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GEORGE REEDY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW V
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George E. Reedy
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Date

INTERVIEW V

DATE: October 27, 1982
INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE E. REEDY
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Hyatt Regency Hotel, Dallas, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let me start with a general question about 1953. Of course, the Eisenhower Administration has come in. I wanted to ask you to just discuss the Eisenhower Administration's legislative liaison operation: how it worked, whether or not you feel they were effective in lobbying for the administration's programs, and what LBJ's relationship with the individuals was?

R: It was very ineffective at first. The major person in the White House that did have some knowledge of the Hill was Jack Martin, I. Jack Martin, who had been Senator [Robert] Taft's assistant. I have a feeling that other members of the Eisenhower Administration, it's not that they distrusted him, because he was a very honorable man, but I think they just didn't feel sympathetic toward him. And as a result the Eisenhower Administration was very, very clumsy in its dealings with Congress. It later became terribly effective, but not for two or three or maybe even four years.

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G: Do you recall any examples of this clumsiness?

R: Well, I know that they got very much outmaneuvered by LBJ on the initial effort to put through a so-called Yalta Resolution, which was

really a rather funny thing. The Republicans had operated under the mythology for many years that the Yalta agreements signed by Roosevelt had been treacherous agreements which turned over all kinds of things to the Soviet Union. Well, it was sheer nonsense. Anybody that read the Yalta agreements with any kind of sense of reality would realize that about all it really did was to confirm points of strength that the Soviet Union held and points of strength that we held. But people weren't very rational in those days. There was a feeling that Eastern Europe would have been entirely free if we hadn't signed the Yalta agreements. Eisenhower had to go along with it because otherwise he would have split the Republican Party irrevocably, and he would have been unable to have gone into the election campaign with a united party.

After the thing was over, he came up with a resolution that was a masterpiece of weaseling. What it came down to, if you parsed the language, is that the United States was not going to abide by any agreements that were illegal. It didn't say the Yalta agreements were illegal, it just said the United States wouldn't abide by any that were illegal. Well, of course the Taft wing of the party, and everything to the right of Taft, immediately jumped into the breach and started proposing amendments to try to shape it more their way. What Johnson did was to immediately leap into the fray and insist that you couldn't start amending a thing like that because it would divide the nation in foreign policy. That it would give a very strange picture of a president that could not, at the opening of his term, get a

simple resolution stating his policies through the Congress. A little bit disingenuous but the Republicans really couldn't do much but splutter. It was a rather clever stroke, because it was the opening gun of a strategy that we had already figured out, and that was to support Eisenhower against the Republican Party.

We had discussed this in advance, in advance of the convening of Congress, that one of the strange aftermaths of the election was going to be a Republican president who did not get along with his own party in foreign policy. He did get along with some Republicans, of course, but to the extent that isolationism was still a force, it was mostly among the Republicans. This started things off nicely. The American public at the very beginning of the Congress was treated to the spectacle of the Democrats defending Eisenhower against the Republicans. It worked beautifully.

G: How did he decide on this strategy, do you know, of supporting Eisenhower?

R: I think that I wrote a memo at one point of suggesting it.

G: Do you think it was based largely on Eisenhower's popularity?

R: That was part of it, but I think there was another part, too. I think that he realized that the public was very tired of partisan bickering. Many of the theoreticians, so to speak, in the Democratic Party were coming down hard and strong on the business of the opposition is to oppose. Well, Johnson--and I agree with him fully--didn't think the American people really thought that way. The American people thought the business of anybody in office was to serve the American people.

And to announce right at the start that, by God, we're going to give Eisenhower a battle right down the line would have been just suicide. I wrote him one very early memo--I think in fact you sent it to me, I hadn't seen it in years--in which what I said was that what we should do is just simply announce a policy that if Eisenhower was right, we'd support him; if he was wrong, we'd try to change what he was doing, and if it turned out that he was so completely wrong that we couldn't change anything, then we would oppose what he was doing but in a very honorable and gentlemanly fashion. At that particular point--I generally agree with that anyway, because I think that the whole thrust of American politics is against the type of partisanship which can go down well in a parliamentary system, but where you're able to reconcile these things in Parliament. But in this particular year I think it would have been disastrous to do anything else. Eisenhower was terribly popular.

But what is more interesting is not just that he was popular, but that he was popular because everyone looked upon him as an instrument of reconciliation. That's something that many people didn't quite realize. Eisenhower wasn't popular in the sense that Roosevelt was popular, that Roosevelt was going to rescue us from the demons of Depression. The Eisenhower strength was that he looked like he could pull the country together again. Therefore, to go off in a hog-wild campaign of automatic opposition to Eisenhower would have put the Democrats in the position not just of opposing Eisenhower, but opposing national coherency in the country. Well, we could rely on

the Republicans to do that. Anybody that's ever had any dealings with the isolationist wing of the Republican Party knows that they are going to be against anything that even smacks of any kind of cooperation with any other nation. I'm not sure how much of that is left. I think it's a sentiment that's pretty dead in the United States, but it was really alive then. And Eisenhower, of course, had actually spent most of his life or most of the preceding twenty or thirty years in virtual support of the foreign policies of Roosevelt and of Truman. So he was bound to clash with that wing of the party, and what we did was to take advantage of it. It was a deliberate strategy that was determined before the Congress even met.

