this election. As a matter of fact, from the time of the election on began the most unceasing assault upon the problems of this country, I suppose, that any administration has ever undertaken. Because 1965 brought to Washington the 89th Congress, probably the progenitor of more progressive liberal legislation in the history of this country, with the possible exception--and I'm not even sure of that--of Franklin Roosevelt's time. But these were the days of the Voting Rights Act and Model Cities and Rent Supplements and anti-poverty legislation and conservation and beautification. All of the

great landmark legislative bills of the President had their origins and passage, for many of them, within these next two years. Almost from the very hour that the polls closed, the President was whipping his staff into even a greater frenzy to move on the various legislation.

F: You're getting a little ahead of my story. What I'm trying to establish is what went on between convention and election.

V: Between convention and election was mainly the election itself. We had a lot of legislation going forward, but essentially there's no denying the fact that the election of President Johnson was the overriding consideration. Obviously you could not give the kind of attention to the business of the government that you would in a non-election year. But what I'm saying to you is that while the election did occupy a good part of his attention, he was then even laying the groundwork for this overwhelming avalanche of constructive legislation that poured on the 89th Congress beginning with January 2, 1965. So between, say, October, November, December of 1964, the real push was on to--

F: This was when he was pressuring the task forces to get their reports?

V: Absolutely. The task forces were operating and there was an enormous push to go forward on this particular thing. As a result we were ready when the Congress opened for the beginning of the Congress to start the flow of the legislative messages.

F: That leads us into the next topic I want to take up with you, which is staff work. Do you have time to start on that now?

V: Yes.

F: Then let's talk about that a little bit. First of all, let's just talk about general duties--your morning sessions with the President.

V: The way the staff work went forward, of course Bill Moyers, Marvin

Watson and I would gather with the President the first thing in the morning, every morning, early, 7:30 or something like that, in which we would go over all the decisions he had made the night before in voluminous night reading, the things he wanted to do that day to get his schedule going, the kind of programs, plans, projects, movements he wanted to start, so that we could clear the decks early for the movement of that day.

F: As a general rule, how long did these little sessions last?

V: An hour, an hour and a half. Then the day would go forward. Now Mac Bundy, and Rostow following him, was totally in charge of all the foreign policy work. Moyers and myself, for example, attended all the National Security Council meetings, all the meetings on Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, etc. Bill Moyers and then later Joe Califano were in charge of the task force operations for domestic legislation, and they would gather daily with various members of the government in working all the various aspects of the legislative projects the President had determined to pursue. And then from time to time we'd sit down with the President to go over the task force reports, memoranda of various legislation proposed; he would make his own judgments of whether or not to do this or that or the other, make his changes, and then start the wheels of the details going forward.

We had some specialists on the staff. Doug Cater concentrated in the very important area of health and education and did an enormously effective job of focusing on those particular areas, so that he became expert and knowledgeable totally in the thing.

Of course the Larry O'Brien staff operation continued on with the Congress, which was very important.

Marvin Watson and I handled all the appointments, Marvin the daily appointments, myself the long-range appointments. I was in charge of gathering together all of the speech, the spoken written word of the President, to see that that moved forward, as well as involving myself in a number of other general duties that he would anticipate.

The Johnson White House staff was actually quite small. For example, I handled appointments with one young male assistant and two secretaries. I think today in the Nixon White House there must be twelve-fourteen people handling that. I handled all of the speech writing by having two young men assisting me, very able, and then calling on specialists from time to time in the speech writing operation, and I daresay that today there may be a dozen people operating in that area. The President's staff was small. Bill Moyers and Joe Califano had three or four young bright lawyers to give him assistance, but the work of the White House staff went on with really small numbers, a very small staff. I'm sometimes amazed, and even appalled, at the fact that we did handle all of this with so small a staff.

F: Now the appointments secretary has a great deal of power, at least in the public eye. How much leeway did you as appointments secretary have in determining who would and who would not see the President. I know some people of course were just ruled out automatically, I'd rule them out myself.

V: We had a great deal of discretionary power, operating within the ken of what we knew to be the President's desires. Now there were certain people that you just don't keep out. You don't keep out Cabinet officers or key officials in the government, and so that was automatic. Although we did have to fit in a Cabinet officer who would want to see

the President "today," and the President's schedule was so tight that I would automatically say, "I think we might get you in about one o'clock tomorrow, Mr. Secretary, if that's all right with you, unless it's absolutely urgent." The idea of the appointments secretary is to fend off those who would confront the President with time consuming conversations and that sort of thing. So we had to guard his time.

