

LBJ AND THE GREAT SOCIETY

Interview #11

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RITCHIE: We talked about the 1960s, but only from the perspective of the Central Arizona Project. I wondered if we could go back today and talk about the Great Society and Johnson as president. You had worked with Johnson when he was a senator, and had seen him as a vice president. Could you give me your impressions of him when he became president of the United States?

ELSON: Well, my impression of him, coming in under the circumstances that he did, I really thought he handled himself beautifully under the circumstances—and also very calculatingly exploited the situation to advance a lot of legislation. When you look back at that period, his timing was perfect. He knew what he wanted to get done and he put all of his persuasive powers behind that, and moved things that could not have been moved without the assassination. That made possible a lot of legislation, I think, that would probably have difficulty running. But using the momentum of the assassination, and the feeling for Kennedy, it moved things right along. I think part of the tragedy, though, was with the administration of some of the programs, like always. As Carl Hayden used to say, you can make a law that is "horse-high and hog-tight," but unless you have good administrators, who are good at carrying out the legislative intent, it's not worth the piece of paper it's written on. Some of the programs I don't think were funded adequately. That happens all the time.

But I felt that Johnson succeeded. Look at the civil rights legislation and some of the other Great Society legislation. I had a lot of personal experience with community action programs—what did they call that? They would fund local projects. I helped a couple of communities, and I'm still known in some of these little Mexican communities out home, and in one Indian community, a Yaqui village in Guadalupe, near Phoenix. I worked with them in a lot of programs under some of the legislation that was enacted during the mid-'60s. They tried to dismantle all those programs now, but what the hell was its name?

RITCHIE: There was the Office of Economic Opportunity, there were the regional authorities, but there was a community action program.

ELSON: Yeah, it wasn't VISTA. Gosh, that's awful that I can't remember. Anyhow, my impressions of Johnson; I think I was critical in one of my earlier interviews that I think he might have done better had he moved on some of the Kennedy people that were not necessarily loyal to him. You can understand that, but I think that he would have probably been better off and had better advice, particularly as Vietnam kept unfolding, had he had some of his own advisors around who might have cautioned him about the drawbacks of getting us deeper and deeper involved. As everyone knows, that's the thing that will probably prevent him from being one of the great presidents, in the sense of being blind to what was going on over there. You could get into a lot of history when you talk about who started all that. Of course, it goes all the way back to Eisenhower, back to '54 as I recall, when we first sent advisers over there.

I think I said he was a better leader than president, but they're two different things altogether. I marveled at his skill as a leader, but I also thought he was a hell of a president.

RITCHIE: Would you say in some respects that he was sort of the ultimate majority leader as president? Was he still trying to run the Senate from the White House?

ELSON: In a sense I think he was. Of course, you had Mansfield here as leader, and with his different approach to things Lyndon got away with a lot of things that I think he might not have under a different type of leadership. But, yeah, he didn't forget what he had learned up here. Again, he could rely on a lot of those old chairmen. He knew them as well as anyone. I think he had a great advantage, just knowing the Hill made it much easier for him as a president to get things done, because he knew the game as well as anyone on Capitol Hill, and he used those skills. I think that whole background of being the leader really helped him accomplish the many things that he did accomplish in the legislative field. Then, together with exploiting the feelings for Jack Kennedy, and in a good way—I'm not speaking derogatorily at all,

about either one of them. He just knew the emotion of the country and how to use that to help him move along his program.

For instance, he knew he could always go to Carl Hayden, or Dick Russell, and some of those, and Maggie, and Scoop and all of them. He could put together quite a little combination. Of course, [Everett] Dirksen was around. He was probably in the best position of any president, certainly since Truman, to move things along. When you think about the two, it didn't dawn on me until now thinking about the two, the way they both got in the White House, it's sort of interesting the way they became very strong presidents and used their legislative skills very well. Lyndon was a master. He was exceptional. And I think a hell of a president, except for Vietnam.

I remember getting so irritated, because we would get all the briefings, the senator would get all the briefings on the progress of the war. He was on the watchdog committee and all that. And you'd hear Dean Rusk give you the same old treatment, and from the State Department and the Department of Defense, about how everything was going well. Then you'd talk to others and you knew that wasn't quite right. And yet when you raised the issue, you were overwhelmed with statistics, and figures, and body counts, and all the other things. Then you were never quite sure of the cost, what was all going into it. But Lyndon knew that he could get the type of support from an appropriations standpoint that he needed. I remember well the juggling they did to try to keep the budget under a hundred billion dollars, that was about '65 or '66, and then of course the next year they broke that. They did some "original" bookkeeping to stay under the hundred billion, and, Jesus, what is it today? It's incredible.

