INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: GLEN P. WILSON

INTERVIEWER: T. HARRI BAKER

PLACE: Dr. Wilson's office, Senate Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee, Washington, D.C.

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B: Sir, let me introduce you here briefly. You were born in Waco, have a bachelors in aeronautical engineering from the University of Texas, worked for Lockheed, [saw] World War II service in the navy, and in 1952 [received] a doctorate in psychology from the University of Texas. Then after a time at teaching and as a research psychologist at Lackland Air Force Base, in 1955 you joined Mr. Johnson's Senate staff. Is that [correct]?

W: That is correct.

B: How did you get that job, sir?

W: Well, that is a very interesting story. At the time I was engaged in an attempted business activity in Austin, Texas, and my wife was working for Max Brooks, who was in the Kuehne, Brooks, and Barr architectural firm, and Mr. Brooks was a very close friend of Lyndon Johnson's. I think he was involved in designing the Lyndon Johnson Library, and he has been close to Mr. Johnson for a number of years. Toward the end of 1954, it became evident that my business efforts were not successful, and I had decided that I had to go back to work,

probably at teaching or in a research capacity of some kind. Since Mr. Brooks had relied so heavily on Marie--that's my wife--in his operation, I told her that I thought it would be a matter of courtesy to advise Mr. Brooks that I was looking for a position, and that the chances were high that it would probably be somewhere other than Austin, and that consequently she would probably have to leave at some undetermined time in the future.

Mr. Brooks was upset by this, and his first thought was that maybe he could get me a job at KTBC. He wanted to know if I would consider such a thing. So when my wife came home and gave me that, I said, "I'll talk to anybody as a courtesy to Mr. Brooks. But I've got no interest in working for a radio station or a TV station and no background, interest, experience, or anything else. But I'll talk to them."

There was also some mention that maybe there'd be a job in the Senator's office. But it'd really started off, at least in Mr. Brooks' mind, as something there in Austin, because his motivation was to try to keep my wife there! One thing led to another, and before it was over, Mr. Johnson had offered me and Marie a job in his Washington office.

B: Had you known Mr. Johnson before that?

W: No, only as he was the congressman from Austin. I had lived in Austin for a number of years; I sure as heck knew who he was.

B: Had you had any political involvement, partisan politics, campaigning, anything like that?

W: No.

B: What were your first duties when you came to Washington with the Senator's staff?

W: Well, as an interesting commentary on the office operation, on the day we walked in--incidentally, we had to leave on very short notice, and we drove over the long New Year's Day weekend in a driving rain to get up here. The day we arrived here was the day the Congress began in 1955, and it was, in fact, in this very suite of rooms here. We walked in the front door to report for work, and there wasn't anybody here who knew we were supposed to go to work for him. They thought we were constituents. It took a little while to establish the fact that we were here to go to work.

B: This suite, which is now the Senate space committee, was Senator Johnson's suite then?

W: Yes. It's just an accident of nature that the committee wound up here.

B: What did you end up doing?

W: Well, in that context, the truth of the matter was that nobody had much of an idea as to what we should be doing. One of the girls who was here who had been handling military cases was scheduled to leave, so they put me to work on those. So for almost the next three years, I worked in the Texas office sort of handling the routine military cases.

Mr. Johnson, as you know, was a prominent member of the Armed Services Committee and was at that time the chairman of the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. I'm not sure of the exact dates on this; I'm sure you can get them elsewhere. But, during World War II, a serviceman could not write his congressman without getting permission of his commanding officer. I don't know the circumstances surrounding the incident, but Mr. Johnson was responsible for having that regulation changed.

So, he became a sort of hero among a lot of people in the services, because now they had the freedom, like any other citizen, to correspond with their elected representatives. As a consequence of that, he got a large amount of military mail from people in the service, all over. While ordinarily in a senator's office--if, let's say, you are a senator from Pennsylvania and you get a letter from a citizen from Illinois complaining about Social Security, unless you're on a committee or something, you'll refer those letters generally to the senior senator of the state that the letter comes from. But in addition to large numbers of just plain, everyday Texas servicemen's cases, we had them from all over, and the instruction was that we answered them all. So, it was an interesting job, and I came into contact with staff members of the Armed Services Committee, Preparedness Subcommittee, and with the various service liaison officers.

B: Did Mr. Johnson take a personal interest in that kind of thing, or did he just kind of give you. . . ?

W: He had in earlier days. I think it's of interest to note that he became majority leader of the Senate the day I came here and as a

result of the election of 1954. As a consequence, he did not have as much time then for his Texas operations as he had had in previous years. As a result of that, we very rarely saw Mr. Johnson in this office, in the Texas office, any more. There were one or two of the cases that were of sufficient prominence and pressure that they got to his attention. I think, perhaps, I wrote him a memorandum from time to time.

I remember once, not too long after the Parris Island incident where the Marine had walked a bunch of recruits into the river and drowned them, there was a great deal of material in the press about bad treatment of the recruits by the services and so forth. To make a long story short, we had a letter from a man in San Antonio whose grandson had been inducted, and he claimed that the boy was being mistreated.

Everything you did, of course, you did it over the signature of the Senator. We sent out wires telling the grandfather we were going to look right into this thing, you know. It was strictly a routine inquiry as far as I was concerned--we sent a buck slip over to the Air Force to ask them to give a report on the case--until we got a telegram from the grandfather that said that the boy had died as a result of the hazing he had been given by his sergeant. Well, that kind of jazzed things up a little bit. [There was] a series of phone calls. We managed to retrieve the commanding general, who was bear hunting in Alaska, and get him back down to Lackland [Air Force Base] in a hurry. And the grandfather was naturally distraught.