I used to always, before I would set anybody down, I'd always check it with the President, let him know who was coming, because even the appointments secretary couldn't know. You might schedule an appointment with a man that for some reason unknown to you the President didn't want to see at that time, and so I never took the position that I was all-knowing and all-powerful. I've often said that nobody, no matter how close to the President, knows everything that goes into the President's mind in the shaping of a decision. So I was very careful. Usually before I set the appointment firm I would give the President a list of tentative appointments that I had planned to make for him.

F: Did you make the determination of which were on the record and which were off?

V: With him. Sometimes I would suggest it be off the record, he'd say "on the record," we'd discuss it. Sometimes vice versa. The President would listen to the people in his staff and get their judgments. Sometimes he wouldn't agree and sometimes he would. But there would be that discussion with him because I never wanted to put the President in the embarrassing position of having an appointment with somebody that for a reason unbeknownst to me would have caused a rupture in some plan that he was moving on that I didn't know about. But generally the appointments secretary did have discretionary powers to waive off some-

body and say, "Well, the President's busy, but let me let you talk to--." "I'll be glad to see you or Doug Cater or Califano or George Reedy or somebody, Horace Busby, can talk to you."

Many times this would satisfy the man because if he knew, for example, that Jack Valenti had access to the President and the ear of the President all he wanted to do was to get to the President some complaint or some request or some piece of information and would be quite content to talk to me, knowing that the message would be passed along with dispatch. I think that that was key.

Also I took the notion that the congressmen and senators were enormously important men. I would get a hundred to a hundred and fifty phone calls a day, but I would always answer as quickly as I could a congressman or a senator because my oversight would not be deleterious to me but to the President. If that congressman's call wasn't answered he would be unhappy with the President. So as the President's surrogate I answered those calls immediately. I was always deferential to congressmen. I tried to challenge myself to see how fast I could respond to their requests, and oftentimes I'd try to get back to them within an hour or two. They appreciated this. They liked this. I wanted them to know that we cared about them very deeply, and I think part of the Johnson staff operation was this kind of instant servicing of the needs and aspirations of congressmen. Very important. Otherwise, you get yourself in a lot of trouble. Many a time I would call a congressman at eleven or twelve o'clock at night; I'd wake him up, but I think he would be impressed by the fact that, by God, I was on the job and I was calling him. I'd say, "Mr. Congressman, I'm sorry, we've been awfully busy over there, but I wanted you to know that I am

returning your call and I'm ready to help you. What can I do for you?"

The President insisted on that sort of thing. I think the staffing operation kept that in mind--the importance, the indispensability of the congressman and the senator.

F: How did you prepare his night reading? This to me is one of the wonders of the world, the fact that you get something to President Johnson in the afternoon and he'd have an answer back the next morning.

V: Many times we could do a lot of the answering ourselves, but a lot of the things we thought the President ought to see. And so the night reading was prepared by putting in there everything that you thought of real importance. Some things you thought could wait, they didn't have to go in that night; they could go in two nights later. Some things you thought could be done without the President having to actually waste the time seeing them.

F: We've got a time and a physical problem here with Jack Valenti, for instance. Jack has got other duties, he's not just a reading clerk. How did you find the time to assimilate and dissimilate, etc. so that you in turn could send a package along?

V: Very simple. Anything that's important enough for the President to read ought to be important enough for Jack Valenti to read. So obviously we read it all. I read everything that went over the President's desk. I had to! Anytime you put something in front of the President, a five or six page memorandum, it's going to take him a few minutes to read it; therefore you'd better be damned sure it's important enough for him to take the time to do it. So we did read it and made a judgment.

F: Now the President admittedly liked short memoranda.

V: Yes, I think everybody likes short memoranda.

F: When someone with real significance comes in with a long one, did you ever try to reduce it?

V: Yes. Many times I'd take the long memorandum and myself would digest it for the President in a one-page preparatory statement, saying, "Secretary So-and-So is writing this. In it, he makes the following requests or statements: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. He suggests that: one, two, three, four." Then I'd say, "My judgment is that we might consider doing one, two." Now attached to that is the crux of the memo so that the President could get a quick reading of what it said, what the general tenor was, and if he wanted to, he could go to the thing and read it. Many times I'd say, "If you'll note on page five of this memorandum, I have circled in red this key paragraph that you might want to read." In other words, you make it easy for the President to get to the jugular of the thing without wading through all of the other material.

