

INTERVIEW I

DATE: January 16, 1969
INTERVIEWEE: CLEMENT J. ZABLOCKI
INTERVIEWER: PAIGE MULHOLLAN
PLACE: Congressman Zablocki's office, Rayburn Building,
Washington, D.C.

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M: Let's begin by identifying you, sir. You're Clement Zablocki, Democrat from Wisconsin.

Z: Representing the Fourth District which comprises the southern half of Milwaukee County.

M: And you have served in Congress since the 81st Congress, January of 1949?

Z: January 1, 1949. Just finished twenty years.

M: That's right! You just had an anniversary last week, didn't you? I believe that's the same time that Mr. Johnson--

Z: Was elected to the Senate, yes.

M: Did you have, in those early years, the late forties and early fifties, any instances of direct contact?

Z: Hardly any at all. Very, very few.

M: Very little chance because of the different Houses you served in. Later on, in the fifties, after he became first minority leader, then majority leader, did he work closely with the House?

Z: Yes. As a matter of fact, we did have a mutual friend after all, Sam Rayburn. And with Speaker Rayburn and then-Senator Johnson, his protege, there were occasions that we had an opportunity to meet the President at that time.

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M: Did he come over and what? Socialize?

Z: Well, at least once a week, the Texas delegation got together. And week after week, it was inevitable, that on several occasions, we would meet.

M: He is alleged, by most people who've observed his career, to have governed during that period, or operated during that period, through something that's called various names--amounts to being called a conservative coalition of some kind. You represent a liberal district, a northern district that's neither southern nor conservative. How does someone in your position see his leadership in the fifties?

Z: Well, I certainly try to keep things in perspective. I, myself, as an urban congressman, naturally would tend to support certain legislation in which my constituency is interested. Senator Johnson had a constituency he had to represent in Congress. Therefore, he would tend to be more conservative than I would be. On the other hand, even if he disagreed, I have never seen him to be disagreeable during that period.

For example, specifically, I didn't agree to the extent then-junior Senator Proxmire attacked Senator Johnson as a leader--specifically on oil depletion allowances. There may be excesses and abuses in that particular area. But for then-Senator Johnson to be in agreement with Proxmire was unthinkable. He just couldn't wipe out the oil depletion allowances and vote against it and remain in the Senate; not any more than if I voted against all labor legislation and expect to remain in the House, and represent the Fourth District of Wisconsin. One must

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take into consideration the composition of the district that a person represents. Therefore, I wasn't as critical as some of our Northern liberal Democrats were of then-Senator Johnson, the President.

M: He was also accused during that time of being effective by pretty well surrendering to the Republican executive leadership. Do you think that's accurate?

Z: No, I don't believe that's accurate. Of course, when Republicans were in power, or in order to get some Republicans to assist him in passing legislation in the Senate, concessions had to be made. I don't think, however, that he unduly compromised his position with the conservatives so as to damage the Democratic Party in any way. I think it was quite evident that the legislation under his leadership--especially in the latter days of the Senate--had been legislation that was successfully adopted that never would have been possible without his--call it if you wish--agreements with the Republicans, or the wheeling and dealing, as they sometimes referred to it.

M: Did he use that wheeling and dealing, in any instance, on House members? Did he ever cross over to do a little of the Johnson politicking with--

Z: Well, I think he let Sam Rayburn do most of that. Sam was an old hand at it; I think whatever Johnson learned, he learned from Speaker Rayburn. He hasn't, of course, from my own personal experience, reached as far as the Fourth District of Wisconsin in this respect.

M: When Mr. Johnson was nominated for the vice presidency, to the great surprise of some in 1960, did that cause any trouble for people whose

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constituencies were such as yours?

Z: No, not such as mine, because prior to the Democratic National Convention I predicted a JFK-LBJ ticket. And this is something I called to the attention of Speaker Rayburn after the convention. As you well know, Speaker Rayburn was all out for LBJ in the 1960 convention. Now I was a JFK man; I was for John Kennedy. I made a friendly wager, which of course has never been collected--and I didn't expect it to be collected--with Speaker Rayburn, that John F. Kennedy would be the nominee and LBJ would be his running mate!

M: You made this before?

Z: Before the convention. Yes, sir. Even some of my friends--editors of the Milwaukee Journal--said I must have been smoking some kind of prohibitive drug--stating it was an unimaginable ticket. But I said this would be the strongest ticket; it would be the strongest ticket either way. If LBJ happened to win the nomination, I think he needed JFK. I wasn't, therefore, surprised with the Convention outcome. I thought that President Johnson, as well as the Democratic leaders who wanted the Democratic Party to win, would have to make that kind of a sacrifice, if it was one, on the part of Johnson. I don't think it was, as it turned out to be. Because they made an excellent team, Kennedy and Johnson. There wasn't any animosity between them. They worked together just fine. And because, as I said earlier, I did not have the tendency or get in the habit of unduly criticizing the Senate leader, Lyndon Johnson, I had no retraction. I didn't have to eat crow. But, as I say, some of our colleagues in the North,

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and particularly one or two in Wisconsin, were a bit uncomfortable with Johnson on the ticket. But they were also uncomfortable with having John F. Kennedy as the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party.

M: Who had they supported then? Stevenson?

