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STEWART L. UDALL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW I

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78705

ACCESSION NUMBER 74-259

INTERVIEW I

INTERVIEWEE: STEWART UDALL

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

DATE: April 18, 1969

Tape 1 of 1

F: This is an interview with Secretary Stewart Udall in his office in Washington D. C.; the interviewer is Joe B. Frantz. I think we can dispense with undue formalities and get on first name. Stu, tell us very briefly your background and how you came ever to be in the Cabinet.

U: Well, I entered public life at the national level in the 1954 election when I was elected to Congress from what was then the second district of Arizona, which included all of Arizona except the one county around Phoenix. So I had one of the largest congressional districts in the country in area. And--

F: The country had gone Republican in '52. Here you're coming out as a Democrat in '54. What induced you?

U: Well, I was a liberal, still am, and an incumbent congressman quit who was very conservative, Joe. He was about like the average Texas Congressman. In fact he boasted that he voted with the Southerners more than anyone else. I thought the district was more liberal than that. I had been active in politics, primarily as a campaign manager. I always said jokingly, I managed three unsuccessful campaigns in my county for candidates for governor.

F: Maybe what you need was a good candidate.

U: That's right. So I had a background in politics. I ran for Congress in '54 and I kept the district--because it has a strong Democratic registration--and I managed to be reelected four times, and always with pretty good margins. So I had some leeway. I was really one of the founders of the Democratic Study Group in the House. I guess you'd call me one of the more activist younger members of Congress interested in liberal ideas and reform generally.

F: Let's interrupt this narrative for a moment. In that you ran, of course, into Speaker Rayburn and I rather gather he wasn't too keen on the Democratic Study Group.

U: Well, looking back, of course, I enjoyed a very good relationship with Speaker Rayburn. He was in his later years then and of course he was always a bit crusty, you know. He wasn't easily approachable, but he was kindly in his way to younger members. He and I, in

our relations, got along very well. I had, incidentally, I probably had more to do with him at the time of the Labor Reform Bill in 1958-59. That was the one instance of major legislation where he and I had to come together and so on.

As I look back I was considerably critical of his leadership in some ways at the time, and I'm even more critical today. In the sense that I feel with the House as an institution he was a stand-patter, much more than Lyndon Johnson was as a leader in the Senate. I think the legacy of Speaker Rayburn in terms of the future, as far as being a kind of broker between this North and South coalition which had many things that were unnatural about it, he was the best man you could pick and he handled this very well.

F: Good manager of things as they were.

U: That's right, and he had a broad concept rising out of the Roosevelt years, and the war, of the national interest. And he had a lot of strengths. I wouldn't want to indicate that I didn't appreciate the strengths that he had.

But I think as far as the institution was concerned, he was kind of a dead hand of the past. He was against any significant reform and change. I used to say, "The Speaker had such a view of the House; he loved it as an institution; it's kind of sacred and everything," so you kept everything the way that it was. And yet the country was rapidly changing and I use to say that he believes in leaving the House alone. The spittoons were there when he came to Congress in 1913 and they're still there and he was about the only one that used them.

Well, in any event, we want to get on to the big thing of the Presidency. I was staunch Adlai Stevenson fan in both of his campaigns. Looking onto the 1960 election, of course, I felt this was a great opportunity for the party. As late as early 1958 I think I was still a Stevenson man. In fact I wrote an article for the New Republic which I gave the title, "Why Adlai Stevenson haunts the Democrats." I felt again his strong qualities were so strong that any of the Democrats that I saw at that point in some ways didn't measure up. I thought that we were going to be haunted by the appeal he had.

But as I looked at the landscape, Stevenson had been defeated twice. I felt this was fatal. Our problem was to oust the incumbent Administration, to beat Richard Nixon at that time, who obviously had the advantages that the ins had.

I felt on the other hand probably the candidate that I most closely identified with because of my own personal background was Hubert Humphrey. And you know if you had just given me the choice ideally, I think I probably would have picked Humphrey.

Kennedy in the early period, before I got acquainted with him, I didn't really identify with him because this Hollywood charisma thing to me was not enough. It

bothered me that a person who was obviously very attractive and did have a certain appeal, but I kept wondering did he have depth? Does he have the strength that would be needed. And I was dubious about Kennedy in '57, '58.

Lyndon Johnson it seemed to me at that point--and I really ruled him out from the beginning in my own mind--that he was a sectional candidate despite the fact he was from Texas and had tried to broaden his appeal and in the way that he ran the Senate, ran it on a national level. But still both in terms of his personality, in terms with his strong ties with Senator Russell and others, I couldn't see him carrying the big states. So myself, in my own mind, as we moved on into '59 and '60--and I was then as the big national issues were concerned, I was deeply involved with the Labor Reform fight because I was on that committee, and all of us felt that if we didn't pass that bill, this would kill us in the 1960 campaign. And I had a real crich and a confrontation with the Labor Union leaders on that because they wanted to kill the Senate bill in the House in 1959.

F: Did you ever work directly with or against Mr. Johnson during this period when he was Senate Majority Leader?

U: No, you see--

F: I know you were in two different worlds.

U: I was a junior Congressman and he was in the leadership. A junior Congressman in the House--then and now. Unfortunately, I think the House stifles ability, prevents able men from making the contribution they could make, and I would cite, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Jack Kennedy. None of them did much in the House.

I had one little conflict I remember in 1958-1959. I thought that Senator Johnson and Senator Jackson and others were pressing too much on the missile gap thing and I said something that was more frank than you would say, thinking it wouldn't be published about these people.

F: To a reporter?

U: No, it appeared in some newspaper. I think Walter Jenkins or somebody called me and rapped my knuckles a little bit, explained that Johnson was unhappy. In fact Senator Jackson was unhappy because this somebody put a headline on it--not in a national newspaper, it was one of these labor newspapers or something. So that I never did sit down with Johnson. I knew these people as Congressman--I worked there--but you didn't have any sort of issue or anything where you were working intimately with them, with their people.

That was where--I gravitated to Kennedy when I worked with him on the Labor

Reform Bill, because I saw then qualities that I didn't realize that he had--a strength and toughness because this was a mean issue and it could have destroyed him. He also surrounded himself with extremely able people, this was another thing that appealed to me. Archibald Cox, who was later Solicitor-General, Ralph Dungan, these were the two people I worked with primarily. I conducted actually with Cox's help a seminar in my office on the whole business on labor law for about a week before the House started working. So I found myself working closely with Kennedy and I could see then that there was more than charisma and I began watching him more closely. I could see he was growing very rapidly and the whole thing, curiously enough, came to a climax as far as I was concerned--because I had decided the way most Congressmen didn't, members of the House you know. In fact the Johnson-Rayburn strategy was to use the leverage they had with members of the Senate and members of the House and make them one of their main counters in the convention. For that reason, other than the obvious people, you know the Minnesota people being for Humphrey, the Massachusetts and personal friends being for Kennedy.

F: Missouri for Symington--

U: I was one of the few Congressmen that really stuck my neck out and got into the state level. But I did it very quietly and Kennedy did not recruit me. These people never came to me.