I'm certain that if it hadn't been for the flurry of telegrams to the grandfather, in Lyndon Johnson's name, insisting that we were moving heaven and earth up here to find out what had happened--which by this time we really were--[that] is the only thing that kept it out of the newspapers and kept it from blowing up. That, as I say, was the type of case. That one I remember pretty vividly because it was a lot of excitement involved in it.

B: What kind of boss does Senator Johnson make?

W: Well, frankly, my personal contacts with the Senator [were] reduced virtually to zero because, as I said, his office was in the Capitol, and I had very, very little occasion to talk to him, particularly through the period when I was still doing these military cases.

B: When did you move over to the Defense Preparedness Subcommittee? Was that before or after the Sputnik incidents?

W: Well, it was immediately after Sputnik. As you know, that created quite a lot of interest and concern in the country. I think Lyndon Johnson was one of the first to see what some of the real importance of this was, not only to the defense of the country, but also to the prestige of the country. At the same time, it was pretty clearly a good political issue.

He had met with Senators [Richard] Russell and [H. Styles] Bridges during the month of October of 1957, and they had agreed that they would go to the Pentagon to get a briefing on this problem. I forget the exact date. I think it was like November 3 or 4. It was almost exactly a month after Sputnik. They went to the briefing, and they

were not satisfied that they had been given all of the right answers. In other words, they felt like it was probably important to go forward with their own investigation. It's important to note here, now, that this was done with the full concurrence of Senator Bridges, you see, who was the ranking Republican on the Armed Services Committee as well as on the Preparedness Subcommittee. I can't remember whether that meeting was just before or just after the second Sputnik. As you recall, the second Sputnik. . . .

B: The second Sputnik was in November.

W: That's right. The second Sputnik was, I think, November 5--November 3, excuse me. The second Sputnik was November 3, so I guess this meeting was on the fourth or fifth or something.

B: It would have been after the second Sputnik.

W: Yes, I believe it was after it. The meeting was set up before the thing--that is to say, the meeting to get the briefing at the Pentagon.

B: And I suppose the second Sputnik just increased the sense of urgency?

W: Sort of increased the tension and the excitement and concern. And it was at that time, I think that very week, that I was put over on the Preparedness [Subcommittee] staff.

B: Well, then, plans were already under way for an investigation by the [Senate]?

W: Yes, Mr. Johnson had announced that right after this meeting at the Pentagon. I'm sure from your records you can get the exact date of that meeting.

B: Yes, in this kind of thing, we're not trying to get precise dates, because that is on a written record.

W: But I recall vividly the following Monday. I don't know the date of that, but it was a Monday. Mr. Weisl came in--Ed Weisl from New York--and his assistant was Cy Vance, as everybody knows by now. Mr. Weisl called the staff together and said, "Now, Senator Johnson has said we're going to start hearings in two weeks. From the amount of material we have to go through to get ready for these hearings, I don't see how it can be done. But the Senator says we're going to do it, so we're going to try." And we did. We started them on schedule. Those hearings were very historic in the whole development here, because they were done in the typical Johnson way of getting the full support of all his people. Just as an aside, throughout the entire time that Mr. Johnson was chairman of that Preparedness Subcommittee, there was not a single minority report. Every report ever published by that committee while he was chairman was unanimous. And he prided himself on that.

B: Mr. Johnson's famed urge toward consensus?

W: That's right. It's a hell of a good way to operate in many cases, and he certainly made it work in a lot of them.

B: There is some indication, in some of the printed material about Mr. Johnson's career, that there was a bit of friction between Senator Johnson and Senator [W. Stuart] Symington at the hearings.

W: Well, there was, in general, some friction between those two gentlemen by virtue of the fact that they were both angling for [the Democratic

presidential nomination in] 1960. I think that was probably at the root of it more than any personal feelings they might have had.

Well, as a matter of fact--and we're going to drift right into this in a minute anyway--we had the establishment of the [Senate] special space committee, and that was set up as a real blue-ribbon committee. It had chairmen of several important committees that were involved, or were thought to be involved in the space program, and their counterpart ranking Republican member. In this kind of a set up, it left one extra space to be filled on the committee, and Lyndon Johnson chose Senator Symington for that job, out of everybody else in the Senate. I know there were some people on the staff, and his own brother, [who] were very upset with him when he did that. As I have heard the conversation retold, Johnson just said, "Well, he's the best man qualified for it." So he selected Symington. If there were any other reasons for that other than that statement, I don't know what they were.

B: Mr. Johnson pretty well hand-picked all the members of that joint special committee?

W: No, you see, this is again a typical operation. What happened was . . .

B: They became ex officio by virtue of being chairmen of other committees?

W: Yes, that's right. He took the Foreign Relations Committee. Senator [Theodore Francis] Green was chairman at the time so they put him on; the Armed Services Committee; the Commerce Committee. [John] McClellan was on it. Commerce was [Warren G.] Magnuson, and McClellan was there because of Government Operations. I forget the exact list. It's all in the--

B: The list is all in the record.

W: Yes.

B: Was there any special reason for having that joint select committee, rather than the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee, continuing the investigation?

W: Yes. There were several reasons. One is, you see, Mr. Johnson had held these hearings in November, 1957--November and December--and they'd gotten an awful lot of publicity. In addition to the two Sputnik launches, there was the conspicuous American failure on December 6, 1957, when our first Vanguard blew up on the pad. So when the Congress reconvened in 1958, there were just scads of bills introduced. As you know, it's a common practice for a senator to have a bill worded in such a way that it would be referred to his own committee. So you had a number of bills floating around that would have done this and that and the other, as far as space was concerned. Some of them had gone to the Commerce Committee; some, the Armed Services Committee; some, the Government Operations Committee. The matter was getting out of hand pretty fast.