The way Carl Hayden always looked at his president, whether he was a Democrat or a Republican, he was the president of the United States. Unless he felt the president was really wrong, he would give him the benefit of the doubt practically all of the time. He would support him particularly in foreign policy matters. So a president pretty much knew he could rely on Carl Hayden's support for initiatives that he wanted to undertake and funding that was needed in the international field. It was rare for him to take exception.

I remember one particular incidence, the Six Day War in the Middle East. Christ, the war hadn't been going on two days or three days, when all the Zionist organizations

were in town, from every state in the Union. There were nineteen of them from Arizona, led by a young Jewish rabbi from Tucson. The senator was smart enough to meet them in my office, so if he had to leave and go vote or something they wouldn't be in his office. The meeting later turned out to hurt me pretty much the following year in my own campaign. Everyone in the Arizona delegation had signed this letter that was being circulated to go to the president of the United States saying that the Israelis were really attacked and were just defending themselves. Carl Hayden was the only one who refused in the Arizona delegation to sign a letter like that, for several reasons. He never signed a joint letter unless it was on a regional matter. Most always he would write his own letter, maybe send it at the same time, but it was very rare for him to ever sign a letter like that. And of course, he was always going to the White House and could talk to the president personally. The senator explained to the group the reasons why he didn't want to sign a letter like that. He said, "I support the president. He has more information than I do on the whole subject. He's in instant communication around the world. I have confidence that he'll make the right decisions in this matter." He said, "I can do more by picking up the phone and letting him know my sentiments that way, or writing my own letter, but I don't like signing letters that might be used for different purposes than what they're intended." He politely explained it to them, and then the bells rang for a vote.

He excused himself and said, "Roy here knows my position as well as I know it. He'll answer any questions you want, and I'll try to get back as soon as I can." So this young rabbi jumped all over me. This was partly a result of the rumors that Carl Hayden was getting senile and I was really pulling the strings behind the scene. They figured that I could talk him into signing this letter. Well, I went through just like he did, explaining maybe in a little more detail, and giving examples where we didn't do this, and on things a lot closer to home. That didn't satisfy them. Then he started quoting President Johnson's Gulf of Aquiba speech that he had made in March of that year. It just so happened that before they came in for the meeting I had reread that speech and I had underlined all the important, salient points, and this rabbi was misquoting the president, whether deliberate or he hadn't read it, whatever, but it was not what the president had said. I listened as long as I could, and I said, "Now, wait a minute, that is not what the president of the United States said. This is what he said." And I pulled out the speech and read it to them. Well, that didn't help. He really got ticked off then at me.

I made the stupid mistake of saying, "Look, we're in the third day of the war, it's going to be over before the weekend. They sort of remind me of a bunch of piranha, they're chewing up the cow, there's not going to be anything left but bones. You're making a big issue out of something that's going to be over before you get the letter down there." Something like that is what I said. That really teed them off. Carl Hayden never did sign the letter, but he did talk to the president about the whole thing.

Well, it wasn't thirty minutes after they left our office when I got a call from our office in Tucson. Running our Tucson office was a friend of mine who I had hired, who I went to school with at the university, and he was of the Jewish faith, great guy. Name of Dave Garber. He called and said, "Roy, what have you done? What have you and the senator done? If you ever thought of running for the United States Senate again, you've wiped out any chance!" He went on and on, and I said, "Well, Dave, what did you hear?" He said, "You were rude to them, you were impolite, you insulted them." I said, "First of all, Dave, you weren't here. I don't know what they told you, but that's an inaccurate report on what actually happened at the meeting with Carl Hayden or with me." I told him what I just told you what I had done. He said, "Well, you just ruined it. What are you going to do about it?" I said, "I know what I'm going to have you do. I'm going to have you call whoever called you back and tell them if the price of their support is my blind allegiance to the state of Israel, I guess that's too bad and they can go shove it up their you know what." He said, "I can't do that!" I said, "You've got one of two choices: you can either return the phone call and do that, or you're no longer working for Carl Hayden."

Well, I saw him last summer and we laughed about that incident, but I faced a very hostile crowd both in Phoenix and Tucson the next year when I went out there, at the Jewish community center. Standing room only, and I thought I was going to get tarred and feathered at both places. But when I got through giving my explanation, about what I thought about the state of Israel and American foreign policy and our relationship, I got a standing ovation at both places. But I never got any money! [laughs]

How did we start on that? I guess I was using that as an example of the way Carl Hayden would support a president, whether he was a Republican or a Democrat. I

remember he supported Eisenhower in going into Lebanon, in the Suez, and all those things back in the '50s.