Z: Some were supporting Stevenson, and some Hubert Humphrey. Really, the contest in Wisconsin was between Hubert Humphrey and JFK; so much so, that I think in the 1964 election this tended to cause President Johnson to have certain, well, shall I say misgivings as to what extent he could trust some of the former JFKs like myself, now supporting him, as I did in 1968. I think this has been the situation in almost all of the Northern Democratic organizations where there was some split. Or at least those who were supporting Johnson had first preferences. In New York this was quite evident; in California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania. And I wonder if the historians will not sometime give due attention as to why President Johnson did not seek another term.

One of his characteristics is that he is determined to get whatever he wants. Certainly he would not want to lose a contest--he didn't want to take a chance of losing.

M: I wanted to ask you sometime during this conversation about this year, and this seems to be as good a place as any: the Wisconsin primary became the kind of key event around which his withdrawal statement was made.

Z: Only by chance, first of all, you must bear in mind--

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and I'm sure this was the case--President Johnson had carried his decision of withdrawing from the race in his pocket for months. It's been--oh, I think--fairly reliably reported that it was Christmas time in 1967 that he decided not to run in 1968.

M: At least, he talked about it then.

Z: Unhappily just two days before--on the eve, so to speak, of the Wisconsin primary was when the President announced his withdrawal. We had one of the final rallies for Johnson. I was just taken off my feet. I couldn't believe it. I called the White House. I couldn't get to the President, but I got somebody as close as I could, because I didn't see the TV television announcement. As I say, we were at a rally dinner in Wisconsin when the newspapers called to advise me I was without a candidate, that Johnson just withdrew.

M: I remember some of the comments on the TV that night were pretty shocked--by people such as yourself.

Z: I called and learned that it was true. Well, March 31, Johnson withdrew and our primary was that following Tuesday. It was just coincidence. But despite the fact that Johnson withdrew, he still carried two districts in our state, the Fourth and Fifth.

M: One of them being yours.

Z: One of them being mine. In my opinion, he would have carried at least six out of the ten districts, which would have given him the state. There was no doubt in my mind, even on March 31, despite the reports--and I don't know who was giving the reports--Wisconsin was not lost.

McCarthy was doing a terrific amount of campaigning and his young

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supporters were making a lot of noise. But many of those college students on every campus in Wisconsin, as everywhere else in the country, were zealous young students articulating for McCarthy and condemning the President, and only on one issue, particularly the Vietnam issue. Many of them were in college because of the legislation Johnson promoted in Congress. Many of the requests that he made of Congress he got! And were it not for his powerful, forceful means of getting it, those characters would not have been in college. Nevertheless, on merely one issue, Vietnam, they were crucifying him. I think it was hard to take, but his decision was made on the basis that he probably--others, his advisers--thought that Wisconsin was lost to him. But I don't think he would have lost Wisconsin. I'm firmly of the conviction that had he remained in the campaign, he could have carried Wisconsin regardless. He felt, I think sincerely, that if he withdrew from the campaign, he could settle the Vietnam issue more rapidly, or more easily. The communists don't give a damn whether you're a president or not. They're going to stick to their issues anyway; I think he could have done just as well and the Vietnam peace talks would have progressed just as slowly whether he was in or out of the race. Had he stayed in the race, today Nixon would not be our president-elect. Lyndon Baines Johnson would be our president.

M: Did you communicate these views to him, that you thought . . .

Z: Through the channels that I was asked to communicate them.

Now whether they got to him, I don't know. Of course, when I

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did see him personally, I did so, yes. And what surprised me more than anything that night of March 31 was just a week or ten [days] before I was at a White House State dinner a seat away from the President, and he said, "Go in there. Wisconsin's a bloc. Get that regardless of . . . "

M: So the effort in Wisconsin did have his blessing.

Z: Yes, it did, and he said pull all stops out. Don't stop at anything. The money wasn't coming, but he implied that it would be coming. And, darn it, ten days later, he pulled out.

M: The campaign out there, did it have the marks of a Lyndon Johnson campaign? Was it well organized and professional?

Z: This was the situation. You see, I think that, basically, that way deep in his mind, the President had some doubts, even, probably, about Zablocki, because, after all, in 1960 Zablocki was for Kennedy instead of Johnson. The people who were in Wisconsin were not really Johnson men. Johnson didn't establish a campaign organization in Wisconsin as he would in Texas, or some other states. Unfortunately, in 1964, he didn't have to. This is most unfortunate because then you get lax. Because Barry Goldwater wasn't an opponent, he didn't have to. But that weakened his position in 1968. And many of the strategist campaigners in Wisconsin were former Humphrey people.

If I were the president on Pennsylvania Avenue with a situation going as it did, and the doggone pollsters giving all the bad news, and I say, "Now, who have I got in Wisconsin? My God, I don't have anybody I can really trust, even that congressman. He's the only one. There's

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not one legislator . . . " There were only five of us; of course, two senators and two of my colleagues, Reuss and Kastenmeier. I don't think the President could ever trust Proxmire. I'm sure he didn't feel he could. Senator Nelson was opposed to him. He was opposed to the Vietnam War. Although they didn't support McCarthy or Kennedy, neither Nelson nor Proxmire supported anybody openly; but everybody knows that for political reasons, that you don't openly support them. But everybody knew their preferences.

M: Reuss had signed this statement against Vietnam.

Z: Reuss and Kastenmeier, more so than Reuss, have both been opposed to the Vietnam policy. So it was all pro-McCarthy. After all, there are five Democrats, and only one is with you. Four are with what appears to be this character going out capturing one primary after another. And it's not for a President to enter a primary. An incumbent should not enter, need not enter, into a primary. It's an unnecessary political chance that one is taking. I suppose the President thought, "Well, Wisconsin will be lost" and the skids are out from under him. But he would not have lost Wisconsin. It would not have been a catastrophe in Wisconsin. Even if it were, he would have gotten the nomination at the convention. He would. As far as Vietnam, I think the timetable would have not been changed any, and he would be our president today.