I don't know whose idea it was, originally, to set up the special space committee, although it very likely was Gerry Siegel's. Whoever thought of it first, certainly Mr. Johnson seized on it, and he introduced that resolution. By bringing in the chairmen of these various committees that were involved in it, he not only gave the committee a real blue-ribbon status--and again it kind of emphasized the urgency of the space matter--but he had all these bills that had been floating

around re-referred to this special committee. Since most of the senators who were chairmen of the committees to whom these things would have gone, that sort of wrapped it up. It was a good move, as, in fact, almost all of his moves were good in those days.

B: When in this process did the thought start turning toward the idea of a civilian space agency?

W: Well, that's very interesting, and I've thought about that a good bit and discussed it with a lot of people. The man who's really the most responsible for that is Mr. Killian--James R. Killian--who was President Eisenhower's science adviser. He had appointed Killian, I think, back in November as his response, you see, to the Sputnik thing. Killian was really the motivater for giving this a civilian cast instead of a military cast.

Now, in spite of that, and in spite of the creation of the Advanced Research Projects Agency in January of 1958 as part of a Defense Department reorganization bill, on the floor of the Senate, at the very last minute, they put in an amendment to that which gave the Advanced Research Projects Agency the responsibility for the space program for one year or until such time as something else was done with it. It was in the minds of the people operating this then that they were going to come up with this bill. I think the interesting thing is that nobody ever seriously suggested that it be a military program.

B: It was sort of the consensus to begin with that the military be kept out of it?

W: I would say that's correct, and throughout the entire debate on it I don't remember a single senator who was saying that it shouldn't be civilian, that it ought to be military only. We had Senator Russell on our committee; we had Senator Bridges on our committee. And certainly in writing the Space Act, we wrestled with that first section. I guess Gerry Siegel and Ed Welsh and Dave Martin--these names are all in that book*--staff people--and myself sat down there in the basement of this building and tried to work out language which was acceptable to both Senator Bridges and to Senator Russell on this military involvement. But, you see, even at that, neither one of these people or anybody else made a great pitch for leaving this as something that would be a military agency and nothing else.

B: Was there any pressure from. . . ?

W: Excuse me--one more point. I think, in addition to Killian's role in this, was the kind of momentum such as it was that had been built up for the IGY--International Geophysical Year--and the decision much earlier for our country to build the Vanguard and try to get into space with the Vanguard, instead of with the Project Orbiter, which [Wernher] von Braun had proposed as far back as 1955. A conscious decision was made then by the so-called Stewart Committee--that was Homer Joe Stewart, who's still at Cal Tech.

* "Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences, United States Senate, Tenth Anniversary, 1958-1968, Senate Document No. 116, 90th Congress, 2nd Session."

B: How do you spell Stewart?

W: I think it's in this book. [See previous footnote] It's all there. Anyway, the decision was made then, in the context of the civilian nature and the scientific nature of the International Geophysical Year, that our involvement in that should be civilian support involvement rather than military. Now, of course, the military did get involved in it, because the management responsibility was given to the Naval Research Lab out here. But it still was under the aegis of the National Academy of Sciences, with money from the National Science Foundation, and so forth and so on. So that kind of background to it, again, was partly responsible for its taking on a civilian cast.

I remember some year or so later, in 1959, when we had some hearings on government organization for space activities, General [Bernard A.] Schriever came before that committee. When asked what he thought about NASA he said, "Well, that's not the way I would have done it"--meaning organized for the space activities--but he said, "But that's what the law is, and so I support it." And to my knowledge, that's the only scrap of testimony you'll find any place, in those first few years, to indicate that there's anything other than whole-hearted support, even from the military, for the establishment of the civilian space agency.

B: I was going to ask if the military had tried any pressures or to exert any influence through the formal channels.

W: To my knowledge, no. Of course, I know a whole lot more about it now than I did then. But I believe that if there had been any substantial movement or feeling or pressure from the military to do otherwise, it certainly would have come out. And if anybody other than General Eisenhower had been president, they might have done it, too. But the military were very circumspect about how they treated General Eisenhower. You know, he was sort of one of their own, and they were not prone to argue with the President, the General.

B: This may be unanswerable, but I've seen it said in some places that Lyndon Johnson has kind of a distrust of the military, or did in those days.

W: Well, I'm sure you could find people who would make that statement, and maybe on some days it would be true, but you could turn around and find an opposite statement on the next day, and that would be true, too. I think that about the only thing I could say there would be that in dealing at the political level--totally political level, which is what Lyndon Johnson was and is--that there were times when he distrusted a lot of people, and I'm sure there were times when the military came in for their share of that. To back up that statement you would probably have to find individual people--individual generals and the like, or secretaries and so forth--that he didn't trust, rather than just a blanket statement about the military.

Because Lyndon Johnson rode to his greatest fame by his support of the military in the late forties. Of course, the 1948 election was

very close, but he was a great supporter of the military then. And as you know, he came up here and was able to get this Preparedness Subcommittee when he had hardly been here any time at all. It was quite a plum for a freshman senator, and, of course, could not have been done without the support and approval of Senator Russell. But he was very active in that committee. Of course, the early days of that committee were before I got here. But they turned out many, many, many reports, some of them pretty critical of the operations of the military. But I don't know of any of the military people who did not respect him.

B: During the early part of 1958, while the select committee was meeting and then later while you were working out the drafting of the bills, what was the relationship of that process there in Congress to the White House staff?

W: Well, it's interesting that the principal White House staff man involved in that is back on the job down there now, and that's Bryce Harlow. I was not personally too much involved in this operation. The man who was really involved in it was Gerry Siegel, and Gerry was counsel at the Democratic Policy Committee at the time. Gerry was really the main honcho on this thing. He was the guy that gathered the staff together; he was the guy that came up with the drafts of changes; it was his idea, principally, to establish the Space Policy Board, which eventually became the [National Aeronautics and] Space Council which he sold Senator Johnson on. He was just the main man,

that's all. He had a lot of help, of course, but primarily it was Gerry who dealt with Bryce Harlow on that. What other kinds of interaction took place, I don't know.

