

George A. Smathers

United States Senator from Florida, 1951-1969

Interview #3: Lyndon B. Johnson as Majority Leader

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Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie



U.S. Senate Historical Office
Senator Smathers with Lyndon B. Johnson
Senate Historical Office

Ritchie: How was it you became so closely connected with Lyndon Johnson?

Smathers: With [Johnson](#), well, I have to go back now. Johnson had been in the House before he went to the Senate. Everybody knew about Johnson, because he made his mark immediately over in the Senate. He knew what he wanted to do and he went about doing it. When I went to the Senate, [McFarland](#) was the leader and Johnson was the whip, and for all practical purposes, Johnson was the acting leader, because Johnson was never known at any time of his life not to try to be the top dog, or not be the top dog. McFarland was a sweet, nice, pliable guy from Arizona, whom everybody liked, but who was not a particularly outstanding leader. He was just a hell of a nice fellow. So by 1951 Johnson was almost running the Senate.

Johnson, for some reason which I don't and can't account for, liked me, apparently thought I had some leadership abilities. So he pretty much took me over. It was rather him taking me over than me courting Johnson. We were both

tall, we were both from the South, we both had I guess a type of an accent. We both liked pretty much the same things. I got to know Lyndon very well. But it was primarily because of his selecting me, rather than me doing anything spectacular. I think he saw in me a prospective leader.

So that's how it started out, and then he just took me around with him, and gave me, as I've already reported to you, all the little difficult jobs that nobody else wanted to do. He made me go talk to all the new senators about political matters, their reelections. Then it got to be on legislative matters, why Johnson would look to me and give me a list of say twelve guys, for example, that I had to personally go see about this particular legislation, how they were going to vote, what it was they didn't like about the bill, if there were any things they didn't like, what it was they would agree to, and so on, and try to get everybody lined up. So Johnson, as was his historic tendency, he would pass on all the ugly part of his job to somebody else. When I say ugly, I mean the hard-working, tedious part that wasn't very glamorous, and he always did that.

He always had a lot of fellows that he from time to time would call gophers, who he would send to do certain things, and I was one of that group. When I say a group, it sounds like a lot of them, but actually I don't recall that there were very many. I know I was, and I know [Earle Clements](#) was. But beyond that I don't know who else that he worked on like he worked on us. But in any event, because Johnson was the type of guy he was, and then when shortly after

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I got to the Senate, I forget what year it was and whether McFarland was defeated or whether McFarland retired, or what happened, I don't remember.

Ritchie: He was beaten by Barry Goldwater in '52.

Smathers: In '52, so I was there just two years when Johnson succeeded him. That means in '53 Johnson became the minority leader, and at that point Earle Clements and I moved up with Johnson. Then when Clements was defeated, Johnson wanted me to take Clements' place. That's when I've told you that story about how my wife didn't like it, and I didn't like it, and it was so difficult working for Johnson that I just didn't want to work for him any longer. But anyway, it was that procedure through which I became a very close friend of Lyndon's. I've always liked Lyndon.

He was a difficult fellow, as everybody has told you, and as we all know, very difficult to live with. But he could turn the charm on you. He could turn it on and off just like a fellow can turn on a spigot, and when you knew him and were with him, as we were, the fellows who were close to him, you would see the bad side of Lyndon about as often as you would see the good side. People who didn't know him as intimately as Earle Clements, me, and Bobby Baker, and people like that,

they didn't get to see Johnson as sometimes he was, which was a real tyrannical, tough, disagreeable, dictatorial fellow. But Johnson would not show that side to most other people. He knew there were some people that he could get to go his way by being charming, okay he'd do that for them. There was a certain group that he could get to do certain things by doing some sort of a little honor, appointment to a special committee of some kind that he would create, and give them a special assignment. There were others that he would just pal around with a little bit. From time to time he would take a couple of senators to dinner and he would slap them on the back and give them a lot of drink and buddy them, "my buddy" and so on, you know, this sort of thing. Johnson was a man of many, many diverse talents. That was the thing that was amazing about Johnson. Johnson had much ability, and driving ambition to get things done.

[Due to a recorder malfunction, this interview was continued at a later date.]

Smathers: I was having lunch with Larry Levinson and told him that the one thing I wanted to get across was the contributions that Lyndon Johnson made. "That's right," he said, "look at the civil rights bill, look at Medicaid, look at anti-pollution, the model cities act, the preservation of the forest." He said, "You know, all that was passed under Johnson." Then he told me about some fellow who had apparently worked for Lyndon, Bob Hardesty, who had accumulated all this information with respect to what Johnson had done. It was very impressive. I said, "Why don't you get Hardesty to send me a copy of that." He said, "Well, I will." So, hopefully I'll get that, and if you know Bob Hardesty you might get that yourself. He's got page after page of what Johnson did from

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the very first day that he got to the Congress as a Congressman, and went through it year by year, and he says its very, very good.

But without that, I can answer your questions by saying that Lyndon Johnson was far and away the most productive legislator that I ever encountered at any time that I was in the Congress, either in the House or the Senate. He passed more significant legislation, the basic Social Security bill, while it had been started actually before he got to Congress, but he's the fellow that put it on a rather sound and sensible basis. There's no question but what he was the fellow who passed all of the civil rights legislation, either as majority leader of the Senate, or subsequently when he was president of the United States. He did all of these things. The Clean Air Act, I had forgotten that he was the father of the Clean Air Act. I knew that he was the man who got the Medicaid bill adopted. When it came to getting things done, there was nobody that was equal to Lyndon, before or since, as far as I could see.

Now, he was an unusual person, and he had a distinctive and different personality, and he was very, very difficult to work for, because he demanded not

just one hundred percent of your time, but he demanded more than that. That's why he ran people off a great deal, and had a lot of people angry with him. He used to say, "I want only 'can do' people." That was one of his favorite expressions, "I only want 'can do' people around. I don't want anybody who tells me that they can't do something. I don't want them around." That was the way he was, all the time that I was around him.

As you know, the record shows that I was his assistant after Earle Clements, who had been the whip or the second leader, the assistant leader. I was the third, and then when Earle Clements ran in Kentucky he didn't come back to the Congress, so Johnson elevated me to his spot. What made that rather significant was that was the time when Johnson got sick, so it ended up with my in point of fact having to run the Senate for about five or six months. We got things done, but after Johnson had recovered well enough to get on the telephone and call you, why I spent more time talking to him than I did getting out on the floor, and trying to get senators to vote for or against whatever it was that we were for. But Lyndon was really a great man, and I hope that in time he will receive the credit which I think he very richly deserves.

Ritchie: What was it that really drove Lyndon Johnson? Did you have any sense of what motivated him?