G: On the Eisenhower legislative liaison operation, did they try to win LBJ's support with either, say, appointments or other favors?

R: No. No, they never tried that. In the first place I think that they wouldn't have dared, it would have gotten them into too much trouble with the Republican Party. They were having enough trouble with the Republican Party without adding that to it. Secondly, I don't think LBJ would have wanted it, because I think it would have hurt him in his standing with the Democratic Party. However, I think there was a certain understanding there, which. . . .

One of the points about politics or at least the politics of that era which is so terribly difficult for people that didn't participate in it to understand is the capacity that politicians had to reach points of understanding without saying one word to each other. It was a process in which people were sort of tuned in to each other's

thinking. On a number of occasions I think that Eisenhower could have stepped in and really broken up some of our strategy, but he refrained from doing so. Johnson would strike a pose of backing Eisenhower against the Republicans, and I think that if Eisenhower had been a somewhat more partisan man he could have put an end to that, but he didn't. Now, I don't think that any words were ever spoken between the two, I think this was just one of the things that happened.

G: Now, you talked about Martin, but let me ask you also about [General Wilton B.] Jerry Persons.

R: Oh, Slick was one of the best operators around, but Slick had a rather peculiar role. He wasn't just congressional liaison, I think he was also sort of a general adviser around the White House. The congressional liaison operation always went a lot better when Slick was handling it. Not because he was more competent than Jack Martin, but I think that the regular people around Eisenhower had a little more confidence in him than they had in Jack. Also, for that matter, I think Slick was the kind of man who could get along more easily than other people. Jack Martin was a very convinced, dedicated Taft follower; he was for Taft right down the line. And of course that caused some problems in the Republican Party.

But no, Slick was very good at it, but he wasn't full-time. I think one of the reasons that it did improve as time went on is that Slick took it over more and more.

G: Bryce Harlow was another who worked with Congress during this period.

R: Yes, I think he concentrated more in the House than anything else.

Bryce, I don't think he's quite as deft as Slick. Bryce is a very good man, but he was a little bit more in the Jack Martin era.

G: Others have indicated that during the course of the administration LBJ seemed to appropriate some of these men every now and then--

R: Oh, sure.

G: --and the White House would actually have to pull them up short and say, "Hey, you're working for us rather than the Minority Leader." Do you recall any examples where Johnson actually was able to get them to do his bidding rather than--?

R: No, I can't recall a single example. I'm nodding my head in agreement simply because that was such a common tactic of his. LBJ usually knew more about the committee staffs than the committee chairmen [knew]. He was well aware of the power of the staff people, to produce reports, to tilt thinking, to bring certain things to the attention of senators, and naturally he'd operate the same way with the White House, especially when he knew both Jack Martin and Slick Persons and so did I--and Bryce Harlow rather. I didn't know Slick very well until after Eisenhower got into office. I did know Jack and I did know Bryce pretty well.

G: Why was Earle Clements selected as the Democratic whip?

R: He was ideal. First of all, he was from Kentucky, and you have to realize that Kentucky has a special position. Kentucky was not a Confederate state, but it was a state that had a lot of Confederate sympathizers. And while the South does not regulate the southerners-- and in those days that was a crucial point. The southerners knew that

Kentucky wasn't a Confederate state, but they also felt that it had some understanding of the problems of the Deep South. On the other hand, Kentucky is also a state where there is a Republican Party that can fight a very serious battle. That means that Kentucky politicians do have an understanding of the problems of northern politicians that many of the southern politicians of that period really did not have. To most southern politicians, the battle against the Republicans was not a very serious thing. They couldn't conceive of it, because in their states the Republican Party--in Texas here, the Republican Party was an ethnic German party. In Mississippi and states like that, it was an organization of a few blacks that mostly supported Bob Taft. They'd go to Republican conventions hoping that if they jumped on the right bandwagon they might get some plums out of it.

But Clements, as a Kentuckian, could understand that. Furthermore, he was probably--he was one of the shrewdest operators around. Clements was a very good operator. He knew how to approach people, he was a very cautious man. He's also a partisan Democrat, but he wasn't a crazy partisan, so to speak. It would have been impossible to have found a better choice.

G: Did this have anything at all to do with LBJ's selection as majority leader? Was this a package deal at all?

R: No, he selected Clements himself.

G: It was his decision?

R: Oh, yes. But they had no problem with it; everybody accepted it immediately.

G: And for the reasons that you gave? I mean, did he articulate these reasons?

R: No, he wouldn't have to. I think anybody in the Senate would have agreed with the judgment I just gave you.

G: Of course, Clements had a reputation for being more liberal than LBJ, I gather.