M: Would have favored him because of the changes that occurred.

Z: I think so.

M: There's kind of a mystery here. Mr. Johnson's, of course, known as a professional politician of the finest, supreme type.

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Z: Yes. He's one man I know of that can say, "Come, let us reason together," and you come out thinking what he intended you to think in the first place. He had no intention of having you change his mind.

M: But on the other hand, there seems to be fairly common agreement that the Democratic National Committee, while Mr. Johnson's been president, has been rather disorganized, and when the campaign rolled around this year, was not very effective. Why did that happen? How could it happen?

Z: Well, the Democratic National Campaign had a tremendous number of people who were John F. Kennedy hold-overs. And they worked fine in 1964

B: But, as you said, they didn't have to do much in 1964.

Z: They didn't have to do much in 1964; some got fat and lazy, not as witty, and not right on top of everything. Then, when a brother of a former president, who's making noises of being a candidate--and I'm not now implying that Larry O'Brien, or anybody else in the last campaign, or John Bailey . . . I'm not referring to any particular incidents. Although, I must say this in all frankness: I've campaigned with Larry O'Brien for JFK and I campaigned with Larry O'Brien for LBJ; there was a difference.

M: A noticeable difference to someone who'd . . .

Z: Well, you can tell when somebody's simply going through what he believes is in the best interests of the country. There isn't that spirit; there isn't that enthusiasm, that burning desire to stay up all night, and two days or three nights in a run, if necessary to win. It's going

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through the paces, through the races, and making the race without a pace!

M: It's not a matter of conscious disloyalty?

Z: No, no, it wasn't disloyalty. There just wasn't the amount of enthusiasm, for lack of a stronger word. The zeal wasn't there.

M: It's an interesting problem, and one that's going to occasion a lot of questioning down the line. Why this

Z: You see, John F. Kennedy in 1960 had a trusted soul in every hole! And some of them waited until the time would come where they could campaign for another Kennedy. And I think they are still waiting for an opportunity.

Now, much as I have really and sincerely worked for John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy would not have been my choice--despite that one time I did say that he might be presidential timber. But after observing him and having an opportunity to know him a little bit better later, I could not support him. And certainly not Gene McCarthy. I'm certainly very sorry that Robert Kennedy was killed, but had he lived, I believe my reservations about him would have been borne through, as they were about McCarthy. A real man, the fiber of a person comes out, and the strength of a person comes out in defeat. And Gene McCarthy couldn't take a loss. If you can't take a loss, you can't trust a man in winning.

M: That's a pretty good axiom, I expect. What about labor and Mr. Johnson? From 1960 on through

Z: Labor was split. Labor always looked upon Johnson with a jaundiced eye.

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After all, in view of some of the record of LBJ as a senator, they didn't forgive or forget. As a president, his record with labor was good. But, again, there was lack of support from some labor leaders-- Victor Reuther, Walter Reuther. Victor was with them earlier. Walter Reuther's the one who counts, really. The Vietnam war was born, and the UAW was not behind LBJ. And they weren't--with great enthusiasm-- behind Hubert Humphrey! We've had, in Wisconsin, our problems with that segment of labor.

M: Was labor eagerly participating in the primary campaign this year, or were they kind of holding aloof in Wisconsin?

Z: In the primary, I should say there was very little labor activity in the early months. But when Wallace became a threat and the McCarthy people [became] so vocal, labor looked more favorably toward Johnson.

In the primary, they had done very little, very little, as far as Hubert Humphrey was concerned. Of course, for Johnson, there wasn't any primary to do anything about. However, labor did support him.

M: But they weren't outringing doorbells for him. They weren't doing much for him?

Z: For Johnson, yes. Except the UAW, yes. Oh, yes. On our committee, we had the state chairman of the AFL-CIO, Johnny Schmidt. Labor was, in Wisconsin, for Johnson. But again, not with the enthusiasm which one would expect. We didn't have all of labor. The UAW was not with us.

M: That's a big

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Z: In Wisconsin, it is. UAW is quite a large segment of our

M: We've kind of ranged off here, chronologically. To go back, when Mr. Johnson became president suddenly after the assassination in November of 1963, how did he operate with regard to some of the congressmen who'd been around longer? Did he get in touch with you, for example, fairly soon after that?

Z: No, as I recall, the first time we were called in was on legislation. Very shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy he did address the Congress, at the end of November. And then, as I recall, [he did make] an address to the nation Thanksgiving Day.

M: That's the "Let us continue."

Z: "Let us continue." But really, we didn't have any contact until when Congress resumed in January.

M: Had he maintained fairly close contacts with congressmen while he was vice president? Had he spent quite a bit of time on the Hill during that period?

Z: Yes, he had, and he was deeply interested in the success of members of Congress and their congressional districts. He was always accessible and cooperative. As a matter of fact, I recall--I believe it was 1963--a situation arose which indicated the sensitivity of Johnson. Well, every politician is sensitive.

M: Or he won't be a politician very long!

Z: That's right. He wouldn't be in politics very long. But Johnson seemed to be very sensitive in respect to whether he was totally received.

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He was invited to speak at our Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in May of 1963. Our then-senior Senator Proxmire refused to fly in with him, and apparently, was not going to attend. It so happened that it was one of the first times that I could not go back to the district in Wisconsin to attend the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. And here the Vice President was going to speak!