The last night of the Congressional session of 1959, when we had finally wrapped up the Labor Reform Bill, I called up about two o'clock in the morning and asked to see Kennedy. He said come on over. I went over to his office and I told him I was going to go home and go to work for him. My idea at that time was that I would line up my Congressional district, get friends of mine that I knew were supporters of his to start working to get on the delegation, to go to the Convention in Los Angeles. I made no public announcement, I just went home and I worked all fall. I went around my district and I got everybody lined up and Mr. Rayburn, who wasn't as alert as he should have been--this could have been known. In fact no one took my effort too seriously. That was part of the advantage of the whole sort of coup.

But the other part of it is, Johnson and Rayburn didn't court me. I was of no importance in their scheme of things. The first time I ever had any talk with Speaker Rayburn he called me up one day while the House was in session, about a week before the Arizona convention. Of course, at that point the battlelines were drawn and the troops were mustered and it was a very late hour and he said, "I understand you're having your convention in Arizona this week."

I said, "Yes, that's right Mr. Speaker."

He said, "Well, I'm all out for a man and you know who he is and I don’t want you

to hurt him."

I said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a high regard for your man; I'm not trying to hurt anybody, but I have to tell you that I've been working for several months for Senator Kennedy and I'm going to do what I can for him." I said, "Lyndon Johnson is my second choice," which he was all along, and "I'm not going to try to hurt him; I'm going to try to help somebody else." Well, you could tell he was a little disappointed. He didn't bawl me out. He didn't put any pressure on me. That was the way he ran things. He respected the reality of it and the only thing for me to do was be completely candid with him. So I went on out to Arizona and we pulled off our coup.

F: How much of a coup was it? Had McFarland been working? I'm talking about Ernest McFarland who lost in that '52--

U: Ernest McFarland you see had been the Majority Leader and was very close to Lyndon Johnson. He then had been Governor two terms. He ran for the Senate and Goldwater beat him in '58. He was at that point, not a spent-force, but I mean I was in office. He was out--

F: He had lost his momentum.

U: But he and the group that were for Johnson were very lackadaisical and slow-moving and they were older. I was younger and I guess had a little more vigor and alertness.

Also, there was a middle group that was sort of flirting with Symington. This was the group that really had controlled the delegation the last two or three times. They weren't necessarily for Johnson. They were for going to the convention uncommitted and bargaining for the highest bidder as it were. In fact, they had very selfish interest, some of these people. They wanted to be the ones that delivered the delegation and my battle was as much with them. It wasn't a Johnson versus Kennedy thing. It was the old guard that had always controlled the Arizona delegation versus the group that wanted to commit for Kennedy. The battle was carried on that way and it was very close.

In fact, I had some defections in my congressional district, I had tried to structure it because under the system at that time, my congressional district had a majority and we had the unit rule you see. So all you needed was a majority, but I had some defections. I knew I would have some. I had more because the Johnson people went to work at the last minute and turned a couple of the counties around on me, so I didn't have it in my own district. Of course, I was working closely with people in Phoenix.

But this old guard group that I'm talking about that was leaning to Symington or Johnson, but McFarland was working with them, they were determined if they had a majority of Maricopa County, you see, in the county caucus, then under the unit rule they had the whole county. All they needed was one or two small counties from my district to

have the show. Again, their strategy at that time, they wanted what they called an uncommitted delegation. But we knew as far as Kennedy was concerned, unless we had a Kennedy delegation we had nothing really because of the unit rule, you see.

That was the way the battle went. They had a very close vote in the Phoenix-Maricopa County delegation. They finally decided for peace and harmony reasons to divide the delegation up, which was what was good for us. We had a clear majority at the convention. I was elected as Chairman and we went on to the Convention in Los Angeles. Now where do you want to go from here?

F: All right. So you've gone to Los Angeles--

U: I faulted the Lyndon Johnson strategy all along with regard to Los Angeles. If you remember his idea was of waiting very late to make an announcement although it was very clear that he was going to go. But his basic strategy was wrong. It was miscalculation of understanding national convention politics. He felt that he and Speaker Rayburn, with the leverage that they had with members of Congress and members of the Senate, that they could use the Congress, and their control over the Congress and individual Congressmen as the main lever to get the nomination. Of course, they had strong ties with Jim Farley and Dave Lawrence of Pennsylvania, and others. They weren't solely relying on Congress. But I felt all along, because I knew the Congress, that if Lyndon Johnson thought that Magnuson and Jackson in Washington and Gale McGee and these other Senators that they were going to deliver their states for him, the smart Congressman or Senator wasn't going to do what I did in Arizona. He doesn't want to get in these crossfires.

You see I deliberately got into the '60 thing because--and it was a risky business and I lost a lot of my margin in my congressional district but I believed that the '60 election was vital for the country, for my party and you ought to stick your neck out. That's just the way I played high-risk politics. I felt Johnson was over-relying on--. In fact, there was a kickback on this--that Senators and Congressmen could deliver state delegations.

What I did was very atypical in Arizona--and I didn't do it alone; I had some help, a lot of help--but therefore it seemed to me that his strategy was bad. And that really from the beginning he never had a chance. I think had Kennedy not been able to make it, probably the Kennedy people would have been more inclined to turn to Stevenson perhaps, rather than to Johnson. Because the President, he had the South hung around his neck despite his best efforts to present another image. I just could never see, as Los Angeles approached, him being the nominee.

Now I felt on the other hand all along, although I was astounded when Kennedy made the move and even more astounded that Senator Johnson at that time, accepted the nomination that he would take the Vice Presidency. This to me was an ideal ticket.

Perfect ticket balancing. I'll never forget one thing that night on the floor because I was all worn out and I'd gone out to somebody's place at mid-afternoon with some of my Arizona people. We had taken a swim and we were coming back in the car, and we suddenly heard the news that Johnson had accepted. Of course, I was just overjoyed and delighted with this because for me, personally from my part of the country, this was an ideal ticket. I thought this was clearly a winning ticket.

Well, I reached the floor and a lot of the liberals were very angry. I remember Joe Rowe and some of the Negro leaders and others talking "sell-out." The floor was in quite a hub-bub and I ran around what I call putting out fires tried to talk to all my liberal friends and saying "Hell, this is the smartest thing Kennedy could have done; it means we'll win the election, and this kind of balance is very important."

Well, I ran into Ken Galbraith on the floor and he made a wonderful comment that I've quoted many times. He said, "Yeah," he said, "That's right. This is the sort of cynical, Machiavellian thing that nobody would have thought of or done except maybe Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932!" I thought this was the real answer. You had Roosevelt and Garner. Here was another combination of this kind and, of course, Kennedy asked me to make one of the nominating speeches for Johnson which I was delighted to do.

F: Did you write it yourself?