R: He had the reputation, but the reputation really wasn't deserved. One of the things that was happening in those days is that people had stereotypes, and one of the stereotypes is that anybody from a Confederate state except Tennessee--and most northerners don't realize that Tennessee was a Confederate state, you know. They had the feeling that anybody from a Confederate state was Deep South, Mississippi, South Carolina. They knew nothing about the Piedmont in North Carolina, they knew nothing about all the regions of Texas that really are not Confederate at all. They just assumed that because Johnson was from Texas, he was more conservative, and that simply because Clements was from Kentucky--which had been the state of quite a few liberals, people like Alben Barkley and Marvel Mills Logan, people like that--they just automatically assumed he'd be more liberal.

Of course, on one issue I would say that Clements probably was, that was on labor, that is by the standards of liberalism at that time. He was probably a little more liberal than LBJ.

G: Now early on, the Democratic Steering Committee met and decided on those committee assignments. Here we have the first indication of LBJ's plan of putting freshmen on high quality committees.

R: That was a very important move, one of the most important he made.

G: How did he get the more senior members to accept that?

R: I know his own version of it. I'm not quite sure actually how he did it, but I know his own version was that he walked into the meeting on on a committee and said that many years ago there were a couple of young boys nearby and he went over to take the older one over to spend a weekend with him and his family. Bubba was the older one. And that young John, the younger boy, started to whimper that why couldn't he go, too. His mother said no, you can't go. And finally the young boy, John, said, "But Bubba's been two wheres and I ain't been nowheres." Johnson said, "I then said to them, 'Look, gentlemen, a lot of you have been two wheres and even three wheres and four wheres. We've got some senators around here that ain't been nowheres. Now can't we do something about it?'"

That's his own version. My own belief, at that time most of the seniority was really in the hands of the South. You had a few western senators who were senior, but they were perfectly willing to go along with LBJ anyway. My own belief is that LBJ very early, in private conversations, started taking advantage of a growing belief that he might be a presidential candidate. Because I know that in later years he deliberately played that. It served him in very good stead. It kept some of the more Far South southerners off of his back at crucial moments. They would always say to themselves, well now, wait a minute, here is a man. . . . I've mentioned this in my book, by the way, that this was a deliberate tactic of his. But nevertheless I

think it started right there. And what he was saying is that he had some young northern senators who were Democrats and he just had to get them on something besides the capitol committee on roofs, domes and skylights, or committee on the disposition of useless executive papers, that kind of nonsense.

I think another thing is that he had at least one young southern senator, too, he had to do something with, and that was Price Daniel. And there may have been some trades there. Besides which, the committee that he put Kennedy on, as I recall, was the Labor [and Public Welfare] Committee, which most southerners wouldn't want anyway. So it was a question of salesmanship, but I think the primary thrust was their realization that LBJ had to have some leeway in order to get national recognition, and I know that this was something that moved Dick Russell very early. When was the year of the Suez Crisis? It doesn't matter. [1956]

Russell and I became very close very early, because LBJ put me on the committee investigating the [General Douglas] MacArthur return. I was really the whole staff of that committee, virtually. Russell and I became terribly close, because intellectually we were quite a bit alike even though we were politically very divided. Russell made no bones whatsoever--he was quite open with me--that he thought the only way to ever really put an end to the Civil War was to elect a southerner president. And he could not see any southerner that could get elected president except LBJ. He talked about that to me as early as 1953.

G: Is that right?

R: Yes. I remember later on at the time of the Suez Crisis, when Johnson had done something that was just absolutely magnificent, I've forgotten what it was now--but I'm talking about the parliamentary delegation, the NATO parliamentary meeting in Paris, that was one of his best performances--and Russell saying to me that night over a couple of drinks, "George, maybe we can get this man elected president yet."

G: Do you recall what Johnson did with the delegation?

R: Oh, yes, I do remember now. There was a great deal of difficulty about the oil situation, in which some of the delegates from the other countries wanted to put through some kind of a resolution endorsing quotas or something like that. Now that was an absolutely impossible situation for the United States, simply because the United States government does not have or did not at that time have that kind of control over oil. I remember sitting there, I was talking with Bill Fulbright, and I showed Fulbright one suggestion that I thought might work out, that this should be a matter of common--I believe my exact language was "this should be a matter of common concern." Fulbright and I talked about it a little bit. I gave it to Johnson, it was just a phrase. My God, Johnson took the thing over, he did one of the most beautiful jobs I've ever seen of selling the whole NATO parliamentary conference on that wording, which got us out of a very bad [situation]. It had no legal force or anything like that, that wasn't the problem. The problem was that the United States could have been put in a dog in the manger situation, in which it would have been

blocking at least a proposal to do something about a situation that in Europe was terribly serious. I remember we couldn't even get any heat in the hotels. This was in the late fall when it was awfully cold in Paris. The water was supposed to be heated for two hours in the morning, and what that meant was that ice wouldn't come out of the spigots when you turned it on. But I'll never forget that remarks of Russell's, "George, maybe we can elect this man president yet."

G: Do you think that LBJ had similar visions of--?

R: --of being president?

G: Yes.

