

INTERVIEW III

DATE: July 21, 1978
INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM S. WHITE (with occasional remarks by June White)
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. White's residence, Madison, Connecticut

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G: Let's start with 1933, the year that you met Lyndon Johnson. He was working as [Richard] Kleberg's assistant at the time.

W: They used to call it secretary, but, yes, it was the same thing.

G: Do you recall the situation there in the office?

W: Johnson was really in a real sense running the office. Dick Kleberg was a very genial, nice man, but he was a very social type. He was not a hard worker. He was very rich, you know. Johnson used to say that Kleberg's congressional salary wouldn't pay his club bills. But Johnson, when I met him--it was late in 1933--was immensely active in that office. Kleberg was not always there, by any means. Johnson was particularly active with the federal relief agencies. He got all sorts of relief assistance for Kleberg's district in Texas. He was very acute about it, and actually was much more forthcoming about that than most members of Congress.

G: I gather that even then Lyndon Johnson had a policy of answering the mail the day it came in.

W: I think he did. I'm not aware of that directly, but I know he was constantly involving himself in writing under Kleberg's name to constituents,

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to bureaucrats, and particularly to Kleberg's district. I think that he may on occasion have, in calling federal bureaus, left the impression it was Kleberg.

G: Is that right?

W: I think so, because he certainly got a lot of attention. Really, he became widely known in the bureaucracy that early because he was awfully active. Any time a program came up of assistance to people, Johnson would try to qualify Kleberg's district for it.

G: I gather he did have contacts, close friends, in these agencies and departments.

W: He did. He developed those quite early. I think he began to develop them about the time I met him, actually.

G: Do you recall any people in particular that [he contacted]?

W: No, not especially. I remember his calling things like the AAA, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Public Works Administration. I think about that point he met Harry Hopkins, who was in the White House with Roosevelt, though I'm not clear about exactly when that happened.

G: Kleberg was on the agricultural committee.

W: Right. That's why Johnson was very active with the Department of Agriculture and with the AAA.

G: I have one note here about their efforts to get pensions for retired Texas Rangers.

W: I'm not aware of that one. I didn't know about it.

G: How about aiding veterans with service-connected disabilities?

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W: I know he was doing a lot of that. As a matter of fact, that was a pretty consistent theme throughout his public life. He did an awful lot for veterans. Of course, as you know, he later became quite an expert in Congress on military affairs, military appropriations, whatnot.

G: I also have a note that he went to the Civil Service Commissioner's office and obtained civil service status for an elderly customs inspector in Texas.

W: I'm not aware of that. I don't know about that. But I might say before we leave that subject of his helping veterans--this was later, when he was in the Senate--there was a Mexican-American soldier killed in Korea. His body was sent back home to South Texas. I can't recall what county it was. It was not very far from Johnson's home county; it's in that area, the Hill Country. They were not going to bury him, that body, in the Anglo cemetery there. Johnson just raised hell about it to the point where he had the army fly that body to Washington and had him buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

G: That was Felix Longoria, I guess.

W: That's right. Yes, it was.

G: I have a note here that Johnson met Ogden Mills in connection with public building projects. Does that ring a bell at all?

W: No, it does not. I don't have any knowledge of that.

G: How about Jim Farley? Do you recall his meeting Jim Farley?

W: I recall that he spoke often of Farley and admired Farley. Johnson, at even this early stage, was developing quite an in with the Roosevelt

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Administration. I think he probably first came to FDR's notice through the reports of bureaucrats to the President about how persistent Johnson was in getting federal aid for his constituents. So in that connection or at about that time he met Farley, but I don't know the details of it.

G: Anything on Hamilton Dam project?

W: I don't have any memory of anything of that sort, no.

G: I gather that he would compete with the people, say, in Tom Connally's office, to release announcements of new projects first.

W: Yes, he did.

G: Can you elaborate on that?

W: Well, he was almost the scourge of the Texas delegation about that matter of getting aid, as I said, for the Kleberg district. Yes, he quite often would rush to make the first announcement so that it would come from Kleberg's office rather than from one of the senator's offices, or even one of the other congressmen. He did a lot of that and he made very effective, constructive use of the press in behalf of Kleberg.

G: I have a note here that he took a job as House doorkeeper at one point.

W: I think it must have been before I had met him, because I don't have any memory of that.

G: Did you ever go to his room at the Dodge Hotel?

W: Yes, but I can't remember anything about the circumstances. I remember when he was staying there. I think he was sharing a room with--I don't remember who. I think Bob Jackson may have stayed with him in the Dodge Hotel at one time. The Dodge Hotel was a fairly run-down little hotel

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near the Capitol in Washington.

G: He would, I guess, have lunch there in the Capitol, wouldn't he, somewhere.

W: Yes, I think he ate at Child's a lot. There used to be a Child's restaurant or cafeteria near the Union Station, which again was somewhat near the Capitol. He lived very frugally, because he was always broke and so was I in those days.

G: Were you ever with him in Texas when he was down at the King Ranch?

W: No, I never was with him on any Texas matter or affair, except in 1952 when I was with the New York Times. I was out on one of those ear-to-the-ground surveys, you know, what's going to happen in the election. Johnson was running or assisting in running the [Adlai] Stevenson campaign in Texas. I ran into him by chance in the airport in Fort Worth. He took me in to the Fort Worth Club, and we were having a drink there in one of the rooms. He met one of the very famous Texas multimillionaires. I am not clear in my mind whether it was one of the Murchisons or who it was, but he was one of the great oil millionaires of the state.

Johnson looked him right in the eye and said, "Are you a Democrat?" and the man said, "Yes." Johnson said, "Are you for Stevenson?" and the man said, "Yes." Johnson said, "Well, goddammit, why don't you do something about it?" meaning make a contribution. This man pulled out--he had a little neat blue serge suit on, very mild man--a check and handed it to Johnson, and Johnson very grandly put it in his pocket without looking at it. That's one of his techniques of raising funds for Stevenson. That's the only time, other than purely personal visits with him in Texas, that I recall seeing him operate in Texas.

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G: I understand that he would go out to your house. Did you live in Virginia then?

W: Yes, I lived in Washington at one point, and then I lived in Alexandria, Virginia. I can't remember just what years those were.

JW: He went to New York to [see you].

W: Yes, he went to New York to see me in--no, that was long after I had left Washington and gone to New York.

G: I have a note here that--on the patronage thing--he used to go out to your house in Alexandria, and he would discuss columnists' writings with you.

W: I don't recall that really. He did come to my house, certainly, but I don't remember any discussion of columnists.

G: Like Raymond Clapper and Walter Lippmann.

W: No, I don't recall it. He may have done it, but I don't remember that. He usually talked to me about public affairs, public issues, or what he was doing in Kleberg's office, things of that sort. I don't remember any discussion with him at that time about the press.

G: Did you get a sense of his political philosophy at this point?

W: Yes, I got a sense that it was very pragmatic. He thought politicians were there to serve people, really. He never was very interested in doctrine or in ideological disputes. He had a favorite expression; he liked can-do people, as he called them, people who could do something. His whole public career was highly pragmatic. He was prepared to take a half loaf if that's all he could get. He did not want to risk everything on some throw of the dice, ideologically or any other way.