U: No, heavens, it was done on the spur of the moment. I was just thrown up there and ad libbed something. In fact, Ted Kennedy--I was thinking back--he called me up and said did I want to make one of the seconding speeches. I think this was while the first one was being made. I felt so strongly about the importance of this ticket and that Johnson gave him the balance and the strength that Kennedy needed that I could very sincerely say--because I also thought Johnson had been the strongest Senate Majority Leader on this period. I admired, as contrasting with Rayburn, his flexibility, his feeling that the Senate as an institution ought to evolve and change. I had always admired that in his Senate leadership.

F: Did you see Mr. Johnson at all at the convention?

U: No, I didn't see Johnson. As a matter of fact I didn't see Kennedy. It was a funny thing because I probably had as much right as Walter Reuther and other people to go see Kennedy after he won the nomination. But I was so worn out and my feeling at that time was, "Well, he's harassed and I don't need to go by and congratulate him and bask in the glory." And Kennedy in a funny way, you know he appreciated that. I never fussed much over my relationship with him. I was sort of retiring all the time. I never pushed myself forward. I was just there and did my job and this sort of thing he appreciated, I thought.

F: Did you have any contact with either Mr. Kennedy or Mr. Johnson up to the time that you

were offered a Cabinet post?

U: Well, you see the 1960 campaign I was running for Congress. I was not involved in the national campaign. I was not an adviser of Kennedy's as such, you see. I was just a Western Congressman trying to be reelected. Lyndon Johnson came through Tucson, my home town, and we spent part of a day together. In fact, I was with him in Phoenix and so on. He was in high fettle then and was a very good campaigner for Arizona. We spent the day together and talked some. That was the first time we had seen each other since the convention and you know, I dealt with him in a straight forward way. I think we sort of patched things up a little bit at that point. At least there was no open animosity between us. We were two guys trying to campaign together and win an election.

Then Bob Kennedy came into Arizona. I spent time with him and urged him to have Senator Kennedy come in during the campaign, which he did about the last week. I spent a little time with him in his room talking over the campaign and the Arizona side of it, making some suggestions about his Arizona speech--which he didn't follow incidentally. So that was about my contact with the campaign.

F: So then it's November and you've won and the Kennedy-Johnson ticket won. What happened between then and January?

U: Well, my being selected to the Cabinet, I've always thought, was a combination of two or three circumstances. One was that the West had turned Kennedy down practically flat. You know he carried two of the small states. California appeared to go for him, then went the other way. The California delegation had been divided. Governor Brown had wobbled all over. When Kennedy looked at the West, he didn't owe the West much and there was nobody that he was particularly indebted to. Mrs. Green of Oregon and I, we were the only two who delivered anything significant in terms of the pre-convention period. So, unless he wanted to pick a Senator to be Secretary of the Interior, and there were none really at that point that were logical. He was, I guess indebted to Senator Jackson, but most of the Senators by then had sufficient seniority that being in the Cabinet wasn't particularly attractive to them. And so, since there was nobody that had any leverage on him, and he obviously I guess wanted to pick a Westerner and I suppose he had confidence in me and felt we knew each other well enough. His brother--his youngest brother, Ted, who had sort of worked the West for him--he and I had formed a good relationship, I know he and Hy Raskin, who was Kennedy's other operator in the West, that was when it first began.

I didn't campaign for the job. I was out in Tucson kind of licking my wounds because I had lost half of my margin in my congressional district. Kennedy went down to a resounding defeat in Arizona and I didn't campaign. I think this probably helped me with Kennedy. I didn't have Congressmen or Senators calling. I just sat back and waited and in about two or three weeks Ted Kennedy and Raskin reported back to me that it looked

pretty good. Finally I was told to come on to Washington, and went to see him. They had made up their mind then that they wanted to offer it to me, and it worked out that way.

F: During your period as a Cabinet member under President Kennedy, did you have much opportunity to see Vice President Johnson?

U: I had several contacts with the Vice President. All of them were very happy ones, incidentally. In the summer or early fall, August or September, for example, 1961, we made a trip together down in Texas dedicating the saline water plant at Freeport, went on down to Brownsville, had sort of a public meeting pushing the Padre Island National Seashore. Mrs. Johnson was along with him. I could say very sincerely some of the things to the Texas people about him and what I thought the Administration was doing, that he belonged to the country now. I was trying to say to them, don't judge him the way you judge a Senator, he's a national officer and he belongs to the country now. We had a very good day. That was really the first full day that I spent with him. Then he came over to my Department at one point and talked to a convocation of the employees and the Department and said some very good things. He had a lot of ties with Interior, with Ickes, with the conservation programs in the New Deal, and he said some very good things about my Department and about his hopes for it and so on.

We had two or three interesting conversations. I was the first Cabinet member to go to the Soviet Union, and one day waiting about ten minutes, I remember for a Cabinet meeting, we got in a conversation. He was asking about my impressions of the Soviet Union and I told him in a sort of capsule form. He liked what I said, and he asked me for some papers or some summary that I had talked about. So our relations, while I was in the Cabinet while he was Vice President, were pleasant and constructive and I had no clashes with him at all.

F: Did you get the feeling that he was chafing at the lack of sufficient duty and honor?

U: Joe, I didn’t. I wasn’t an intimate of the Vice President's at that point. You got the feeling because--and of course this was confirmed later when I got to know him much better and watch him--of a certain resignation and restraint. The Vice Presidency is a miserable job for a person who's an activist and who has ambitions and aspirations. Of course, both Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey were those type of men and naturally the Vice Presidency was a very frustrating job. You sensed that in him among other things, which for him was out of character because after all he had a better job really running the U.S. Senate. He was restrained in making comments. Kennedy, you know, would almost have to draw him out on some things.

And you saw him really operating and being very happy about it. I remember this first world trip he made and President Kennedy asked him to give a Cabinet report. He

had his charts and he was up there and he was in good form. You could tell he really had his teeth into something. He was telling us about Ayub Khan in Pakistan, I remember that. The contrast with that of, you know, having to sit passively and be just one of the people at the table. It obviously took a great deal of self control and it was obvious to me he wasn't happy. But the Vice Presidency isn't a happy job. It's a frustrating job.

F: It needed a man who's willing to put on a dignified suit of clothes and preside at something ceremonial, but that's the sort of man you don't want to be Vice President.

U: That's right and you're subordinate. I'm sure he had many days when he kicked himself for changing jobs. Yet you respected the fact that he was enough of a party man--I always felt good about him in that. He wanted to beat Nixon. He and Rayburn--this I don't think Nixon ever realized in the 1950's--the distrust and the wounds that he created. The fact the Democrats distrusted him and the fact that Rayburn would have said to Johnson--if he did--and that's what we all came to accept, that when he finally advised Lyndon Johnson to take the Vice Presidency he said, "You've got to take it; if you don't Nixon will be President; you can't let that happen." That took a sacrifice on his part. I always felt he had made a very great contribution to his party in doing that. Yet Kennedy, like anybody who's going to be President, he wanted to run the show and wanted to run things. I think he tried to be thoughtful and sensitive with regard to the Vice President, but the job is of such a nature that it was just inevitable that there would be all kinds of disappointments and a feeling that you were neglected, that your talents weren't being fully used--just simply trying to define a role. All the Presidents that I've watched in operation--Nixon's doing it now--you know they talk about they're going to raise the Vice President and give him a new role and they give him some things to do. It's essentially a fifth-wheel job. And it's therefore very--

F: You take the hand-me-downs.