So we were called in. I was called into the Vice President's office by one of his aides, and was advised that he understood that I was not going to go to the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. I said, "That's very true, but it's not because of the Vice President at all. It's just a family situation. My daughter will be receiving First Holy Communion. My mother and some relatives will be house guests over the weekend. And I just can't go. I think I ought to stay here. J-J Dinners come and go. Every year we get one. My daughter's day will be only one day." So I thought my presence wasn't necessary, and I thought of all people, the Vice President would understand. He's a family man, basically, which is more and more in evidence now that he's a grandfather.

Well, at any rate, that apparently didn't satisfy him. Because I got a call directly from LBJ, with the fact that if a plane were arranged to fly me to Wisconsin and back right after the J-J Dinner, I wouldn't have to miss either event. I said, "Well, the J-J Dinner is in the evening and unfortunately, the church ceremony was early afternoon. I just couldn't see being in both places. I'm very sorry, Mr. Vice President, but I'll be there in spirit; but this is one time

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I'll have to miss." But I don't think he ever forgave me for it, anyway. He wanted, at least, members of Congress there. And as I surmised, the newspapers, unfortunately, did speculate that I didn't come because I was together with Proxmire and opposed to LBJ making the J-J Dinner speech.

M: Naturally they were going to speculate that.

Z: Of course, I denied it, but once it's made in the press, the denial is never read.

M: How did he proceed to get the vast amount of legislation passed in 1964 and 1965?

Z: I think over the years, as Senate leader, he is one who counts and stacks blue chips. I think he had a few to cash in every time he wanted to have some piece of legislation. As I say, he was a most unusual politician, having great sensitivity of how to get somebody to come your way with a promise or a repayment for a favor past done.

M: What about his technique? Did he call people up regularly and say, "Come on, Congressman So-and-so.

Z: No, he was not necessarily pugnacious, but he was determined; when he got hold of somebody, he just kept right after them until they weakened.

M: Was his staff effective? Did he have good people down here?

Z: Yes, he had a very good staff, very good people. I thought he had a better liaison with the Hill as president--almost better than Kennedy did.

M: Could Kennedy have passed that program, do you think?

Z: No. I don't think Kennedy could have passed [it]. He could have in

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the House, but I don't think he would have been successful with the Senate. Johnson had a sufficient amount of following and uncashed blue chips to get it through the Senate, which was necessary.

M: How did he lose it then? This credit that he had, the consensus that he developed, which apparently in the last--

Z: I don't think he has lost it as yet.

M: You think his power in Congress has been steady then; it hasn't deteriorated?

Z: I don't know of any serious reversals he had. Of course, he didn't get everything he wanted in civil rights or gun control, but you don't get everything you want in an election year, no matter what it is.

M: No, of course not. But you don't believe the criticism over Vietnam and so on eroded his position with Congress?

Z: No, as a matter of fact . . . Well, let's take the Vietnam issue, a Vietnam Resolution. It certainly would not pass by the unanimous or near unanimous vote that it did earlier in the House and Senate. But if Fulbright thought for one moment--or Senator Morse--that they had the votes to reverse it, they would have considered such a resolution. I think that if President Johnson's resolution were put to the test, [it] would have received the support for his policy in Vietnam from Congress.

M: Well, that introduces your area of particular expert knowledge and specialty. You've been on the Foreign Affairs Committee, I suppose . . .

Z: Since I've been in Congress.

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- M: Since you've been here. You're now number two Democrat behind Representative Morgan.
- Z: Chairman Morgan, yes.
- M: Do you recall in the 1950s--going back quite a ways--did then-Senator Johnson who was not on the Foreign Relations Committee take any active interest in foreign problems during those years?
- Z: No, that, I think, in his early years as vice president and president, was his weakness. He did not take an interest in foreign affairs to the extent that most anybody looking forward to being president should. He did not. His interests were mostly domestic.
- M: Did he generally go along with President Eisenhower pretty well?
- Z: I think, yes, on most issues--and for that reason, I believe that when President Johnson, then-Senate leader, was in a position where he wanted Republican support, he leaned heavily on Dirksen. Because Johnson did cooperate. Whenever it was in our national interest, and for the defense and stability of our country, and stability and the mutual defense in the world, he did support the programs of President Eisenhower.
- M: You don't recall, in the fifties anytime that he took a specific, strong stand on any issue of foreign affairs?
- Z: Specifically, I do not, because he would not affect the House. His leadership was in the Senate. It was Rayburn in the House and then-Majority Leader McCormack that had carried the ball for Eisenhower on the floor in the House. I don't recall anything specific, but there was no doubt that as Rayburn did in the House, Johnson did in the Senate.

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He helped carry through the proposals on international affairs that President Eisenhower had recommended and requested.

M: What about when he was vice president? Do you recall that he took a greatly increased interest in international affairs then?

Z: Somewhat increased. As you know, he then began to become more of a foreign traveler. In that respect, he couldn't help but increase his interest. It was somewhat increased; but again, it was not evident to us in the House, because then, as president of the Senate, his primary activity or leadership was in that body.

M: Outside of yours.

Z: But there's sufficient evidence, by just going into the statistics, of the amount of help he has given.

M: How has he operated with the Foreign Affairs Committee, and all committees concerned with international affairs, as president? Have his briefings . . . ?

