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HORACE BUSBY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW VII

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HORACE W. BUSBY

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Signed by Horace W. Busby, Jr., on May 7, 1999.

Accepted by John W. Carlin, Archivist of the United States, June 4, 1999.

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ACCESSION NUMBER 99-10

INTERVIEW VII

DATE: December 21, 1988

INTERVIEWEE: HORACE BUSBY

INTERVIEWER: Michael Gillette

PLACE: Kozy Korner Cafe, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

B: In that Nicholas Lemann piece the name of a commission jumped out at me, the committee or commission on juvenile delinquency, and I thought for a moment--well, longer than a moment--that that might be one of those things that was over there. I checked with Fogertson [?] and it wasn't there, and I think his article probably suggests this. It wasn't in EOB. I think Nick says it's at Justice and Fogertson thinks it's at HEW, but it had an appropriation.

The Leamon piece says that Bobby [Kennedy] rode to the Hill with this young sociologist who finally enabled him to understand his point about delinquency when Bobby said, "Oh, I see. If I'd been born here this might have happened to me." With that sentence that says that he was riding to the Hill--Bobby had taken this guy along because Bobby was going to testify on an appropriations bill, and then something that had jumped up just ahead of this in that text was that this committee or commission on juvenile delinquency made some grants. Well, I don't think--it's possible--but I don't think that something without a congressional base would have enough money out of the president's monies--whatever you call those monies. They would have some money. It's possible to

have something set up over there based in the president's contingency fund, I think it's called. Basically the president's contingency fund, while it's small, it's into the millions, hundreds of million dollars, I guess, and it's small by governmental standards. It's basically like an ever-normal granary. If the president wants to expend a hundred million of it for some kind of relief or some other purpose, there's no argument ever from the Hill about replenishing and they don't attach--or they haven't thus far--they don't attach controls to it.

Anyway, the committee or commission on juvenile delinquency went through a little period of prominence here and then it disappeared. The interesting thing to me about its disappearance--when I say disappearance, it disappeared from anything you ever read about--and the disappearance occurred concurrent with Johnson's accession to the presidency, which tells me that nobody did anything about it but that David Hackett and Eunice [Shriver] just--that wasn't Eunice's priority, and it just disappeared out there somewhere. Which puts it back into the category of the kind of thing I'm trying to tell you about; something that sort of doesn't have a life of its own. Have you interviewed Hackett? Did you tell me you had?

G: Yes.

B: You have? I'd really like to know. He just walked away from it, I'm sure. Of course, you know Bobby stayed on a time at Justice. I don't know whether Hackett went to his Senate office or not. The suspicion of the people I've talked to yesterday and today is that he did.

It was things like that that had some kind of existence over there in EOB. And I'm sure that's--no, I'm not sure--I'm sort of sure that that's where it was housed. The thing is, we didn't know its origin.

Now that, you might say, was our fault--I'm talking about now only the juvenile delinquency group--in that if, as Nick's research indicates, or his writings indicate, there was, in fact, a supporting congressional appropriation. I guess it was incumbent on us to know that, but Hackett was so close to Bobby that I wouldn't have touched anything about that. Not just in 1964; I wouldn't have touched anything on it in 1965 without a very heavy presidential purpose supporting that and without--if it had been left to me--some sort of an alternative proposal. Now the President's committee has proposed a commission on mental retardation that was regrouped in 1966, and was a successor to the Kennedy thing. That was all out in the open.

G: What is the distinction between the committee and--?

B: One was Kennedy's; one was Johnson's.

G: No, I mean just the terminology of the commission and--

B: Well, that's funny. I've been asked that and have discussed that before and I'm not sure I still remember it, but a commission implies a government agency. I don't really think that the commission on mental retardation fit. It wasn't a creation of Congress. And I don't know--I don't think it was--I'm sure it wasn't. A committee is just what it says. It doesn't have any pretense of being a--if it's the president's committee it's the president's committee, like say at Commerce it's the secretary's committee on fair trade. It is the

secretary's committee. This is a subtlety of great magnitude but it matters to me. It is implicit that a commission reports. It does a study or it keeps track of things. It makes a report to Congress and/or the executive. It is not implicit that a committee does the same thing. A committee may exist for a whole different reason. There was an oversight committee established on the poverty program on which I served too, chaired by Morrie [Maurice] Leibman in Chicago. [It] had just a little bit of heft on it. While reading the *Atlantic* I kept wondering if Nick had gotten into that. It was a very frustrating experience for me, to be on that committee.

G: Why was that?