R: I'm not sure. One of the strange things about LBJ, and I realized it more and more on this particular trip where people are asking me questions about how he felt about this and how he felt about that, he didn't open up very much. I could guess pretty well what he was going to do, and I think I could guess pretty well what he was thinking about certain things, but the man could keep his own counsel like nobody else I have ever met. And I don't know whether he was seriously thinking in the back of his mind about being president. I do know, though, I'm confident--he never said, "I am doing this," but I know that he was deliberately using the fact that he might be president as one of the ways of buying elbow room from the southern Democrats. That I know. Because I wrote too many memos that he used and too many speeches and everything else based upon that assumption.

G: Well, another question on the subject of committee assignments: would he use a committee assignment in order to advance legislation, say,

either promoting a senator to another committee in order to free up something in the previous committee that the senator was blocking?

R: Oh, sure. However, I can't give you a specific example because that would be such a common occurrence. I'm trying to think if I can of any committee shifts. I really can't think of it.

G: I think for example that Strom Thurmond left Judiciary and went to Armed Services just before the civil rights bill or something like that came through.

R: It could well have been.

G: It may have been a labor bill, but I think it was [civil rights].

R: I didn't particularly notice that, but that would be a typical LBJ tactic.

G: Now, I notice something here early in 1953 that I wanted to ask you about. LBJ evidently requested Truman to appoint a U.S. attorney for Nevada, a guy named James William Johnson, Jr. Why would he do that?

R: I'm really baffled by that, because--a U.S. district attorney for Nevada?

G: Yes. U.S. attorney, yes.

R: That would have been Pat McCarran, and nobody with any sense crossed Pat McCarran. Pat McCarran was the deadliest man that ever lived in the Senate. God, he was deadly. He could cut your head off and you wouldn't know it until you tried to shake it and it rolled on the ground. Pat wanted that for some reason, he wanted that for some reason. LBJ would not have interfered in the appointment of a

district attorney for Nevada unless Pat was involved in it somehow. It would have been too stupid for him.

G: Now, when the Armed Services Committee considered the nomination of Charles Wilson to be secretary of defense, do you recall Johnson's role in that, the hearings?

R: I sure do. Poor innocent Charlie Wilson. Wilson was almost a caricature of the kind of businessman who was convinced that politicians are nothing but a bunch of greedy rascallions that have to be put in their place by honest businessmen. He'd had no political experience whatsoever and he did not realize that he was going up in front of a committee that had more experience and had more men of stature than any other committee in the Senate. He was pounding on the table and saying, "You men have got to realize that there is a new force sweeping this country." Whew! I could almost hear the knives being sharpened.

He made one very bad mistake. This was in a closed hearing. I wasn't there at the time, but what he actually said I discovered later on. They were trying to get him to get rid of his General Motors stock, and he thought, well, an honest man like me, why should I do a thing like that? I am honest, and since I'm honest I don't have to comply with the [laws]. These laws are made for dishonest people, not for men like me. But somewhere along the line he made a remark that "what is good for the United States is good for General Motors" and vice versa. Well, Johnson came out and he told it to me, except he changed it a little bit. The way I got it is "what's good for General

Motors is good for the United States" and vice versa. The sort of thing I'm never sure whether Johnson inverted the phrase, because there is a difference in emphasis. But nevertheless, I got that out to the press real quick. Oh, Lord, when it finished, within a couple of days Charlie discovered that he had to sell all that stock at a loss. You know, when you force sale like that, it was always rather tough. He was a very much chastened man. If it had been anybody but a millionaire I might have felt sorry for him.

G: He could afford it.

R: Oh, he really walked into that one.

G: Now, Johnson did have two Texans in the cabinet, Robert Anderson--

R: Yes, Bob Anderson was a rather close friend of his.

G: --and Oveta Culp Hobby. Did he get along well with these two?

G: He got along extremely well with Anderson, and he got along as well with Oveta as did anybody else. And he got along even better with her after she got in the cabinet than he did before. What happened, I still remember the session with Oveta. This was when Eisenhower had sent up the nomination. Oveta came to Johnson for advice on how to handle herself. And so Johnson [did meet with her], he and I both. We were in the room with her, and there were a couple of her advisers. Johnson sent out to Pauline Moore, who--you must have heard of Pauline?

G: Sure.

R: Who kept all the voting records. We got all the voting records on the last time the Senate had turned down the cabinet position on Health,

Education and Welfare. He went over the list of senators that had voted against it, and checked them off, gave the list to Oveta and told Oveta to go and see them. And also told her how to approach them. And it worked, it worked quite well. I think Oveta was quite grateful to him, and he got along well with her after that.

G: Did he individualize the recommendations? Did he say, "Approach Senator X this way, and Senator--"?

R: Yes. Oh, yes. It set up a rather lasting relationship even with me, because as the years have passed I served on various committees and commissions with Oveta and got to know her pretty well.

As far as Bob Anderson is concerned, Johnson had known him before and they were rather close friends. Anderson had a wonderful reputation in Texas; everyone regarded him as a very benevolent, very wonderful man.

G: As a result, did he have more success in dealing with these two executive departments than other ones?

R: He would have anyway I think, but he didn't have many dealings with them anyway. You see, at that particular point, as a Texas senator, neither department would have been quite that close to him. A Texas senator is much more interested in the Interior Department or in the Agriculture Department or in areas like that. I can't remember any individual dealings, it's just that he had two people in the cabinet that held him in rather high esteem and I'm sure he used it, I don't know how many occasions.