RITCHIE: Did you get any sense about Hayden felt about Vietnam, other than that he supported Johnson because he was president?

ELSON: We went over—we were supposed to go to Vietnam on one of these trips. I forget what broke out, but they said it wouldn't be such a good idea to go into Saigon at that time, so we ended up only getting briefings in Hawaii, where the headquarters were actually for fighting the war. He thought it was a mistake, as he did in Korea, I mean what [Douglas] MacArthur wanted to do, get into China, he thought that was crazy. He was concerned about the war, but he pretty much supported the president's position, I would say probably until he left. He started to have reservations, like everyone did. What changed me a lot on the war was that I brought a person in who was an expert on high level nuclear fallout, who was analyzing the B-52 bombings in Vietnam, the aerial reconnaissance and all that.

We had staff people on our personal staff as well. One fellow was working for the senator at the time, I hired him at the request of [J. William] Fulbright and [John] McClellan, because he came from Arkansas, and his father was a well-known lawyer and quite a man himself. But he was sort of wild. In fact, I let him go on a trip to Vietnam, but I didn't know he was also reporting for some radio stations back in Arkansas. He wrote a letter to Fulbright about what he saw over there that really turned Fulbright around on the war.

RITCHIE: What was this fellow's name?

ELSON: Clyde Pettit. He's the one who also wrote the book, *The Experts* [Secaucus, N.J.: 1975] about Vietnam, with all the quotations. We would always have these arguments. Like when I first ran in '64, I was pretty much a supporter of the war, and by the time '68 came around I had serious reservations about it. Of course, everyone else did too. But the arguments in our own office, and then beginning to question all the statistical information that was coming out of there, and the reports, and realizing that it was really more of a civil war. Everyone was so hung up on fighting Communism, which had been going on since the Cold War started.

I think the senator started changing his mind maybe in '65, '66, but he still helped Johnson and for the most part went along with what McNamara and Rusk and all of them were saying was going on. I never did believe [General William] Westmoreland. I first met him in '61, right after Kennedy was elected. I think it was in March of that year I went down to Puerto Rico where he was commander of the 82nd Airborne, or something. They had an operation called Porto Pine Big Slam, which was to see how rapidly they could deploy troops and move them. They brought them from all over the country down to Puerto Rico, this mass movement of troops and equipment. He was spick and polish and all that, but I didn't think he was very bright. And my opinion hasn't changed.

But I can't recall the senator not supporting the requests for funds that were needed, and the new weapons systems and everything else. But I think he had doubts, mainly because we had these arguments going on all the time in the office over the war, because of all these young people, and then the families at home who had lost sons. And you could see the war taking away from the domestic programs, because Lyndon was trying to do both without the nation going on a war footing. And the cost were astronomically high. Then I got disgusted watching some of the same people make fortunes that always make fortunes out of war, some of the construction companies and others that were really ripping off the country, building all the so-called war effort for Vietnam.

When I ran the second the time, it wasn't really much of an issue in my campaign with Barry. Of course, he had the high ground there, because he said we should have gone out to "win" and it would have all been over. Well, hindsight's wonderful.

RITCHIE: In the '60s, there was pressure for guns and butter, and the Appropriations Committee was really on the firing line, because it was supposed to appropriate money beyond everybody's expectation on both ends. You had all these social programs, but you also had the war.

ELSON: Well, and then of course with the social programs you started getting a lot of the backdoor financing of the programs, where they bypassed the Appropriations Committee. It was tough, but with the way the economy was booming as a result of the war effort, the revenues were coming in. They weren't balancing the

budget, but at least the project was we were borrowing from ourselves, not like we're doing now from the rest of the world.

RITCHIE: Johnson did impose a ten percent surcharge.

ELSON: Yeah. And I think it really became a great concern, because the social programs that had been enacted, as I said earlier, weren't getting the funding that they needed to carry out what they really hoped to accomplish, you know, Head Start and all of them, which really would have had a profound affect had they been funded properly, and would still be doing good things had they received the proper funding. Particularly when Johnson was there and had that legacy of the Kennedy-Johnson feeling, I think you would have seen the Great Society be a success, rather than a partial one. That is a result of the damn war and his misjudgment and miscalculations on that.

RITCHIE: It's pretty remarkable, looking back, that the Senate gave Johnson just about everything that he wanted during that period, both the programs and the money.

ELSON: And the money, yeah. I'm trying to think where they turned him down.

RITCHIE: The only thing was "right to work," 14 (b).