B: There was a fellow named Bradley Peterson [?] brought in as the executive director, and I had no idea where Bradley Peterson came from or anything else. I got along with him fine and still do. I found out some--I think he went to the Nixon White House so I said, oh, that's what the problem was; he was a Republican. But then I went to speak in 1981 to the local--I mean to the metropolitan area's--what's the name of the organization for administrators? Public administration group. And lo and behold, here was Bradley as chairman of the whole thing and it was maybe the third time they'd called on him to be chairman. He's kind of a career guy who's been in and out and around. I was very frustrated because Morrie, who's a delicious man and a very dear friend of mine--I don't know whether you've ever talked to him or not. Oh God, you ought to talk. You should have talked to him two hundred people back. Maurice Leibman.

G: Is he here in Washington?

B: No, he's eighty--pretty close--he's seventy-eight, seventy-nine, eighty years old and he merged his law firm into Sidley and Austin, which is one of the premier midwestern-based law firms.

G: Chicago?

B: Yes. He had this history [of] chairing this poverty oversight thing. He's traditionally a Democrat although I don't know when he last voted Democratic. Known all over everywhere. I've known several men like this, who can always have a part in anything. They find a way to have a part in things. And Morrie--I guess, well, Morrie had known Sarge [Shriver] when Sarge was in Chicago running the Merchandise Mart. I think that's where this started. He was very much a part of the Kennedy world--not really a part of the world, but there were some episodes in which somebody constituted for Kennedy a citizen's committee on foreign policy or something and Morrie, in the presence of a lot of establishment figures--so I was told; this was with Kennedy--talked too much.

One of his law partners told me once both in frustration and admiration that he felt that Morrie has an original perception. He didn't say of something; he said he lives by an original perception, and he does. He loves strategy so he goes to Korea; he goes to Berlin, and he knows places like that. I know when he went to Korea once in the seventies the commander of the U.S. forces put him up in the most prominent VIP quarters. He gets things done. He calls me once in a while and he's having dinner at the Madison and I go, and the last time I went he had Abe [Abraham] Sofaer, is it?--that's the general counsel at the State Department, which is a highly prestigious position. He



resigned from the federal bench in New York to take it, as a matter of fact. And A. [Arthur] B. Culvahouse, who is the outgoing general counsel at the White House, a nice kid who was one of Howard Baker's friends, and one other person. You just don't normally go to one man's small throwaway dinner and find a company like that. But you ought to talk to him about--I don't know if you can get him by saying, "I want to talk to you about this thing." He would have some papers. You might want to bring that up with him, and I guess nobody's ever asked him for them if they're not down at the [LBJ] Library. But he would be responsive to his being asked about his [being] foreign policy counsel to Rusk.

G: Why was this frustrating?

B: Because I felt that as an oversight group we should oversee. We should go look at some of the programs and some of the projects. We should have numbers. We should be able to establish a report either critical of the program or supportive of the program, and if it was going to be critical I was a point man in that I would expect, and I suppose most others would expect me to be the guy to go tell the President, "This is what can come out. Do we want it to come out or do you want to stop it?"

Now, he had Mr. [Jesse] Kellam on there, which was plus and minus, and Mrs. Winthrop Rockefeller. I think that's what she--no, she maybe was on the mental retardation thing, excuse me. Carl Perkins, one or two other people out of the congressional past, maybe some from Congress. I'm not sure. Large group. But we never produced a report that was anything other than just kind of discussion of theory.

Nobody ever paid any attention to the thing. That's just not my idea of a committee or a commission or anything.

We didn't hurt the program, which nobody had any bent to do, but I don't think we helped it, either in terms of providing a base for stronger support of its operations or in the public eye. The second way and the more important way for a commission like that to operate is to provide a base for the agency itself to make changes that need to be changed. It's funny; it never crossed my mind until that very moment, tying this whole operation back to what I said at the outset about Morrie, the reason obviously that he was chairman was Sarge. And it had never crossed my mind. I like Sarge Shriver. Limited, but I like him. I'll be damned. That never had occurred to me.

G: Was the commission established after a specific event or in--?

B: No. I left over there in 1965. I think the first thing I went on was the committee on mental retardation and then this thing--that would be in 1966--this thing likely came up in 1967. I didn't know it was being considered or that I was being appointed or anything else until a big, long tube arrived in the mail and it had a commission in it. I opened it up, "Hey, what is in here? A map of something or other?" I was always trying to get a NASA photo of Maryland so I could find my farm on it where I was living and I thought, "Well, this may be my map from NASA," but it wasn't from NASA; it was from the White House. So when I opened it up here [it read], "Reposing trust in your integrity and competence, the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, hereby appoints you to be a member" of this thing on the poverty program.

Oh, I remember Johnson got so bad about this. He didn't want his people, the ones close to him, to get reputations of sloughing off, not being attentive to these programs or whatever, and I never did know what bastard he had doing this for him on this committee. Now, I'm not sure whether this was a commission or a committee. As a matter of fact, I guess it was a commission because I think the authorization for it was in one of the congressional enactments about the poverty program. I think that there were enough complaints or something that Congress was interested in having this thing for reasons, I suppose, of saying we're already doing something about it, which we were not doing. But he wanted his people to be there.