F: Did you have anyone in the Cabinet that the President looked upon as virtually a professional or compulsive memo writer, long-winded?

V: No. I think the two men in the Cabinet he respected the most were Rusk and McNamara. He had a great belief in their judgment and in their general overall mental capacity to get the nettle of a problem and bring to it logic and intelligence.

I know that one of the things the President wanted me to do was when Bundy left there were a number of people that were being considered for this job. I recommended Walt Rostow, one of those that recommended Walt Rostow to the President, because I thought he would be the best man

to do it. Now the President called me in one day and said, " Now, I think Walt's the man to take Bundy's job, but I want you to talk with him because I think one of Walt's faults is his prolixity, his verbosity. I want you to tell him how I like to be handled."

I remember that I sat down with Walt before he took the job and I went over how to write a memo to the President, how to conduct yourself in a meeting with the President. The President liked the crispness, the dispatch with which, say, a Bundy or a McNamara presented its case. And I told him that in meetings that if he were opening the meeting to state the issue and briefly, very briefly, maybe state the pros and cons and then shut up. I thought the memorandums ought to be very spare, very lucid, and wherever there was one redundant word it ought to come out. I had a long conversation with Walt and he took it with amazing good grace and great humility, and I am told by the President, responded to it in a way of result.

F: It runs against his nature.

V: But I remember that very well, trying to instruct Rostow in the care and the feeding and the handling of Lyndon Johnson. But I can't imagine any President that wants to read long memorandums. I just think that every President has the same problem, and that is a scarcity of time. And you must, if you're an aide to a President, try to make it easy for him to understand the facts in the issue and enough of the pros and cons to give him a handle that he can grab hold of to make a decision.

F: Did you ever get involved particularly in congressional liaison beyond just being a good White House contact for the people, but I mean going to the Hill?

V: Only on rare occasions. Rent Supplements, Model Cities, the President

would actually get other people other than his liaison people to contact congressmen that I knew and who respected me. In the immigration bill I took a leading role in that, in trying to make sure that bill got through and got out of committee. I had long, long meetings with key congressmen on that immigration bill because the President thought because of the fact that I'm of Italian origin that I could bring to bear on this some personal passion that would be useful. So he called on me for that particular piece of legislation. And he would call on other staff members for similar expertise. But mainly the legislative work with the Congress was done by the congressional liaison staff.

Although the best liaison we had with the Congress was Lyndon Johnson. He spent an enormous amount of time persuading congressmen to vote for particular issues.

F: You've got the problem of ambassadorial luncheons. Now I'm not talking about what the chief of protocol has to handle, but I'm talking about you as a White House representative at diplomatic luncheons, your liaison with diplomatic--.

V: We did this. We started in the White House something that I thought was very, very useful. It occurred to me that ambassadors of the 120-odd countries that are here in Washington never see the President, except when they have a crisis and they bring a note from their government, or when they present their credentials. That's the only time they really see him. We concocted a rather simple little plan that was enormously successful. Working with Lloyd Hand, the chief of protocol, and the State Department, I would invite anywhere from four to seven ambassadors to a lunch at the White House in the Fish Room, which is now the Roosevelt Room. To get an invitation to dine at the White House with a presidential

assistant is quite an event in an ambassador's life.

F: It doesn't hurt him to put it in the report back home.

V: Oh, no. Lloyd Hand and I would greet them and bring them in. We'd sometimes have the assistant secretary of that particular area, if there was homogeneity of geography among these ambassadors, like African ambassadors or European ambassadors.

F: Did you try to some extent to fix it up that way?

V: To some extent, yes, because the problems, you see, would then be similar. Lloyd, myself, the assistant secretary would talk to these ambassadors about their problems. I would be briefed in advance about everything, and I would tell the President. Around dessert time, I would ask my secretary to tell the President's secretary that we were ready, and the President would come into the Fish Room, have coffee with these ambassadors and sometimes stay thirty minutes to an hour. They would ask him questions, he would tell them what was going on. And it was a fascinating thing and of course they were overwhelmed by it because then they could go back and cable their governments, "Today I had lunch with the President, and I told him this and asked him this and he said the following." It was very, very successful.

When I finally left the White House in mid '66 we had had lunch with over sixty ambassadors, I think. I had hoped to go through the entire diplomatic corps. I think after I left it sort of slacked off because I took an intense interest in it and I pushed it and shoved it and I made certain it got on the President's schedule; I made certain that he was going to be available that day because it would have been catastrophic if I have a luncheon and then the President is not available.