G: Okay. Now, Arthur Perry joined the staff at this point, too.

R: Right.

G: What did he do on the staff?

R: You have to realize that Arthur Perry was the old-timer of old-timers. He went all the way back to--oh, what was his name?

G: Sheppard?

R: Sheppard, Morris Sheppard, the author of the Sheppard act, the Prohibition act. I think Arthur Perry knew about everyone in rural Texas literally. Old man Sheppard had a flat rule in his office that no constituent could have the last word. If a constituent wrote to him and he wrote a reply, and the constituent wrote back thanking him, he'd thank them for the thank you. If the constituent wrote back thanking him for the thank you, he'd write back again thanking him for the thank you. The result was that Arthur Perry knew just about everybody. And what Johnson had him do was to sort of handle Texas mail and just sort of keep in touch. As majority leader, Johnson was in a rather difficult position, because he couldn't spend full time on Texas problems. He wanted somebody like Arthur Perry around. Arthur was especially good in some of the areas of Texas where Johnson was not at his strongest.

G: Now he had, I guess at this point, the Texas office, the Democratic Leader's office, and the Policy Committee.

R: Right.

G: Where did he spend his time?

R: Mostly the Democratic Leader's office.

G: Is that right?

R: He would rarely go over to the Texas office. In fact, I think Walter Jenkins just moved in and used his office, the whole suite. And of course the Policy Committee office was used for staff; we had a fairly large staff. And the Democratic Leader had his own office, which was a pretty nice office, pretty sumptuous. He spent most of his time there when he wasn't on the floor.

(Interruption)

G: --because that is an interesting point. You were talking about [Wayne] Morse and moving his seat.

R: Yes.

G: Why did he request it, first of all?

R: Morse had gotten at loggerheads with the Republican Party. I think at that point he decided he was an Independent. He really wanted to cross over to the Democratic Party, but he didn't feel that that was fair, seeing that he had been elected as a Republican. I believe he had actually opposed Eisenhower in the previous election. My mind and memory is getting a little bit off on that. But I know that he was very much persona non grata on the Republican side of the aisle. The account that I got--of course I got this from LBJ--was that while he sat there, there were all sorts of whispering and nasty things said to him, and he finally decided he couldn't take any more and asked that his seat be transferred to the other side of the aisle. He did not, however, register himself as a Democrat until he was able to change at an election and run as a Democrat.

G: I see.

R: Of course, that bill, the tidelands bill, nobody is sure yet that that has any real force in effect. I don't think anybody will ever find out either, because the trouble with it is that nobody's ever found any oil out there.

(Interruption)

G: In June, early June, the Christian Science Monitor published an article speculating on whether or not [Allan] Shivers would take on LBJ in 1954.

R: Yes.

G: Did he have any fear that Shivers was going to run against him?

R: I don't know if fear, but I don't think there was much doubt that Shivers was going to [run]. In fact, at that particular point everybody in Texas was getting set to run for the seat, not only Shivers but Price Daniel and whoever was--who was the--?

G: John Ben Shepperd?

R: No, I don't think John Ben Shepperd was, but--

G: Well now, Daniel was already there.

R: No, no, I'm thinking of--oh, Lord, I'd know the name in a second if I heard it. It doesn't matter, there were an awful lot of people getting set to run for the seat. We thought that Shivers was, or every indication we had was that he was. That he was tired of being governor. This dictated the strategy that we followed, which was to have Johnson go down to Texas in the fall and make a whirlwind tour of the state. Lord, what a tour that was. He must have shaken we figured somewhere between a hundred and two hundred thousand hands in the

course of two months. He visited every single place in Texas, and he spoke to every single person that would stand still long enough to listen to him. And what it really amounted to, he did his campaign even when nobody else was campaigning, and therefore at the end of it to run against him would have been absolute madness. He really caught them napping that time. As it turned out, the only person that filed against him when it was all over was poor Dudley Dougherty down in South Texas. But that was deliberate. This is a question of killing the opposition before it had a chance to become opposition.

I don't see anything here that isn't perfectly apparent.

G: Apparently after [William] Knowland first took over from Taft, after Taft's illness, he really tried to bulldoze some things by LBJ. At one point I understand Johnson actually adjourned the Senate out from under Knowland. Do you recall that?

R: I recall the incident itself, but I don't recall the circumstances surrounding it. I do know fairly well though what happened. Knowland's problem was that he was a rather awkward man. He was not graceful in anything that he undertook. His concept of the leadership was a very unusual one. He thought the position of the leader was to raise banners, that the leader of the party should raise a banner and that the party should rally around it. I remember he carried it so far that on occasions when he had to oppose Eisenhower, he would physically leave the leader's seat and go to the back of the Senate and take a seat in the back of the Senate before making a speech opposing Eisenhower. But he regarded the job of leader as being that

of a flag or a banner. After a while, when he got to working with LBJ and discovering that he really could trust him--a number of different--they really developed a very close relationship. So close I can remember one night when LBJ was having a few drinks back in Skeeter Johnson's office and LBJ got in one of these "I'm going to quit" moods. There was Skeeter, there was myself, I think Earle Clements was there that night. But there was Bill Knowland. To my surprise, he was doing this in front of Bill Knowland, the Republican leader, and Bill and everybody else was begging him not to quit.