U: Yes.

F: Did you get the feeling that Kennedy was going to dump him in '64? Did you see much evidence of dissatisfaction by the sort of inner Kennedy group?

U: Well, actually I never heard this discussed. I wasn't part of the Kenny O'Donnell-Larry O'Brien group that would sit down around drinks and all. I talked with these people. I had their confidence of course, but I wasn't part of that inner circle.

I had the strong feeling myself, from all that I observed, that he would stick with the ticket in '64 but he would certainly frustrate him and dump him in '68. I've always wondered and speculated, you know, what would have happened had Kennedy been reelected what would have been, come out in '68. But I felt all along that Johnson was going to be frustrated in his ambition to get another crack at the Presidency. You know,

he was going to end up as a kind of a bitter person as a result. It just seemed to me that was it, because there were so many of the Kennedy people that regarded Johnson as an Andrew Jackson, rural, earthy, corn-ball politician, who was really of the old period rather than the new. I think there's enough of that feeling in the Kennedy group that they would never have groomed him to run.

But I think there was also the feeling, and I think Kennedy's last trip to Texas with Johnson was an indication that they were getting ready for the campaign, and I think that trip in itself indicated they were going to stick together. That was always pretty clear in my mind and I never heard any comments from anybody about dumping Johnson in '64.

F: Did Kennedy use Johnson, particularly, to keep a relationship with the Senate or was there after the beginning an attempt to keep him away from Capitol Hill?

U: I didn't feel he used him enough. That was one of the things I faulted Kennedy on. Having someone with Johnson's skills in the Senate, I would have used him a lot more. I think that might have given him more to do and more satisfaction. Kinda said, "Now look, you know this thing so well we're going to give you the major responsibility," and in effect make him the chief adviser. I don't know to what extent Larry O'Brien, you know, who at that point was running the Congressional liaison, did use him. I know they did use him on certain things, but I'd have used him a lot more if it had been me.

F: Where were you November 22, 1963?

U: I was on that plane going to Japan, the Japan Economic Conference at the time of the assassination.

F: Tell me about how you got the word and what happened?

U: Well, others have told the story, I'm sure, and I don't think I have too much to add. The word came in. Rusk called us back. It had come in over the teletype on the President's plane, been shot. Of course, you had this first feeling of horror. I remember then the other ticker item came. I've got this incidentally myself. I put it in my pocket. The second item came through and said, quoted Clint Hill, one of the secret service agents as saying that he was dead, even though it then began--all this murky stuff--I just had a sinking fatalistic feeling at the very beginning it was fatal. I remember, you know, saying to myself because I remembered this reception that Johnson and Adlai Stevenson had gotten within the last few years in Dallas and the shot that had been fired at General Walker and I said, "My God! Why did they have to go to Dallas?" you know. It was essentially a rather naive stupid reaction but it was just a feeling of horror that something like that can happen. You had the feeling, too, on the plane because all the Kennedy people were there and a lot of his Cabinet that the roof had just fallen in, you know, that something had ended, a crushing weight falling on you. It's an experience that I suppose you never go

through in your life except under those circumstances. It's different than the death of a friend because a whole life that you built suddenly collapses. You go through the same thing I've found out now--. We better date this; this is April 8, 1969--when an Administration ends. It's a change in your life, a very profound one. This one was so sudden, so traumatic--

F: The transition is immediate instead of having a little preparation. How soon did you see Mr. Johnson after the assassination?

U: Well, I asked myself the question--of course, there was all the chaos and I always had the attitude--I regret it now to a degree--with Kennedy as President, I did the same with President Johnson in the beginning--that in a time when there was so much pressure on the President, so much turmoil and everything that maybe the best thing you can do is quietly do your job and not go bothering him. Orville Freeman and others asked to see him, went in to see him, right within that day or two, to try to encourage him and talk with him.

I thought about doing this but the thing that kept nagging at me, and there was a little element of pride in this too, is that--because I of all the members of the Cabinet, the reporters when they began to write the next week--you know, "What is Johnson going to do with the Cabinet?"--I was singled out as the first to go because of the 1960 convention. I thought if I went in with hat in hand it would look like I was pleading to stay on or something, and I didn't know the President that well either.

Although I remember on the plane after we had turned around and were coming back--President Kennedy was dead--several of us--Rusk, Luther Hodges, I guess, and some others on the plane, Bill Wirtz--and somebody said, "I wonder what kind of a President Johnson will make." Nobody had any strong opinions. I had one, and I expressed it to the group right there, because I said I thought he'd be decisive, strong and that his experience as Majority Leader of the Senate, that this was the thing to look to. He had the feeling there of running the country, making national decisions, and that this would be his great strength and that I thought he would move decisively and I thought he would show strength. There was no doubt in my mind about it that he would be a strong President because he knew how Washington operated. He had dealt with Presidents. He had, I was sure in his own mind, his own ideas, everybody does, of how a President operated, how to get things done.

But I didn't go to see him. I waited. And those were terrible days for me because you know. I was just at that point, having had three years, and there were a lot of frustrations in that period. I was new and I was breaking in and I'd had a bad first year. But I was getting my Department organized the way that I wanted it. I was really ready to take off and yet I was being told by everybody that Johnson had no use for me. They were all saying that he's vindictive, that he has a long memory, and Udall will be the first to go. I was, in my own mind, trying to accept this. I was fatalistic about it. I was ready

to accept it.

He called me in about the fifth of December. There was something that brought it to a head. Kennedy had selected me to represent him at the Independence ceremonies in Kenya in Africa. The question was, am I going to go ahead or would I be replaced? Of course, President Johnson then had set his general course, which was that of continuity--again, very smart politics and I thought smart government. Instead of kicking the Kennedy people out he sort of clutched them closer to him, and said "We're going to go on down the road together." We'll be a team here, keep the Kennedy people. Still the question was, "Would I be a notable exception?" That's what I was asking myself, "Well, is this good news for me or not?" So he had me into his office and we talked for about fifteen minutes. He made it plain to me he hadn't forgot and he was tough. He wanted to make it plain that he--this was all insinuated, I was going to be tested by how I performed--which of course is what I expected all along, it's what I expected him to do.

But the other major move that he made--and this of course was a very reassuring thing to me. After talking with me a little bit he said "You're ________ and you understand, and I understand all the background." It was plain that he hadn't forgotten the past, but he said, "We've got a job to do and you can do your part."

Then he got to the subject of oil. This was a surprise to me. He had thought it through. I think he had talked to Frank Ikard or some others. I've always guessed that--certainly Walter Jenkins advised him. He said, "I'm from an oil state; oil's a very controversial subject," he said, "I want to have a relationship that Roosevelt and Ickes had." Again his past experience coming to his aid. He said, "I want you to make all the oil decisions, you to run the oil program; I want oil out of the White House." Well, this is all very heavy responsibility putting it on me. He said, "I want you to walk out and tell the reporters this." He had his press secretary take me out and this is what I told them.