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- G: I gather that he was somewhat interested in Huey Long.
- W: I think he was fascinated by Long, as we all were then, in the sense of watching him. I don't know what his final, ultimate, deep attitude was toward Long. He certainly was interested in seeing him. He was a very colorful man.
- G: Do you recall talking to him about Huey Long, or what he said about him?
- W: No, other than some of his comments about Long's political effectiveness. I don't ever recall his talking about what he thought of Long as a person, or as a politician, beyond the technical aspects of it.
- G: Anything on the Texas State Society and his activities with that?
- W: Not that I recall. He went to it, and I did occasionally, but I never thought he was deeply interested in it. I think he went to see friends, but if he ever became an officer or something in it, I never knew about it. Maybe he did.
- G: Was he still active in the Little Congress by the time you were [there]?
- W: By the time I met him?
- G: Yes.
- W: If he was, he never discussed it much with me. I think he once told me how he managed to get elected to be the speaker of the Little Congress.
- G: What did he say about that?
- W: Well, what he said in effect was what he did all his life. He made a lot of friends against the day when he might need them, you know. He used the same sort of technique he later used in the Senate. He helped people, and he expected help in return. That basically is how he got that job I think. I never took that very seriously, I guess, and I didn't ask him much about it.

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G: I'm wondering how much time he spent with it.

W: The Little Congress?

G: Yes.

W: I've no idea.

G: You never went to a meeting or anything?

W: I did? No, no. I think he looked on it as purely a preparatory ground, as something he could do to learn some legislative or parliamentary techniques. I don't think he was terribly interested in it for its own sake.

G: Let's skip up and talk about some of his associates during this period. Did you get any insight into his relationship with people like Sam Fore?

W: No, other than that Fore was an old friend, a publisher in Texas who had helped him. He was fond of Fore and appreciated what he had done. He had a closer association with Maury Maverick when Maury was in the House for a while. Johnson always, I think, went out of his way to keep a good association going with politicians in San Antonio, because as you know, he always had really a very humane view toward Mexican-Americans. He really tried to help them, and he also had a lot of their support, as you know, always.

Your note mentions Malcolm Bardwell, who was Maury's secretary or assistant when Maury was in Congress. I had a very amusing story from Malcolm. San Antonio in those days was a pretty tough machine political town. Malcolm, who was sort of an engaging cynic, in other words, he put on more greater cynicism than he really had, was telling me about Maury running the first time for Congress. Malcolm said he would stand near one of the polling places and a Mexican-American would come by, and he'd

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say, "Juan, how would you like to be a member of the Railroad Commission?"

The idea being to get Juan's vote, you see. Now whether that really happened or whether Malcolm was just telling a tale, I don't know. I just simply saw his name and it reminded me of it.

G: Do you recall Mr. Johnson working in Maury Maverick's campaign in 1932?

W: No, I didn't know whether he did or did not.

G: How about Roy Miller?

W: Roy Miller was a very, very sophisticated, engaging man who was a big lobbyist in Washington. He was a great friend of Kleberg. I see you have a note that he recommended Johnson to Kleberg. That I didn't know. But I do know that Roy Miller always had a sort of a paternal attitude toward Johnson, was clearly interested in him and helped him a lot, tried to help him a lot.

G: I gather that he really used Kleberg's office as his own.

W: Miller?

G: Yes.

W: He may have. Kleberg, as I told you, was very relaxed. He didn't work very hard at being a congressman. If he liked Miller, I'm sure Miller could use his office.

G: Did you see much of Miller in Kleberg's office, or did you see them [together]?

W: No, I saw Miller around the Capitol, but I don't ever remember seeing him in Kleberg's office except in some sort of casual way, maybe occasionally.

G: What did you think of him politically?

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W: Miller?

G: Yes. What was his political persuasion?

W: Well, as far as I knew, he was a sort of a brass-collar Democrat. He was a good Democrat, good party man. I don't think Roy Miller took it very hard. I think it was part of his professional obligation to get along with congressional people. I don't know Miller's association with the Kleberg family, but obviously it was quite close.

G: I gather that there was a Mr. Horatio Adams [?], who worked with G.E., who wanted LBJ to go to work for him at this point.

W: I'm not surprised, but I didn't know Mr. Adams. I don't know anything about that story.

G: Elmer Pope [?], does that ring a [bell]?

W: Didn't know him. You're dealing mostly with people in Texas, and I'd been somewhat detached from Texas.

G: Okay. How about [Alvin] Wirtz? Did you see Wirtz and Johnson together during this period at all?

W: No. I knew Wirtz from my days covering the Texas Legislature. Johnson very often spoke of Wirtz very fondly, but I don't remember ever seeing those two together myself. The same is true of Welly Hopkins, who later went with the CIO, was a lawyer, I think, for the CIO.

G: Blaine Holliman, I gather, was also a good friend of LBJ's.

W: I did not know him, or if I did I've forgotten him frankly. I don't think I did.

G: Any of these other names here?

W: No. I knew Jerome Frank slightly as counsel. I think he was counsel to

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the AAA, a very brilliant man. I knew him independently of Johnson, really. I never saw them together.

G: There's a woman named Helen Crouch that was a friend of his, that had a broadcasting program. Her father was on the New York Supreme Court, I think.

W: What was her name?

G: Helen Crouch.

W: No, I did not know her.

G: How about Tom McNamara? He worked for Drew Pearson.

W: No, I didn't know him either. If I had I wouldn't really like it, because I never really cared for Pearson.

G: Pearson and LBJ must have had a strange relationship.

W: They must have had. I never was quite clear what it really was. You see, in some political issues they thought alike. But I think Johnson was ultimately very angry with him and perhaps very kind to him. I never was clear about the relationship at all, so I don't really know about it.

G: You knew the other members of the Texas delegation, in addition to Kleberg.

W: Yes.

G: As you look at this list of names here, do you recall any stories or anecdotes about LBJ and these Texas congressmen?

W: I remember the one about [John Nance] Garner very well. When Garner was trying to move in on the Texas congressional delegation's patronage, Johnson gave me a story about it and I wrote it. It sort of blew up Garner's plot. It sort of destroyed his plot, and Garner didn't like me for a while. I wrote it simply as a journalist, but Johnson thought that

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was quite a coup.

All the names you have here, I knew most of them quite well. At that time, you see, they were pretty senior as far as Johnson was concerned. He certainly had a relationship later with Tom Connally, a very close one, and of course with Rayburn, who you know became speaker. He knew Wright Patman quite well. He knew Martin Dies quite well. My impression was he didn't really know [Morgan G.] Sanders very well, or [Hatton W.] Sumners or [Clay Stone] Briggs or [Fritz G.] Lanham. He knew Ewing Thomason quite well. And Tom Blanton, I don't know. He knew Marvin Jones quite well. Jones was on the Agriculture Committee, and Johnson, even while he was a congressional secretary, was very busy with that committee as I mentioned to you earlier, because of Kleberg's--obviously in his district--interests in agriculture.

G: Have any contact with Morris Sheppard?

W: Did I?

G: No, did he?

W: If so it was probably very slight.

G: Did he ever talk to you about how he got the job as Kleberg's secretary?

W: No, he didn't really. I don't remember he ever mentioned it to me. I just always assumed that Johnson came from a ranching family down there roughly in that area, and that there was probably some family connection maybe or maybe his father, Sam Ealy Johnson, had interceded for him. But I never knew. Johnson never told me anything about it.