Once the mental retardation committee met here in late summer, as I recall, and had a routine meeting, then four or five days later he decided to do something at the White House with the committee, or with mental retardation, and so in great panic the staff of the committee started calling in members, that they were invited to the White House and all like this, and the executive director, a fellow named [David B.] Ray--who went to Tennessee, became and may still be the director of mental retardation in Tennessee--he called and said, "I can't get Bess Jones. She's not in Austin." I said, "Well, no, of course she's not in Austin. She and her husband drove here from"--Herman [inaudible]--"for this meeting and are driving back and it's part of their vacation, and certainly they can't be back in Austin in two days, going that way." So whatever it was at the White House, she wasn't there.

The next Sunday--that was like on Wednesday or Thursday--on Sunday the President came out to my place at Sandy Springs and he got off into a funk about Bess Harris--that was her name before she was Bess Jones--and [how] he just never thought she would betray him and other words short of treason. And I said, "What has she done?" She didn't come to the meeting at the White House. I said, "Mr. President, she doesn't know about it. She couldn't have known about it. She was traveling cross-country and there was no way to reach her. "Well, she ought to have known about it. Doesn't she ever call in anywhere?" I'm sure she didn't. I could not console the man and I couldn't control his fury at Bess, because here was one of his own people that didn't show up. It was going to blacken his eye.

One time at one of these poverty things--there would be an absolutely waste of time, running into discussions that wouldn't have held the attention of any reasonably mature person, in my view--and there was something else I wanted to do, or had to do. So, like the meeting met at ten or nine-thirty, I guess, and at eleven o'clock I told Morrie that I was going to do it and I did. I went ahead and left and stayed away through lunch, and then came back like at two and the meeting went on until the end of the day. I had barely gotten home. I'm not even sure I got home, [the] President of the United States [was] calling me. "Well, I just don't know what to do when *you* betray me." And of course I had no idea at that moment of what he could possibly be talking about. "You just got up and walked out of that meeting this morning." I said, "Well, I did," and I told him

why and that there was a conflict and I said, "I came back." "Well, you shouldn't have let there be a conflict." He was just up on the wall.

I never knew who did it, this bastard [Eugene?] Patterson calling the White House or Jesse Kellam, and I don't think Jesse Kellam would enter into a deal like that. It could have been somebody else, but I did find that Jim Jones or--this was during the totalitarian days of Marvin Watson. He had instituted this system by which somebody was supposed to report to the White House if any Johnson person strayed out of a committee or didn't show up. I resented it.

G: How often did this committee or commission meet?

B: It didn't meet on a regular schedule that I remember, like monthly or weekly or anything. It met sort of at the call of the chairman, although usually this was agreed upon at the previous meeting. It did in time, I think, produce some literature and you really ought to look at it, because the article in the *Atlantic* tells me just because of the nature of the interests of a generation, there weren't people with Nick's interests in the sixties. There are now academics and others interested in that program. He's focused on community action, but I mean the poverty program. There's a whole constituency in academia out there on that program, and I don't know; you could tell me more than I could deduce myself whether the poverty thing has grown bigger or smaller with the passage of time. I guess it's grown bigger, hasn't it? As an event.

G: I think it goes through cycles [inaudible].

- B: Well, we had that period. The guy was invited to the university to speak about how we had failed; that was part of the thesis but the other thesis was that the poverty program had increased poverty. That was a popular thesis in some book.
- G: Let's shift gears a minute. Tell me that episode, if you would, of LBJ getting a letter from an old friend with regard to a speech that Dr. Warren had made.
- B: Everything about this episode was and is nebulous in describing what happened. I'm talking about a piece of paper on which I can only assume that what was written there, was what he said was written there. He called me in and he had this one-column newspaper clipping, four or five inches long, four inches long maybe, and it had come out of an envelope. I didn't see the envelope. Mail doesn't arrive at the President's desk with envelopes. There was a letter, correspondence from somebody, in handwriting. I have told you that my impression was that the author of the letter was most likely Jay Taylor in Amarillo, one of the President's oldest friends and supporters although he wasn't as old as the President; [he] died before the President did. He also had a quick mind. He was a director of AT&T. He was the director of a lot of national corporations. He was head of the cattleman nationally, as in Texas, but he had broad views. In trying to reconstruct it, I think the only reason that I thought it was Jay Taylor was that I thought that I saw on the letter Amarillo as a return address. Summarizing that part of it is just being--I'm just doing that to get that on the record. It didn't happen all in this neat little sequence. But anyway, he called me in and he was holding this. He had a little slight grin on his face and

he said, "Do we know"--what was his name, what was his first name? This is criminal because I did know the man's name.