Smathers: Well, I think that Johnson came from a very--modest is not the right word--how shall I say it? He came from a background of utmost poverty. His family did not have anything. Nobody in his family had ever achieved very much, certainly not in a material way. I think that as much as anything else motivated Johnson to lift himself and all those around him out of those very bare bones surroundings in which he grew up. He frequently talked about the things that they didn't have when he was a young boy. They didn't have fire wood on certain occasions when they would get cold. I remember one

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time when we were in Florida and it suddenly turned cold. We were out on a boat and we couldn't get warm, and I remember Johnson saying something to the effect that "I haven't been this cold since I was a kid living back on the Pedernales, back in Texas." I said, "My God, did it get this cold?" "Oh, sure it got this cold," but he said, "the thing about it was we didn't even have heat of any kind. We just had to huddle up around whatever firewood we could gather." He said, "That was pretty tough getting warm when six of you were trying to back up to one fire." He would talk about things like that.

I think he was very much inspired to lift himself and his family out of those conditions in which he grew up and to really achieve something, that's why he had this enormous ambition, and this enormous drive. That's what he did, he did that. So, you say what drove him? I've heard people say [Lady Bird](#) did, but I don't

think that at all. Lady Bird was sweet and thoughtful and kind and helpful to Lyndon, but I don't think that she tried to inspire Lyndon to do bigger things. Lyndon didn't need any of that! Nobody needed to talk to him about why it's important to get ahead. He was preaching that all the time to everybody. "Man, you've got to get with it. We can't be sitting around here doing nothing. We're not just going to sit here scratching." He used to have a lot of vulgar expressions, you know, "scratch your ass, and pick our nose, and spit." "What the hell! Damn it, we're not going to do that." He would go along like that all the time. He brought that with him.

Ritchie: He came out of a poor family, he went to a really small college, and yet he was in the Senate with a lot of men who were born to wealth and who went to Ivy League schools. Do you get the sense that he was trying to prove that he was as good as or better than the people he was dealing with.

Smathers: I'm sure. I think that's true. The eastern establishment was generally the establishment that he didn't particularly like. He respected them. He knew that the guys who had gone to Yale and Princeton and Harvard and all that were pretty smart guys, but he was damn well determined that the guy who came from southern Texas and didn't have much, and if it hadn't been for the C.C.C. he couldn't even have gone to college. He was going to damn well prove that fellow was not so handicapped that he couldn't accomplish a great deal for himself and for his country. He was determined to do that. To get back again, I think it was that background which had a lot to do with Lyndon's ambition. He wanted to prove that with guts and determination, and if you're reasonable smart--which of course he was--you could get away from that background you had. People say, "Well, how come Johnson did so much for the poor people?" Well, Johnson was poor. He understood it, that's why he passed much of this legislation which enabled kids to borrow money to go to school. That's why he passed legislation which made it possible for poor people to get medical assistance and medical care. He saw the evils, in a way, of the poll tax system, and the basic evil of the old civil rights laws that we had. I think Johnson saw these things as a young man, and as a poor man, and as a guy who never had anything in his life that he didn't have to earn for himself.

Ritchie: When Johnson took over the leadership of the party in '52, he followed after [Lucas](#) and McFarland. The leadership was a pretty weak position in many ways then--they were both defeated for reelection. How did Johnson make the position so powerful if it had been so weak under his predecessors?

Smathers: Again, it's the personality of the man and the drive and ambition of the man who has got the job. As leader, you had the opportunity to be a real leader, or you could be like Scott Lucas or McFarland, who were kind and sweet and nice guys, but who really were not motivated to the extent that Johnson was.

That job was pretty much what the fellow who was leader made of it. Neither Scott Lucas or McFarland, both of whom I served with--I don't think Scott was leader when I got there, I think McFarland was. I was in the House when Scott Lucas was the majority leader. I went to Europe with him and [Fulbright](#) on a trip one time. But they did not have the drive nor the ambition nor this constant urge to really get things done that Lyndon had.

When Lyndon got into that position, that was the biggest position in name that you could have in the United States Senate. That was bigger than being [president pro tempore](#). It was infinitely more powerful than being vice president of the United States. The president, obviously, as we all know, couldn't pass anything. He couldn't get his program through at all if the majority leader, as strong as Lyndon was, if the majority leader didn't agree with his program. Because Johnson could get the Senate to do most anything he wanted. Consequently, when [Eisenhower](#) was president, Johnson had as much to do with running the country as Eisenhower did. Now, people didn't know that. Eisenhower always had been a great general, everybody liked Eisenhower, and everybody had the highest respect for him. But as far as a legislative artisan, or a legislative architect, no he was not that. Nor were the leaders of his Republican party in the Senate after [Taft](#) had died. I think [William] [Knowland](#) came in after Taft died, and Knowland was not Robert Taft.

Robert Taft was a strong, able leader. I recall very well when I first got into the Senate one of the first votes that I cast was, in reflection, a mistaken vote. I shouldn't have voted the way I did, but I voted because Taft was leading the fight against statehood for Alaska and Hawaii. He made the very strong point that here we are with Alaska who's got less people in it than any one of the small counties in Florida, or as he would say, in Piqua, Ohio, or some reasonably small town, why they had more people than Alaska did. And yet Alaska was going to become a state of the Union and have two votes in the Senate. It was a disproportionate representation for the few people who lived in Alaska. The same was true pretty much of Hawaii.

I recall how when Bob Taft was leading that fight against it, I had just come to the Senate. I think it was 1951, and he came over to me. He was not a fellow with a great sense of humor or anything of that character. There was nothing about him that relaxed. He was more like Johnson, but he didn't have Johnson's charm. Johnson could turn it on when he wanted to. I don't think

that Taft ever even thought in terms of charm. I think Taft was a totally dedicated political figure who was so honest and so honorable that whatever he believed he had to do. It didn't make any difference whether it was partisan or not. He didn't feel that those two possessions should become states, and he spoke out against it. As I started out to say, he was handling the opposition to that, and he came over

to me, I was a freshman senator and I was much impressed with him. He said, "Young man, how much time do you want to speak against this bill?" I said, "Well, I don't know that I really want any." He said, "Oh, we've got plenty of time. It's agreed that each side has three hours, and we've only got four or five people to speak. You're going to have all the time you want." I said, "Well, I'll make a little speech against taking in these states."

I recall very distinctly the first speech that I made after I got to the Senate, I was called on to make the speech by Bob Taft. Anyway, we were unsuccessful, and I think time has proven that we were wrong in opposing it, and that the people who voted for statehood cast the right vote. I don't know, I mean, it's going that way. Someday we're going to think about taking Puerto Rico, who knows?