G: I hear that he pronounced the Congressman's name "Klee-berg," instead of "Clay-burg."

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- W: He did sometimes. He had a great facility for mispronouncing people's names. I think sometimes it was meant that way. I'm trying to think of somebody whose name he persistently mispronounced, and I always suspected he was doing it to cut him down a little bit. But I can't recall now who it was. Oh, he used to call Bill Moyers "Moyer." He'd always say, "Moyer did this, Moyer did that." He cut off the s. Now I always felt maybe he was doing that to goose him up a little bit, you know.
- G: I gather that LBJ also handled Kleberg's finances, paid the bills.
- W: I didn't know it, but I wouldn't be at all surprised. Because as I told you, Kleberg was not a very hard worker. He spent a good deal of his time away from Washington.
- G: Did he spend much time with the Klebergs socially or was this strictly a nine to five [job]?
- W: I doubt it. Well, no, not nine to five. It was about nine to nine. But I always thought that was very much a boss and an employee relationship. I may be wrong, but I don't think there was a social connection.
- G: Now by contrast, when he became the elected official, he evidently included his own staff in his social life.
- W: He did, amazingly so. He's the only president I ever knew who did it to that extent. Johnson would have his staff people at White House functions, and there was no distinction in his mind between them and the Chief Justice of the United States, in his attitude toward them. He did a lot of that. He was very good about bringing his people into the more agreeable side of their work. He always did that and he nearly always at a party, whether it was at his home or later in the White House, have some of his

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staff people there, and they were treated just as everyone else.

G: I guess he would have been offended if Kleberg had treated him as a social inferior.

W: I don't think Johnson would have minded, I don't think it would have signified much to him. He didn't have much of a social sense, other than he liked to have real friends around. But Johnson, I don't think Johnson was ever snubbed. I don't think anybody could have snubbed Johnson, because I just don't think he was snubbable. He once told me, for example, when De Gaulle came over when Kennedy was killed and met Johnson, of course, as his successor, there was a story around Washington that De Gaulle had snubbed Johnson. I asked Johnson about it. He said, "Snubbed me? Hell, no, how could he?" Then he told me that when he had gone over to Paris before that on a mission for Kennedy, he said De Gaulle had been very, very icy with him and said, "Young man, what have you come here to learn from me?" Johnson said, "Just any goddamn thing you think you can teach me." So that was his attitude. I don't think Johnson would have been the least crushed if Kleberg didn't invite him to dinner or something. Because I don't think he gave a damn about that kind of thing.

G: There were problems in the office by the time that you knew him.

W: Problems in the office?

G: Yes. He was very restless in that office. I don't know all the causes of it, but I know he was very dissatisfied with it, and that he was very uneasy about the situation with Mamie Kleberg.

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W: I never knew any of that. Johnson never discussed the Klebergs with me in any personal way at all.

G: Really?

W: No. Never. Never mentioned them except as his boss, you know, in connection with his work. I didn't know anything about that. My guess would be that Johnson was not so much upset at any situation in the office as he was at anxiety to move out to a more significant thing. After all, he'd been acting as congressman, in fact, for a long time. I think he began to think how he'd like to be a congressman.

G: Did he ever talk to you about that?

W: Not directly, but I got that impression, that he was preparing himself for more than being a secretary. He was entitled to a little bit of discontent about that, because he really did a tremendous job in Kleberg's name. I never knew about any trouble in there, in the office. I always just thought he was a little restless because he wanted to be on the way.

G: How about putting his brother Sam Houston in that position? Do you know how he decided to do that?

W: I don't know how that happened. I don't think Lyndon Johnson ever even mentioned it to me. Our conversations in those days, indeed nearly always, were on pretty objective matters, generally, on policy, on politics, in an impersonal sense. Johnson never talked to me much about his personal relationships with people. If he did, it always was involved in a political relationship. Our conversation was nearly always fairly impersonal, fairly objective. Externalized, I mean, rather than internalized.

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G: I have a list of legislative issues. I gather that he favored a repeal of Prohibition.

W: I think he very much did. I think in his case it was quite genuine. I don't think it was a case of being converted by the polls and whatnot. Johnson I think always regarded Prohibition as an infringement on personal rights. I don't think his father ever supported it, Sam Ealy Johnson.

G: Let's talk some more about this patronage fight with Garner. What was the resolution to that?

W: Well, the resolution was that Garner retreated after this piece of mine had appeared in the papers. Garner pulled back from his plan, his plot or whatever it was. There was some arrangement, some kind of a treaty made between Johnson, as representing Kleberg, and inferentially some other Texas congressmen who also didn't want their patronage taken away by the Speaker. Garner was either speaker then or--

G: Vice president.

W: Vice president. He was vice president then. They drew up some kind of a paper, an agreement on it. I never saw it and don't know what it was. I treated it as just a story that I had done, and I didn't pursue it after that.

G: I heard that Johnson was actually the one that drew up the agreement.

W: He probably was. Garner knew very well where it had come from.

G: Really?

W: Yes.

G: Was he incensed by this?

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W: Yes, he was not very friendly to me for a while. I think he later realized that I had no malice in it. I was just doing the journalistic job. It, of course, was a very considerable story, particularly in Texas, because it involved all these Texas people.

G: But Garner, as vice president, did have large patronage powers, didn't he?

W: He certainly didn't take them away from the Texas congressmen, because Johnson saw to that. I guess he did. I don't know. I don't really know about that.

G: Maybe he took them away from the senators.

W: He might have. I don't think so though.

G: My impression was that that was the precedent that Lyndon Johnson used to cite for having the patronage that would have been [Ralph] Yarborough's when he himself was vice president.

W: It may have been.

G: It depends on whose ox is being gored.

W: Yes, entirely. Entirely.

G: How about the soldiers' bonus? Do you remember that?

W: Yes. As a matter of fact, I remember writing a story about Roosevelt sending up his veto on the soldiers' bonus. Johnson, for some reason, was very much moved by that story. I don't know why. I never asked him particularly. I got the impression that in his heart Johnson thought Roosevelt was right about that. He never said that directly, but that's the impression I got. I think politically Johnson probably would have-- had he been in the House--voted to override, but I think probably looking at it abstractly he thought Roosevelt was right.

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G: The story is that he persuaded Dick Kleberg to vote for the Agricultural Adjustment Act.

W: I would guess that's right, although I don't know that in my own knowledge.

G: Do you recall any other legislative issues where he asserted influence?

W: While he was secretary to Kleberg?

G: Right.

W: No, I don't, other than I know in this sense Johnson was basically of a liberal disposition and Kleberg was conservative. So, I'm sure that he had a good deal of influence on Kleberg on a whole range of issues, in that sense. Because Kleberg was very dependent on him in many ways. But I don't know of any specific thing.

G: Now, reportedly there was some offer to make him a manager of the project controlling the tides at the Passamaquoddy Bay.

W: Never heard that. I don't know anything about it.

G: It sounds kind of farfetched.

W: It does to me. But it's possible, because by that time--I take it we're probably talking about 1934 or thereabouts?

G: 1934-35.

W: By that time, as I think I said earlier, he had come favorably to Roosevelt's notice, Johnson had. He was becoming well-known around Washington as a doer, as a man who gets things done. That was well before he was thirty.