G: I'll fill it in.

B: It wasn't Lucian Warren. That's a former newspaper man here. It wasn't Melvin. I don't remember what it was. Maybe I'll think of it. Anyway, he just asked me, "Do we know about a Doctor Such-and-such Warren?" and I said, "Well, I know who he is. He's pretty prominent in medicine. I understand that he is referred to as the founding dean of the UCLA medical school, which I don't know what that means. I knew that he was or had been dean out there and that he was here with this mental retardation operation.

He said, "Do you know him?" I said, "No, I've never seen him." He said, "Well, did you know that he was head of the President's Committee on"--I think it was Reading and Learning Disabilities. I said, "No, I didn't know that we had a committee." He said, "Well, we do." This was characteristic Johnson. He was twitting me. He said, "You just don't keep up with what goes on around here. You didn't know I'd formed that, did you?" And I knew him well enough to know he hadn't. But you know you also can't quite be sure and I said, "What's this all about?" and he said, "Well, Doctor Warren's out"--somewhere. Why my mind is settled on Nebraska for it I don't have any idea. It seems to me that it may have been a university-type town, which didn't mean a great deal at the time, but anyway, Doctor Warren had been out. He was the director of the presidential committee on such-and-such. It would have been formed by President Johnson. He brought greetings to this gathering from President Johnson, a lot of stuff like

that in the little piece, because the people on the newspaper and the people at the place, they were really thrilled to pieces to get somebody straight out of the White House coming out there. I told him, "We didn't do that," and he was amused. He understood what was going on, I think, better than I did because he would allow for somebody doing something like that and I wouldn't. I couldn't imagine somebody just saying, "I'm on a commission." He said, "Nose around over there. Find out what all's over there."

Now he didn't say get rid of it or anything, just find out what's there. And so after a few days--you don't attack something like that straight out of the barrel; you think about it a little bit--I went over to EOB [Executive Office Building] which I rarely, rarely did. We had a few people over there, like Doug Cater. Not very many, two or three. Nothing like they do now; nothing like they did under the Nixon years. We didn't make that kind of a use of the place, and those offices, like Cater had a corner office facing the White House, a splendid office. His role didn't require him to be in the White House and so it was nice.

I went over and just walked around the halls smelling the air. I couldn't believe that all the offices were occupied, except there were maybe a couple of small suites where there weren't any lights on. What I did was to start opening doors and asking people. I opened the door and asked them if they were this committee that Doctor Warren had said, which nobody was, and having used that to kind of get in I'd say, "I'm Horace Busby, special assistant to the White House." I didn't know it then but I've been told since that all those people over there are very conscious of every name in the White House. They don't



see them but they know the name. I'd get in and I don't think I ever went into an office in which there was anybody who looked like a senior executive present, which I thought was just the way it was, and which I learned to understand later that the reason there weren't any executives there was that there weren't any executives who were supposed to be there because there wasn't anything going on. I would say that a high percentage of those offices didn't have anything to do. They were making work. They had gotten things out of whatever department.

See, they weren't necessarily on our payroll. Almost nobody at the White House is on the White House payroll. They're detailed from other places and they're detailed at all levels from secretarial on up to--well, you just don't bring anybody into the White House trying to fit them into a salary slot, because that's too long and complicated. After having asked if they were this thing or something else, then if I got inside I'd start a conversation. I said, "What is this office? I was looking for this other one." It doesn't sound plausible, but I don't remember anybody ever answering that question directly. Somebody would say, "Well, we're part of HEW," or "We're associated with a navy project," or something like that. Enough of an answer to where you didn't seize them by the throat and say, "Impostor! Out! Out!"

I didn't realize until twenty years later how little I was getting. Subsequent to my day over there--oh, it wasn't a day; it wasn't an hour that I was around over there asking these questions, and I didn't begin to go into every door. I came back and was thinking

about some way to attack the problem that still exists: how to find out what they are. Do you go over there and demand that they fill out a form or what?

After a few more days the President asked me about this thing, which was kind of unusual. I wouldn't have expected him to carry it around on his mind. I said, "I went over there and scouted around. All the places are full but I can't tell you what's going on." He said, "That whole building?" I said, "Yes. There are some things over there that are legitimate like the Office of Telecommunications and"--oh, I forget. It shouldn't have been put there. It was put there by statute and now finally the Nixon Administration--so I've been told--absorbed it into Commerce, that telecommunications thing. It was strictly a ploy by some people to get around the FCC and it caused all kinds of obnoxiousness because it did get around the FCC. There was a struggle that nobody paid any attention to over who was going to be primary in allocations of the radio band, and that's pretty serious business. The people who were candidates for that allocation--it was both domestic and foreign. We were in a treaty negotiation for allocation of frequencies that went on for years, and there were questions as to which agency was going to do it and which agency was the most competent.