G: What was bothering him at that point, do you know?

R: I don't know. He did this quite often. I can recall very distinctly at least three occasions when he was going to quit the Democratic leadership. Of course, I remember the night before--I think I've already told you about the night before he went up to Atlantic City to accept the nomination. He kept me out on the White House lawn for at least two hours saying he was going to go up there the next day and quit. I don't know what was eating him. In fact, I later wondered whether he really meant it at all, whether this might not have been just a way of testing the loyalty of the people around him.

G: Or seeking reassurance?

R: Or seeking reassurance or maybe binding them more closely to [him]. But I remember that particular night Bill Knowland was begging him not to quit. It was one of the strangest things. We all had enough Scotch in us that things looked logical that would not have looked logical otherwise.

G: Do you think perhaps he wanted something from Knowland and was trying--?

R: No, I'm confident that he didn't at that particular point. This man had certain peculiarities, and this was one of them. When one of these things would pop, he could always be so terribly convincing at the time, very convincing. Of course, it was better--he would do one of two things when he got too much whiskey under his belt. One was to start feeling terribly sorry for himself, here he was all alone in the world, nobody loved him. If he had been a young child, he would have said, "I'm going out in the garden and eat worms, big, fat, woolly worms," but instead he said, "I'm going to quit, nobody wants me." "You can fuck them all," would be a typical phrase.

The other syndrome when he had too much liquor under his belt was to get somebody in the room and just berate them for about--sometimes all night long. He would do that under circumstances where it was extremely unwise, with witnesses. I've often wondered what kind of report Steve Smith took back to the White House after that famous night in Bangkok that I think I've told you about.

Oh, nothing here. The drought legislation I remember.

G: That really was a problem throughout the mid-fifties.

R: Oh, it was terrible. I remember passing a field once near the Ranch with A. W. Moursund, and saying, "Hey, A. W., why did they burn over that field?" and he said, "George, they didn't burn it over. That's drought." It was that bad.

All of this is very apparent. Dudley Dougherty. Poor Dudley. I'll never forget when Dudley had that storefront in Houston. Did I ever tell you about that one?

Well, he started getting one of those talkathons which were very popular in that period. Somebody in the crowd, a prohibitionist, asked him what he thought about the demon rum, and Dougherty thought it was a reference to his alcoholism, which was rather notorious. And Dudley said, well, he used to drink and he realized it hadn't done him any good, but he promised them this. If they'd elect him to the Senate he'd never take another drink. I couldn't believe it when I heard that one.

G: Joe Pool, of Dallas, at one point here in midsummer criticized LBJ for delaying the release of a federal survey on Texas water needs. He got the date of the report, and evidently it was just a political swipe at Johnson, which LBJ handled.

R: It wasn't worth much.

G: Do you recall any details of that?

R: No, it's not worth recalling. It was one of those weird right-wing swipes at Johnson which had absolutely no [significance]. You have to realize that especially in that period there were an awful lot of political moves that made no sense whatsoever. What they were, you had both extremists on the right and extremists on the left, and their idea of politicking was to be constantly on the attack. It makes the period a little bit confusing. You really had to know what happened to know why some of the things were significant and some were not.

- G: Now, it looks like LBJ almost went to South Korea in July, July 29. Perhaps it was Senator Taft's death that--or something like that. He didn't [go].
- R: I don't recall that at all. I have no recollection of that.
- G: Let's see, here it is, July 31. Okay. To consider an increase in the debt limitation, I guess. They were going to stay for that reason.
- R: I do not recall anything about that.
- G: Whose idea was it to campaign in 1953, do you know, the fifth-year campaign?
- R: You mean for the Senate seat?
- G: Yes.
- R: I think I proposed it originally.
- G: Is that right?
- R: I'm pretty sure I did. The idea being to knock out the opposition before it could become opposition. It was very effective.
- G: Now it's a fairly wide practice for senators to campaign in the fifth year extensively.
- R: Right, but it does not have quite the same effect. Nobody was prepared for it, you see. There were a lot of people that were set to run against LBJ, and they did not anticipate that what he would do would be to cut the ground out from under their feet in the fall. By the time the fall of 1953 was over, filing against LBJ was a total waste of time. He had seen just about every voter in Texas. Today people are doing that, but it's a tactic that has lost the old effectiveness simply because it's anticipated now.

Those speeches are sure vanilla. Nothing here.

G: I see he did go to Winder, Georgia, to attend the funeral of Russell's mother.

R: Yes. Oh, sure. He wouldn't have missed that for [anything].

G: Now, you have here the travels there, that schedule, Austin, Lubbock, Houston.

R: Yes, but I'm looking at this August 21, when he flew to Tyler. Was that where he made that hideous "get out of the United Nations" speech? I think it was. Oh, Lord, and that was [inaudible].

G: Were you there?