G: Any other alternative career possibilities that he was pursuing to your knowledge?

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W: Not to my knowledge. I've always been amazed, by the way--I always was then and since and later--that some corporation didn't offer him an enormous job. Because there's no doubt in my mind had Johnson gone into business he would have been a literal billionaire. He had a genius for handling people. I'm just surprised that he wasn't brought into that. But I think Johnson basically had this very strong drive for public service. Had he been offered the chairmanship of Sears & Roebuck, I don't think he would have taken it. I'm guessing. He wasn't a professional do-gooder, but he had an awful strong drive for public service. He gloried in it, of course, too.

G: Did you ever get the feeling that he wanted to move back to Texas?

W: Not really.

G: He never expressed a desire to do that?

W: Not really, no. I think he missed Texas a lot, but also Johnson always really had a pretty national view of things. He was not a professional Texan at all.

G: Were you aware that he had met Claudia Taylor and was courting her through the mail? Do you recall?

W: I don't remember when I became aware of that. As I said earlier, Lyndon Johnson and I rarely exchanged purely personal confidences. We both, I think, had an interest in external association, of issues and whatnot. But I remember, either just before the marriage or at the time of the marriage, his telling me about her, but nothing about the courtship or any of that. Johnson and I never talked in those terms. I don't know why; we just didn't.

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G: What did he tell you about her?

W: Only that he was being married.

G: Really? Do you recall the first time you saw him after he was married or the first time you saw Mrs. Johnson?

W: I think the first time I saw her was when--I think they were married in Texas, weren't they?--he brought her back to Washington, I had them to my house. I think it was New Year's Eve or some holiday. Bird was unaccustomed to drinking and had a drink or two and really got sick. Johnson berated me, and has many times since, about serving her bad whiskey, cheap whiskey and whatnot. I doubt if Bird had ever had a drink of hard liquor in her life until this occasion. Johnson put it all off on me, that I had got her drunk and I had done this and that, you know. I served whiskey called Windsor. Johnson said this was the worst whiskey he had ever heard of and that made her sick and so on.

G: Did you see much of them socially after they were married?

W: Yes, quite a bit, increasingly so after he became vice president, I guess. We were with him socially I think more after he became vice president. Well, perhaps not. Anyhow, we saw a lot of them. Yes. My wife and I, June, saw a lot of them lots of times. When he was president we were at the White House very often, particularly on weekends.

JW: We certainly saw a lot of them when I first married you.

W: Yes, I guess we did. I'd forgotten how often it was.

G: Did you have any insight into how he got that NYA appointment? Did he ever talk to you about that?

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W: A little bit. He asked me to come with him, to do something there, and I didn't do it.

G: To join the NYA?

W: Yes. As I recall it, what he told me was that Roosevelt called him up and appointed him, offered it to him. As I was saying earlier, by that time Johnson was very well-known among the New Deal people in Washington. Harry Hopkins was a great friend of his, [as were] various people in the New Deal, Jerome Frank, whom we mentioned earlier, AAA.

G: Anything else on the Kleberg years that you [remember]?

W: No, I can't think of anything else. Those years were characterized mainly by Johnson's furious activity in behalf of Kleberg's office. That's about what happened. He was practically a genius at getting things done for that district. I suppose undoubtedly the training he got there helped him a lot when he was in Congress and when he was in the Senate.

G: Let's skip over the House years for now with the idea of coming back later on to those.

W: Okay. Oh, before we leave it, let me tell you a story that I think will be interesting to you, involving Rayburn. When Johnson went to the Senate I think Rayburn was a little annoyed that he had lost one of his star pupils in the House. He told me one day, when Johnson was already majority whip for the Senate, "You know, Bill, it's tragic that Lyndon Johnson left this House. He'd have been a big man here." I said, "Mr. Speaker"--no, I called him Sam by that point--I said,

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"Well, Sam, after all, he's Democratic whip of the Senate." He said, "That doesn't amount to anything. He'd have been a committee chairman over here." (Laughter) I don't remember whether I ever told Johnson that or not. I think probably I did.

G: There must have been some mild rivalry as to which body was the best.

W: Oh, there was. Rayburn was furious about it. Rayburn was absolutely fanatical about his devotion to the House. I wrote a book on the Senate called Citadel. After it came out--it got a pretty good reception--I had walked over to the House one day, and I ran into Rayburn. He growled and said, "What are you doing over here?" I said, "Well, do I need a passport?" He said, "Yes, hereafter you do."

G: Let's talk about Lyndon Johnson's years as Democratic leader. Since you mentioned it earlier we might start with his role in the 1952 campaign.

W: Well, his role in the 1952 campaign--Rayburn was involved in that deeper than Johnson. Rayburn was the southern leader for the Stevenson campaign, South-wide and Johnson was the Texas leader, more or less under Rayburn. As I told you, some of Johnson's critics thought he didn't exert himself too much for Stevenson. As far as I could see, he made a pretty good effort for Stevenson, although I wasn't in Texas. I told you a while ago about the incident in Fort Worth. I'm not really knowledgeable about all that Johnson did or did not do in that campaign.

G: I gather that he was particularly disturbed about Stevenson's view on the tidelands.

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W: I suppose he was. Also the southern fellows in the Senate were a little bothered about Stevenson's position on the filibuster rule. Stevenson said, in fact to me, at a press conference in 1952 in Chicago before the convention, at the governor's conference I think it was, that he would support the continued right to filibuster. But [Richard] Russell of Georgia, for example, [who] was by the way a distant cousin of Stevenson's, he was very anxious to have this nailed down, this thing. So I think that in that sense Johnson was possibly a little nervous about what Stevenson might do about Rule 22. I guess he was concerned about the tidelands issue. Well, I know he was, because later on when Stevenson was campaigning in Texas he saw Governor Allan Shivers, and Shivers smoked him out in public on the issue of the tidelands. I remember Johnson saying, somewhat impatiently, he thought Stevenson had been very foolish to let Shivers do it.

G: How did Johnson describe it? Do you remember his exact words?

W: I don't recall exactly. He said something to the effect that Shivers took him into camp, and he should have watched out for that kind of thing.

JW: Also, didn't Stevenson, before he was nominated, go back on the filibuster publicly?

W: No, not before. He went back on it later.

JW: Oh.

G: Well, Lyndon Johnson became minority leader in 1953. Anything on that first page that [you would like to talk about]?

W: No, other than, if my memory is correct, one of the departures from tradition that Johnson had instituted was an effort to put junior senators on

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at least one significant committee. That was obviously a very popular thing. He had felt that juniors had been too much overlooked in the past. I remember his doing that. I remember a rather eloquent statement he made to the Democratic Caucus when he was elected leader, to the effect that he was first of all an American. He was a Democrat, but not a Democrat, in effect, at the expense of principles of the country and whatnot. His intention I think was to draw distinction between the leader of the Senate and a leader in the Democratic Party, namely that the Senate leader had to respect the traditions of the Senate and not be terribly partisan. I think that was what he was hitting at.

G: I gather that he had a pretty good understanding with [Robert] Taft.

W: He developed an understanding. He didn't have it immediately, but he developed one. Taft was a very shy, reticent man, actually very warm. People didn't know that. Johnson characteristically sensed that he was. But Johnson would kid him in the most outrageous way and Taft, to everybody's amazement, would laugh.