Anyway, there were some legitimate people over there and then there were these other voids. When I made my little--it wasn't [in] any way a report. I was just telling the President how far I'd gotten and I told him what I'd done and he said, "I heard you were over there beating up on them." And he said something to the effect that they'd really

been yelling about it. "You must be real tough." Which, I know, is a joke about me. It's funny. I'm obviously not a person that other people describe as tough or think is tough.

Johnson had found out somewhere back--not too far back--he had decided I had a tough streak. I faced down somebody. Well, I faced down once the photographers at Orly Airport in Paris. We were having a press conference and they just continued shooting and so I stopped the press conference. We had French officials, U.S. officials, everybody, at a table. I just stopped the press conference and got up and went around between the table and the photographers and I said, "Stop this. I will tell you when you can shoot more pictures. No more flash." Johnson told me aboard the plane. We took off, he said, "I've never been more proud of one of my men in my life." He just felt he was always surrounded by people like Walter Jenkins or somebody who would not bark at people even if they needed barking at. I didn't consider this barking, even. If I hadn't done that they would have fired off two thousand flashes and they didn't need--

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

B: The press is obedient to a fault. So anyway, that happened and so he was twitting me a little bit about being tough.

G: How did he know? How did the feedback come to him?

B: Well, see, this is something I have never known, one of many things I've never known. I figured that somebody went running to somebody else in the White House and asked him, in effect, "What the hell is Busby doing over here? What's he up to? Because Fogertson

has given me--what I've learned from Ed in recent times [is] that was kind of the slant that everybody took.

G: [Inaudible] threatened?

B: No, the question was, "What was he doing over here?" Which was asked in an ominous way and others were saying, "You know what he was doing over here." This is the first wave. This is the commander out of the Trojan horse. This was all very pleasant. In fact, it was pleasant because I had caused something to happen and Johnson, in the same sense as Orly, he appreciated that. He said, "They're pretty stirred up. Some of them are pretty stirred up over there. I don't think you should go back. I don't think you should go any more into this. Turn it over to John Macy." What that told me was that maybe he was concerned, as I would have been, too, had I known what he may have known, too, with the prospect that some of these people might go running to patrons in Congress or whatever, or to Eunice Shriver or some other Kennedy and we'd get into a Drew Pearson column fight or something of that sort.

I didn't go back over there. I did talk several times to Macy. Macy was not entirely clear as to what this was all about. John could never--or had not literally at least--fully overcome the fact that he was upholding Kennedy standards--New England standards--against the Philistines from Texas. He wouldn't have said something ugly like Philistines. One of the most polite, nice men you would ever run into, but others other than myself felt that he had never worked with people from the South or Southwest before in his life, I think. I guess he had on the Hill, but he was frequently surprised that there

was such a high quality prospective appointee around. He never recommended anybody from that part of the world. I also found after we'd had the initial conversation, then he was, I thought, not too sure whether this was the President's interest or my interest. He was fishing around in waters he had no business fishing in, as to what my bias might be about something over there. So again I suggested that there be a meeting with the President, which I didn't attend and didn't intend to attend, and I don't know quite what the President did.

Fogertson has told me that the problem had a big factor of self-correcting reactions. People started leaving, pulling back. I'm sure, government being a matter of human nature as it is, that there were some people who dug in their heels and were prepared to fight me or whomever, although that may be wrong. The ones that shouldn't have been there had to be acutely conscious of the fact that they really had no license to be there. I understand better now than I did then that if you had some guy who had set up an operation--say he was in one of the departments, Labor, HEW, whatever--and he had set up an operation, somehow gotten into one of those operations detailed over there, it's very likely that some of them would not want something to come up back at the home office in effect about, "What's this person doing over here?" and "Who authorized this and what have you been doing the last six months or two years?" I think that's why it was collapsing as fast as it apparently did.

G: So a lot of people left that--

B: Some left. I don't know whether any of those shops actually closed all the way down. To have gotten the flag planted there was something they were going to hang on to. I mean, that's from an institutional loyalty thing. If I'm the railroad retirement board and I've got a closet over at EOB, by God I'll fight for it whether it's my closet or the next fellow's. Among other things that fascinate me about it is what I've learned through you, that there is nothing on any of this. Not that there's nothing on what I did because I never told anyone, no occasion to, and very inappropriate for me to go around talking about it. What I find much, much more interesting than that is the fact that there's not some list somewhere of who had room assignments in EOB. I gather that that's a true statement. Do you have such a list? Does GSA have such a list?