R: No, but what happened--I had written a speech for him. We had to do something about the right wing in Texas, which at that time was really getting terribly powerful. What I did was write one of those ifs, ands, and buts things about if the United Nations doesn't do this and if it doesn't do that and if it does something else, that we're going to have to consider pulling out. The speech was absolutely harmless, except he started to read it and he got excited about it, and by the time he got to Tyler he had taken out all the ifs, ands, and buts. My God, the whole nation the next day woke up to a story that the Senate Democratic Leader was advocating pulling out of the United Nations. Whew! Boy, we had to do some tall explaining on that one.

G: How did you handle it?

R: I think I just punted. Of course, the original speech--thank God the original speech was safe, safe as a brick church. One of the difficulties with LBJ is he never really connected words with a meaning.

He thought a speech was to entertain the audience. The real impact of language, the fact that it could move people and it could make a difference, I don't think that ever really occurred to him. This was one of his grave weaknesses. He knew how to use language when he was talking about a deal. You could always rely on him in a deal to do exactly what he said he would do. Of course, you'd better look and be very careful about what he said, but his word was good. You know, where I grew up, the worst thing an Irish politician could say about another one is he has no word. Well, LBJ had a word. He was reliable in that sense. But in speeches, whew! I'm pretty sure--I have the feeling that was the occasion when he went to [Tyler] when he made that horrible speech that gave us a few bad weeks.

G: Now, in Houston he addressed the Mid-Continental Oil Association, and I'm told that there he more or less threw away the speech and sort of gave them a gloves-off civics lesson on what would happen if they defeated him and a northerner ended up Democratic leader.

R: Yes.

G: Can you recall that speech?

R: No, I can't recall. I know he did that, but you see, he did that so many times. Actually, one of his pet stunts was to start out on a speaking tour, and after he had memorized the three or four that I'd written for him, he'd turn up with a speech that had been written. He'd say to the press, "Now, it's a perfectly good speech. I have an assistant [who] sat up all night long writing it. I'll stand behind every word." Then he'd drop it on the floor and he'd say, "But I'm

going to talk to you folks from the heart." Then he'd give them the speech that he'd given them at the previous address. And he could look at a speech and memorize it; he had photographic memory. But, God, that was funny.

But I think that here he may just have done that, that he may really have done it. He had an uncanny sense of what a crowd was thinking, an uncanny sense. If he stood in front of that audience and suddenly realized that he could talk turkey to them, he would. That was one of his greatest strengths in politics, he really could feel a crowd. Now of course sometimes, like the night in Tyler, he could feel the crowd and say some things that would be unfortunate.

I remember the Mid-Continental Oil [speech]. It was a classic.

G: Did he in fact at that speech talk about his powers as Democratic leader and how he could protect Texas' interests better?

R: That was the way it would sound to the crowd. If you actually listened to it and analyzed the words, you would find it wouldn't quite come out that way. He was a master at creating moods.

G: But someone had said that that was really a dramatic speech, that when he finished you could hear a pin drop in that room.

R: It was. Sure. He was very good at that. But nevertheless, at the same time I think that if you'd had a tape of the speech and had read it very carefully, you'd discover he wouldn't quite have said what they thought he had said.

Another thing about him, when LBJ made a speech really off the cuff, it would wander all over the place and the people listening in

the crowd had to be perfectly comprehensible. I can still recall in 1954 when he made a speech at Brigham Young University out in Utah and he really had them in the aisles. The President of Brigham Young said, "We made a tape of this. If I send you a transcript would you do whatever editing is necessary, Mr. Reedy, and send it back?" I said, "Sure." That was the worst promise I ever made in my life. When I saw the speech on paper, he had sentences in it that ran about two pages long. You know, they were running all over the place and sentences that made no sense whatsoever. It took me about two weeks to get that damn thing edited. What I practically had to do was to write a new speech.

But, Lord, he was magnificent when he just would get on the stump and felt right. It was sort of a tone. He knew how to stick in key phrases which would drive home to the people that were listening to them and would make them think what he wanted them to think, but would not necessarily be a full-blown commitment, as they would discover later on.

G: Did he try to get some local input ahead of time?

R: He didn't need it. He didn't need it.

G: Really?

R: He didn't need it. I'd write some out for him sometime, but it was unnecessary.

G: I notice in the middle of this he flew to Chicago to address the Retail Druggists' Convention in Chicago. Do you remember that?

R: Yes. Now, there was some reason for that, what was it? What was that date again?

G: Let's see, it was October 13.

R: Oh. Why the devil did he do that? What sticks in the back of my mind is that there was somebody in Texas that wanted him to do it as a personal favor. It had no other significance. He was doing somebody a personal favor, and I can't remember who it was.

G: Now, he did spend some time in Dallas on this trip. I'm wondering if he had much support here and if he understood Dallas, if he was able to establish--?

R: Oh, he understood Dallas; he understood it inside out, but he didn't have too much support here. Whenever we took Dallas into our calculations, any kind of political calculation, what we'd start thinking of is how much we could stand to lose in the city and still carry the state. He never planned to carry either Dallas or Houston.

G: Is that right?