G: Really? Can you recall any example of this?

W: No. Taft at that time was sitting up more toward the front of the chamber, and if one of the Republican senators would do something that annoyed Taft Johnson would go over and whisper to him in a stage voice, "That's one of your boys, Bob." Things of that kind. Taft would really break up laughing. Nobody had ever dared deal with Taft in that way till Johnson came along. His association with Taft was really largely personal. Taft just liked him. They did not often see eye to eye on issues. Occasionally they

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did. I think, primarily, that Taft tolerated him because he liked him, more than because he agreed with him.

G: I gather as Taft became ill and after he died and Knowland became his permanent replacement, that there was some friction between the two.

W: Oh, actually Johnson ran Knowland totally.

G: Did he?

W: Oh, of course, [on] anything really significant. He had Knowland thinking it was his idea by the time he got through. For example, the McCarthy censure committee, you remember, the select committee. Knowland theoretically appointed the Republican members, but Johnson appointed every one of them.

G: Did he really?

W: By putting it in Knowland's mind. Yes. I was present in his office one day when they had their final conference on this, and Johnson literally appointed these people.

G: How did he work it?

W: For example, his mind would fix on some Republican he knew Knowland detested. He'd say, "Now, Bill, I'm sure you want so-and-so." Knowland would say, "Oh, no! Good God, no, I don't want so-and-so!" and he'd wind up naming the man Johnson wanted. He did it all the time. He did it in the Democratic Steering Committee. He wanted to get Mansfield on the Foreign Relations Committee as a freshman. They'd never had a freshman on the Foreign Relations Committee. Walter George was chairman of the Steering Committee, I believe. In any case, George was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and his word had great weight. Johnson knew

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that George could not stand Herbert Lehman of New York. Lehman was senior to Mansfield in the list of applicants for the job on the Foreign Relations Committee. So Johnson said to him, "George, I'm sure you would like to have Lehman on the committee." George, of course, hit the ceiling, came down and lit on Mansfield. Johnson did that all the time. Johnson completely ran Knowland. I don't mean every detail, but every critical thing. He had Knowland thinking he thought it all up himself. He did that very often. That was a part of his leadership.

The only Republican that Johnson ever had any bare-knuckle thing with was Styles Bridges of New Hampshire. Bridges was a very tough fellow. He and Johnson had served together on the Armed Services Committee and knew each other, each one, like the back of his hand. Bridges told Johnson one day when Johnson was--well, let's say conning, really, Leverett Saltonstall about something, "Lyndon, you can do that with Leverett but, by God, you can't do it to me." Johnson said, "I know that, Styles."
(Laughter)

G: Do you remember what he was doing to Saltonstall?

W: No, I don't remember. He was baffling Saltonstall, getting Saltonstall to do something he didn't really want to do, and succeeding in doing it, and Bridges [was] sitting there laughing at him, quietly, not openly.

G: Can you recall any other occasions when Johnson outmaneuvered Knowland, even while the Republicans had the [majority]?

W: Frankly I can't recall any occasion when he didn't, really, when he wanted to. Knowland was an admirable man in many ways. He was very inflexible and not one-tenth as bright as Johnson in maneuver and so on. So Johnson

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took care that he always obtained a very close personal relationship with Knowland, so that he could approach him at any time. He really just sort of overwhelmed Knowland with his brilliance as a leader.

G: I guess it was during this period that President Truman visited Washington. I believe you did a story on President Truman's comments about Democrats who were too supportive of President Eisenhower.

W: I went to see Mr. Truman at his hotel. He said he was getting damn tired of the way the Democratic leaders were kissing Eisenhower on the cheeks. I'm going to tell this as it actually happened. This is slightly risqué. I wrote it for the New York Times. It had a big head on it, and Johnson was very upset the next day that Truman had done that and that I had written it. I said, "Well, after all, I write what I choose." He was all right, he was a little annoyed. He and I and Senator George were sitting in the president's room off the Senate. Lyndon Johnson was shouting to George about how Truman had done this and so on. George, who had this great pipe organ voice said to him, "Now, Lyndon, I wouldn't be too upset. Knowing Harry, it's lucky he didn't say he was tired of your kissing both cheeks of Eisenhower's ass." I thought it was kind of an amusing story. (Laughter)

G: Anything on foreign policy here in 1953? The NATO status of forces agreement, do you remember that?

W: Yes, in more popular terms, that was the decision of Truman to send troops to Europe. Yes, I remember that very well. Johnson didn't take very much of a public part in that, but he strongly supported Truman in his maneuvers around the Senate. Indeed, that was pretty much his whole approach on

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foreign policy, Johnson's I mean. He was very careful not to offend the protocol of the Foreign Relations Committee. He was not a member of it, but he had a tremendous hand in the foreign policy in the Eisenhower Administration, he and Rayburn both. Because they had a fairly traditional southern politician's view that the President should be supported beyond the water's edge, as far as one could possibly do it.

He believed in a strong president in foreign policy, and he believed very strongly in bipartisan foreign policy. He did not like to make foreign policy any kind of a partisan issue. That was quite genuine with him. So when Truman decided to send the troops to Europe under the NATO treaty, Johnson strongly supported that. And while I don't remember that he made many speeches, he did an awful lot of lobbying for the President in the Senate cloakroom and on the floor. He did the same with reciprocal trade agreements. Actually, Johnson never did, nor did Rayburn, ever really break with Eisenhower on any foreign policy. They got annoyed at times, but they felt that this was something you didn't do unless you just had to do it.

G: On the next page, if you see any of these legislative issues here that demonstrated LBJ's mastery of the Senate or his role in either passing or obstructing this legislation, why don't you talk about it.

W: Actually, one could look at this list and say in substance that almost everything on it, that passed, that became law, that became enacted, Johnson had something to do with. Because he was, of course you know, in charge of what went on the floor.

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G: Can you recall in particular how he influenced this piece of legislation or that one, or which senator he leaned on, or what his tactic was in this case or that case?

W: I can't in any detail. See, the thing was that Johnson was constantly working the floor, working the cloakroom, keeping in touch with the interests, the desires, the weakness of the other fellow. He had a tremendous sense of how to appeal to people, where to appeal, what appeal to make. I might say, on foreign policy for example, he and Rayburn again would not let the Democratic National Committee, insofar as they had any voice in it, make any attack on Eisenhower on foreign policy. That resulted in the end in developing that Democratic Advisory Committee. I think Paul Butler was chairman of the committee then. But Johnson and Rayburn were very indignant about that, because they didn't think that unelected people should speak for the Democratic Party.

But Johnson's method of persuasion is sort of legendary, really. It was justly legendary, because he was just enormously capable in cajoling, wheedling, scaring. It's not true that he blackmailed anybody, emotionally or any other way, but he would throw in a fairly stiff reminder that you may want a bill next week, you may want this next week, and so on. He was just very adept at measuring gain and loss in other people. I don't mean that in a crude sense. I mean if a man was interested in certain legislation, Johnson would expect that he would help him in his legislation.

G: Let's look at 1954.

W: Okay.

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G: Do you remember his role in the defeat of the Bricker Amendment and the George substitute that was offered?