I don't know how, from the outside in the government, you do this. My feeling is that something would come up under the Kennedys or maybe back under Eisenhower, and somebody started a reaction to it within the West Wing and they called up Justice or Labor or Treasury or whomever and started working with somebody. Then they said, "Let me find space for you over here," and so they would put somebody in there to work with them. Then when that project was completed they wouldn't give up the room assignment; they'd just slip somebody else in there. How they got passes, what they said on their passes about who they were--although at that time that really wouldn't have been very difficult.

So that's my story and it's so strange, because it is as though this whole thing I have talked about may never have happened. Now, admittedly I wouldn't have thought of it.

G: It was Ed Fogertson?

B: I wouldn't have considered it consequential until I began to hear the other side of my own actions, up to and including Ed's very small vignette about the people around Warren having a strategy session, deciding it was crucial for Warren to meet me and kind of work this out. And we did; we met.

G: When was that? When did you meet him?

B: It was sometime in 1965. My recollection of it, we didn't have a meeting, sit down and talk, or anything like that, we just [said], "Oh, hi." "Hello, Doctor Warren, good to see you," out in the hallway, something like that. But that had all been planned. Fascinating. It may bear on it, maybe doesn't; [Theodore] Sorensen was down there. Johnson was first of all trying to keep Sorensen, wanted to keep him, which was very unrealistic. Secondly, Ted was separated from his wife--I don't think he was divorced; he was eventually, and he had two small sons whom I never saw. So Johnson had asked him to bring the boys down and he sensed, or Sorensen was explicit and said so, a resistance to being caught up with strange people celebrating Christmas, since he didn't feel like celebrating. Johnson said, "I'll put you over at the Scharnhorst"--or no, I don't know whether it was the Scharnhorst or the Lewis place. More likely the Lewis place, I guess. "You've got total peace and quiet, all like that, with the boys."

So that's why Sorensen had come, and Sorensen had come to do the State of the Union [Message], which was why we were discussing this stuff at all. It was in the context of what goes into the State of the Union. Sorensen didn't need any guidance on what he wrote, but whether to go in or go out, so that's where this all came from. My point in reestablishing that--I know that the article says it was on Sunday night that I did it, and I just didn't think even when I read the article that I did it on Sunday night. I don't know why I would fix on that. But what I was reacting to or what I can react to now is that Sorensen, like I would have done the same if I'd been involved, wanted the weekend; he wanted the Saturday night and Sunday to write. Why it's better than Tuesday or Wednesday I couldn't tell you, but it is.

That all overlays this and the *Atlantic* article stresses community action, and even intimates that I was reacting to community action and Johnson was reacting to community action. I didn't tell Nick that and that was not really the case. My memorandum doesn't react to that at all and I do not think that there was any discussion of community action at that time. I think that the whole thing on community action came up after Sarge got this shop operating.

G: The task force that was set up, wasn't it?

B: Whatever organized the program. To say that they were liberal is to say nothing. You had militants of sorts, activists who naturally gravitated to that program because here's where the action is. They probably felt comfortable with Sarge and the Kennedy background to it. See, this was one thing that was an annoying downside to this whole



period, and it continued well beyond 1964. The kind of people who wanted to confront city hall, confront the local establishment--the word "establishment" was just then getting established in the way that it's been used in politics since. They wanted to confront Johnson just as much as they wanted to confront the mayor. They thought you had to confront Johnson, and this is what made a lot of things trickier than they should have been. They had no confidence at all that Johnson was anything other than a southern racist. That didn't bother somebody like Bill Moyers, who may have thought that himself, but it bothered the hell out of me.

G: During this time period Walter Heller and Kermit Gordon were also out there?

B: They were down there. They were there on the budget. They weren't there on this. Heller was there on the overall economics because Johnson attached so much importance to that, and the tax cut thing he wanted. I think Johnson was sold on the tax cut but his problem was getting the tax cut through Congress. Ronald Reagan got a tax cut through in three months. It took Johnson a long time to get Harry Byrd's consent and that's what he was having Heller around [for], to bone him up on that subject.

Now Johnson also liked both of those men. He found them pleasant to deal with, nice to deal with. Heller was much more professorish than Kermit Gordon, who you wouldn't necessarily have thought was a professor, and Kermit was much more at ease with Johnson than Heller ever really was. But they were sitting in this room and Sorensen was off at the other side. Sorensen and I had kind of a scratchy history, which I won't go into, that went back several years. He's sitting over there with a note pad and I'm sitting

off on my side of the room without a note pad, and he was making notes for his assignment and I don't make notes anyway, so it didn't matter. He and I were not really, officially, speaking. [Inaudible] I didn't want to get trapped into either a conversation with him, or particularly a debate with him. Now when I finally spoke up--I spoke up two or three times before I wrote the memorandum--he kept saying to Heller and Gordon, "Well, what kind of projects, what are you going to do in this program?"