B: How did it happen that the House and the Senate ended up with two slightly different bills?

W: Well, they generally do. I might just say in passing that after the Senate set up its special subcommittee in February of 1958, there was great pressure on the House side for them to do likewise and also to put somebody who was equally prestigious as chairman of it.

I can only give you this story from things I've heard; I can't really verify it, but apparently, the House did not establish their committee until some weeks after the Senate committee. And the reason I heard for it was that they were trying to get Congressman [John W.] McCormack--he was majority leader of the House at that time--to take the chairmanship so the House would have a committee that was equally prestigious, and he didn't want to do it. They finally, somehow or another, persuaded him. And I must say that he took over the task eagerly and performed it very well once he did it. But that was my understanding as to why the House was a little slow.

Well, back to your question, this is really the purpose of the bicameral system, if you're going to have two legislative bodies. The House looked at the bill; they had their hearings and listened to their witnesses, and they saw what they thought were certain shortcomings in the proposed legislation, and they wrote the bill their way to take care of this. So it's the same thing. So this is the way it works.

B: I believe, actually, the only major difference was over the locus of policy--the Space Policy Board. Was it difficult to work that out?

W: Well, that's not quite correct. The House had a much more limited concept of this than the Senate did. The House, in their original bill, had set up a civilian-military liaison committee which was patterned strictly after a similar committee that existed between the Atomic Energy Commission and the Department of Defense. This civilian-military [liaison committee] was strictly a means of coordination between the Defense Department and the space agency. Organizationally it was deficient, because they set up a separate chairman of this committee--Civilian-Military Liaison Committee was the name of it, CMLC--and it had a separate man as chairman of it, who was in fact neither fish nor fowl, nor responsible to either agency, and had no authority. They did recognize that there was a need for day-to-day liaison--some kind of coordinating activity between the Defense Department and NASA. In the Senate bill, we took the position that there were other authorities in the law which allowed NASA to set up all kinds of coordinating committees with the agencies for daily operations. If they wanted to do it, it was perfectly all right.

The original House bill also had a Civilian-Atomic Energy Liaison Committee, which would have set up a second committee with the same kind of function between the AEC and NASA. But both of these were very limited in their operation and, as I'll show you in a few minutes, poor from the standpoint of organization.

In the Senate bill, on the other hand, there was a greater recognition for the importance of an overall policy. The Space Policy Board was not really to be involved in the agreement between NASA and DOD or the Navy as to whether they were going to pick up their capsules or not. It was a question of establishing policies for the United States. I forget the exact membership in the original board as it was in the original Senate bill, but it included the secretary of state and the secretary of defense, of course, the head of NASA, the head of AEC, and, for a while I believe, we had the director of the National Science Foundation on it.

The Senate approach was that space was an important national matter, and it had to be approached from the standpoint of development of policy at the highest levels. Furthermore, in the Senate bill, this board--it was called a board sort of like a Civil Aeronautics Board or something--had real power. It would have been able to have settled disputes between the agencies and, in effect, to tell them what to do and to say who would be assigned such and such a program. Because it was clear that whatever the outcome of the bill was, the military was going to retain the right--which they should have--to do their own research and development in space if it was necessary to meet military requirements. As I say, the Senate approach was much broader; it looked at a larger picture.

The compromise of course is what is now the [National Aeronautics and] Space Council, which was defanged of all real authority and made

into simply another advisory group for the president. The CMLC went out of existence in less than a year and a half, and it was replaced--incidentally, under the authority that NASA has in the bill in the way that we said it had all along--with a group they called and still do call the Aeronautics and Astronautics Coordinating Board. It differs organizationally from the CMLC in that it is co-chaired by two high officials--one at NASA and one at DOD--at present, the deputy administrator of NASA and, now, the assistant secretary of defense for research and engineering. So that, whatever these people come to as a decision as to what they ought to be doing or coordinating, these are high line officers within their own respective organizations, and they can see that it's carried out, which wasn't at all like the CMLC.

B: Then, with the passage of the act there was formed the Senate Aeronautics and Space [Sciences] Committee--chairman: Lyndon Johnson. And you became a staff member of that new committee?

W: Yes, sir. I was the first chief clerk of that committee. I might just tell you a little side story here. This is one of those stories I had thought I might tell you about. Some people on the Government Operations Committee have never been happy with the way that the Joint Atomic Energy Committee worked, because it violates the basis of a bicameral system. It is, in fact, the only joint committee that has a legislative responsibility, and to that extent it is really unique. It disallows, as I described earlier, the process of the give and take and the pull and tug of a bicameral system. If you're going to have a bicameral system, you really shouldn't have a joint committee with

legislative powers--regardless of the historic reasons for it. Well, as I said, there were some people on the Government Operations Committee who never were happy with the Joint Atomic Energy Committee operation, and in fact they wanted to create a new space committee and put atomic energy in it, too, and break up the Joint Atomic Energy Committee.

B: Did they have in mind a joint space committee?

W: No, sir! Absolutely not! That was the point, to have a Senate [committee] and a counterpart in the House, a space and a nuclear committee, atomic energy committee. But nevertheless, there was powerful interest in the joint committee structure, joint committee kind of operation, and of course for reasons that I'm not entirely sure of, the House special committee did include in their version of the bill provision for a joint space committee. It didn't go so far as to try to accommodate or to subsume the Atomic Energy Committee, but just to create a separate, but also a joint committee on space. That was an addition to the bill. Of course, it could only be made in the legislative body. It said nothing, of course, in the draft from the White House, about how the Congress should organize itself.