ELSON: Well, yeah, 14 (b). I don't think he put all his talents to work on that one. Did I tell you how 14 (b) got into Taft-Hartley? Like a number of things there were no hearings on that. It came out of the conference. There was no legislative history. It can only be found in the conference report. I remember doing research on that for the senator's '56 campaign, because Arizona is a "right to work" state, and how it actually got in there. They didn't even have a vote on it in the conference, it was just sort of written in by whoever was writing the conference report. The senator had seen that happen before on some other pieces of legislation, where some staff person wrote in some things that no one had known about, including the Indian Claims Commission, with aboriginal titles, he still thinks that in that case one of the law firms here in town got to one of the clerks.

But 14 (b) would be one. He was doing that for labor, but I don't think he cared that much about it.

RITCHIE: In the House, on the other hand, he had more trouble. In '67 the House tried to cut appropriations significantly, ten percent, and there was a big fight between the House and Senate over the continuing resolution. But the Senate gave him just about anything he wanted.

ELSON: Oh, yeah. I give Carl Hayden a lot of credit for that. I don't say it was just because of Lyndon. I think he would have done it if it had been Kennedy, or Eisenhower, or any of the others.

RITCHIE: How frequently did Hayden deal with Johnson in those days?

ELSON: Oh, see the senator would never socialize very much. When he was invited to the White House he would put on his tuxedo and go there occasionally for dinners, a state dinner or something like that. Most of the time he'd be invited down as part of the leadership, so he'd go on a regular basis. Then, when he wanted to see him if it was something that was really important, he would pick up the phone and say, "I want to see you, Lyndon."

Of course, the White House had good liaison. I think old Mike Manatos covered our office practically on a daily basis, or every other day. So I would say at least once a week he would see the president. And if it was anything else he would just pick up the phone and say, "I want to see the president." I never knew him to be turned down, but that wasn't that often. If he had to see him he would pick up the phone or just go down there, jump in his limousine and go trotting down. That would be particularly true from after the assassination up through '66—and up to the end, meaning his retirement.

But the other committee members, like Russell, the senator listened to Russell a lot on military stuff, without question. There was such a closeness there between the two men. They thought pretty much alike, so Johnson knew he didn't have any real problems there. He probably wasn't going down there as much as he should have.

RITCHIE: Or as much as you would have liked him to have gone.

ELSON: Yeah.

RITCHIE: Other than the Central Arizona Project, were there things that Hayden was looking to get from Johnson at that stage?

ELSON: Well, at that stage. . . .

RITCHIE: Had you settled your patronage disputes with Udall?

ELSON: Certainly by that time, because we had not only taken care of all the Kennedy supporters in Arizona, that were key members of the Arizona delegation that went for Kennedy, but we also then were able to do some things like. . . for instance, the senator never had a judicial nomination up until Kennedy. That was the first one. We caught a lot of hell on that one. There was a vacancy, a judge had retired, and we named Arthur Davis, who was actually a distant cousin of the senator, I think to the seventh degree of sanguinity, or whatever you call it. Stewart Udall raised so much hell with me because he wanted someone else, or his brother, Mo, or any number of people other than the one we named. He knew that Arthur Davis was a very fine attorney, but he looked at him as really a Pinto Democrat, a very conservative Democrat. What Stewart didn't understand, and I couldn't tell him—he didn't know, and he didn't [expletive] to Carl Hayden, he [expletive] directly to me, he really chewed me out—was that Arthur Davis was terminal. He only had about a year to live. He had cancer. He became a judge, and was a good judge, but only for a year. Then we got another judgeship in Arizona, so there were actually two vacancies coming up.

This is where again I had to marvel at Carl Hayden. We named the former head of the American Bar Association as the next judge, and I caught hell on that again. Not the senator, but I was blamed for it, for this new vacancy. Stewart at that time was supporting Bill Mahoney, who was a good Kennedy man, a good Irishman and all that. The senator had known his father, and knew Bill, but when Bill came in to see him, the senator told him to his face, he said, "Bill, you'd make a [expletive] judge. You have a lousy judicial temperament." But he said, "You would make a superb ambassador," and he picked up the phone and called Kennedy and Bill went to Ghana. We didn't tell Stewart

that, and Stewart really got irritated because we had taken care of Bill, but not the way he wanted him taken care of. Wally Craig was that second judgeship that he named. He also served on the Warren Commission, Wally Craig did when he was president of the American Bar Association. We didn't think we could be criticized too much for putting him on, though we did among the liberal, or the Udall faction.