After awhile the word got around and so we never had any declinations of these invitations because they knew they were going to see the President. As a result I thought it was very successful, and the President liked it. It gave him a chance in an informal setting, taking very little of his time, to meet and talk personally with ambassadors.

F: You have a cascading of new African nations. Did you have any difficulty keeping the President straight on--?

V: Not at all.

F: Does he have an interest in maps and geography and that sort of thing?

V: Absolutely, and also a retentive mind.

F: So I could be from Mali or Upper Volta or somewhere and this would fix in his mind.

V: He had no difficulty at all. I'd make certain of course, we'd have a little place card in front of the ambassador so that he would know what country they were from. But he was able to speak knowledgeably about their problems, and many times to say, "I just came out of a meeting on Vietnam. Let me tell you what we talked about." This would be enormously interesting to these people, to hear from the lips of the President about a Vietnam meeting.

So they were very successful. And then of course the ambassador from Ghana or the ambassador from Mali would say to the President, "You know, we've got the problem of cocoa and prices," and the President would say "Yes, and we're doing this, this and this about it and hope to do that, etc." He was quite knowledgeable about the subjects.

F: Did any of them come in with chips on their shoulders?

V: Not that I was aware of.

F: It was always a relaxed session then?

V: They knew that this was a special occasion for them, and they were all obviously trained diplomats and diplomats don't have chips on their shoulders unless it's a deliberate plan. They used the occasion to listen and then to ask questions of the President. All in all, I would count it a very successful venture.

F: Let's talk about speech writing briefly. Your function to some extent was that of editor and coordinator, right?

V: Yes, I wrote some of the speeches, but mainly it was a question of making sure the speech got written because we were turning out lots of written prose. If it was a major speech we worked on it for weeks. If it were a Rose Garden type speech with the President making a presentation or meeting a group, that could be done within twenty-four hours. But it was on the important speeches, say, like the Howard University speech that Dick Goodwin did most of the work on--I sat with Dick and he brought in Pat Moynihan for the statistical background. That speech would go through ten or fifteen drafts with Dick and myself working, I worked with him, and then getting the speech to the President and the President making notations on it, changes, back to myself, back to Goodwin, and then this round-trip operation continuing on.

F: At what point do you start tailoring it to LBJ's style?

V: Right from the very beginning. The people who are writing it try to keep it within his style, although the President had great admiration for sort of a spare eloquence that Goodwin was very good at.

F: When you bring in these young speech writers, you've got to educate them?

V: Yes indeed. And with them--I would work with Will Sparks and Bob Hardesty, for example, when they came aboard. They're very able men

and excellent writers. I like to believe that I was very helpful to them in really working with them. They'd bring a speech in and I'd go over it line for line, saying, "This is not the way you want to do this. The President likes it this way," etc. So that after awhile they came to know pretty well what was acceptable and what was not. But that was a question then of educating them, of breaking the thing down, of the kind of prose, the meter and the rhythm of the sentence; and aware of the fact that the President wanted a newsworthy item in every speech, not just a lot of blather and rhetoric, but there ought to be some pungent specific fact that was worthy of recounting by a newspaper later on. This took a lot of education and a lot of time and effort in order to tailor this to what he wanted.

F: Did you take work home or did you stay at the office until--?

V: You didn't take work home, because I would usually arrive around 7:30 in the morning, 8 o'clock, and would leave the White House anywhere from ten to midnight or one, or work around the clock many times. So there was no taking work home. You went home to sleep and then you were up the next day. You worked there at your desk to do these things. Many times when the President was in a meeting, I wouldn't go in the meeting--I'd go back to my office to work on that particular speech. Of if he had taken a nap I'd be in my office working on that particular speech, or whenever you had the opportunity to do so. But the hours were very long and very strenuous. There was no homework simply because you were home about six hours and you hoped to use those six hours for sleep.

F: Right, introduce yourself to the children. In the President's personal draft of a speech, did you give stage directions ever?

V: No, no stage directions.

F: Did you try in any way when you were going to have a televised speech did you try to do anything to improve the President's TV image?

V: Yes. A number of times on State of the Union messages and that sort of thing, I would try to get the President to practice the speech at a rostrum. Sometimes we'd have a tape run so he could see it. He did this sometimes. But for the most part, he didn't. It was very difficult to get him to take that time. But I always thought that any rehearsing of the speech would not only make him feel more comfortable but it would make him get set with the rhythm of the speech. He knew the speech, he'd read it over many, many times, and when the speech was done it was his speech because he did a lot of the rewriting himself.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

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