This made it plain to me at least that I was going to stick through the election because this was a vote of confidence in me and a very shrewd political move because here I was a Kennedy man, I was a liberal and he was going to say, "This is my man to handle oil matters, I delegate to him full responsibility." Now he never did this on a piece of paper. He didn't do it himself. He told me to go out and tell them that. He said, "Tell them" told me like he always did--wanted to run every detail--said, "You tell them this, and you tell them this and you tell them this." So I went out and told them.

This was our first showdown. Of course, still everybody kept talking, all the newspapers, all the columnists that wrote about the Cabinet that I'd be the first to go. I lived under that cloud really that first year until after the election.

F: How much of a role did you take during the campaign?

U: Well I campaigned very vigorously. The President, of course, used the Cabinet very well I thought in that campaign.

F: And Cabinet wives.

U: And Cabinet wives. My wife and I--my staff prepared a map of all the trips we made during those two or three months as compared with the way Humphrey did in the '68 campaign. I was amazed how little he used the Cabinet because I thought if he'd said to the President, "Look, I want to use it the way you did in 1964." The President would have said, "Go ahead, don't use certain people." We were all over. I was in the West quite a bit, much of the time. I was, you see, most of the time in the Kennedy-Johnson Cabinets I was the only Westerner in the Cabinet. The West wasn't a particularly fruitful field for us in '60 or '68. Of course, the President with his landslide carried it well, but I participated very vigorously in it.

Of course, Mrs. Johnson and I--and that was the other thing that began to cement relations I think. She and I hit it off so well and worked together so well, with the President trusting her judgment the way he always did, I really had it made. I guess our first trip that we took together in August of 1964. She took a trip to Montana, Wyoming, Utah, listened very shrewdly. She and I went over the trip. Of course, she was feeling her way at that time. She was very very cautious in exposing herself until she was sure what was going to happen, and this was her venture of this kind. It was deliberately designed, among other things, a nice combination of low-key politics helping Senator Moss and Senator McGee in Wyoming and Utah, who were two of the most vulnerable Senators. She did the thing beautifully and I'm sure it was enormously helpful to them. Yet at the same time we were looking at national parks. We were looking at the Indians. She dedicated a dam. This was the first time when she became a public person, taking a trip in her own right and trying to communicate with the country. This first trip fortunately was one of her most successful trips. I think she came back with quite a glow and really determined at that time. I think that first trip, the way I always look back at it, help make up her mind that she wanted to carve out a career and a place of her own and do something in her own right--rather than being just a wife the way five out of six--

F: We'll get to Mrs. Johnson later; I want to ask you quite a few questions about her. But we'll do that another day. So you campaigned all through the summer and early fall of '64. Did you begin to suspect that it was going to be a landslide?

U: Yes, I thought all along--I told President Kennedy on his last Western trip in September of '63 that Goldwater would be the nominee. I, of course, being from Arizona, followed Goldwater very closely and I knew how close he was and how he had courted and cultivated the grassroots Republicans. They'd been the Taft Republicans. They'd been frustrated all this time. They were determined to have their fling and Goldwater was their man.

Again, Goldwater understood national convention politics. He understood that a lot of these people were selected well in advance. They were deeply beholden to him and they were going to have their inning. I sensed Goldwater's strength.

I remember telling Kennedy--this may sound a little bit skeptical about it but then he said to me, "Well, that would be quite a campaign, wouldn't it?"--because the lines would be drawn sharply and so on.

So it didn't surprise me when Goldwater was nominated, and it didn't surprise me either that he turned out to be such a bust as a candidate, because part of his appeal was openness and extreme candor and yet he's a shallow person essentially. He was just certain to make a lot of damn-fool mistakes and President Johnson really just toyed with him in this campaign. Johnson was savvy and he understood these issues and he really ran that campaign pretty much himself. Goldwater made about all the major mistakes that somebody can make.

I happened to be, I remember, in Denver right as the big climax of the campaign occurred--the Walter Jenkins thing--when everyone wondered, "Well, would this be very damaging?" because I'm sure the Goldwater people were just chortling because this proved all these subtle insinuations that they had been bandying about, that was one of the main themes of their campaign--something corrupting about Johnson. Yet right at that very moment--this was all spaced within two or three days if you'll remember--Khrushchev was overthrown and Harold Wilson, the Labor Government won the election. So here was sort of a climax within the campaign and I was with Palmer Hoyt in Denver, and the President of course had his lines out to everybody, his usual telephoning. Hoyt and I talked about it, he said, "Well, this washes the Walter Jenkins thing out completely." For him to stop the campaign and be President for a week or ten days, which he did. He was trying to get the President on the phone. I don't know whether he called him but I suppose others were advising Johnson that this was the thing to do and he did it. Every time Goldwater made a mistake, I mean, thinking this was an athletic contest, hell he ran for a touchdown.

Goldwater was an ideal opponent. I always thought that if he'd been nominated Kennedy would have trounced him, too, probably not as big as Johnson did, because President Johnson, as a result of the way he handled the transition and everything--his politics the first year in office, I thought this an extraordinary performance. I thought President Johnson’s first year or eighteen months had a period both politically in terms of getting the things done that he wanted to get done that he had as good a period as Franklin Roosevelt had. I think his Presidency was remarkable.

F: Did you begin this early to sense the deterioration of the national party machinery?

U: Yes, yes this was true, and this was a result of President Johnson making the national

party and the machinery and so on--as treating it as something personal. I mean, I don't think he fully appreciated--. We're all creatures of our past and he's a creature of Texas politics. That was the kind of grass roots politics that he knew. You never had strong party organization, warring clans, cross currents and everything else. You never wanted to get tied too strongly. You were maneuvering all the time.

Kennedy, of course, had some of the same characteristics. John Bailey was a figurehead all along. He was just someone who's a pro to be in there and do things, but I think Kennedy understood more than Johnson did the importance of having a more vigorous party organization as such.

Just to race on ahead a moment--I remember after the 1966 election, when we of course just got shellacked, I went over to the White House two or three days later. Again I probably should have asked to see the President but I didn't, ________ so I talked to Marvin Watson. I said, "For God's sake, you've got to get Bailey out; the President's got to have a chairman that everybody knows is his man and is close to him," and I said "Whether it's Larry O'Brien or you, or whoever the hell it is, you've got to crank up and reinvigorate the party organization." Well, nothing happened. I thought it showed at that point--because by then, you know, the President was increasing trouble. Having a vigorous well functioning organization was obviously going to be important in 1968. There was decay.

F: They needed the raise-list type who could bring them back from the debacle of '64.

U: They really need fresh leadership and I was appalled that Bailey was kept on.

F: Breaking into the narrative for a moment, why do you think Johnson kept on so many Kennedy people so long?

U: Well, that was always curious.