W: Yes. Let's don't get into that, because it's absolutely impossible to explain that amendment, except that the effect of it was to reduce the President's power to make foreign executive agreements and even treaties. As I say, don't get into it because it had the famous which clause which nobody could understand. But in any case, Johnson's role there was fairly typical of his role often. He was not forward visibly on this amendment. But he had people like Senator Tom Hennings of Missouri, who was a very fine constitutional lawyer and they were sort of his running backs, the people who did the work. Johnson was very engaged in defeating that amendment, profoundly engaged because he thought it was a very severe restriction of the President's power in foreign policy. But he was not so much visible in it as he was quarterbacking it behind the scenes.

G: Do you know if it was he who persuaded Senator George to offer that substitute?

W: I think it probably was, although I'm not certain of that. My memory is not clear on that.

G: Anything on the Albert Beeson nomination?

W: No, I don't remember that frankly. I don't even recall it. I might have been away from Washington.

G: I gather it was during this period when he and Senator Russell, among others, advised President Eisenhower that the United States should not support the French effort in Indochina unless the British went along. Do you recall that?

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W: I recall it vaguely, but I might sort of make a more general answer to that by saying that in fact, Johnson and Rayburn to a very large degree, I won't say ran foreign policy under Eisenhower, but they certainly held a considerable veto power over it. He didn't do anything in my opinion, Eisenhower didn't, without their tested or actual consent.

I recall generally that Johnson and Russell were troubled primarily, as I recall, at a speech Nixon had made at the newspaper editors association, which suggested, or seemed to suggest that we might intervene militarily. I know Johnson and Russell didn't want to do that. Later on, much later in the game, they parted on Vietnam because Russell and John Stennis and others in the Senate were upset that they didn't think Johnson was doing enough militarily. They thought he ought to, as the expression went, "get in or get out." Johnson was much more cautious in committing forces. It was ironic that many people consider that he was too rash. As a matter of fact, a great many of his oldest friends, a very considerable number of decisively important friends of his, thought on the contrary he wasn't rash enough, that he wasn't aggressive enough.

G: Let me ask you about the Goldwater Amendment to the Taft-Hartley Act. This was very much a partisan vote here. Johnson managed to defeat it. He got three Republican votes in the process.

W: Very untypical Republicans, all three: [William] Langer, [Milton] Young and [George] Malone. Well, actually, I don't recall this specific matter, strangely enough, because I covered that bill for the New York Times. But I don't remember the Goldwater Amendment. I do know that

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Johnson basically supported the Taft-Hartley bill. This rather surprises me; I don't even remember that amendment. I don't know why.

G: Do you know how he was able to get George Malone to vote with him as often as he was?

W: No, and it puzzled everybody, absolutely puzzled everybody I ever knew how he did it. I think he was just nice to Malone. A lot of Democrats acted as though Malone was kind of a fiend, or a devil incarnate, but Johnson was always friendly with him. I think it's just that.

G: How about Bill Langer?

W: Same. I would say the same thing. Langer was sort of an outsider in the Senate. He wasn't widely respected or liked. I always thought that in that case, too, it was just that Johnson was kind to him.

G: Do you think Johnson was proud of his ability to get these Republicans to vote with him on the partisan issues?

W: Oh, yes, very proud of it. Actually, Johnson really preferred everything he did to have a bipartisan cast, everything of significance I mean. Johnson never was a very partisan man. People don't realize that. He was partisan in a somewhat narrow frame of reference, but he never was a gung ho, 108, 110 per cent Democrat.

G: I gather his ability to get these Republican votes would really surprise Knowland.

W: Oh, Knowland was constantly caught off guard, yes. Knowland, see, never did his homework the way Johnson did either. He never went around selling these people. Knowland was very standoffish. Johnson would buttonhole

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anybody at any time, day or night, and get him off in a corner and give him the reasons why he ought to do so and so, and very often the man would do it.

G: How do you explain his rapport with someone like Margaret Chase Smith?

W: Oh, I think Johnson's sort of gallantry with her was giving a little southern treatment to Margaret. They were on the same committee for a long time, the Armed Services Committee. He could be very courtly when he wanted to be with women, and I think that probably Margaret just sort of thought he was a nice young man, you know.

G: I have a note here that indicates that he named Paul Douglas to the chairmanship of the Joint Committee on the Economic Report.

W: I remember it. I remember that Douglas was a consistent critic of Johnson's, and I think partly that was done [because] Johnson tried to withdraw his teeth a little bit. Douglas never could stand Johnson. I never knew why, but he couldn't.

I see you've got a mention here of Eisenhower and Churchill meeting in Washington. One of the things that Johnson did that I always liked a lot--which I had suggested by the way, maybe that's why I liked it--was arranging for Churchill to be given honorary citizenship in the United States.

G: You suggested it to LBJ?

W: Yes.

G: What was his reaction?

W: Thought it was a good idea, he said, and he eventually had it done. Looking over the list of these things, it's astonishing how much he

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had to do with things, isn't it, Johnson? Legislation. I suppose there's nobody in history, no president and no senator probably, who's ever been as deeply involved in so much legislation as Johnson.

Oh, I see you've got one here: in 1954, when Eisenhower claimed that a Democratic Congress would mean a cold war of partisan politics and Johnson's response. And I remember that because Johnson was absolutely livid, and rightly so, because nobody, but nobody, had helped Eisenhower more on foreign policy than Lyndon Johnson. Johnson thought that someone had written this for Eisenhower, this piece, and he had sort of given it in an off moment. He was frantically angry about it, rightly so, because as I told you earlier, he and Rayburn were enormously good to Eisenhower in foreign policy.

G: Did he talk to the President about that, do you think?

W: I don't know. He never told me whether he did or not, nor did Rayburn. Rayburn was furious, too. They never said.

I see you've got a list of LBJ's western tour in 1954. He was out there, Johnson was, to try to help some Democratic senators. One of them was [James] Murray in Montana and one was [Joseph] O'Mahoney in Wyoming. O'Mahoney had been smeared quite a bit in the McCarthy era. He was defeated for the Senate and then came back later. He had defended Owen Lattimore who was accused vaguely of various things, pro-communism, whatnot, typical McCarthy stuff. O'Mahoney, in the interim when he was out of the Senate, was counsel. I think he was counsel for Lattimore. In any case, he was a defender of Lattimore and the Republicans were using it against him in Wyoming.

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Johnson was out in Cheyenne to make a speech for O'Mahoney and Johnson wanted him to talk about things of interest to farmers and ranchers. They couldn't care less about Owen Lattimore or the Institute for Pacific Relations or whatever. Johnson assumed, being Johnson, that Joe O'Mahoney would speak about farm problems and cattle problems and what he had done for Wyoming. O'Mahoney got into a long, learned discourse on the obligation of a lawyer to a client, to this group of farmers and ranchers, out in this hot sun in Cheyenne. Johnson's sitting on a platform, I'm sitting behind, he absolutely could hardly restrain himself muttering, "Joe, for God's sakes, shut up." O'Mahoney talked about an hour and Johnson did everything but get up and drag him down finally. Just got up and said, "Joe, it's good. Thank you, it's nice to be here," and so on, because he thought O'Mahoney was turning off all these farmers and ranchers. They didn't care about this issue he was talking about, you know. It was fairly typical of Johnson's determined attitude of common sense. He just did not believe in going to talk to a lot of farmers about a lawyer's obligation to international law or something.