R: He figured they were both going to be losses.

G: Of course, he seemed to do better consistently in Houston than he did in Dallas.

R: Yes, well, you've got a different situation. Dallas is really a conservative town. You know, the backbone of this city is banking and insurance, and banking and insurance are two industries that tend to breed conservatism because basically bankers and insurance people are conservative, that's all there is to it. Whereas Houston, Houston is kind of a gamblers' town, and in Houston what you have is a continuing

battle between the far left and the far right. It's a highly ideological town. Usually in an election in Houston, the far right will come out on a national basis, but there still is enough strong liberal sentiment in Houston that he could always rely on something. In Dallas the vote could be very strongly anti-Johnson.

Most of this, of what you're looking at, all comes under one basic heading, which is just part of the overall plan to hit every part of Texas that he possibly could.

I'm just looking to see if anything unusual happened. Uh, oh! This is the famous Uvalde meeting. Lord, it was a real godsend, where--do you know about John Nance Garner and the "can anybody think of any good and patriotic or party reason why Johnson should not be elected to another term?"

G: No.

R: Oh! This was a real key to the whole election. He went down to Texas, and I don't know whether he'd put John Nance Garner up to it or not. I just know the story as told to me by LBJ because I wasn't with him on that occasion. You know, Garner had opposed him in the 1948 election and afterward the word began to float around that Garner sure would like to have a nephew--I think it was a nephew--of his appointed postmaster of Uvalde. But he knew he couldn't get it through Johnson. When Johnson heard about it, the word he sent was that it sure was a miserable country if a former vice president of the United States couldn't get a nephew appointed a postmaster and he would not block it, which changed Garner's thinking considerably.

Well, the story that Johnson told me is that he showed up at this session at Uvalde and Garner was pouring drinks, striking a blow for liberty, as he put it, and he finally said, "Now, is Mr. A&P here?" The Associated Press stringer stood up and said, "I'm here, Mr. [Vice] President." He said, "This is off the record." And he's supposed to have told the assembly a story about how he'd gotten elected to Congress--I think it was back in 1912 or something like that--and decided he liked it, but didn't see any reason how he could be re-elected because he hadn't done anything during his first term. He was sort of a political accident. He went back to Uvalde and took his problems to the town banker, who was his only important friend. The town banker said, "John, you just go fishing for a couple of weeks. You get out of here and leave this to me." When Garner came back after a couple of weeks, he discovered the banker had walked up and down the streets of Uvalde saying, "Can anybody think of any good, patriotic or party reason why John Nance Garner shouldn't be re-elected to a second term in Congress?" Well, of course nobody could think of a reason why he shouldn't be re-elected; he hadn't done anything. So by the time the banker had finished a couple of weeks, John Nance was a shoo-in.

Garner said, "Now, this is on the record from here on out. Mr. A&P, take notes on this." And he turned to the crowd and he said, "Can anybody think of any good, patriotic or party reason why Lyndon B. Johnson should not be re-elected to a second term in the Senate? That's all. The rest is off the record. Let's go strike a blow for

liberty," and he went and started to pour the liquor. It took about two days for the story to get out, but it swept Texas. It was big headlines everywhere. People wrote--that is, they didn't write the part about Garner, but just Garner asking the question. And really, it had an awful lot to do with his re-election, Johnson's re-election that fall. Because Garner had put the--you know, if you put the question the other way, "Can anybody think of any good reason why he should be?" it would have been deadly. I teach this concept in my classes now, control of the question. If you can control the question before the voters, the answer is automatic.

That's the only thing I see here, and I'm almost certain that must be the meeting that you had here on November 4. He spent the night at Dolph Briscoe's ranch, which of course was near Uvalde.

That meeting of the Texas Society of Architects, that was just a favor to Max Brooks, Max and Marietta Brooks.

G: Did he work generally through the postmasters or county men or district men?

R: County men and district men, not through the postmasters. Our county and district set-up was a very good one, had an effective organization.

G: This was the congressional districts you were--?

R: No, this is state senatorial districts.

G: I see. Okay.

R: That was a very effective set-up, very effective.

All of this is just more of the [same].

My God, another football game. I always trembled when he went to one of those things.

G: Was he distracted?

R: He didn't pay any attention to the game at all. He cared about as much about football as I would a ladies' dressing parade.

G: Why did he go?

R: Because other people went. He could meet people there, he could talk to them. He knew that every red-blooded American had to go to baseball and football games. I was always worried that the television cameras would be on him, you know, during a home run with the bases loaded or a fifty-yard pass, and there would be the camera showing him talking to somebody.

G: Well, I think you've covered 1953.

R: 1953, see, there's so much of 1953, there's an awful lot of activity here, but it all centered around one thing.

G: I've heard the story that at one point Shivers came to Washington and they had the Texas congressional delegation dinner. They maneuvered Shivers into presenting a plaque to LBJ, or having his picture made with LBJ when the plaque was presented. Do you recall that at all?

R: I sort of recall it. I sort of recall it.

Oh, God, I'll never forget his Atoms for Peace speech. Eileen Galloway actually did most of that, deserves a lot of credit for it, too.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview V]