Z: Well, again, yes, he'd have briefings, "Come let us reason together"; and bring us to the White House and have the cabinet members there. Now, I recall several occasions: for example, the additional wheat sale to India, I think about two years ago, and the addition to or the retention of our military manpower strength in Vietnam. He'd call us together, read all of the data and the statistics, and have cabinet member after cabinet member come up and lecture to us--not so much the leadership, but some of the lesser leaders in the Congress, such as myself. He'd say, "Have you got any questions, got any suggestions?"

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and you didn't dare differ. I must say, as far as I was concerned, because I did support the program and saw merit in his proposals, I didn't differ with it. But there, nobody questioned after he was called in to advise and consent. There was consent and then advise.

M: That was my next question. You're too fast for me. His briefings were more in the nature of telling you what the policy was, rather than asking you what it should be?

Z: Oh, yes. He'd call us in "to reason together," but you'd better reason his way!

M: Was this done frequently enough, in your opinion? As often as it should have been?

Z: Well, with the demands made on the President's time, I think he did, really. I must say, President Kennedy did begin this policy. Democrats as well as Republicans would be called in, more likely those members of the committees that were specifically charged with carrying out the authorization of appropriations in certain areas would be called in oftener. But President Johnson made a sincere effort to advise--I'm not saying consult now--to advise members of Congress; we did have briefings, and questions were asked. Of course, some questions were elementary; some were political; therefore, one must not expect that the President would not change his mind after some political question was asked him. But at any rate, he did, from time to time, advise Congress of the economic situation in our country, as well as

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the international situation abroad.

M: Some of these key crisis instances are going to be extremely important to trace down. For example, did he call substantial numbers of congressmen in prior to the Tonkin Bay Resolution?

Z: Well, the Tonkin Bay was not. . .

M: Sixty-four?

Z: I'm sorry. Yes. The Tonkin Bay--

M: After the incident in the Gulf, did you get called down then, for example?

Z: Yes, we were briefed on the matter, but the President did not ask for a resolution. A proposal was made that a resolution be offered, and I don't recall that he commented one way or the other. I think the decision for the resolution was made on the part of Congress. He did not request it to my knowledge. As a matter of fact, I don't think he would request it even this last year, or the year before.

M: Of course, a lot of the people who supported that resolution later say they were misled.

Z: I can't recall how they could be misled, because they were told the facts and they knew the situation. They were misled, possibly, if they didn't think that an approval would be carried out to the extent that it was.

M: Do you remember any of them objected to the President then? Or, like you said awhile ago, it was pretty difficult to object to what was being said to you. Do you remember that any of them did voice dissent that early?

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Z: No, no. They had not. Everybody, of course, was quite concerned and somber about it. But first of all, to make it very clear, the briefing did not request a resolution. It was just a report, pure and simple. They had the military there, and the CIA, to report.

M: So they weren't called on really to say yes or no to any proposal?

Z: To anything. "This is what happened. This is what it was: "We've got to be prepared, now, for any eventuality. For this is what I've got to share with you," is what the position of the President was.

At that time, of course, nobody questioned the accuracy of the report. And during the time that Congress took very speedy action, and I think it was very necessary to have expeditious action. To my knowledge, nobody questioned it.

Oh yes, our Senator Nelson says he, at that time, did not protest, but he did make some inquiries as to whether it was necessary to ram it through, as he termed it, to rush the question. He felt that hearings ought to be held. But anybody knowing of a sensitive situation, a resolution dealing with such sensitive matters, knows it couldn't be an open hearing anyway!

Those who were in the leadership, and those who were in the committees that had to be advised or should be advised, were advised and informed. All members of Congress who didn't have an opportunity to be at briefings could read the transcripts later in committees. So there was no excuse of not being informed.

M: Is the same thing true in some of his other crises? For example, in

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the Dominican Republic, were there people privately opposing that at the time the decision was made who were overruled?

Z: If they were made, then they were very private. At least, I didn't hear of any public opposition, or even to use your word--private.

It must have been very, very private. I haven't heard of any.

M: So some of the criticism which arose later was based on hindsight perhaps?

Z: Yes, sir.

M: Rather than in advance.

Z: There wasn't any criticism at the time that the report was made or the steps that were taken.

M: Undoubtedly, Vietnam, of course, is the key issue in Mr. Johnson's foreign relations through his time. Do you think that he has personally had a consistent position on Vietnam that was his own, or has he relied on the advice of some group or some man who particularly . . . ?

Z: In a situation such as Vietnam, certainly, any President must depend on the advice and the counsel, as well as the reporting of people directly involved in the matter. The President would have to depend on the advice and the reports, first of all, and the advice he got from General Maxwell Taylor, or from General Westmoreland, or at the present time from General Abrams; as well as getting the reports from a diplomatic standpoint, political, from Secretary of State Rusk and the Ambassador in Saigon; as well as his own--well, in his case, and Komer, and others--Lansdale [General Edward Lansdale, USAF]--that were in the area on certain and particular matters. And also

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whatever information in this area that was available, from the Intelligence agency.

But I think, in the final analysis, he made his own decisions. Everybody gets advice, but you don't have to take it. When you take it, it's yours. It's your decision, even if it's somebody else's advice.

M: There's been the charge, occasionally, that he has relied too heavily on the military, or not heavily enough on the military.

Z: We've had instances of briefings in this regard as well, where a certain amount of additional manpower was requested. The number requested, of course, was pared down. But at the time that the briefings were held--and I was at some of those in the White House--the opponents, such as Fulbright, never had anything to say, never questioned it at the time. They may have gone out of the White House a day or two later and protested. But no protest, or no alternative figure, as far as number, or none at all, was made.

M: At the time of the briefing.