G: Were you with him on this tour?

W: I was not with him. I was out there for the New York Times, and he was out there speaking. I was with him in the sense that I met him, yes, and went to the hotel with him. I think in retrospect, that's when he probably began to think he might possibly be a national candidate himself. He was trying to develop some obligation to him from

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Democratic senators. I think also, give him his credit, too, he was genuinely trying to help these people because a) he wanted to continue a Democratic majority, and b) he liked them.

G: You talked about the McCarthy censure in your earlier interview, and I won't ask you to go into that other than to ask you a couple of items. Do you have any idea if this episode is what caused the relations between LBJ and Stuart Symington to cool somewhat?

W: What, the McCarthy episode?

G: Yes. Well, Symington's feeling that Johnson was not doing enough to oppose McCarthy openly.

W: No, I don't think so. I doubt that very much. I don't think their relations cooled until Stuart Symington developed presidential ambitions. Johnson handled that--I dealt with that earlier--but Johnson handled that with great pragmatism, great sense. Hugh Gatskill [?] was a leader of the Labour Party in England. I was talking in London one day to Gatskill and I told him that I had gone--I was a great friend of Johnson's--I had gone to Johnson once and said, "For God's sake, why don't you do something about McCarthy? He's destroying the Bill of Rights. He's making these wild accusations about people." Johnson turned to me and said, "In the present climate"--something to this effect--"I am not about to commit my party to a high school debate on the subject: 'Resolved, that communism is good for us,' with my party taking the affirmative." What he meant was the atmosphere at the moment was such that people were so super excited that to say anything against McCarthy, to

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some people, was to convict oneself almost as a communist. He was saying the time wasn't ripe, that he would do it later. And he did eventually.

So I told Gatskill this. Gatskill laughed and said, "You know, he's a man after my own heart. I have now on my desk here a report from a royal commission advocating that we liberalize the homosexuality laws in England. To paraphrase Johnson, I am not about to commit my party to a high school debate on the subject: 'Resolved, that homosexuality is good for you.'"

G: Let's look at 1955. Wayne Morse by now had changed parties and was helping the Democrats form that razor thin majority, I guess about two votes. He and Strom Thurmond were right on the fence. And Morse got a seat on Foreign Relations. Do you think that was part of an understanding there?

W: I wouldn't say directly, but I think Johnson certainly was doing everything he could to appeal to Morse. When Morse was out in the wilderness, was an independent, Johnson was very kind to him, gave him some committee assignments from the Democrats. Johnson had a peculiar relationship [with him]. Morse could be vicious about Johnson, and Johnson persisted somehow in sort of liking him.

G: Why was that?

W: I think it was because he thought Morse was kind of a touch of salt that the Senate needed. He was contrary, difficult, mean, and Johnson in a sense sort of admired that, sort of thought it was a good thing to have somebody like that around, kind of an emery wheel. But he always liked

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Morse in spite of everything. I never did understand why, but he did.

G: Item number six, this tax bill, demonstrates what you were saying earlier about Johnson's relations with Harry Byrd and how he was able to whittle away at Byrd and get him to do things that he was not at all disposed to do.

W: Yes. I don't really remember the details of this fight. At that time I pretty much concentrated my work on foreign policy, and I don't think that I even was aware of all that went on in this thing, the tax thing. You'll observe down there that in the same period of time Johnson was helping to bring West Germany into NATO. That was the kind of thing I was interested in and I don't think that I even wrote about the tax thing.

G: Did you talk to him about his efforts with regard to NATO here in West Germany?

W: Oh, I talked to Johnson about it many times, yes, as a reporter primarily, you know. Yes, he was very interested in NATO. NATO was really in a sense one of his babies. As I told you earlier, he supported it very strongly when we entered the treaty, when Truman sent the troops to Europe. Johnson was very much a NATO man.

G: I wanted to get you to talk about that highway bill with the Gore amendment.

W: Oh, yes. I had forgotten the date on this, but it was when the interstate highway system was being legislated and Albert Gore of Tennessee was the author of a bill for it. Gore was a very unsouthern kind of

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fellow. He really wasn't liked in the southern caucus. While Johnson was not a creature of that caucus, he was a member of it. At any rate, Gore had this bill up authorizing an interstate highway system, and he put in a rider, a proposed amendment, to bar signs from the highways. At that moment, Johnson, Alben Barkley of Kentucky and Walter George of Georgia were in Johnson's office having a drink. I was in there with them.

Bobby Baker, the Senate secretary of the Democratic majority, came rushing in and told Johnson quietly that Gore was putting in an amendment against billboards and George was very close to Coca-Cola people in Georgia. He was calculated not to like this much, but at the moment he wasn't particularly indignant, he was just a little annoyed. But then he had another drink or two, he got more and more annoyed, George did, at Gore. Because the ultimate point was they didn't like Gore. That's all there was to it. Johnson didn't; George didn't, and Barkley didn't. So Barkley, who normally would have been all in favor of barring the billboards decided this was a slur on his old friend Walter George. So he got a little more indignant as he had another drink or two. Eventually Baker came in and said Gore was prepared to withdraw the amendment, whereupon George gets up and totters out and goes on the floor to object. He won't let him withdraw the amendment. Then George comes back and Barkley decides he will go out and take Gore on. Gore got up again to ask unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment, and Barkley objected.

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Well, Johnson at this point was really a study because he, as I said, he didn't like Gore, but he didn't allow such things to carry him too far. He didn't allow personal dislike to carry that far. He wanted the bill passed and attended to. He also, however, was sympathetic to the personal feelings of George and Barkley. So the net of it was that the Senate had to meet until about nine o'clock that night before Barkley and George would let Gore withdraw his own amendment. It's a very interesting illustration of how much the Senate was run on personal traits, personal characteristics, so on.

G: Anything on reciprocal trade legislation?

W: Other than that Johnson always supported it in principle. I don't remember. He considered that an important part of foreign policy. As I mentioned several times, he was always in favor of very broad presidential authority, long before he became president, in foreign policy.

G: Item number twenty-four there is something you may recall.

W: Let's see. Oh, yes, that was before Johnson finally set up that investigation of McCarthy that led to his censure.

G: No, I think he had already been censured by this point.

W: Oh, oh, yes, I guess he had. No, this was one of McCarthy's last efforts, some sort of attempt by Senate resolution to restrict Eisenhower's movements at a Geneva conference. The Republicans wanted to avoid embarrassment by just shunting it aside in the committee. Johnson decided that he wanted it brought to the floor so that he could put the Republicans on record as having voted against McCarthy,

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which he did. I think the reason he did it was that some of the leading Republicans voted with McCarthy in the censure matter, Knowland, for one, the floor leader. I think Johnson wanted to put them on record, even if belatedly.

G: I gather he was pretty good at times at creating a little intramural strife between Republicans.

W: Republicans? Oh, yes, yes, he was very good at that.

G: Can you recall any other examples?

W: No, not in any detail. It was kind of a consistent effort whenever he was in trouble to divide the enemy. I don't remember. This was probably the sharpest example of it, this thing right here that we were talking about.

G: I gather that a lot of his success had to do with his timing, his ability to bring something up just at the right moment.