Well, it passed the House committee that way and came out on the floor. In the meantime, the staff, led by Gerry Siegel, was putting together suggested language for our special committee's consideration. Apparently, Mr. Johnson told Gerry--whether he specifically mentioned a joint committee, or whether he said something like, "Well, every place you can find something in the House bill that we don't disagree

with or that we can go along with, go ahead and put it in our bill, too. That will give us some points of similarity, and there won't be as much squabbling when we get into conference." Be that as it may, and whether this was done with malice aforethought or not, I'll never know for certain. But I have my own feeling about it.

When the bill got to the House floor, however--and it passed the House just, oh, I don't know, a week or so before we finally got ours to the floor--we heard that Mr. Rayburn had said that he didn't want any more damned joint committees. So, Mr. McCormack got up and offered a committee amendment to strike out that section that established the joint space committee. And, as far as I recall, that was the only amendment they made on the House floor on that bill. So that even though it had come out of the committee with provision for a joint space committee in it, when it passed the House it did not have it.

Well, when we went to mark up our bill, we were sitting there with a draft. It was printed in our version of the bill with a joint committee, but the House had already cut it out on the floor. But I remember Mr. Johnson saying, "Now we've got to leave this in there. I've got to have something to bargain with them with." Presumably, he reluctantly gave up the joint committee structure to gain some other concession from them. And he really had them because they couldn't say, "Well, we're against the joint committee," because it had been in the bill as they reported it out of committee.

But my feeling about that has always been that I never did really see Mr. Johnson as a sometime-chairman of a joint committee. The fact of it was he really wanted to be chairman of a standing committee of his own. I just have a feeling that there was always a little more to that than met the eye as to how that provision got eliminated from the House version of the bill, and then how he maneuvered that to use it against the House for some other purposes.

B: You suspect maybe Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn got together?

W: That is a very strong suspicion. What I'm really saying is that I think from the very outset, Mr. Johnson wanted to be able to have his own standing committee. It certainly was clear to everybody that this was a subject that wasn't going to go away, and it did not, at that time at least, have any nice, neat little niche you could put it into under the existing committee jurisdictions. So it was a perfect opportunity to form a new committee. After, of course, we "reluctantly" gave up the joint committee to the House in the conference, why, then of course, Mr. Johnson had to turn his attention to how to handle this matter in the Senate on a permanent basis. But, you see, by supporting that joint committee, he again insulated himself from possible enemies who might be saying, "Well, you're just trying to build more empires." He could say truthfully, "Well, I tried to set up a joint committee, and the House would have none of it."

B: That's a first-class example of Lyndon Johnson in operation.

W: Well, the facts are there, and you can make a few surmises.

B: Then, as I said, the Senate committee was established with Senator Johnson as its chairman and you on the staff. Did Johnson then continue to take an active interest in the operation of NASA?

W: No, not too much. Even though the resolution creating this committee was passed in August of 1958, it didn't really go into business until 1959. But by then we had a new Congress. The Democrats had won heavily in the 1958 elections, and for the first time, Lyndon Johnson had a reasonable margin to work with. He'd been working with a one-vote margin for four years! For four years, he did this! Anyway, he had a bigger margin to work with, and he devoted more of his time--I think for reasonable purposes--to the majority leadership than he did to the committee.

He set up two [subcommittees]. He really just wanted to set up one subcommittee. He set up a Subcommittee--a so-called subcommittee--on NASA Authorization, which is, in fact, all the committee does--NASA authorization--and made Senator [John] Stennis chairman of it. So Senator Stennis chaired this little subcommittee for a couple of years, and then the full committee would meet and just in one meeting accept what they did.

A second subcommittee was set up because Senator Symington was looking for a platform, and he got the Subcommittee on Governmental Organization I was telling you about a short while back. But those are the only two subcommittees this committee's ever had, and they were short-lived. Certainly the NASA Authorization Subcommittee was clearly designed to take a lot of the work off Mr. Johnson's shoulders.

B: Mr. Johnson, then, didn't get involved in, say, the choice of Keith Glennan as administrator [of NASA] and that kind of detail?

W: Well, you've got to keep in mind, now, there was a Republican administration, and I can't. . . . I don't know. I never thought of this before. I can't believe that the administration consulted Mr. Johnson on the appointment of Dr. Glennan. I'm sure they must have taken into account Glennan's qualifications. After all, he did have to come up and be approved by the Johnson committee. But if they ever tried to pre-screen Dr. Glennan or anybody else with Lyndon Johnson before they made that appointment, I'm not aware of it.

B: Then, to skip over a bit of time here, Mr. Johnson becomes vice president, and the Space Council is altered by legislation to make the vice president the chairman. From your vantage point here, did Mr. Johnson really exert much influence over the space program from that position?

W: Well, one of the first announcements President Kennedy made after he'd been elected to the presidency--and this is in December of 1960--was that he was going to make the Vice President the head of his space advisory council, or something of that kind. Well, when we read the transcript of that press conference, we weren't quite sure what he was talking about. He didn't use the proper title for the Space Council, and so we weren't sure if that's what he really meant or not. I mean, we thought that his reference to a "space advisory group" was supposed to be the Space Council. And, as it turned out, that was true.

Now, Mr. Johnson was given responsibility to select an administrator for NASA, or to get some candidates for it. And he and Ken BeLieu, who is now back at the White House again, working for Bryce Harlow, and Bill Moyers--Bill Moyers and BeLieu spent a lot of time in the month of January, 1961, trying to get some candidates for that job. They went through a whole lot of them, I can tell you that, before they got to Mr. [James E.] Webb.

B: I've seen a figure of seventeen, or something like that.