Ritchie: When you mentioned Robert Taft, that reminded me that Taft was only majority leader for a few months. He really didn't want to be majority leader.

Smathers: That's right, he didn't want to be it.

Ritchie: And Dick Russell didn't want to be majority leader.

Smathers: Dick Russell didn't want to be majority leader.

Ritchie: A lot of the powerful senators would prefer to be chairmen of committees.

Smathers: That's right. I think this would be fair to say, at least I don't know of anybody who made of the majority leadership the powerful post that Lyndon Johnson made of it. [Dick Russell](#) wanted to stay with the Armed Services Committee. He liked that, it was big in Georgia. They had a lot of military installations in Georgia and everybody had been thinking about the military, we had just gotten through with World War II and God knows it looked like we were going to have to fight the Russians, so that was a terribly important committee. Senator [Walter George](#), he was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, he didn't want to become majority leader. [Harry Byrd](#) probably would never have wanted it. I'm sure he much preferred being chairman of the Finance and Taxation Committee, because, at that time before Johnson came in, those powerful committee chairmen could actually control whether or not any money got spent.

Dick Russell was chairman of military appropriations and he could control who was going to get money and what the size of the army, navy or anything was going to be. He could do it. Same thing was true of Walter George as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. That was infinitely more important because all the foreign countries of the world who wanted to deal with us, they had to deal in a

way with Senator George. Those committees were still important, but after Johnson made such a powerful majority leader, Johnson in a way over-leaped them. He leap-frogged over them in terms of importance.

I think he became as important as let's say the Speaker of the House of Representatives, who obviously was more important than any of the chairmen of those committees in the House. The reason why was because with his authority he could control what legislation was coming up, he could make recognition of whatever Congressman he wanted to, he was the fellow who was expected to the party leader at that time. Johnson became in effect the Speaker of the Senate. He either took unto himself these powers that the Speaker had and by making himself a one-man Rules Committee, so to speak, who would schedule what legislation was going to be brought up, what would be considered, and then he picked a lot of guys and put them on his various committees. That picture right there with Dick Russell and Earle Clements and me and so on, [Stuart Symington](#), we were all head of some committees. Of course, I was Lyndon's assistant, standing there talking.

But Johnson elevated the majority leadership to a much more powerful position than it ever had been before, there's no doubt about that, just because of his own driven personality. I haven't seen anybody since Johnson who has been quite as powerful as Lyndon. Today we have [George] [Mitchell](#), and we had [Mansfield](#), who was nice but not of the driven leadership that Johnson had.

Ritchie: How did Johnson operate in terms of the lieutenants that he had? What was his staff structure, using other senators?

Smathers: It was a very personal thing with Johnson. Johnson just sort of picked out the people he liked. I happened to be one of those apparently that he liked. He picked me out and he wanted me to be much more ambitious than I was, and he got very angry with me when I refused to become his whip after Clements was defeated. I've told you that story, that's when I suggested Mansfield. Johnson picked his people just exactly why I don't know, but I know that I was considered one of his favorites. I know that he liked [Hubert](#) very much, even though he disagreed with Hubert about everything almost. But he liked Hubert's personality. Johnson did not particularly care for [Albert Gore](#). Why, I don't know. I always liked Albert. Johnson didn't like [Jack Kennedy](#), even from the start. But Johnson had his definite favorites. I happened to be one of them.

Johnson liked [Barry Goldwater](#). It was very peculiar about the fellows that Johnson really got stuck on. He liked [Bernie Maybank](#), who was a senator from

South Carolina. He always liked Bernie. Bernie was chairman of the Banking and Currency Committee, and Bernie could get most anything he wanted from

Johnson. Johnson was a fellow who picked his friends. Why he would pick certain people, I couldn't tell you. And he didn't pick them just because they agreed with him, because Humphrey never did agree with him. But he was crazy about Hubert.



Johnson and Humphrey at work
with Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey
Senate Historical Office

Ritchie: Now, would Humphrey be included in the circle when Johnson would gather people around to plan strategy?

Smathers: A good deal. When Johnson first became president, before he ran in his own right, right after Kennedy died, Johnson always invited Humphrey over to the White House when he invited anybody. And of course, later Humphrey was his vice president. But Johnson really liked Hubert. He didn't like Mansfield that well. He liked Mansfield all right, but Mansfield was a fellow that everybody liked, so it was easy for Johnson to go to Mansfield because everybody liked Mansfield, and everybody still does. As you've heard me say, Mansfield's probably the most saintly guy that I know. He and Lady Bird Johnson, if ever there's a special place in heaven for human angels, there's got to be Lady Bird sitting up there as well as Mike Mansfield.

Ritchie: What role did Bobby Baker play in Johnson's team?

Smathers: Bobby Baker was as close to Lyndon as anybody could possibly be. This was the thing in a way that was Bobby Baker's downfall, because when Lyndon handled him the way you would a young colt, he had a bridle on him and he had a saddle on him, and he guided Bobby. He'd tell Bobby exactly what to do, and how he wanted it done. Bobby was a young man with unlimited energy, unlimited ambition, and very intelligent. He didn't have good judgment, because he was a very young guy, but he saw and appreciated the fact that Lyndon was the most powerful man in government almost. He met constantly with Eisenhower, he controlled Sam Rayburn over in the House, so he ran the government. I have to say that Bobby Baker was as close to Lyndon Johnson as anybody in the whole Congress. Bobby, through Johnson, was very powerful.

A lot of people didn't like Bobby, because Bobby sometimes wouldn't handle that as well as he should, see. But he was constantly with Lyndon, knew what Lyndon thought, and was quick. He could just dart around. Lyndon would say, "Get so and so on the telephone." [Snaps fingers] Bobby would have it. "Get so and so." "Let's do this, let's do that." Johnson was never asking him, "Bobby, what do you think we ought to do?" It was none of that. Bobby was never anything other than an employee of Lyndon's, but a trusted employee, and the hardest working employee that Lyndon Johnson ever had. He was never at the level where he could tell Lyndon, like Dick Russell, or Walter George, or [Bob Kerr](#), or me, or the people that Lyndon liked, Bobby was never at that level where he could sit down and say, "Now, I think you ought to do this," because

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Lyndon wouldn't permit that. He was an employee, there wasn't any doubt about it.

But he was close, and everybody knew he was close, therefore when Bobby would call you, as a senator, he was always very polite. He'd say, "Senator, the majority leader has asked me to ask you to do so and so." And you knew that was it, he had sent him to do that. It went on like that. Now Bobby, after Lyndon was gone and Mansfield wasn't the type to control Bobby like Johnson was, so Bobby got power struck suddenly. He thought all of a sudden that he was Lyndon Johnson, Jr., and all he did was get himself in a lot of trouble, a lot of criticism, and finally big trouble and out of the government.