F: There are both pros and cons in this decision--

U: That was always a curious thing to me. Charlie Boatner on my staff, the old Fort Worth newspaper man who, of course, watched Johnson as a Texas journalist for years, and knew him extremely well. In fact, he went to work for Johnson as Vice President and came on over to my Department in the summer of '63. I made Charlie my Director of Information and he was a very good tie with me. He knew Walter Jenkins, knew all the people. It was one of the smart things I did because Charlie could do a lot of communicating with these people who were personal friends of his and the President knew him and respected his judgment on things. Charlie once said to me, and it seemed to me this was an element in it--it was the way I sized it up because I would have made a lot more changes in the Cabinet than Johnson did quite frankly--because one of the

conclusions I came to as an administrator is that some of the best things I did in running my own little Department--and a Department is not different than the government; it's a microcosm of government--was that at certain times when you're dealing with key people you've got to be ruthless. You may have a person who you're fond of, and as a person he's got very fine qualities but he's just the wrong man in the job at a particular time, or you need someone different. Charlie said to me, "Well, Johnson's never fired anybody in his life." This is probably an overstatement, but what he was saying is that Johnson wasn't ruthless, you see. Here was a reputation of ruthlessness. This was the paradox of it.

But I saw so many instances where with my Cabinet colleagues I thought he would have strengthened his hand if he had made changes. He either didn't make changes or he made the wrong kind of changes.

I personally feel, and I think the Clark Clifford experience proves it, I would have made some major changes after the 1966 election. I'd have replaced Rusk and I would have done the way old FDR used to do. I'd gird myself for the '68 campaign. I think if he had made major changes perhaps in State and Defense and some others and said, "All right, God damn, we're going to shake this thing up and some of these people are tired"--which they were.

F: You're stuck on their past.

U: Well, sure. You're like a baseball manager in a way. You know, you pat the guy on the back and say look, the seventh inning's here and we've got to have a left-hand hitter or we've got to have a new pitcher or whatever the hell it is. You've just got to be tough about it. Yet the President just clung and held on to people. I would have made a lot more Cabinet changes--needn't go into specifics at this time--than he did. I always felt this was a weakness in that he wasn't as tough and as ruthless with people as he should have been.

F: Do you think--neither one of us are two-bit psychologists--but do you think there's an element of insecurity there that makes him want to keep familiar faces around?

U: I think that was an element of it too. Let me give you an example, and I'm going to spell it out here.

Orville Freeman is a good example. The Department of Agriculture job in the period of the 1960's is a miserable job.

F: It's a loser.

U: It's a loser. Nobody could have done it successfully. They made the farmers mad. So what should you have done about '66? Get a new Agriculture Secretary see. This would

be political in part, but you're getting someone to create a new image and he could try to rub everybody the right way and at least get a feeling that a fresh effort was being made. You know, he probably wouldn't have been a person as successful as Freeman but you have done it for political reasons. You could give Freeman, if he wanted it, a good assignment somewhere else.

I would have even have done like FDR did, shift people around in the Cabinet--some of them perhaps--you know, the way he used to do with Wallace and Harriman and others--move people around rather than keeping them in one slot. I think it betrayed him ultimately on Viet Nam--in that he had this team and they all hung together and there was never a fresh face that came in that wasn't responsible for all the decisions. I think that was one of the things that Clark Clifford was able to do. He could say, "Well, I'm not tied to the past; I'm going to start fresh right now, so here's what I find, and here's where I began and so on." Boy, I would have replaced several of them, particularly the State-Defense team. I think they were tired and they were so tied--

F: Embattled, really.

U: Yes. Embattled, that you just make a change, that's all.

F: When did you decide that you were going to stay on as Secretary of Interior and quit being "that Kennedy man in the Johnson Cabinet"? Is that something you began to feel?

U: No, really, Joe, that was an easy one for me because the Department I had with its focus, as I say, we had a big climax year. That's another thing I should have mentioned in 1964. This was beautiful in terms of the country and politics of it because the President signed these bills all at the same time. We had the Wilderness Bill--which we'd been fighting over for ten years--came to a climax and that was passed. We passed the Conservation Fund which was going to plow one hundred million dollars, which was pennies, but I mean it was a hell of a lot more than we had, into a national effort to save park lands, open space, and the outdoors. Well, there was a whole group of bills that were passed in the late summer and fall. I can just describe it as a jackpot. It just came gushing out. It said to the country, "Look we're going to do some things."

So then my work had begun to come to fruition. I had my own team going and I really stayed on the last three or four years because I felt I had the best job in the Cabinet and that I could see the significant accomplishment was taking place. And we were all having the exciting experience of feeling, rightly or wrongly--I used to talk to the President about this--that we were changing the goals in the country, changing the feeling in the country about the American environment and feeling that I really had a strong team and was charging down the track. I almost felt I owed it to the country as well as to myself to stay on as long as the President wanted me to stay on. Success led to success and I really had the feeling that we were one of the Departments that was establishing a

pretty clear-cut image in the mind of the country and that we were a plus, you know, that we were regarded--whether you want to measure politically or measure by what we were doing--that this came up on the plus side. This was a very creative period to be there, and it would have been almost a betrayal of everything I believed in to want to get out of government and seek personal advantage of some kind.

Of course, as it went along the President appreciated this. He appreciated what we were doing. Mrs. Johnson's involvement in some of it helped, but I suspect when he looked around the Cabinet table he thought, "Well, they're doing positive things; they're working hard and seem to be getting things done."

You know the President never did call you in. I think probably it would have been a good thing to do because psychologically you need the confidence you get. I felt I had his confidence of this all along but I think I would after the '64 election have called everyone in individually in the Cabinet, had a half-hour talk or visit with them and said, "Look, you're doing well, but I think we've got to make more of an effort here or there and so on." But I had talks with him at various times, usually sort of casual, which is good. He was following the main line of action that we had underway. He was very good in that period of '64, '65, ‘66, particularly before the budget crunch got on. He wanted new programs. He wanted to be innovative. His ideal was Franklin D. Roosevelt. Of course, I knew that and I played the comparison by way of showing him what we could do and kept talking about this is the third wave of the conservation movement we have underway here.

They were eager for us to come up with new ideas. Of course, I had a lot of new ideas, like the Wild Rivers Bill, which is I think a concept as important as the Wilderness Bill. I came up with it and he put in his State of the Union Message in 1965. It took us three-and-a-half years to get it but he wanted to get out front with it, get going on it. He was responsive. There was a rapport there that I'm sure other Cabinet members didn't have in that he had an instinctive feeling--because of Johnson's rural background, his involvement in the New Deal Conservation programs sort of--this was in his veins. He thought about the land a lot the way Roosevelt did. Roosevelt was his idol and you could come up with a good idea and say, "This is good for the land and good for the people,” he bought it.

I lost few arguments with him; it's hard for me to think of something--other than budgetary matters--where I said, "Look, here's an idea for a new program or a new policy.” He was very receptive.

F: As far as Interior was concerned, you could generalize and say that Mr. Johnson as President was not really representing a culmination of the New Deal but actively supporting his own program in company with you?