Then all of a sudden we had two more judgeships come up. One in which he called up Jim Eastland, because he was a labor lawyer. And then another Kennedy appointment. Anyhow, getting back to your question, we had pretty much taken care of all the patronage problems at that time. The senator still had his interests in all sorts of Interior matters, parks and forests and agriculture matters. I think I told you that from the early '50s to 1965 we helped write most of the cotton legislation, with [John] Stennis' office and Eastland's. So he still had all these other interests, highways were always dear to his heart. He was always interested in the military.

I think he was more interested in the troops and the welfare of the troops than he was in the actual weapons systems. I would watch him when we went out to look over Arizona bases, or any other places we went, he was always more interested in their facilities and how the men were being taken care of than in the equipment. He was more interested in their well-being than in their weapon systems, particularly as they got more and more sophisticated. He was concerned about the training required to operate the stuff. But he was also very supportive of the space program, fascinated by it. You know for an old man he had these incredibly young ideas, and could visualize, and knew how much time it took until it would eventually get there. He had all this faith in our being able to do it. But I can't think of anything that he really wanted badly at that time, in the late '60s, outside of getting the Central Arizona Project.

RITCHIE: One bill that he did introduce at that point was about newspapers

ELSON: Oh, God, yes! The Newspaper Preservation Act? Well, we started that whole thing. That's pretty funny. That happened after the '62 election. The Justice Department had gone and used as a test case Tucson, Arizona, in the *Arizona Star* and *Citizen* because they had a joint operating agreement. The *Citizen* was really concerned. Bill Small, the old man, and his son, were very much concerned, but they

were also very big Republicans and they thought that since they never quite supported Carl Hayden that he wouldn't talk to them about their problems. So Pulliam, who also owned two papers there, it was joint operating but not quite the same operation—and by this time I had become quite friendly with Mr. Pulliam—he called me and said, "Would you come out and look into this situation, and see if the senator would consider dealing with it?" I said, "Sure." So on one of my trips out there I met with Mr. Pulliam and he explained it, and then I went down to Tucson and met with the owners of both of those newspapers. Then we met with the attorneys for a number of the groups.

It was the most frustrating experience I think I have ever had on legislation, working with them trying to come up with the language. We had the Legislative Counsel draft some language initially. It took us thirteen months to get some of these people to agree, and I remember at one big meeting down at, what's the club next to the Russian embassy, on Sixteenth?

RITCHIE: The University Club.

ELSON: The University Club, big meeting there. Old General Hansen represented National Geographic. His father was quite a guy, but the son was a little short guy, was a Marine Corps brigadier general, and thought his [expletive] smelled good. I had more problems with him. We argued over just the name of the bill. Finally I said, "We're just going to put in a bill and try to get something moving." Finally we did. The old senator, after I explained it to it, he thought that they had a good case, not the way it eventually worked out, which they've used for tax gimmicks and everything else, and some of them weren't really family newspapers like in the Tucson situation.

I remember going around the country, and I sent some staff people around the country, a guy by the name of Chuck Zuver who was working for us then, I assigned him almost totally to that piece of legislation. Then we took one of the staff people, Bloom, who used to be on the antitrust subcommittee, practices law now downtown. We took him out to Arizona to meet with Pulliam and the people out there. Then we went to the various other operating places, San Francisco, Denver, I forget all the cities involved, Detroit. We went and looked at every operating place. I didn't go on all those, I went on a couple of them. Certainly I took him out to Arizona. I went to Phil

Hart, of course, who was chairman of that antitrust subcommittee. As you knew around here, nothing ever happened on the antitrust committee. They just held lots of hearings, but I can't recall very much legislation ever coming out of there the time I was around here. Of course, Phil Hart was such a gentleman.

But it was just frustrating as hell working with all the owners. Finally, we got Hart to hold some hearings. I guess it was '68 we almost got the bill out of committee. I had never seen Senator Hayden, or heard of any senator doing this, it just shocked the hell out of me. I'm glad you reminded me of Failing Newspaper Act which became the Newspaper Preservation Act. But I remember they were supposed to mark-up the bill. Christ, we were working. I had that one staff person working full time on it. And every time there was supposedly going to be a mark-up of the subcommittee, I think there were only five senators on the subcommittee, they could never get a quorum. This got very frustrating, and every time we'd think they were going to mark-up the bill, someone wasn't there, or they couldn't get there. This went on for a long time. Finally, one was scheduled. Carl Hayden went there and made them get a quorum [laughs]. If anyone had tried doing that to him in his committee! And Phil Hart got a quorum [laughs]. I had never seen anything like it. He just sat there, "You played around with me long enough, I want this bill marked-up." And he sat there while they worked on the bill. I think they reported it out of the subcommittee, but it sort of died there because he could never get it through the full committee, as I recall.