Ritchie: Would you say that the major thing that people like Bobby Baker did for Johnson was to provide him with information, count heads?

Smathers: Oh, sure, that was it. Johnson would ask Bobby, "How's so and so going to vote?" Republican or Democrat, Bobby would be back in fifteen minutes telling you how the guy was going to vote. That's what the whip was supposed to do, that's what I was supposed to be doing all the time. That's why I knew the way it went, but I would be busy, I would be in my little committee, whatever the committee was at that time, usually the Commerce Committee, holding a hearing, so Johnson knew that he shouldn't be calling me, taking me out of the committee to ask me how was Harry Byrd going to vote on something. He just would get Bobby to do it.

Bobby knew how to be very apologetic, and he knew how to be very polite, and he'd say, "Mr. chairman, the majority leader is trying to make up a list of those people who will be for this bill or those people who are going to be against it. Hopefully, if you have made up your mind, he would like to know whether he can count on you to support this, or whether you're going to be against it." Usually, everybody would say, "Well, Bobby I'm going to be against it," or "I'm going to be for it," whatever the case was. Bobby would report that back to Lyndon. He was

constantly running errands for Lyndon. So he was powerful, and everybody knew that. He wasn't the best liked guy, but I liked Bobby. I felt sorry for him when he got in his trouble, but he was his own worst enemy.

Ritchie: What was the role of Bob Kerr in all of this?

Smathers: Bob Kerr, Lyndon loved Bob Kerr. See, the reason that Bob Kerr was so powerful was that Bob Kerr was a guy who had made himself many, many millions of dollars. He was without question the richest guy in the Congress, certainly in the Senate, and he had made all of his money himself. He was born on an Indian reservation in Oklahoma. He had fought his way up tooth and nail and had become head of Kerr-McGee, one of the great modern oil companies. Then after he had made all the money that he wanted, he decided to get in politics, so he ran for governor of Oklahoma and got elected, and was a good governor. Then he decided he'd run for the Senate, so he got elected. Everybody knew about his story, having come from total poverty and living on

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an Indian reservation, never knowing really who his grandparents were, and having achieved this high stature. Bob had all this money, and he would help many other senators in their reelection campaigns, which gave him additional power. Johnson knew who Bob Kerr was, and he knew how much money he had, and he knew how smart he was. Bob Kerr had a tremendous influence on Lyndon.

I served on the taxation committee with Bob. He was smart, tough, absolutely a bull dog, afraid of nothing. He would help everybody who came to him and wanted campaign money. He'd just open his pocket up and give it to them. That gave him a lot of influence. That's one of the reasons that I want to get my bill going again that people cannot contribute to campaigns if they don't live in the state from which the senator comes.

Ritchie: Talking about campaigns, and finances, and Bob Kerr and Bobby Baker, what was Kerr's influence on Baker?

Smathers: Tremendous. Next to Lyndon, Bobby was Bob Kerr's gopher. Some people would call it an unholy alliance. I don't call it that at all, but there was no doubt that Bobby Baker knew about Kerr's wealth and Kerr I think made it possible for Bobby to live in a better house, and he could do things with his wife and children, things that he couldn't do without Bob Kerr. Bob Kerr was a very generous fellow. He had made all of his money. I think it's safe to say he was the richest guy in the Senate. [Theodore Francis Green](#) was supposed to be pretty rich, all those guys from Rhode Island, [Claiborne] [Pell](#), you know, they're all very wealthy, but I think that Bob Kerr had more spendable money than any one of these family moneys. Family money like Pell's money, and Theodore Francis Green's money, and the [John] [Heinz](#) money, and the Kennedy money, that's all

tied up pretty much in a trust, so that while they have plenty to live on, they don't have plenty to throw away in other people's campaigns. Bob Kerr had made it all, and he had it all, and he carried around with him a wad of dough all the time. He had always four or five thousand dollars in his pocket. So he was powerful, he was powerful.

Ritchie: In what ways did this influence Baker, just to over-extend himself?

Smathers: That's right. See, Lyndon and Bob got along well. I think Bob voted for most everything that Lyndon was for. On economics, Bob was very conservative, but on the other issues, the civil rights issues, the social issues, Bob was surprisingly liberal. Of course, that was what Johnson was. Johnson was much more liberal than people ever thought he was, because he was from Texas and they thought he was some sort of a redneck. But Bob Kerr helped Lyndon on all those, what we'd call today progressive pieces of legislation. Bob Kerr was big, he was big. I liked Bob, but everybody was a little scared of Bob, because he had a very sharp tongue. In a debate, he was an impatient fellow. He'd get up and say what he had to say in fifteen minutes, where other people would take an hour to say the same thing. He didn't make

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a lot of speeches, but he would get up and ask two or three questions and he would say some very rough stuff to whomever he was debating with. It was always very rough.

One of the interesting stories about Bob, [Russell Long](#) tells this a lot better than I do, but it happened in our Finance and Taxation Committee. We had [Paul Douglas](#) on the committee. Paul was a great Democrat from Illinois, and a great liberal, and a great purist, and scholarly, but somewhat impractical, having been a -- this is not to condemn all teachers, or anything -- but having been a professor most all of his life. Anyway, he was on that committee, and Bob Kerr knew all about every business angle there ever was.

I forget what the specific piece of legislation it was, but somehow, it had passed and Bob Kerr had been the guy who was responsible for it passing. It had some sort of tainted overtones, some special interest type thing. When that fact was finally brought out in our committee one day, Paul Douglas was the guy who first learned about this thing having opened the gate to some sort of quick claim deal, or something while it was not totally dishonest, it was questionable. All of a sudden, this piece of legislation which Bob Kerr had sponsored and we'd all voted for, with the possible exception of Paul Douglas, Douglas jumped up and said, "Mr. Chairman, is the senator from Oklahoma not ashamed of what he did with respect to this legislation? This conspiracy, this combine of dirty people who get together to profiteer off the backs of the good people of this nation. Is he not ashamed of himself? Why isn't he embarrassed to death? Why is he sitting here

smiling? He ought to be ashamed! Shame on you!" And then Bob Kerr stood up, he said, "Let me say this to the senator from Illinois, I am ashamed. I'm ashamed of every combine, I'm ashamed of every conspiracy, I'm ashamed of every get together of this kind that I'm not a big part of." And everybody just broke up laughing. It was so funny the way he said it. He didn't back off a bit. But everybody laughed. To this day, people who were on that committee, Russell Long particularly, they remember that.