W: Well, I don't know how many it was. But again, you have Mr. [Robert] Kerr coming on the scene. Mr. Kerr [was] a very shrewd man, who made his pitch at just the right time, I guess, for Jim Webb. It was a very good appointment, as far as I'm concerned. I don't think Lyndon Johnson knew much about Webb when he recommended him to the President. I may be wrong on that. Webb had been here in the government; he had been under secretary of state under Truman, and he'd also been head of the Budget Bureau. So I'm not saying that he was totally unknown to Mr. Johnson; I just say I don't think they were really very close. It was the relationship between Senator Kerr and Webb that got that job done. About that time, I guess, Mr. Johnson was willing to take most anything.

B: What was the trouble in finding a man for the job?

W: Well, there's the usual. But look what happened just recently here when the new Republican administration came in. I know for a fact they tried half a dozen or more--who knows, a dozen?--people to try to get

them to take the administrator's job. And they wound up sticking with Dr. [Thomas O.] Paine, who's a . . . well, I don't know what his politics are, but he was appointed by a Democratic president. For the most part, it's a question of seeking out someone who seems to have a big national reputation, and somebody with a name; and, generally, those people, unless you can really offer them something worthwhile, have other commitments, you know, and they don't want to do it. So you go through a usual sequence until you get down to somebody who wants the job.

Also, I think there was probably a little bit of concern. You see, this was much prior to the time that President Kennedy had made the recommendation to the Congress of going to the moon--the Apollo program. And I think that some of the people who were asked, let's say, to take over this job didn't really know what they were going to be doing. They didn't know what kind of commitment that President Kennedy was going to give to it. Furthermore, since Lyndon Johnson had been given the job of selecting this man, they didn't know whether they were going to report to the President or to Lyndon Johnson. Was Lyndon Johnson, as chairman of the Space Council, going to be running the space program, or were they going to be running it as head of NASA? I think those must have been questions in the minds of the men who were contacted in January of 1961. It certainly would have been in my mind if I'd been in that kind of position.

B: How did it turn out? As you pointed out, Mr. Johnson's position as head of the Space Council can look at least a little anomalous. How did it

actually work out in practice: the relationship between President Kennedy, Administrator Webb, and Space Council Chairman Johnson?

W: Well, you've left out a key figure there in Ed Welsh, who was appointed executive secretary of the Space Council. Even though President Kennedy had announced his intention of giving this job to Lyndon Johnson--and then there was the legislation that came along to amend the Space Act so this could be done--while this was grinding through the mill, Lyndon Johnson took the position that he wasn't going to do anything at all about it until he had the authority to do it. Now, there wasn't any reason why he couldn't have done that. He could have called together the Space Council as the President's emissary, you know. Because the President said, "This is what I want you to do." But this is part of the tip-toeing at arm's length operation that takes place, I guess, at all high levels of politics, and he just would not do anything at all on that Space Council until it was in writing, in the law, that he was supposed to do it.

In the meantime, though, Kennedy appointed Ed Welsh as executive secretary, and he was appointed and confirmed before the bill making Johnson the chairman of it was ever signed. So he had nothing to do with the selection of Ed Welsh. And I'm pretty sure he wasn't consulted about that, either. There were times in subsequent years when Ed Welsh let certain people know in no uncertain terms that he'd been appointed by President Kennedy, and not by Lyndon Johnson. So the friction that existed was between Welsh and Johnson in many cases.

Then when President Kennedy decided we needed a policy in communications satellites, he set up a special task force to do it, because, it included people other than those who were in the Space Council--like for example the Federal Communications Commission--and he made Welsh the chairman of that group. As far as I know, Johnson was cut out entirely, or nearly entirely, on that very important establishment of communications policy.

So I think that nobody--well, you know, everybody's heard this--but most people really don't understand how really weak the vice president of the United States is. I mean, he really has very little power, and the nature of the job is such that it's unlikely that he ever will. There are hundreds of government officials down to low levels--you know, GS-15s--who have a great deal more authority in the overall context of the federal government than the vice president of the United States does.

B: Do you know if Mr. Johnson played a major part in the decisions of that year? Particularly in the decision to go for the moon?

W: Yes, he was involved in it, and so was NASA; so was Welsh. This was done, ostensibly, under the aegis of the Space Council. Johnson had just become chairman. The law that made him chairman of it had only passed in I think it was April--late March at the earliest. It's in that book [see previous footnote]. That's one good thing about this little book; all the dates are in there. [The date was April 25, 1961.]

But he was given the job, I think, primarily, of trying to see that this got congressional support. Because I recall a meeting in which Senator Kerr--who was our chairman of this committee by then--and Senator Bridges, and about three of the staff people, including myself, went down to a meeting that Mr. Johnson had in which were the principal people from NASA, the principal scientists and all. They outlined this project, the Apollo project. This was what that group had tentatively decided to do.

When I say "that group," I don't know how many people were involved in it. I do know that NASA called in all their center directors and most of their principal scientists, and from other sources, I've gotten the impression that there were probably as many as a hundred of their top scientists involved in that crash operation of late April and early May of 1961. By the time Mr. Johnson had gotten to the point of trying to present it in an informal way to the Congress, I think they had already tentatively made their decision that this is what they wanted to do--that is to say, go to the moon and back. Mr. Johnson's role was, as far as I could see, simply to try to get the support of the principal congressional leaders before the suggestion was made to the Congress by the President.

B: Was there any serious objection from congressmen?

W: Well, this was duck soup for Lyndon Johnson, dealing with Bob Kerr and Styles Bridges. I mean, they were old buddies, for sure, and there was no problem there. I don't know whether he had a similar meeting for

the House people or not, but I'm sure he discussed it with them. Mr. Rayburn was still alive and still the man to deal with on the House side. So I'm certain that whether or not Mr. Johnson discussed the matter with Overton Brooks, who was chairman of the House space committee by that time, [it] was really irrelevant, because Rayburn was still the speaker.

B: It's a little after six o'clock. Have you got time to go on?