U: Well, Joe, ten years from now historians can toy with this and see. I think that we broke some new ground. That's all I'll say. It's my judgment and the record is there, but I think there's a new attitude and consciousness. You know, after all, what a President does, what the Secretary of the Interior does, you're orchestrating what's happening anyway and maybe you can--the question of leadership is both responding to the country and making the country respond to you. You play it back both ways.

F: You did get the feeling you were evolving something, not merely wrapping up a package.

U: No. No, we were breaking new ground. We were coming up with new ideas. We were helping the country reshape its goals in terms of the American environment and Mrs. Johnson's thing was part of this. I think the country understood this and I think this is really what resulted in the fight over Hickle my successor. He appeared to want to turn the clock back and, by God, the people weren't going to let him.

They all say, they compared Interior in the 1960's, my Department, with Ickes. Funny thing, Ickes was a very colorful person but if you ask somebody what did Ickes do? What policies did he initiate--and it's a good question for the historian. I haven't studied that period myself. But I don't think, aside from soil conservation and dust bowl--this is a very obvious thing that you had to do--the CCC program, of course Ickes didn't initiate that, Roosevelt did himself. In fact, the solid conservation things in the Department of Agriculture if you look to the Interior Department, what initiative they were providing, new ideas and so on, I don't think the '30's compare with the '60's.

F: Has the Department of Interior, in a sense moved eastward under you and President Johnson? I get that feeling.

U: Well, I felt--

F: Well, wasn't there a concept for a long time that it was primarily a trans-Mississippi Department, the Department of the West?

U: Most of the years in this century Interior was thought of as a western Department, western lands, the Indians, the national parks and so on. Yet, I think one of the important things we did--the Hickle appointment [set] us back on this--is to give the Department a national image and a national role. I courted and had many contacts with all of the groups that were fighting--some of these urban and suburban--conservations fights in the east as in the west. And the Department, because of things like we were doing with national seashores and wild life--one of the most important things the President did as a vote of confidence in me was to buy my recommendation that water pollution be transferred from HEW in 1966. This was done. This gave us contact with every state and every community in the country.

I think Interior had a visibility and people had a feeling about it all over the United States. It really became a national Department, which it must be. We have to have a Department of Conservation or Department of the Environment and I think we made a very strong move in this direction. Now whether this is reversed remains to be seen, I don't think it will. I think the Department has a truly national role and a national function. I think this ought to be enlarged. I'm going to testify next week with Senator Jackson's committee on some of my views with regard to the future. I think you have to have a National Department of Conversation or the Environment--call it what you will. It has to be thinking for the whole country, not just for a section of the country.

So, if to an extent, we ended a sectional attitude of the Department--the Department itself you see, a lot of its attitudes in the bureaus and so on, they were looking at their own thing. They were concentrating on the traditional way of doing, business and one of the things that we tried to inspire them to do, and I think we did this. If you look at these four yearbooks that we turned out, this was one of our real accomplishments. We began communicating with the country and we began making all of our people in the Department, and this was exciting for them, think for the country as a whole and talk about the country as a whole, not just talk about building dams in the West or something like that.

F: The development of the concern with pollution in the Department of the Interior is a product of these years of the '60's, is it not?

U: Well, Joe, when I look back at the 1960 campaign, for example, and the things that Kennedy talked about, most of the things we did in the 1960's were--if they were talked about at all--were very minor notes. Of course our country, air pollution, water pollution, we were getting dirtier and filthier all the time during this whole century. In the 1950's you know Eisenhower--one of his last acts in 1960 was to veto a water pollution bill on the basis that this was something the states ought to do, the local community, the federal government ought not to play a role. Kennedy, in a speech or two, mentioned in a very casual way water pollution. His whole theme in the west--and that was the way again he came to the Presidency--was a kind of a Johnny-one-note thing that I thought later looking back on was unfortunate. I was one of his advisers. I'd shaped his campaign. His appeal was he was going to reverse the no-new starts policy of the Eisenhower Administration. Well, this was building dams. He wasn't talking about it--to show you how far we've come in eight years, nine years. He was appealing to the West by saying you elect me President, we'll build more dams.

But to talk about what we now have evolved as the environment, as the American environment, what kind of cities do we want to build, and clearing up the countryside, cleaning up air and water, this began to evolve under Kennedy. I don't want to attempt to allocate the credit between the two men, but this was evolving. It was developing. They were moving toward it. I personally think there would have been a culmination under

President Kennedy, but I think a very good culmination came under President Johnson. These laws that were passed on air pollution and water pollution, I think we'll look back upon as laying the basic foundation of national action in these fields. And setting out new goals, you know, that we can clean up our rivers and we're going to pass the laws that are necessary.

You know, we still haven't put up the money. There's an organizing effort to do and this is going to be tough business but I think they'll look back at the 1960's and say, "Well this was the period where we became aware that we're making a mess out of the country; we decided to clean things up; we decided to develop new attitudes and approaches toward the American environment." As I say, Johnson was very receptive and very good on these things. If you could come in with a water pollution bill or an air pollution bill, well, let's go, gung-ho. And you know, industry and government--it came through loud and clear that the President said that we were going to do this and everybody better get busy.

F: So you could talk with him on that sort of thing on a strictly man-to-man understanding basis.

U: Well, he was always receptive. You didn't have to go in and argue and convince him on something like this. Basically his instincts were very good, as I say, the instincts of a rural person who has a feeling for the land and who came up through the New Deal really was that Roosevelt with the country flat on its back, said "Well, let's start rebuilding," and you started with the land, building dams and soil erosion, replanting forests. It was a great concept.

F: How did you happen to get in on this Job Corps bit, in which they're using people on park projects?

U: Well, I was disappointed--

F: Originally this would have been a straight HEW.

U: Yes. Well, I was a supporter all along and pushed very hard for the Youth Conservation Corps idea. I mean maybe in retrospect we were a little bit sentimental, maybe the way that OEO went on this was right with these urban orientations, but the idea that a lot of us had was that we could do again, maybe more successfully, what Roosevelt did with the CCC camps. You know, take the city kids out in the country and have them working with their hands, doing a lot of work of this kind. The Job Corps became--the way OEO administered it--Shriver and these people--I had a big fight with Shriver and these people one time. They didn't want, to call the Job Corps Conservation camps. They were going to call them Job Corps Rural Centers. With most of them being these urban centers where you're really teaching kids a trade. Now, maybe they were right, I'm not sure on that, but

they didn't even want to use the word conservation.

I finally told them, "Well, that's what I was going to call it, as far as my Department was concerned and if they didn't want to we'd go argue with the President about it." Well, they gave in at that point. We ended up with a rather modest program and I think in retrospect, although they did it in such a way that was unnecessarily costly, that this is one of the most successful parts of the program because these urban kids and ghetto kids and deprived kids, there's no better experience for any man than to get in the out-of-doors and get acquainted with how you do things with your hands. You have a feeling you're building things. All you had to do is go and see these kids and the pride they'd take and there's something visible there they've done--build a wall or cleaned out a forest or whatever it is.

F: Go back to the Cabinet for a moment. Did you feel a mounting tension between the President and Bobby Kennedy?