But Bob was a strong guy, a tough guy, and good. People would listen to him because he was the only big businessman we had in the Senate. We had a lot of wealth as we do today, the Heinzes and the Kennedys and the Pells and the Theodore Francis Greens and all that.

Theodore Francis Green, let me tell you a story about him. He was old, he was about ninety years old, and he was on the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. As was the case, all those people on the committees get invited to the embassies, the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indians, the Latins, whomever, they're out there every night. You can go somewhere every single night if you want to. Here I walked into this embassy out there on Cathedral Avenue, I forget which one it was, but here was Theodore Francis Green who was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, he had those thick glasses on, he couldn't see very well. He was looking at a piece of paper and studying it very carefully. As I came in late, he looked like he was going out, but he had stopped to examine this. I thought to myself, well he's looking to see where he's

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supposed to go next. I said, "Hello, Mr. Chairman, how are you?" He looked up and said, "Hello, George." I said, "Are you trying to find out where you go next?" He said, "No, George, I'm trying to find out where I am now." It was so funny. That was typical of Theodore Francis Green, a wonderful, sweet guy.



Senator Theodore Francis Green, leaving the Russell Senate Office Building
Senate Historical Office

Ritchie: When you talk about some of these figures from the Senate, like Kerr, a lot of people have called them wheeler and dealers, and there's a sense that there's a pejorative on that, as opposed to the Paul Douglasses.

Smathers: Well, most of the people who say that are all the liberals. Bob Kerr was not a great liberal, but he was a great thinker in this sense: he had experience running a big business. He knew the tax consequences of certain legislation we were proposing. There was not another man, with the possible exception of [Wallace Bennett](#), who had been president of the United States Chamber of Commerce, who was on the Republican side, and Harry Byrd knew a little bit about it because he had a lot of apple orchards, but Harry Byrd was not the businessman that Bob Kerr was. So when these complicated tax problems would come up before us, there would be nobody who really knew. Paul Douglas didn't know what they were all about. I didn't know what they were all about, as far as experience is concerned. Russell Long didn't know what they were all about. [John Williams](#) of Delaware didn't know what they were all about, and I forget who else was on that committee. Nobody knew except Bob Kerr.

Bob would say, "Now, let me tell you what the real world is. Let me tell you why this piece of legislation opens up the door for a lot of this that shouldn't happen. You're giving benefits when you don't know what you're giving, because that's not the way it works." What happens is, all the staff people too--see, none of those people ever have had any business experience to amount to anything. They come out of college, they're bright as they can be, there's been all kinds of scholarship awards, they then go to work for the government, and they have really never known what it is to be out in the business world competing with your fellow man.

After I retired from the Senate I used to get invited around the Chamber of Commerce making speeches and they used to love to hear me say that "I retired when I was fifty-six years old, and I'm standing here before you today,"--let's say at the Tallahassee Kiwanis Club--"and I'm glad to see you gentlemen. Let me tell you a little bit about my experience. After I retired in '69 and went to open up an office, I went down and said, 'What's it going to cost me?' And the guy said, 'You've got to pay fourteen dollars a square foot.' I said, 'What does that mean?'" I had never in my life paid any money for an office space! I had been a United States attorney, I had been a Marine, I had been a Congressman, I had been a senator, all my life, thirty some years, never paid rent, never bought a yellow pad, never had paid for a paper clip, never had paid even for a stamp. Okay, that's what these guys over there are.

[Teddy Kennedy](#)'s never paid for one. He don't know what it is. He don't know what it is to have to run a business, and pay people, and argue with people about what it costs to do certain things, the government's always done that. And in his case, he even has it worse than that. He's like Heinz and those others, they have

the money coming in and they don't have to worry anything about that. They don't know what the business community is all about. And that's why Bob Kerr and [Stuart Symington](#) also--I should have put Stuart in there.

Stuart and Bob Kerr were the two guys whom people used to listen to when it came up to really a business type of a question, because both of them had been in business, and both of them had been eminently successful. Stuart had been the president of the Emerson Electric Company. He was first in New Hampshire and then he went to St. Louis. Then he decided to get into politics. But he knew a lot about business. He was the first guy, and Bob Kerr, who used to talk about the imbalance of trade in those days, and people paid absolutely no attention to either one of those guys about that. But this is what I've learned, after having been out of the Congress for twenty years, my God, it's amazing that we get along as well as we do! Because there are very few business people over there.

That's one reason why we never seem to get the budget balanced. These fellows don't really appreciate, to the extent that they should, the danger of the continued imbalance in the budget. Now, a businessman has learned it, because he goes broke. He has to take bankruptcy, or he has to give up his business. These fellows have never had that experience. Russell Long is just like me, never had one day of experience. He was chairman of the committee for twelve years, okay, never had that experience. So this is one of the weaknesses of our system.

Ritchie: I was curious about--when we were talking about Kerr and the other Democrats whom Johnson could count on--what was Johnson's relationship with the Republicans, like [Knowland](#) and [Dirksen](#)?

Smathers: He got along great with Dirksen. Johnson was a fellow who was not partisan. He appeared to be partisan, he traded on it when it was valuable. He could go to the Democratic convention and make the most partisan speech you ever saw. He could sit down the next night and go with his rich Texas friends, who were all the Bass brothers and others, all of whom were Republicans. He went with this fellow [George] Brown, of Brown, Root, which was at that time the biggest construction company in the United States. That's where he was when he had his heart attack, at Brown's estate in Virginia. Johnson could go either way on that. He was really not a partisan, except he had to be. He had to have an identification as the Democratic leader, therefore he had to lead the Democratic party. Now, Hubert, on the other hand, never had a moment's hesitation about being a great liberal. He was always that way, and very consistently so. Johnson voted liberal on most of these things, and basically underneath was liberal, but the people in Texas I don't think really

understood how liberal Johnson was. Because he would have had a hard time getting elected probably had they known that he was really that liberal. Hubert

was one hundred percent; Johnson, he knew what he wanted to do, what he wanted to achieve, and whatever it took to do that he would be that way.

Ritchie: What was your impression of William Knowland?

Smathers: William Knowland on a scale of one to ten I'd have to give him a five. He was a conscientious, honorable, pedestrian type guy. There was nothing about him that I felt was especially attractive. He'd been a newspaperman, except that he was the soul of Republicanism. He had no humor, no sense of humor. Not a particularly good speaker. I just didn't think too highly of him, like I did of Bob Taft, like I do of [Bob Dole](#), like I do of some other Republican leaders that I know. I didn't think that much of him.

Ritchie: I got the sense that Johnson could dance circles around Knowland.