Z: At the time of the briefing. Questions were asked how that number was determined, why that many, but I don't recall anybody saying, "Mr. President, I flatly disagree with you. I think you ought to get another general or somebody. I don't think you should send any of these men over there."

M: What about domestic politics? Mr. Johnson, again, was a great politician here. Do you think he let domestic politics guide his decision in foreign affairs frequently, or at all?

Z: I wouldn't say frequently, or not at all. It depends on the particular domestic issue and how his foreign policy affected the domestic issue.

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Now, as far as Vietnam was concerned, it was repeatedly tied in with civil rights demonstrations and they really don't go hand in hand. I don't see the necessity to have a demonstration for civil rights and opposition to Vietnam at the same time. It seemed that the issue of military service, draft card burning, or the demonstrations against the Selective Service Act and the Vietnam involvement were all on campuses, usually--some of the leaders that had participated in those demonstrations had one time, earlier or later, been involved in civil rights demonstrations. But the two of them, in my opinion, just don't mesh. They're not completely related. So even that is not an example of where his foreign policy would in any way affect his domestic policy.

But I think the growth of a man such as Johnson can be determined. I think historians will properly record it. Of course, he had a somewhat parochial interest when he was a senator, but he sure changed when he was president of the entire United States. Even when he became the leader in the Senate, he set aside some of the parochial interests.

M: It depended on his constituency what his activities were.

Z: Yes. Much of the legislation that he had supported did not have the complete support of his constituents, I'm sure.

M: I'm sure of that, in Texas.

Z: Texas is big. It's got room for everybody. He had his share of conservatives, I'm sure.

M: Has the fact that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has been, if not dominated, at least made up in some number of so-called doves, has this meant that Mr. Johnson has used the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to a greater extent than he might otherwise have done? Has he

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come over here because he could get support over here?

Z: The President, himself, did not come. . .

M: No, has he relied here because this was. . .

Z: I think a president, or his secretary of state in this instance, will tend to pay greater attention to, and cooperate with, that body or those members of a legislative body who desire to be cooperative and to learn. The only reason in the last few years that the House Committee on Foreign Affairs has outshone and become the leader in international affairs, over and above and surpassed that of the Senate --which, of course, would be the body that historically was looked upon as the organization in the legislative branch of Congress that deals with foreign affairs-- is because of our approach.

For example, in the last few years, my own Subcommittee on the Far East, conducted hearings on the Sino-Soviet conflict, hearings on what United States policy should be in the Pacific. We had China hearings as well. We had ours first. We had practically the same witnesses. Quite a few of the witnesses we had, Senator Fulbright also invited. However, the witnesses we had before our committee had varying points of view. I mean, we were seeing both sides of the story, hearing both sides of the story, trying to see both sides of the coin. We didn't select our witnesses to build up our predetermine position on what our policy should be in Southeast Asia, for example, or in China. The witnesses that we had that gave the point of view that was not entirely in keeping with some senators' point of view

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were not invited by the Senate. The questions we asked, I think, were more objective. We were searching for ideas, criticism, constructive criticism. The Senate questions were asked in a vein where the answers would be intended to substantiate what the position of the chairman was.

You can't expect a representative from the Executive Branch to be really very generous. Although I must say that in spite of the grilling that Secretary Rusk got, he still kept his composure by responding as a gentleman to people who were not so gentlemanly and he really impressed the people of our country. I know I was terrifically impressed. He rose in my esteem, because he did do a terrific job representing the President and the President's position, before not so much a committee that wanted information, but that appeared it wanted to badger the witness, and embarrass the administration, and to confirm their own conviction.

M: And all on television.

Z: And it was all on television. Now, the country didn't see our hearings. We don't have them televised. The Senate hearings were televised. But we've already been pretty well recognized for our thoroughness and integrity. As a matter of fact, our transcripts are now used as textbooks in universities throughout the land, and will go down as hearings that have made the Committee of the House Foreign Affairs a great committee. I think they indicated to a great degree that the House on Foreign Affairs was a committee that was more responsible by demonstrating the responsibility that it realized was the role that Congress should play. Naturally, the Executive Branch would depend on that kind of a committee

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or those members of Congress that would give some credence to what the Executive Branch was saying. There's no point in saying anything if you know dog-gone well, no matter how much it is the truth, the other fellow won't believe it. If there had been any favoritism-- and I don't think that is the word--greater desire for the House to carry the Executive Branch policy internationally, it's because the House was in a better position to do so. It's just that simple.

M: Has there been a pretty sharp division between those who supported the Vietnam policy and those who didn't, on the House Committee, that hasn't become so public as the Senate one?

Z: There were a hardcore of ultra-liberals--two-score--that had been critical, but at least did not get the attention that the Senators did. Oh, we had a few, Fitz Ryan, Brown of California, Reuss, Kastenmeier. I don't want to mention names, but there was. . . Don Fraser.

M: These are the people who led the signing of the letter to President. This sort of thing.

Z: Right. That list.

M: They're fairly well known. Were they an organized group?

Z: Well, I think just maybe two or three of the Foreign Affairs Committee signed it. Ben Rosenthal, Len Farbstein, Don Fraser, I think, were the three on the House Affairs Committee who signed it. Maybe one or two more, but not very many. Not nay of them, thus far, have come up with any solution to Vietnam War.

M: No one has, I suppose.

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Z: And Don Fraser supported Humphrey in preference to McCarthy. So there wasn't so pronounced an opposition, or certainly not as effective opposition, as in the Senate.