W: Yes. Very much so. That's why, as I mentioned earlier, he would not bring up the McCarthy thing until he knew he had the votes. I forgot to say--and that's only fair to him--he wasn't cynical about that. He said to me, when I originally proposed this to him, "If I put that thing in now, we're going to lose"--we, meaning those who wanted to censure McCarthy--"and it's going to confirm McCarthy in the minds of the country as a legitimate leader on this matter." Yes, his timing was a very important part of his [success]. He was like an actor in that sense, like the theater. He had an enormous gift for discovering the right time to put on the right kind of pressure, just enough, not too much but not too little.

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G: I guess he also knew where his votes were.

W: He always knew where the votes were and, more, he knew where the people were, emotionally and every way. He had an enormous gift for reading people, particularly individually, one at a time. Kennedy once said to me, President Kennedy, that no man alive had ever won an argument head to head with Lyndon Johnson. He meant if only two were involved. Johnson's gift for that sort of thing, head to head, one to one, one on one they call it now, for discussion or persuasion was enormous. He was never as good with large crowds, as many politicians. He never was very successful at it. He was a very sophisticated man and he dealt brilliantly with sophisticated people, but not so well with simple people. And of course, senators on the whole are sophisticated people. That's why he had such a tremendous record in the Senate. He didn't have to deal with the mass feeling or excessive emotionalism or any of that in the Senate. That was one of his great strengths. He did not have that strength as a president. He was not as persuasive as a president as some have been.

G: I gather he was also very good at counting votes.

W: Oh, yes, he always knew right down to the last vote where they were. If he didn't, Baker would go find out for him, Bobby Baker.

G: Baker must have been good at that.

W: Bobby Baker I think is a real tragedy, because there's no question he did some very deplorable things, but Baker was a tremendously gifted young man in the sense of the Senate, in the operations of the Senate and the people of the Senate, and very devoted in his way. It's tragic

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to me that he got into the mess he got into. It's a case, I guess, of a man getting into the wrong sort of thing. Baker was brilliant as a political tactician. He obviously was not very brilliant about taking care of himself.

G: Anything else on his skill as majority leader and the techniques that he was known for?

W: I think the only thing that I can add to that is that Johnson had not only a great sense of timing, but a great capacity at times for self-restraint. He was very careful not to offend the mores, the habits of the Senate. I mentioned to you earlier that he would be very involved in foreign policy, but very quietly, discreetly so, not so that he wouldn't annoy the prima donnas on the Foreign Relations Committee. He could be very vigorous and aggressive, obviously. Everybody knows that. He could also be very restrained. It depended on whom he was dealing with. He knew everybody; he knew everybody in the Senate. He knew exactly where he stood, where he was, what his emotional content was like. He had a tremendous tactile sense of people's insides. He knew what fellow was subject to flattery, what fellow was subject to a little roughing up, what fellow was subject, you know. And he never made a mistake. He didn't apply the wrong remedy to the wrong man.

JW: He did every once in a while.

W: Well, he did. I shouldn't say never. But I mean, he was very, very good at estimating how far to go and how far not to go with each individual.

G: Do you recall his role in the issue of Alaska-Hawaii statehood?

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W: No, other than to say that I don't think he was very passionate about the matter either way. It's not the kind of thing that would engage him very deeply.

G: He was a close friend of John Burns though, I gather, the governor.

W: Oh, I think he was for the Alaska bill and not very keen about Hawaii, because he thought Hawaii would go Republican more often than not. But Russell restrained him a lot. Dick Russell had this great emotional feeling against admitting any more states, particularly non-contiguous states. He would harangue Johnson quietly--harangue is not the word--debate with Johnson about the unwisdom of bringing these people in. But I don't think Johnson was ever very keen about that. I think it was a kind of a routine performance with him.

G: He had his heart attack in 1955. You did visit him at the hospital, I gather.

W: Yes, I did. I went over immediately. I heard of it at night, and I went over the next day to the naval hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. Russell and I, I think, were the first people to call on him, Senator Russell. I mean the first outside the family, of course.

G: What was his condition at that point?

W: Well, he was very weak and he looked bad. He made some jokes. He made some jokes to Bird about a new suit he had. He said that would be satisfactory to bury him in. Later on, when I would go out there, he would have a whole battery of typists, and he was running the whole Senate from the hospital bed.

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G: I gather he was very depressed during this period.

W: Yes, he was. I think it's fairly common for heart patients.

G: Did he feel that his political future had been snuffed out by that heart attack?

W: I think he was concerned that it might be. I don't think he ever felt it was. But he certainly was concerned about it, of course.

G: Did he ask you about that, do you think?

W: No, he didn't. I wrote something about the blow to the Senate it was, which was a very genuine blow to the Senate, to lose him for a while. He appreciated that a lot and he mentioned it to me. But I don't think he ever said to me outright, "I'm afraid I'm going to lose my influence." But obviously he was.

G: How did the heart attack change him?

W: Not really. No. For a while he was more careful, and he quit smoking cigarettes. But right away, as soon as he got back to the Senate, he started these eighteen-hour days all over again. I was in his office one day when Dr. Jim Cain was there. I took Cain over to the window and I said, "You've got to do something to this man because he's not paying any attention to what you told him about resting." Cain shook his head and said, "It won't do any good. He is probably better off doing it this way. That's the way he is." No, I don't think it changed him much. He quit smoking. He told me once in the White House, I asked him, "How long does it take to quit missing cigarettes?" He said, "I don't know. I've only quit fifteen years ago," whatever it was. He

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still desperately wanted cigarettes. I think eventually before he died he started smoking again.

G: Now you visited Texas, visited the Ranch, that fall while he was recovering I believe, you and Gerald Griffin.

W: Yes. He was planning for the upcoming 1956 Democratic National Convention. He and I knew each other so well that I never had to be hit in the face to know what he was thinking about. He made a great display to us, Griffin and me, of statements he had been making in Texas, and indicating to me that he was planning to be a very significant figure at the next convention, and that he meant to, as I later wrote, develop a centrist position at the convention, not necessarily to be nominated, but I think at minimum to influence the platform.

Well, I wrote that for the Times, that Johnson was preparing this position. I used the term somewhere in there, "conservative." By that I meant relative to the North and East. I meant not, say, Averell Harriman's type of liberalism. Well, in shorthand in Texas that was far right wing. So I think it piqued him very much that this had been printed, because in Texas such lingo meant that he was way over at the right, you know. So he disavowed this. He didn't do it immediately, but eventually he disavowed my piece. Douglas Cater of the Reporter magazine wrote a piece saying that I had broken Johnson's confidence. He didn't consult me. I was furious about it. I think the use of the word conservative was what caused all the trouble. I was using it in terms of New York, understanding in New York. So he disavowed the

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piece, and I didn't like it all and I didn't go around to see him. I just quit going. He eventually called me, and we got back together again.

G: How long was the gap in here?

W: Oh, it was a matter of some weeks. Later on at the convention in 1960, I guess it was, Democratic convention, John Connally was with Johnson and I went in. Johnson was kidding me, he said, "Well, you never come around any more. You don't get any information from me." I said, "Well, if I did, it would turn out to be wrong, wouldn't it?" Whereupon Connally laughed and Johnson just looked at me.

G: That's great. Well, I certainly appreciate your reminiscing. Is there anything you want to add to it today?

W: I don't believe so. I think I've about shot my bolt.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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