Smathers: Oh, my God, Knowland was kind of on Johnson's team without Knowland realizing it. Johnson just led him around by the nose. And everybody used to laugh about it. Republicans used to talk about it. Bill was always up acting like he was fighting something. He never made a speech that I remember wasn't a fighting speech.

Now, Johnson couldn't do that with Dirksen. See, Dirksen was very much like Johnson. They were kind of two of a kind. They thoroughly understood each other, and I think greatly admired each other. They were good friends. Dirksen could get very outraged when it was advisable to do so, about what Johnson was doing, and Johnson could get outraged about what the Republicans were doing, when it was the kind of thing that Johnson felt like it was time to do. They would speak against each other, and then pretty soon in Johnson's office here would come Dirksen and we'd all sit around and have a drink. This happened night after night. No, Dirksen was a delight. I think Dirksen was genuinely almost as popular with the Democrats as he was with the Republicans.

He could make a beautiful speech. He liked to make speeches. He had a great sonorous voice, and he loved to gesticulate. He was an orator and an actor. He could do it all, and Johnson could not make a good speech. But Johnson made up for that in other ways, just plain hard damn work. Dirksen was a marvelous speaker and everybody recognized him as a speaker. I don't ever remember hearing Johnson make what I thought was a real good speech. Even when he came before the Congress as president I didn't think he made a particularly good speech. He'd try hard. He would try to pick up these other fellows' gestures, and he would try to make it dramatic, but he just wasn't in the same league with Dirksen, wasn't in the same league with Jack Kennedy, wasn't in the same league with Bob Kerr. Wasn't even close.

Ritchie: That whole period, 1952-1958, the Senate was always maybe one or two votes different between the two parties. There was never much of an edge. When the Republicans were in the majority they had one or two votes, and the Democrats had one or two votes when they came back.

Smathers: Right.

Ritchie: Does that require a lot of coalition building between the two parties?

Smathers: Sure. That's right. That's why the organization, the Bobby Baker deal, we were supposed to know who was going to vote on a bill before Johnson would ever let it come up. Johnson was a fellow who never wanted to be defeated. He never wanted to get a bill defeated if he thought by playing it the right time he could get it through. He would wait till he heard that two guys were going to be out of town. Right away that would go into Johnson's calculated mind and he would think: I'm going to bring this vote up at that time because those guys have already committed to make a speech at the University of Southern California, on a certain day at ten o'clock; I'm not going to agree to any sort of date to vote on it; I'm going to bring it up then. And he'd bring it up and pass it. That was constantly, always Johnson: how can I get this done? And all these other factors out there, that you would think would have nothing to do with the vote, man they'd go into Johnson's computer. He would think: this is the time to do it; or this is not the time to do it.

He'd think: I'm going to need so and so to do something, so now I'm going to appoint a committee. Let's say there had been a new break-out of relations over the Panama Canal. Now, he'd sit there and he'd think: who is that I can send to the Panama Canal who would be grateful for me appointing him? Who's the guy that I need to have on a certain vote. Maybe a Republican. Okay, he wasn't supposed to appoint Republicans, but he would go to Bill Knowland and say, "Bill, I've got Smathers and Gore going down and they would like to have these two guys that you've got. They would like Wallace Bennett and John Williams to go. So why don't we just have a little committee?" So John Williams would go, and Johnson would let him know in advance. Johnson had already told Williams about it before he had even gone to Knowland. Johnson would go walk right over and sit down beside him, "How would you like to go down to Panama?" "Yeah, I'd like to go." "Okay, I've got a committee coming up, I'll see what I can do. I'm going to get Bill--you may have to ask Bill to put you on it, but I don't think so. I'll let you know later on." You know, he's building, building, building all the time, where he could say, "Look, I need your vote, I need your help." He constantly did that.

Ritchie: There weren't that many issues that came up in that period that really were party line issues either, were there?

Smathers: No, we didn't have them. There were not a lot of party line votes. There were big things, Medicaid, there were a lot of Republicans and

Democrats. It was a very conscientious vote. Civil rights, all those things, model cities, District of Columbia [home rule] those were just sort of no party line votes.

Ritchie: In the fifties, the two most divisive issues in the Senate probably were [McCarthy](#) and later the civil rights act. Johnson was minority leader when McCarthy became so important. Do you have any sense about what Johnson thought about McCarthy?

Smathers: He despised him. Nobody really liked Joe McCarthy, interesting enough except [Bobby Kennedy](#). And Jack Kennedy liked McCarthy, he was a big Catholic. And Joe Kennedy, the father, thought McCarthy was great. I didn't like McCarthy because he was in the Marine Corps, as I was in the Marine Corps, and he began to tell about all of his exploits out in the Pacific, which I knew was a bunch of crap. He just told stories about what a great hero he was, and I don't think he went on a single mission. I don't think he accomplished anything. He was out there, but he was out there under what they call an AVS program, which is what I was under. We were both older, we didn't have to be there, he volunteered like I did, but he was not nearly in as much action as I was, and I knew that. And so it really offended me greatly to hear this guy talking about he was in the back end of an SPD with two 20 caliber machine guns and Zeros were zooming all around him and he was shooting all these planes down. That was a lot of hogwash. So I didn't like Joe. The Kennedys liked him. Johnson didn't like him at all, couldn't stand him. He was a bully, there wasn't any question about that, he was a bully.

Ritchie: Did you have the sense that McCarthy was a problem for the Republicans to take care of, or did he see him as a Democratic issue as well?

Smathers: No, I think that Johnson thought he was an issue for everybody, but mostly, obviously, for the Republicans. He hurt his own party in time, with these reckless statements that he kept coming in with, "I have this document," "this is happening," "I have just learned this," and all that very dramatic stuff, most of it baloney. No, I was glad to see him go.

Ritchie: The Senate censured McCarthy in December '54, and it's a very rare moment when the Senate censures a member. How did Johnson handle that? Did he try to line up the Democrats against McCarthy, or did he leave everybody to their own conscience?

Smathers: I think that he realized that the Democrats were going to most solidly vote for censure. The only question was whether or not there would be enough Republicans to get the censure vote passed. I don't think that Johnson had to do any lobbying whatever on that vote. McCarthy had succeeded in making everybody mad, and embarrassing the Republicans.