M: As I read your interests, next to the Far East, where you're the subcommittee chairman, the other one in the area of foreign affairs is probably foreign aid. What about Mr. Johnson's record on foreign aid as president?

Z: I think his record on foreign aid is as good as could be expected. After all, foreign aid does not have a constituency. It's difficult to sell a program--despite how good it is--not only for the purpose of foreign policy, but for our own economic policy to create markets for our exports. The people don't see immediate results. They get disenchanted with the program. And the agency itself didn't do too good a job. After all, you can't sell the program on charity alone, because immediately, people say, "Charity begins at home." If they have starving people anywhere in the world, including Biafra, and we have millions starving here, they say, "We help our own first."

But I think the President had done a fairly good selling job on the program. The authorization was the lowest that has ever been granted. It isn't the amount that the President asked for. The House just chopped it down and the Senate, some more. It was just, again, the mood of an election year.

M: Did he display his usual dedication in selling the program, do you feel?

Z: Yes, he tried to get it to the leadership, at any rate. I believe that

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he, as most of us have, became convinced that the job of selling it could not be dependent on the President or the Congress; it had to be the leaders in the world outside of the legislative halls of Congress who had to sell the program to the people; the newspapers, union leaders, various organizations who were convinced the program was in the best interest of our country and in the best interest of promoting world peace.

M: He's been very big, in public at least, on the idea of building bridges to the East, particularly by East-West trade. Has this been a popular notion in Congress?

Z: No, it has not, particularly in the areas that were hard-pressed because of competition from imports. For example, you couldn't sell people from West Virginia and some parts of Pennsylvania that building bridges to Czechoslovakia was a good idea, especially where there would be glassware and china coming in to compete with local industries. But he has been very successful in continuing the programs initiated by John F. Kennedy in the area of building bridges; so much so that I think the Soviet Union had become terribly concerned about Czechoslovakia and had to march in last August.

M: And this being one of the reasons, the building-bridge policy, the fear?

Z: The fear on the part of the Soviets that satellite countries, the Communist dominated countries in the Eastern Europe, would be less dependent upon the Soviet Union and that the Soviet Union would not have any economic hold on them. Thereby, they would be after economic

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independence, and political independence would soon follow.

M: There are, of course, endless numbers of foreign issues. Are there some in your experience Mr. Johnson may have taken specific interest in, or been involved with you personally in, that might be important to record?

Z: No, nothing that I can think of that we have not touched upon. I don't think of any specific instances in international affairs.

M: What about in the domestic area? Ones that I wouldn't have any way of coming up with because your interest, of course, has been in foreign affairs and is easier to check. Some domestic measure on which you've worked closely with him on which you had occasion to know he was particularly interested, and informed on, and sensitive about.

Z: One, of course, was the civil rights issue which I'm sure the President was a little hesitant in coming to Congress to tell other members who have a political problem with the civil rights issue, when he himself represented Texas, a state which was not zealous in that particular field. But, yes, we were called to try to understand and give full support to the housing provisions of the Civil Rights Bill. And I think the President is very proud of his record of being successful in promoting the various civil rights proposals during his tenure in office.

The only other piece of domestic legislation that I know that the President was all excited about was gun legislation, the control of arms and ammunition. Of course, even in the State of the Union Message, his last State of the Union Message, he said this was one area of registration and licensing that he had hoped Congress would move on. And

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although I don't agree with. . . Here again was an issue that as far as his own district in Texas, or Texas as a whole was concerned, was not very popular, I think. I think that if he ran for Senate now, he probably wouldn't win, on that issue anyway. Nevertheless, he felt this was necessary. My personal views are, of course, licensing, if necessary, and registration, if necessary, can be better done on a local basis, as it's done in some states. Of course, again, guns don't kill people; people kill people.

M: It's easier if people have a gun, though! Johnson's view, I think.

Z: It is easier, yes. I must agree with him, and I did agree with him to a great extent. I don't think we should permit the promiscuous selling of guns and arms--sidearms or hand guns, for example--through the mail. I think that some people shouldn't own a car. If they don't know how to drive, they certainly shouldn't drive. And people kill people with cars, too.

M: You license people to drive cars, too.

Z: That is true. But they started to license people to drive cars just for the purpose of qualifying them to drive cars, but not it's becoming a revenue source. That's why the license is given at a higher rate.

I think there was one more. It was in the economic field. The 10 percent sales tax, we didn't go along with him--10 percent surtax. I didn't think I could go along with it as long as there wasn't any attempt to tie it together with and as a package with some tax reforms. There are taxpayers who are not paying their share of tax and taxpayers who are not paying any tax.

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There was another matter, one instance, where you come to reason with the President, as I did. It happened that Tiger Teague, a colleague of his from Texas, and Jeffery Cohelan, the congressman from California, and myself were in Vietnam. The President called us, after we returned to the United States, supposedly to report on Vietnam, as well as a problem we've had with the Philippine veterans who served in World War II.

Tiger Teague was the chairman of this particular delegation, so the three of us were invited to the White House to report. Well, we didn't get much chance to report on what we observed in Vietnam, or what the problem was in the Philippines. The President poured out his up and coming budget and the economic problems of this country, and our twenty or twenty-five minutes was nothing but a Johnson lecture. And Tiger Teague said, "Mr. President, we'll come back again and tell you about Vietnam." (Laughter)

M: He had his own message to get across that day, didn't he?

You've seen four presidents now from your present job. How would you rate Mr. Johnson's presidency?