That was the beginning of it, and then other people took over. We had worked on it for a couple of years. As I said, it took thirteen months just working on getting a draft that people could live with. Then we pretty much went back to the one the Legislative Counsel drafted, for the most part. We must have argued for a month over the name of the damn bill. I was criticized heavily because we called it the Failing Newspaper Act, when we first put it in. Who the hell gives a [expletive] about the title of a bill? Eventually it was changed to the Newspaper Preservation Act. But what it was, or what we thought we were trying to do, was really prevent these multiple ownerships and retain local ownership, which hasn't turned out to be the case. They've used the act a lot differently than we ever envisioned, and even Mr. Pulliam envisioned. He never saw it as a way for groups to play games. I haven't seen it preserve too many newspapers, tragically.

RITCHIE: There are far fewer now, especially the afternoon papers.

ELSON: Oh, yeah, so it never served the purpose that we originally thought it would. The senator—it was interesting, I thought I was going to have a hell of a time convincing him of whether this was worthy of his putting in the effort. After I had explained the pros and cons to him he didn't hesitate one bit, and I know it didn't have anything to do with Mr. Pulliam. He knew Bill Small, because we always went in to see the editor of the paper, and Bill Matthews who had been a journalist for many, many years. He wrote on everything and thought he was an international expert. Bill was sort of getting senile at that point, and I think had sold out at that point, that was the morning paper, the *Arizona Daily Star*. But when Carl Hayden got behind it, he really got interested in it. I was amazed. He was always asking, "What progress have you made?" He'd lobby the Judiciary Committee, he'd talk to everyone on there, and he made that unprecedented visit to the mark-up. Have you ever heard of someone doing anything like that? [laughs] I couldn't believe it. But I know he would have been very disappointed the way it developed. He thought we could write something that would preserve some local ownership, but now outside of the Pulliam-owned papers in Phoenix, they're all owned by chains. It's sad, really sad.

RITCHIE: Given Hayden's power and position by that stage, did you have problems with people coming to you constantly wanting Hayden's support for this or that?

ELSON: Oh, yeah, sure.

RITCHIE: I would think if they could get him on their bandwagon, that would be a tremendous asset.

ELSON: That happened the whole time I was with him, because when I first came he had oodles of power. But he was very reluctant to cosponsor a bill. He might add his support to it, but he would do it in his way. He wouldn't necessarily cosponsor it. Let me put it this way, if he cosponsored a piece of legislation, you knew damn well he was going to get behind it, if his name was on it. Except, for instance, I remember he used to put in every Congress a resolution which went to the Rules Committee, and I wish he had pushed it, that before you could name any public place, structure,

anything, the person for whom you were naming it had to be dead for at least fifty years, so history could get a better perspective on them. Then we cut it back to twenty-five years, but I still think to this day I wish he had put his weight behind it, because he did believe in that, that we would have enacted something like that, that no public facility or land could be named after any one single person until they had been dead for at least fifty years. I think that would have helped a lot. It would certainly have made your business a lot more interesting.

But, yes, they came around a lot, and we would go on certain pieces of legislation surprisingly, in various areas. Or someone else might be the head sponsor of the legislation and he would then get behind it, write letters, bring it up in various ways, testify, there were a lot of things. There was something when the John Birchers were in evident in the early '60s, we got involved in it. What was that constitutional amendment—they wanted to sell all the government property—what the hell was it? I know we put out a pamphlet on it, and I appeared on a couple of radio shows in the Mid-West, taking on John Birchers. Well, let me think about that one.

But we had lobbyists coming in all the time. People used to tell me that they'd come into the office and they'd see generals and subcabinet members sitting around waiting to see me. Apparently I didn't give them quite the attention they thought they deserved. I don't think I did it deliberately, but you're so damn busy and so many people wanted to see the senator. The interesting thing about Carl Hayden was that anyone could see him. He was probably the easiest person in the world to talk to. They could go in, reporters the same way, but it was amazing the lack of print that ever followed those visits. But anyone could get in to see him, there was a pretty open door. Of course, it depended on time constraints, and when there was anything that had to be decided, and they wanted to appeal to him personally, he always had time for them, and we'd make sure they got in to see him. Lobbyists, it didn't matter who they were. I've seen him on some occasions throw out some lobbyists that were asking for ridiculous things, that he thought were not only a little improper but a little unethical.

RITCHIE: I was going to ask if you had any criteria, or you just worked with everybody on an individual basis?