W: Well, I don't know. We've just about covered it, as far as my contact with Mr. Johnson is concerned. My timing is really not that critical. We can go on a few minutes longer, if you'd like.

B: Well, what about during the presidential years, after Mr. Johnson became president? Did his involvement in the space program change any? [Was it] more extensive, less extensive?

W: Well, of course, after he became president, he had--as everyone knows, either today or twenty-five years from now--a good deal more things on his mind. The space program, by this time, was pretty much in the pipeline, as we say. The major commitments had been made, and the production lines were under way. There wasn't really a whole lot you could do to speed it up or slow it down at this point.

The later years, though, and by that I mean as we really begin to get into the budget squeeze, the last year or two. . . . I'm sure Mr. Johnson did not want to leave office and leave the legacy of having both started the space program and terminated it in the same man. But there certainly were decisions, particularly in this last budget, fiscal

1970--Johnson's budgeting of space--which would simply have terminated the space program after another couple of years. Keep in mind, now, that much of the 1970 budget was prepared even before the election. The budget process goes on almost constantly, you know.

What I would like to leave in the record at this point is that even if Mr. Johnson had been re-elected president, he could not have gone with this budget, because it would have been the end of the space program. There's absolutely nothing in this budget for continuation of manned space flight after 1972, for example. This budget had to be changed, and it would have been changed, regardless of whether it was President Nixon, or Humphrey, if he'd been elected, or Johnson, if he'd decided to run and been elected, or almost anybody except maybe Ted Kennedy, and I'm not so sure but that he also would have had to.

B: Actually, those budget cuts began earlier than that. Practically with President Johnson's first budget, NASA began getting a little bit less.

W: But there you've got to take into consideration the fact that in building up for this major goal, you see, which we have--

B: The Apollo program?

W: Yes, the Apollo program--that there's a natural reduction there. Even in the earliest plans, they show a sloping off of the program after it reached certain peaks. I mean, in a program of this kind, you've got to make your commitments early; you've got to get your things in the pipeline, as they say, and get them started, get them going. After they get to that point, they pick up; they get a certain amount of inertia, a certain amount of an on-going quality to them that makes it

difficult to change it very much. Now, the decisions--or should I say the lack of decisions--were the fact that there are few or no new starts in last year's budget and in this year's budget.

B: The NASA people have said that they need to get started now, or to have gotten started several years ago, on post-Apollo plans.

W: Well, this was a dilemma for anybody, and particularly a dilemma for NASA. Here we are with a commitment to land on the moon and presumably do a certain amount of exploration. Well, it's very difficult before you've even landed there to decide what you're going to do after you've been there a while. I mean, that's the whole purpose of going there is to find out what's there. Your post-Apollo programs, to make any kind of sense scientifically or strategically or whatever, have got to have a very heavy input from the results of the early moon landings.

This has always been a dilemma at NASA because the lead times, for example, on the Saturn V are now running forty-five months. This is almost four years. You've got to decide that far ahead of time that you're going to fire one of those beasts that many months down the road. Well, you may not know, though, the day you commit yourself to starting to build this next booster, what its mission is going to be four years from now. Somewhere in there you've got to decide what it's going to be. But the lead times on the production of some of the equipment, particularly the booster, is longer, by far, than the cycle time of going to the moon and getting some information and trying to adjust it, and trying to understand it, and trying to decide, then, what your next area for exploration ought to be.

Now, this is simply inherent in the program, and that's not to be blamed on anybody. I know there's been a lot of talk about, you know, post-Apollo goals. Well, damn it, this may all look very clear four, five, ten years from now. But until you get some results back from your primary mission, it's very difficult to lay down an intelligent program. We don't know whether it's worthwhile for men to be on the moon. We may find out that the best strategy is to build a big space station, because it's closer to the earth and has a lot of earth applications. Or, as I told a group of assistants over here a month or so ago--many of them who were hostile to the space program--I said, "Look, ten years from now I might say the same thing you are, that man has got no damned business in space. The fact of the matter is, we haven't really tested it yet. We are just now getting to the point where we can find out, where we've developed the necessary implements--boosters and spacecraft and so forth--to see whether there's anything out there that's worthwhile. And in the next ten years we're going to do some exploration on the moon; we're going to put up space labs, manned laboratories, to see whether or not this is worth the effort." I said, "This is not the time to cut back the space program. We have just now got ourselves in a posture where, in the next ten years, we can figure out whether it's worth the effort or not."

B: For a while there--up until I guess this last year--there was a lot of general and congressional criticism of the space program. Has the climate changed any after the successful Apollo flights?

W: Oh, yes. Of course, it does. These people are willows in the wind up there, you know. Whichever way the general feeling goes, you're going to find the center of gravity shifting that way. We've got a few screwballs. Let's face it, we're going to get opposition, but I would imagine that particularly with the support of the Republicans--because this is Mr. Nixon's budget, now, you see--that we won't have near as much trouble this year with it.

B: Did Mr. Johnson get involved in the investigation of the Apollo fire?

W: Not to my knowledge. No. That was a matter that this committee went into a whole lot more than it really should have, you know.

B: Because NASA's committee had already covered [it]?

W: Well, let's put it this way: I don't think the extensive investigations that were held by this committee and the committee on the House side helped the program a damned bit. I don't think that the ultimate changes that took place would have been any different than what NASA would have done on its own investigation. Now, I don't know. I can't prove that. I do know that all this negative publicity certainly brought a lot of creatures out from under the rocks, you know, to get in and oppose this thing.

B: Sir, is there anything else you think ought to be on this kind of record?