Z: I think that he was the most powerful of the four, although Truman, in my opinion, had the more difficult decisions to make. He had the difficult decision of whether or not to use the atom bomb. Not to lessen or diminish the decisions that Johnson had with Vietnam, but I think President Truman's tenure was a more difficult one and I think he will go down in history as a very good president.

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I think President Johnson's shortcoming was he was trying to be a Roosevelt. Truman was a Truman; he was just himself. I think Johnson tried to emulate -- after all, everybody knows that Franklin D. Roosevelt was LBJ's hero, and I think, trying to emulate FDR, Johnson unfortunately did not have the eloquence of speech that FDR had. It's only recently that Johnson really came out to the fore as becoming his own. He's not trying to be somebody, but was himself. Had he been LBJ from the very beginning when he became president, not trying to be an FDR, the 1964 model--

M: That's an interesting insight. One that I think hasn't been made very frequently, but I can see that there is considerable to it.

Z: So much so that I think that for a period there he tried to develop a profile that FDR had, combed his hair as FDR would and. . .

M: Go the whole distance.

Z: Well, it's a hell of a thing you know if we've got a president who wanted to look like Washington, be as tall as Abraham Lincoln.

M: And use a cigarette holder like FDR! (Laughter)

Z: Yes. Overall, I think history will recall Johnson as a very good legislator, and I think his forte was in being able to have had such a splendid record of legislation in the field in which he himself had not been a leader while a legislator. He was also a leader for legislation which he probably would not have supported as a legislator. Then when he became president, to bring about so much of it in so short a time, almost too fast, for me anyway, was remarkable! (Laughter)

M: Well, I think that may be true for several people in your body here.

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You've been both helpful and cooperative. Are there any subjects you would like to mention that you think are important that we haven't talked about? I don't want to cut you off at all. You've been so patient.

Z: No, this is important. I don't think Lady Bird nor the President will forgive me for mentioning this, but this is a little anecdote, incident or happening that really worried me.

The President came to Wisconsin, I think it was 1964, and he didn't have to, as I say, campaign, but he did come into Milwaukee, came into my district of all places. They wanted one visit so the President could say he was in Wisconsin.

Driving from the airport, the President as he was at campaign time impetuous, and he gave, as Kennedy did, the security personnel anxious moments. And for LBJ to do it after what happened in Dallas is something that was doubly important for the President's security personnel whenever he jumped out of a car. We stopped at one place and he said, "I want to go up there and see this fellow." He was out on a porch which they still do in Milwaukee. As the cavalcade went along, he ran up across the street to his man, to the consternation of his security guard, walked up to the fellow and shook his hand. They came back and he said, "Lady Bird, I think I met a Texan, He sure enough was from Texas. He swore like a Texan." This fellow did let out a pure blue streak, and the President let him have it. Repeated some of it, which proved he was a Texan..

Went a block further and he decided to stop in at what I knew it was a Republican establishment, a delicatessen and part of a butcher

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shop, as we call it in Milwaukee. The President insisted on going in to purchase a salami and insisted on paying for it. The proprietor said he didn't want to charge a president.

M: Even a Republican proprietor!

Z: He was a Republican proprietor. He was so elated that the President stopped. This happened to be a Friday, by the way, and it was when Fridays were still meatless Fridays among the Catholics. And this is was in a very highly Catholic area. He purchased some of what for which Milwaukee, other than beer, is famous: salami. . . some sausage and some candy that he said he didn't see since he was nine or ten years old in Texas. I don't recall now just exactly what it was.

And he got back into the limousine and got his knife out and took a chunk of the salami and said, "Lady Bird, do you want a chunk?" She said, "No, thank you Lyndon." He says to me, "Clem, you want a chunk?" I said, "No, thank you, Mr. President." Then he took the salami and of course it was delicious and he ate it and then lowered the window and threw out the salami skin. Bad enough it was salami on a Friday, but I said, "Where is Lady Bird's beautification program in my district?" (Laughter)

I was of course deeply concerned that the newspapers that follow the cavalcade or along side would have picked up this particular demonstration of "disrespect" for, one, Friday which, of course, he didn't have to observe anyway, but even just throwing out the salami skin! Some Republican reporter really could have made a story on that.

M: Oh, yes. And that's the kind of thing they'd love to get a hold of, too.

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Z: Well, I quickly looked around to see if there was anybody that saw it; tempted to say, well, I did say, "Well, beautiful the neighborhood we're driving through and keep it beautiful, Mr. President."

M: Well, that was an instance of him being himself, though.

Z: As I say, he is very warm, very human; not assuming. When you are in private with him, I've always found him to be really down-to-earth. He's relaxed and sincere. He's demonstrated that as a grandfather now the grandchildren come first, everything is less important.

I don't believe he thinks about May, 1963, anymore, but if he does, I don't think he still believes I was wrong in staying with my daughters then.

M: I'm sure he doesn't and I'm sure that when you said they'd never forgive you for telling the story that you're wrong because they both believe that if everything can be told that their record will speak for itself. They're not worried about that. They want all this to be accumulated so that the record can be written properly sometime.

You have properly helped though and everybody concerned will certainly appreciate it, Mr. Zablocki.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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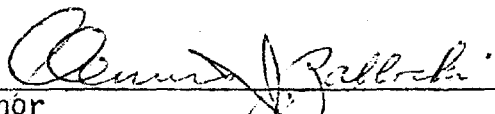
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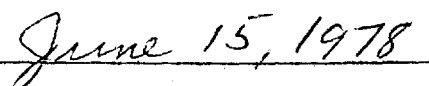
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