Ritchie: When Johnson became majority leader in 1955, the big issue that he faced, and faced for the rest of his tenure as majority leader, was civil rights. That seemed the most threatening one to his own majority, since his party was so divided on that issue. How did Johnson approach civil rights? **Smathers:** Well, first Johnson was a southerner. He had been just as anti-civil rights in some votes prior to becoming majority leader as had Dick Russell from Georgia, or [Sam Ervin](#) from North Carolina, or Russell Long from Louisiana, or [Lister Hill](#), who was a great liberal on Medicaid, and was the father of Medicare legislation in a way. Johnson had voted with the southerners on that. But I think Johnson really was sincerely opposed to extreme segregation, the Ku Klux Klan position and so on. Nobody liked the Ku Klux Klan that I know of. I've never met anybody that was a friend of mine who was a Ku Klux Klanner. I've had people tell me that so and so was, but I didn't know it, and I've never seen one.

But I think that Johnson down in his heart had more compassion for the black people than anybody. I think it mostly came from the economics of the situation, that they had not been given the opportunity to make money in anything other than intensive labor work. They had not been given the opportunity to open little stores, even. They had not been given the opportunity to go to school. I think that Johnson basically had a greater feeling in his heart for the predicament of the black man than did half of these people, or more than half of the people from the North who were constantly preaching about it.

I think Hubert Humphrey who preached about it all the time--as I used to say to him when we debated, "Humphrey, you don't know what the hell you're talking about." In the whole state of Minnesota at that time they didn't have five thousand blacks living out there. In the state of Florida, at that time we had a population of five or six million people, we had two, three million blacks. We knew blacks all the time. In Alabama they probably had a greater percentage. Georgia had a greater percentage. It used to irk me to hear Hubert, and I'd say this to him, "to hear you talk about how we've got to take them into home and so on, and we've got to desegregate, and you don't even know what that problem is, you don't even see a black."

I told him about going to Rochester, Minnesota, to the hospital out there, at Lyndon Johnson's suggestion I was out there for about a week. I never saw a black the whole time I was traveling, from Minneapolis all the way to Rochester. Never saw a one! "And here you are trying to tell me, when down in most of the rural area of Florida, northwest Florida, the blacks outnumber the whites. You see less white people than you do black people. You're telling me that these people have got to take these folks into their home? You don't know what it is, it's ridiculous." But you could debate that with Hubert and it was not personal.

Now you asked me how did we handle that? Johnson believed that it was coming, that blacks should be given rights. And Senator [Holland](#), my senior colleague was very liberal on this civil rights thing, as I was, having been born --

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not that New Jersey had a damn thing to do with it--I was born in New Jersey, I don't remember seeing anything there, but as I told you before, we grew up with a black family. When we got to Florida we had a black family with us for twenty-five years, we all lived in the same house. James, till we got to high school, I didn't realize that there was hardly any difference until we went to high school, and then it suddenly dawned on me that poor James couldn't go. He couldn't do certain things. He couldn't go to certain restaurants. But as kids, you know, we never even thought about, played ball, he was a wonderful athlete, as a lot of them are, and a hell of a nice guy. I never was fearful in my area. Where I came from North Carolina, my people, mother came from Virginia, we always had black people around all the time, grew up with them.

Johnson was for black people, I think that economic circumstances were what convinced Johnson to be for them, that they had not been given a fair shot at making a good living. And some of his people had also suffered that same stigma. He had not had a big education, he had not gone to the University of Texas, or Dallas, Houston, Southern Methodist or all that. He'd gone to a little half-assed school, and he knew that. There were blacks there. I think Johnson had a warm spot in his heart for them. He was genuinely a leader in the civil rights movement.

Ritchie: And that was considering that most of the chairmen of the committees were pretty conservative southern Democrats who were opposed to civil rights.

Smathers: That's right. To just summarize a little bit, I went to Congress in 1946, I got elected, went there in '47. I stayed there till January '69. During that period of time, the one man that I could point to that did more in passing important legislation, which moved the nation forward, civil rights, Medicare, Medicaid, did a lot with finances, the tough things, civil rights, Social Security, and Medicare--which the doctors fought very bitterly--those were the things which socially moved us forward and opened up opportunities for a lot people who had never had it. In the field of education, Johnson was far and away the leader. He did more than anybody during those twenty-two years that I was in the Congress, and I don't know of anybody who has had that impact since then.

He was much bigger, see, as a senator than he was as a president. He was much bigger. That's the way the cookie crumbles. Kennedy was not big as a senator at all. I don't know that anything he really ever passed that was of great significance. He had a couple of pretty good ideas that he talked about, but I don't know of anything that he was associated with as a sponsor. I at least was associated with

Social Security. I was at least associated with H.R. 11, which used to be called the Keough bill, it was originally the Keough-Smathers bill. [Eugene J.] Keough passed it in the House and I passed it in the Senate. In the time, I say I'm Mr. Roebuck of Sears, Roebuck. They dropped off Roebuck and it became Sears. Like the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings bill, [Ernest] [Hollings](#) now has been successfully dropped out of that.

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Johnson really accomplished a lot; Kennedy didn't do much. But Kennedy was on his way to becoming really a big and important president. Had he lived I have no doubt that Kennedy would have been a historic president, because he thought big. Kennedy in a way was above the wheeling, dealing. He was never a wheeler-dealer like Johnson was. He was just as different from Johnson as day and night. I, of course, knew both of them intimately, and they were different, absolutely different.

Ritchie: Here's Johnson in 1957, leading the fight for civil rights legislation, with all these powerful southern committee chairmen from his own party filibustering against it. How does he keep from having the Democratic party split into fragments?

Smathers: Just the genius of Johnson. There were guys that got awfully unhappy with him. [Strom Thurmond](#) left the Democratic party and went to the Republican party, my guess is as much because of Johnson as anything. There were those hard-nosed guys, but there weren't too many. Again, Johnson knew how to play upon Sam Ervin, who came from North Carolina but a very progressive fellow. He knew how to do it to me. He knew how to get along with Holland, we were from Florida. He knew that deep down in his heart Lister Hill was really a closet liberal if there ever was one, and he did everything he could to get himself defeated in Alabama. And Russell Long, he's not anti-black at all. Russell Long is one of the most open-minded guys you ever saw, and he would go as far as he could. Johnson got the legislation passed in such a way that he didn't put us guys on the spot by making it tough. He would let the vote come up in such a way that it would not be spotlighted too much, that we could pass a civil rights.

When Holland and I passed whatever that amendment was that eliminated the poll tax, that was Holland who originally did it. I joined up because I liked it, I thought it was a good bill. Johnson let us pass that just like that [snaps fingers]. It was no big deal. Dirksen same thing, no big deal, "Go ahead, sure, the poll tax ought to be eliminated." I think that two speeches were made on that on the floor, and that was all. Nobody ever spoke against it; I mean, nobody got up and spoke for the poll tax, no southerner. Johnson and his little team, I helped him there a lot, we just eliminated all the opposition by talking to them in advance, saying: "This is what we're thinking about doing. This is going to happen." We would say,

"Let's do this so we can avoid something else for the time being." You knew you had a holding action in there.