G: LBJ kept saying that?

B: Again, I don't know whether Nick is right, that he looked upon it as an extension of the NYA. That may be true in the larger sense, but I don't know. I don't think he has specific reinforcement or support for that statement but it could be true. This situation came up several times.

Kermit Gordon explained that problems were that when the Appalachian whites, who were--what a lot of this was focused on, for what reason I don't know, that when the Appalachian whites came to town to get jobs they didn't know where to go, and so there was this neat idea--this was several years ahead, of course--that they might take over a facility such as Union Station and turn it into this job center, and all these yokies could drive in from the West Virginia hills and go speeding through traffic right down to Union Station, and some older child of the family could leap out and run inside and come out with jobs. Of course, eventually that was sort of undertaken.

The second thing was that what contributed so to poverty in eastern Kentucky was the inadequacy of the road system in the mountains, and in North Carolina. I don't know

whether Georgia was included or not. Anyway, what they would do under this fine program was to pave the roads into the mountains--as we would say in Texas, black-top them--and that would make it easier to get teachers and school buses and all else up there and you could start little businesses, and getting the roads black-topped would be fundamental.

So after these things were said, he was going around the room and he asked everybody to speak, and he asked me to speak and I said, "Well, from experience we have had on programs I've worked with in Texas, two things. One, Texas has the world's greatest farm-to-market road-building program. Sixteen million dollars is taken off the top of all Texas tax collections for farm-to-market roads, and that money goes to farm-to-market roads whether they need it or not before any money goes to anything else in Texas. We have paved roads all over the state, and if you look at a map there's some roads that don't go anywhere. They're just paved because they've got the money and they've got to spend it. With that big a program, any highway builder's dream, the result has been that when we put in the roads, wherever they were--West Texas, where there aren't any people, or East Texas--[the] first thing that the people in the rural areas send into town is not crops, it's not livestock; the first thing they send to town is themselves and they don't go back. When you build a road system you permit the people to leave where they are and you create a migration." "Oh, we hadn't heard anything like that."

I said, "The second thing is that when you establish a facility for the kind of people you're trying to reach, limited, inexperienced, rarely outside twenty miles from where they

were born or lived, and you tell them to come to Washington and drive all the way through Washington and park, where in the hell are they going to get the money to park?" which was then seventy-five cents or a dollar. "They don't have money to park. They don't know anything about jobs. They don't know anything about job interviews. They can't read signs, very often, because they're not that literate. Not a sign with a message on it about where they should go. The thought of attacking their lack of jobs," which was what this was about, "through the kind of facility that you have, if you talk to the local authorities"--and I had worked with municipalities for years--"if you'll talk with local authorities about this they'll tell you it won't work." And I got this all out pretty quick.

There was quiet in the room. I actually made a favorable impression on Gordon, because as he told me sometime later, he could tell I knew what I was talking about. And he said, "I didn't know any of that." And Heller, again being professorial, I don't think liked to be crossed and particularly by someone whose relationship to the President and to the course of affairs, he didn't know what it was. He had to know, "Who is this creature who is speaking here?" Johnson--I don't think we left the room right at that time. I looked around at him--well, I knew what I was doing when I did it. He was just displeased as hell. And the first chance he got he told me. He said, "You just came here to embarrass me. Here you've got Rhodes scholars"--which neither one of them were--"and you've got Ph.D.s and all like that and you start telling them about the way we do it in Texas, and you're telling them that they don't know what they're talking about. Don't you understand? These are the people that Kennedy had in there. They're ipso

facto a hell of a lot smarter than you are." I didn't yield on that, but he was embarrassed that I had chosen to speak that way and so I knew I wasn't going to be invited back into any other conversations, and I left the Ranch.

G: What was his reaction to what they were saying, Heller and Gordon?

B: On the two things we were talking about he would listen and you could tell on his face it really wasn't convincing him, but he didn't know how to come back. When I finally spoke up it was a good bit after the flow of the conversation had already passed by him. I told my wife when we were flying back up here, "I think it's quite possible that, knowing our friend Lyndon as I do, it may be several years before I'm ever at the White House."

G: And then you wrote the memo the next day or the next night?

B: No, they all left and he went off to his bedroom, and I was there in an office. I wrote the memorandum then because, as I said, I didn't want to come back. I wasn't going to get into any more of this stuff.

G: The memo deals with the larger issue of directing the program at the poverty class rather than extending the traditional Democratic base in the middle classes, and how the Democratic Party would separate itself from its base.

B: I didn't say anything about the Democratic Party. I wasn't thinking about that.

G: You do, as I recall.

B: [It would] be very unlike me, in terms of making that a consideration. [Reading] Yes, "If you can do so you can broaden the Democratic Party base as it has not been broadened in two decades."