ELSON: Normally it would be related to something in which he had an interest, or that he should have an interest, and it would cover a broad economic spectrum. I know we got involved in some communication matters. That would be about 1956, '57, we lost to Bob Kerr who was helping the cable people. Again the test case was Yuma, Arizona, where there was only one television station and they were getting wiped out because all the programming was coming in on cable from Phoenix and LA. It was just wiping out that little station. I remember [John] Pastore pointing his finger up at the lobbyists—I think we lost by two votes, but I know we really got involved in that because it was home, and this one particular little station was being wiped out—and Pastore looking up at the gallery and pointing at the lobbyists for the cable people said, "You'll rue the day you won this battle. You'll come begging on your knees to be regulated!" Oh, it was a fun fight.

I was thinking about that when we talked about this earlier, about that incident, because right after that fight one of the guys who was working for Bob Kerr was a guy by the name of Bill Reynolds, so we were always exchanging our vote count. He said, "I got you by two." I said, "No, you don't"—but I knew he did [laughs]. The truth of the matter is, neither one of us knew for sure. But I was pretty sure we weren't going to win it. It was not because we didn't work on it. But after that we were over at the Carroll Arms drinking together and sort of going over all the various strategies we had used and where we fell apart, or where they won it, and how. That's the type of camaraderie that I was referring to back in one of our early interviews. We'd get involved in things like that. It seemed to me we were into every possible subject there was, or anything that was going on Capitol Hill, we were involved in some way, not just voting or anything like that. Of course, the senator really believed in the committee system, and seniority, and would back a chairman when he reported out a bill, and he would listen pretty much to the chairman or the sponsor of the bill. Then, for instance, things that you don't know about him, we'd get involved in all the Capitol stuff, the extension of the east and the west fronts, you name it.

RITCHIE: I wanted to ask you about that. He was president pro tempore, he was chairman of the Appropriations Committee, he was on the Rules Committee, and you had mentioned earlier that he had a lot to do with even the shape of the building.

ELSON: Oh, yeah, and he and Sam Rayburn were such close buddies that the two of them decided what the hell was going to happen with the building and that was it. I remember the great debate with Paul Douglas, one of the funnier things. The great debate was on the extension of the east front. Douglas had been going on for a day, and he had all his charts about what a damage and sacrilege this was, and he was going on and on, and the galleries were full. Carl Hayden always sat in the back, though he was entitled to sit up next to the majority leader by seniority, but he always sat in that second-to-back row so he could get in and out, and right there in the center. And Douglas was in the back there with all his charts, making this great speech summing up his opposition to all this.

About this time the senator walks in, and he's got a cigar in his mouth. He's down below Douglas and he's watching him, and pretty soon Douglas is speaking to him, in a sense just looking at him. Douglas was saying, "When did we authorize this? When did we do this? When was any of this authorized in any piece of legislation?"—so it must have been on an appropriations bill. Then Douglas paused and looked right at the senator. I remember the gallery being packed and everyone listening intently, and the senator pulls the cigar out of his mouth and said, "Paul, we're doing it right now." [laughs] And the bells rang and it was all over. Oh, it was funny.

But of course, being on the Rules Committee and being chairman of that, he knew every nook and cranny. He was always seeing the Architect of the Capitol. In fact, I'm not particularly proud of it, but I'm probably responsible for more height variances in this city than I want to admit. George Stewart, who was the Architect of the Capitol at that time, was quite a guy, but I don't think I ever really personally sat down across the table from him, we always talked on the phone. He was on the Capital Planning Commission, and he was always the swing vote. He just never went to the meetings if he didn't want something done. I know some developer would get hold of me, or see the senator, mainly me, and would tell me something was coming up on the agenda and try to make their point. I'd listen to them, and if we thought it was meritorious. I'd talk to the senator about it, and then I'd call George. All I'd ask George to do, I never asked him once to vote any way, or anything like that, I said, "George, will you just go to the meeting and make a decision on this case, one way or the other." Well, he always made the right decision [laughs] and he always went to those meetings. So half

of downtown was affected, between the [Dominick] Anotonellis and the Doggetts and all the crowd, they were something else.

So we were involved in everything, it seemed like, and it was all fun. But he loved the Capitol. He just loved the whole institution of the Congress. I know when I would make some derogatory comment about the House, trotting down from our lofty position over here in the Senate, he would bring me up so short, because he had a great respect for the House as an institution. Of course, he spent fifteen years there. Man, then he'd give me a lecture on the importance of the House of Representatives. I remember the lectures quite well, and they certainly changed my views. I had never worked in the House, except with the delegations, and with the members, but I had never actually worked over there. But boy, you said anything derogatory about that body, and he'd call me on it. I didn't do it after awhile.