C: Well, are you talking about '64 or are you talking about the whole period?

Joe, I wasn't a party to their conflicts, but there was always something strained. I was close to Bobby Kennedy, you understand that. I think Bob McNamara and I were the two in the Cabinet who were closest to Bobby Kennedy. I had a personal friendship with him, with Ethel, with them. We made a couple of trips, family trips, with them and that sort of thing. This always to me--saddened me to see this distrust that existed.

But there was always tension in the air between those two even after President Kennedy's death, that period of time. You never sensed any warmth, and not knowing the whole history of it--and you could feel then later when Senator Kennedy became a Senator that President Johnson certainly interpreted many of his moves as being designed to undermine him. In fact, their relationship was so bad you know that when I look back on it, once they had gotten off to such a bad start the things that each of them did they tended to interpret it in terms of a personal vendetta of some kind. It was really unfortunate because I watched them both closely enough, and knew them well enough, to know that there were a lot of things that they regretted that had this overlay and yet it was always there, it was always present.

And I think, you know, once Bob Kennedy began to express his reservations on Viet Nam this angered the President because he felt that he was essentially carrying on the Kennedy policy with Kennedy's advisers. Their last meeting, and that violent blowup they had. The story of that, at least as I get it, is just a sort of a summary of the whole thing, but I think the resentments were there, and it was just one of those personality clashes where apparently there was an initial distrust and it fed on itself. A sad thing.

F: When in '64, President Johnson ruled out any Cabinet members from his possible Vice

Presidential nominee, along with himself, was this discussed among the Cabinet members?

U: Oh, I think a couple of us may have talked about it on the phone. It was very clear to us this was directed against Bob Kennedy.

F: No one else really felt rueful about it except--

U: No, no. There was no feeling. In fact I think there was really a--as far as I was concerned in the certain political circles that I moved in, in and out of the Cabinet--Humphrey was very a clear nominee choice, and certainly my choice. I advised Bob Kennedy, I sent him a note oh, in June while he was still in the Cabinet, while this thing was beginning to bubble about the Vice Presidency, I urged him to run for the Senate when that was first talked about, that's another alternative. I sent him a note saying this is what he ought to do. I thought he made the right move getting out of the Cabinet because it was clear that he and Johnson weren't going to work amicably together. The thing for him to do was get out and carve out a career on his own. You know he was young enough at that point. I felt he ought to look on down the road to 1972 and build his own base.

F: The President campaigned for him in New York, was this a conciliation gesture you think, or was this just good practical politics?

U: I think it was practical politics. That was pretty clear to me, Joe. There wasn't much love lost at that time. They both had mutual interest--

F: They're both pros--

U: Sure, sure that's right. They were going through the motions. I think that was clear.

F: Can you discuss very briefly the difference in the way Presidents Kennedy and Johnson worked with the Cabinet?

U: Well, there were a lot of similarities. Of course, President Johnson as Vice President watched the way Kennedy used the Cabinet; quite frankly I faulted both of them. I would have used the Cabinet differently. I'd have used them more. I think probably because President Kennedy was ill at ease--the larger the group got, the more ill at ease he was.

F: He was basically shy.

U: Well, he liked to work in intimate groups. Small groups. President Johnson had some of that in him. In fact you know with his penchant for secrecy the larger the group the more danger the leak. So there was always this wariness you see. You wondered sometimes when you went to Cabinet meetings why they had them. Douglas Dillon would brief you on the balance of payments situation. Rusk and McNamara would tell you about Viet

Nam and the only purpose of the Cabinet as a whole is to discuss of common interest and things of importance and for the President to give general directives and perhaps to invite and encourage general discussions.

Now I thought myself, when the cities began to blow up and all this tension built, if it were me as President--you know when the President had his Tuesday lunch every week and this was discussing Viet Nam--I'd have put together a group on the domestic side and had a Thursday lunch about the internal problems in the country. I think the President might have put John Gardner in charge of that and kept him in the Cabinet, you know.

I don't think either of the Presidents that I worked with really made the Cabinet as versatile an instrument as it could be. I don't think it just has to be these men sitting at the table. There are different groupings that you could fall in. You could do ad hoc things with the Cabinet. You can communicate. I also think because the Cabinet is a group, it's also individuals--and there was the method both of them adopted in the way they ran their offices. I mean you could see the President on something--a major decision coming up where you wanted to see, for certain purposes, you wanted to take certain people in--that gets institutionalized too.

I would think one of the best things that President Johnson did was that year after the election he had us all down to the ranch. We went casually under these circumstances to discuss budget usually. You'd talk to him too about what your new program for the new year was, what your hopes were, and all this sort of thing. But we didn't do it again in a systematic way.

I'd want to sit down with each of my Cabinet officers at least once a year, leisurely time, for an hour or two and so on and say, "Well, give me your thoughts," so that you understood, using them as a pair of eyes, what they sense are their own responsibilities that we ought to be doing that we aren't doing." What are your hopes for the future and, well, as to not make them specialists. I think Cabinet members at their best can think for the country, not just talk about their own Department.

Well, this is really the kind of second guessing because the President on Viet Nam he had this normal little group. I think back in '65 and '66 he might have talked with more people. Of course, some of the close advisers and he didn't want to talk to some of us in the Cabinet. He was talking to Clark Clifford and Abe Fortas and these other people. That was him. He wanted to talk to the people he trusted most and if there's somebody whose judgment you don't particularly value on a given issue naturally you're not going to consult them. But the thing that I don't think either President fully realized, on the basis of my experience, is that the Cabinet officer is not simply someone over there running a Department, he’s getting out around the country. If he's at all a good politician, or just got good sensitivity, he's got a feel for some of the things that are going on--

F: He's got a different vantage point from an elected official.

U: That's right and moments in the Cabinet meetings of both Presidents I worked with were when usually something bobbed up that wasn't on one of these stiff little agendas. You got into a discussion and the President would go around the table and say, "Well what do you think?" And if you don't have people whose judgment you trust enough that you can't say, "What do you think?" and they're just somebody that's running a Department, as they would say, I don't think you're getting the full potential out of a Cabinet. Johnson was a little more inclined to say go around the table on a what-do-you-think basis, but I tend to fault both of them.

F: When he asked what you thought, were people in your judgment, fairly candid?

U: Well, that again is an important element of using the advice of anybody. That's where a President's personality, his preferences, comes in. Does he want you to be blunt and brutal and candid with him only in private, just man-to-man, or is he interested in having a slugging match with his Cabinet? Now they both kind of adopted the idea, which FDR didn't have, that a Cabinet argument was a bad thing. Well, maybe a good bloody show along national priorities or something with the Cabinet--and maybe even it spills out into the newspaper--maybe that's not necessarily a good thing, but Kennedy started with this kind of orderly, highly structured Cabinet meeting and Johnson kept to it pretty much. Too much so.

F: One thing I always thought Roosevelt was a genius was getting people at each others throats and reconciling it.

U: That's right. To bring out differences rather than submerge them, you see. And this I think was one of their limitations on the use of the Cabinet.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]