W: I have one other little story which I'll tell you, and that concerns the feature that allows us to authorize all of NASA's money every year. Now, there's a Senate rule which says that all money has got to be

authorized before it can be appropriated. There are other rules that say, you know, like you're not supposed to legislate in an appropriation bill, and so forth and so on. But many organic acts, or basic acts which create something--a commission, or an agency, or something--will have an all-inclusive clause section at the end that says something like, "There is hereby authorized to be appropriated such monies as may be necessary to carry out the purpose of the act." So you get a blanket authorization, you know, for all time, for this particular group. Then all they ever have to do is come before the Congress for their appropriation. They appear before the Appropriations Committee, and that's about it.

I can't give you all the background of this, but the Armed Services Committee had started somewhat earlier in giving specific authorization for construction of facilities. There was always a great deal of concern whenever you talked about going out to build a building--you know, put some bricks and concrete together. So the Armed Services Committee had a feature which said that they authorized all military construction above--I think it was--$250,000.

So when the Space Act was written, this provision was put in the Space Act, too. In the military committees, in the Armed Services Committees, at that time, at least, this served as a very good lever. I mean, if the Air Force wanted a hundred new wings or something, they had to have ten new bases to go with it, and if you denied them the bases, they'd just as soon not build the airplanes. So it had a great leverage in that way.

But, quite frankly, if all this committee ever had to do was to authorize NASA's construction of over $250,000, it wouldn't have much to do at all. So I think Mr. Johnson felt that this might be some kind of an embarrassment if this committee didn't appear to be a little more active. So, apparently with the concurrence of Mr. McCormack, he suggested that a clause be inserted in some particular appropriation bill that was going through the Senate at that time--this was in August of 1958--to the effect that all of NASA's money had to be specifically authorized before it could be appropriated. Apparently he had Mr. McCormack's agreement on that. They agreed that they'd both support that. So he slipped it into a bill, and it went sailing through [the Senate] without any problem.

The next day, two of NASA's people came up to me, whitefaced, and said, "My God, you can't do this to us. You don't make the other agencies do this. This is unbelievable. We'll spend all of our time testifying on the Hill and won't be able to get any work done." I said, "Don't talk to me about it. Go talk to Gerry Seigel." Well, the people at NASA--it was still NACA [National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics]--they were absolutely up in arms. They'd never had to do anything like this, and they were just flabbergasted by it. They saw all sorts of horrible visions of what they were going to have to do as a result of this little clause.

So they went to the House side, where this particular bill had not come up yet for floor action. It was something that had to go back

for consideration by the House. In the meantime, though, Mr. McCormack took off on his annual vacation to his hideaway in New England someplace and where nobody knew where he was. I mean, this was part of his mode of operation, at least it was in those days. His wife insisted on it every year. It was her price to give her permission for him to stay in Congress, you know. I think it was every August he'd go up to his hideaway in New England someplace--and no phone calls, no nothing, nothing but outgoing calls. He had an unlisted phone up there. Occasionally he'd call in to his office.

So just about the time Johnson was getting ready to take care of this thing on the House side, McCormack goes away and he forgets to tell anybody about his agreement with Mr. Johnson on this matter. And so the House members, who had been influenced by the NASA people, dutifully took the floor to start denouncing this provision that the Senate put in. It got pretty sticky for a while. Mr. Johnson was beside himself. He had an agreement and, by God, he planned for it to be carried out.

The upshot of it was that he agreed to a compromise which made this valid for only one year. Well, of course, by even the next couple of weeks, it was all taken care of. The next year, then, they put it in as a permanent thing. All he needed was to get it in at that time.

I think Mr. Johnson's motives were really of the highest order here, because he had served on the Appropriations Committees, and he had seen how capricious, how arbitrary the committee can be in taking

money away from agencies. In effect, the Appropriations Committees are looking at money as a total bag, so to speak, without really paying a hell of a lot of attention to the program. After all, they've got to go through billions and billions and billions. I think Mr. Johnson felt that any money requests that came before the Appropriations Committee, that had been considered in detail already by some other committee, you see--not just on a broad basis, but in detail--that in effect, the Appropriations Committees would be intimidated in not attacking those programs as much as they would some other program, and that in effect they would get more of their money in the end than if they didn't do this.

B: Did it work out that way?

W: Absolutely! It's worked out that way. And I have had occasion to talk to some of those same people who were so unhappy about this at NASA when it first came up, and they agree without question now that they would have lost many, many millions of dollars more in the last, say, ten years, from the Appropriations Committee, if we hadn't had this detailed authorization process first. Furthermore, the Armed Services Committee itself has changed its whole operation. It isn't easy to change the operation of something as staid and as conservative as the Armed Services Committee, but now they authorize, not everything in the military budget, but all research, development, testing, procurement, as well as construction. About the only thing they don't authorize now is salaries and administrative operation. But they, in effect, took the clue from this committee.

This has been one of the problems with the National Science Foundation. They passed a bill last year, now, which requires the National Science Foundation to have all its programs authorized first. So a lot of people have seen now how this works out in practice. It was a very astute maneuver on Mr. Johnson's part at the time.

Now, this is kind of like trading stamps though. You see, if it gets to the point where everybody does it, then it's not going to have the same kind of impact on the Appropriations Committee as if just one or two do it. In fact, I'm not so sure but what that purpose is really not valid, or is not nearly as valid as it was at the time when it was critical to the development, the beginnings, and the growth of NASA. Right now, I think, you could abolish this committee and it wouldn't make any difference. They might stick its function in a sub-subcommittee someplace.

But this committee was and Mr. Johnson was--as a [final] wrap-up--very much responsible for getting this thing going. I'm just certain that history will show just how important his role was in getting the space program going. Now, maybe a lot of people still don't recognize the importance of the space program. And as I told you, maybe ten years from now I'll be saying something different, that it isn't worthwhile to put men in space at least. But I don't believe that. I think it's going to become more and more a part of our lives. Subsequently, Mr. Johnson will get all the credit he's due for getting the space program the kind of a start that it needed.

B: Thank you very much, Dr. Wilson.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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