RITCHIE: I gather that he supported all the expansions of the building in any direction, and also the office buildings.

ELSON: Certainly, because when he first came here there was only the old building, when did they build that damn old building?

RITCHIE: In 1909.

ELSON: Yeah, and it was only three-sided then. I used to love walking with him around here, because he'd take you down some corridors and places that no one knew were there. I got to know the Capitol pretty well, all the little hideaways, little tunnels. The whole Capitol, underneath here, is nothing but tunnels. So, yes, he supported expansion, but on the basis that he really thought there was danger to the Capitol. I don't think he did it so much, as some of the critics accused, of making more space necessarily. But I think it's amazing that the Capitol has retained its dignity, even with the expansions. The one great thing about the Capitol, unlike St. Peter's or St. Paul's, in Rome and London, you can see our dome. The only place you can't see it from is from either end of the Capitol if you're up close to the building. It still thrills me every time I drive up to the Hill to see that dome. Of course, when I first came back here you could go up there, and I've been up to the top of the dome many times.

I'm surprised more people haven't jumped or fallen off of there when they did have it open.

He just loved the whole building and the institution, so, yeah, he supported a lot of the expansion. I don't know that he was too happy with some of the designs. I remember things like the new FBI Building, that monstrosity, he never really cared for the design, but he got the money for it. I remember sitting in on the Appropriations Committee, that would be about 1961, when we were putting the money in for that. We had the whole committee there and I had a cameraman come in and we televised it, and used it in his campaign the next year. Margaret Chase [Smith] was there, we had the whole crew, and I had them all saying something about Carl Hayden, which was hardly what the mark-up was all about. So, yeah, he supported the expansion. I don't think he liked the new Senate Office Building, which is now the Dirksen Building. He refused to move there. He had a choice of anything he wanted, anywhere, and he said, "No, you can have that place." And of course when they completed it they had to remove all the doors and do them all over again, because the carpets were too thick and the doors wouldn't open.

I remember saying to the Architect, "Any new building you build, make sure you put more elevators on the Capitol side than you do on the other, because when the bells ring that's where the traffic is going to be. Sure enough, they did them the same, and then they had to stick in new elevators. But he loved that Old Senate Building. When he first came the fireplaces worked, and you had those great chandeliers. Oh, they were lovely offices.

RITCHIE: When they opened the Dirksen building, most of the committees that were in the Capitol moved out, but the Appropriations stayed. Was there any question about them moving?

ELSON: No, they moved over.

RITCHIE: But they kept that suite on the ground floor of the Capitol.

ELSON: Oh, they kept that suite, yeah. They still have it.

RITCHIE: Was he responsible for them keeping that?

ELSON: Oh, sure. Damn right. He wasn't going to give that up. Mainly because it was convenient for the House when he had conferences. There was no question that he made sure that they weren't going to give that up. Of course, Foreign Relations also kept their committee room over there.

RITCHIE: That was Senator Theodore Francis Green at that time, the two oldest senators had the two ends of the corridor. Green refused to move out of that space, I wondered if Hayden had felt the same?

ELSON: Oh, yeah, he very definitely did. You wouldn't have gotten him out of there. And of course he got the biggest suite over in the new building at that time. I think the largest committee room was the Appropriations Committee room. That's where he made his retirement speech, and that was the largest room I think in the whole Capitol, on this side. On the first floor of the Capitol we had that suite that went practically all the way around for the Appropriations Committee. Then you didn't have as many staff people as you do now. Then he had a chairman's room when he went over to the Dirksen Building. He kept an office next to the hearing room, as the chairman's office. He would sign mail there. I used to use it occasionally—not for signing mail [laughs]. Well, he was something else that way.

RITCHIE: I thought that next time we could talk some more about your campaign in '68 and some of the things that you've done since then, but you've taken us up through the '60s now.

ELSON: Yeah. I'm glad that you mentioned the Newspaper Preservation Act because that was so frustrating, I mean working with the attorneys. I thought, boy, if I ever get into lobbying and act like some of these characters, I hope someone kicks me in the butt. It was awful. But I'll have to think before our next session about some of the other little things that we got into that you wouldn't have thought we'd get into, like the Newspaper Preservation Act, and like the fight over cable regulation. It seemed like there was always some project that he was interested in, or we had going all the time. There were certainly more than just appropriations matters, but of course everything sooner or later got down to money, so you had everyone from the executive

branch coming around, trying to get by the Bureau of the Budget and get some more help, and from aviation, you name it. It was exciting that way.

End of Interview #11