Ritchie: If you had been whip in that period, if you had taken the job after Clements, would that have put you in a difficult position in your state, to have to support civil rights legislation?

Smathers: No, not in Florida. There was a time when I ran in '50 that I couldn't afford to have my picture even made with a black guy. [Claude Pepper](#) accused me of tricking him into that. I didn't trick him into that. He and I in that race, we hardly ever discussed civil rights. Later he accused me. There

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were a couple of redneck people who were supporting me, the DuPont group of Ed Ball, who ran a separate campaign against Pepper from that which I ran, and that was just based solely on civil rights. I didn't really have anything to do with that, but I got credit for it, needless to say. But civil rights, I never had any problem with that. People expected me to be liberal, I was from Miami. I was the first fellow to ever get elected to a statewide office from south Florida. Nobody from south Florida had ever been elected to a statewide office. The people in north Florida were suspicious of everybody from south Florida.

Ritchie: One other group in the coalition that I'm interested in is the role of organized labor. Were they strongly for Johnson, or did he have many ties with them?

Smathers: Yes, they were strongly for Johnson, but Johnson had enough sense to keep them quiet around him. Johnson kept telling them, "Back down, back down, we'll get this stuff passed for you." See, what would happen, the minute that organized labor would come out and say in a big speech that they were for something, if Walter Reuther got up and said, "I want this to be passed," that would kill it. That would kill it.

Johnson knew Reuther and them, and he would call them in there and say, "Look fellows, you want this bill passed? Let me tell you what I want you to do. I don't want you to say one damn thing for it, okay? You go back to Detroit and shut up. Now, you might pass the word among your union members in the South that if any of them can support it, you'd like to see them do so, but don't make any public speech about it. I don't want you and John L. Lewis and these people jumping up and down about these kinds of things. You'll kill it. Stay out of it, I'll pass it for you, but I've got to do it my way, which is we're not going to emphasize that there's a big difference here. We're going to talk about the pluses of it, what's fair. We've got to make certain moves forward. These are little minute steps," he would say. "We takes these few minute steps so that we don't get overwhelmed. But let's do it this way." Boy, he'd call those guys, and he'd play this fine tune so

that stuff passed just like that [snaps fingers], that you would have never thought could pass. All to his credit.

Ritchie: What do you attribute to Johnson that he figured out how to pull all the strings and use all the mechanisms of the legislative branch?

Smathers: He was just smart. Some people could say he was underhanded, he indulged in subterfuge and all that. Yeah, he did all that, but his motives were to accomplish certain things. And his motives were pure and good. He was a real smart, clever, clever, clever guy. I don't want to use the adjective that some people would use, like "tricky." They would say that he was a type of charlatan. They would say that was devious. He was to an extent, but I say that he only did that because he was smart enough to know that he had to do it that way. You couldn't pass these things standing up beating your chest and saying, "the time has come to give these people the right to this stuff," he wouldn't have gotten to first base. No way to get it passed that way. He

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had to do it the way he did. That's all to his credit. He was smart enough to know that there's no chance of getting through if you were going to try to meet it head on. No way.

Ritchie: Do you think any majority leader could duplicate Johnson's skill?

Smathers: I haven't seen anybody. I haven't seen anybody that even came close.

Ritchie: Do you think the institution, the Senate as a whole, would tolerate another Lyndon Johnson?

Smathers: Oh, I think they could. I think they probably need one. You know, I haven't been over there in twenty years. I think the problem today is that they don't have a Lyndon Johnson. They don't have enough strength over there. It's too dissected, too subdivided. Every guy over there has got a committee and a staff and so on, and he's running off doing his own thing. It used to be that you could get two or three guys lined up and you know you could pass something. That's what made the government infinitely more efficient. About five fellows could run the government: the president of the United States, the Speaker of the House, the majority leader when Johnson was there, and two or three important senators, and you had it. You could get anything done. And we got along fine.

Now, everybody has to make a speech about everything, and we haven't been able to balance the budget since Lyndon Johnson was there. That's pretty hard to think about. Haven't been able to balance the budget. Why? Because everybody has got enough influence and they can hold things up and there's no two or three overwhelming strong guys who can put people in line and say, "Look, we've got to

balance this budget and we're going to have to cut a lot your programs, and you're going to have to hunker up to it and accept it. But we'll give you something else here, we'll give you something else here. But we've got to cut this budget, and we're going to have to save some money." That could be done under Johnson.

Ritchie: When Johnson was majority leader, he was once quoted as saying that the only power he had was the power his office had was the power to persuade.

Smathers: That's right, but "persuade" needs definition with Johnson. What did he mean by persuade? That meant doing favors. That meant making campaign contributions. That meant sending guys on trips. That meant giving a fellow recognition. I know a guy that he brought down to Texas and got him an honorary degree. He said to me one time, "Can you arrange for me to get a couple of your colleagues an honorary degree at Rollins?" I said, "Why Rollins?" He said, "Because there's a senator here who's daughter is going to Rollins." I

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said, "I don't think I can." But that was the way Johnson did things. Some people became so grateful to him that they couldn't say no to him.

There was never any fear. I don't know that Lyndon Johnson ever frightened anybody particularly, by saying "I'll cut you off," or something. He wasn't that crude. He was a pretty crude guy about some things, but not about legislation. He was a consummate artist. He was the painter. He was the Andrew Wyeth of the Senate. He was the Rubens, whatever the great painters are, Goya, all those. He was it. He was an absolute artist at getting these done. How he did it, a color here, a little red here, a little purple there, beautiful. If you were pretty close to him and saw him do this, you just kind of amazed yourself.

Senator Holland was the most honorable man who I ever knew in my life except my own father, but Lyndon Johnson sometimes would take Holland--I'd know that Holland didn't want to vote for a certain thing, and he would tell me a week ago that he was not going to vote for it. I'd be waiting and Johnson would say, "Don't worry, I'll get Spessard." And he'd have Spessard in and the first thing you'd know, pretty soon, Spessard would say to me, "How are you going to vote?" I'd say, "Well, senator, I think I'm going to have to--you know, I've got a little more liberal record than you do, so I'm going to vote for it." He'd say, "Well, I'm thinking about it." You'd see Johnson talking to him a little later, and here he was voting for it! No, he was great, he was great.

Ritchie: Well, senator, you've painted quite an interesting picture yourself, a word picture of all of this.

Smathers: Yeah, well, Johnson was really something. So, all right, doctor, thank you.

[End of interview #3]

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