G: Was the direction of the program, in terms of the concept of a program designed for the poor, addressed that night rather than simply the form that that program would take?

B: No, whether there was going to be a program. As I say, the question was, "Is this in or is this out of the State of the Union?" Form, content, philosophy, none of that was present. The part that I have told you about from Gordon and Heller, those answers all came in response to his specific question, "Give me an example."

G: There's an indication that A. W. Moursund and people like that were out there that time, too, and LBJ tried this idea out on them to see whether Heller and Gordon could sell it.

B: He hazed Heller a little bit, but it wasn't on the poverty program. Heller arrived down there confident, as were all the northern/eastern liberals, that Johnson's--very nearly his first act. They were surprised he didn't do it before midnight of November 24, to impose a tariff on imported beef. The truth of the matter is that I wasn't aware of a great deal of static, at least in Texas, about beef. They were going up and all like that but [it] wasn't that big a thing, but Heller was just--oh, I heard him talking to Gordon, I guess, around the house several times in which he was saying, "We must try to fend off the tendencies toward protectionism." I was thinking to myself, "Doctor Heller, you don't know nothing, because this is a free trader, more so than the man who brought you to Washington," but he was all uptight about this.

In another setting which preceded this setting--maybe it was Saturday afternoon; it was in the afternoon, it was daytime--we were all sitting around in the living room of the main house, where the fireplace was and all. I was sitting as far away from him as the

regular positions in the chairs let and Heller [was] sitting over there on the little built-up brick hearth of the fireplace. What it was really all about was just what I guess used to be called a skull session of sorts; not focused, not an issues thing, but a brand new president feeling his way around in the economic realm. Gordon was giving him some good answers, and there was somebody else there. A. W. could have been present, but that's not important.

But anyway, Heller's so on edge about cattle. He saw an opening and he darted in. We mustn't do this, that and the other, something about cattle. It really punched Johnson's button, and he started building up. I was afraid he was going to rough him up, which would have been ruinous, but he got up and they stood up when he got up, which was a little bit of protocol that I wasn't even thinking about, and so he just goes over to Heller and somehow he picked up, as I remember, a cap or a hat that was lying on the table close by me and he started looking like he was putting it on and he came over to Walter and gets him by the arm. "Get your jacket now," he said, "We're going out for a walk." And Heller's kind of hanging back like, "What kind of a strange ritual is this?" He said, "Yeah, I want you to walk up and down there. There's seventeen ranchers live within three miles of here on this road"--which there weren't, of course--"We're going to stop at every house and I'm going to introduce you and tell them this is Dr. Heller; he's America's greatest economist and expert on everything and he's going to explain to you now why I don't want to put tariffs on cattle."

Heller fell for it hook, line and sinker, and he was a sick man. He was terrified.

You've got to remember that overlaying all this is the fact that as far as Johnson's concerned Heller is the chief economist, so let's go. He had had some nice relations with Heller. He had asked Heller for some material that I had put into some speeches that Kennedy liked, on business, just before Kennedy was killed, and Heller had been very helpful. He kept the Vice President informed with memos that I just loved to read. They were much too long for a president but they were fine for me and for Johnson; Johnson read them. So there was that kind of background. But Heller and Gordon, but particularly Heller, couldn't accept that you just fall into place just like you've been in a month's time. It's going to take a long, long time to build up trust or something, which wasn't true. But when he was going to take Heller off down there. . . .

Heller was a Western Hemisphere-class leaker, at least.

G: Did he leak that story? Is that why--

B: Well, it got into somebody's column or paper or something some way, kind of fuzzed up, and he leaked the story at the start of 1965 about revenue sharing. He had thought it up, felt that the federal government would have more money than it needed from now on so there should be revenue sharing, and he leaked it. It strained the relationship a little bit. Johnson, on revenue sharing--and this is a point of interest--Johnson was absolutely adamant against the concept. He said as long as he was president he was not going to see one dollar of federal money expended that wasn't under federal supervision. He didn't like state governments; didn't trust them. He especially didn't trust big-city municipal



governments. He thought that every dollar a big city spent, a little of it had been skimmed off. Out of the thirties, his view of the state governments were that they were primitive and backward and resisted progress from the national government. There was nothing about his attitude that was singular to him at all, but it was something that was very strongly held.

G: How far did this scenario get played out where Johnson put on his hat and said, "Let's go?"

B: Oh, it didn't get past him holding Walter's elbow, tight enough for Walter to take it seriously, I guess. Walter was game. He would have said, "It's not necessary to put on the blindfold, Commander." He would have gone out, but he had some notion that he was going to encounter something pretty fierce, I think. And of course there was not a cattle rancher within ten or twenty miles of there, but Walter didn't know that. So anyway, that's my contribution.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VII