

Oral History Interview
with
JUDGE RICHMOND B. KEECH

Former Legal Member of the Public Utilities Commission of the District of Columbia, 1934-40; former Corporation Counsel for the District of Columbia, serving as General Counsel for the Public Utilities Commission, 1940-45; former Administrative Assistant to President Harry S. Truman, 1945-46; and Justice of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, since November 1, 1946.

Washington, D.C.
July 26, 1967

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

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HESS: Judge Keech, would you for the record give me a little of your personal background? Where were you born, where were you educated, and what positions did you hold prior to your service as a member of the White House staff?

KEECH: Mr. Hess, I was born in the District of Columbia and attended public elementary and high school in the District. After graduating I matriculated at Georgetown University, which

attendance was interrupted by twenty-nine months' service in the United States Navy, part of which was spent on the U.S.S. *Matsonia* troop transport. While in the

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naval service I returned to Georgetown to take a course in navigation, for which I received a certificate from that University. Following my naval service (and having previously completed my undergraduate studies at Georgetown University), I returned to Georgetown University Law School, graduating in 1922 with the degree of LL.B., and receiving my LL.M. from that University in 1923. My first legal association was with former United States Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory and the former Assistant Attorney General, G. Carroll Todd. When General Gregory returned to Texas, I became associated with the firm of Burkart and Quinn in the general practice of law. Later I was appointed an Assistant Corporation Counsel for the District of Columbia, trying cases in all the courts in the District of Columbia and in the Supreme Court of the United States. Subsequently, I was appointed People's Counsel of the District of Columbia by President Hoover; later I was

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appointed Legal Member of the Public Utilities Commission of the District of Columbia by President Roosevelt and was reappointed to that office by him, and from that office was appointed Corporation Counsel for the District of Columbia and as such served also as General Counsel for the Public Utilities Commission for the District of Columbia.

At the beginning of World War II, I was called by the Army to serve as a captain in the Judge Advocate General's Office, but, after short service there, at the instance of the District of Columbia I was returned to the Office of Corporation Counsel. It was from the latter office that I was asked to join President Truman's staff in the fall of 1945 as Administrative Assistant, in which office I served until October, 1946, at which time I was nominated by President Truman and confirmed by the United States Senate as a Justice of the United States District Court for the District

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of Columbia. I assumed the duties of that office on November 1, 1946, and am still serving on that Court, having been for a part of that time Chief Judge thereof.

HESS: Judge, how did you come to be a member of the White House staff?

KEECH: In the early fall of 1945 a reorganization, as I understand it, of the White House staff had been effected. The Honorable George Allen, former Commissioner of the District of Columbia, had played, I believe, a prominent part in bringing about the reorganization, I had gotten to know Commissioner Allen when he was serving in that capacity and I was serving as People's Counsel and later as Legal Member of the Public Utilities Commission. While away from the District of Columbia over a weekend, I received a long-distance call advising me that the President wanted to see me and inquiring as to

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when I would return. On my return an appointment was made for me to come to the White House where I was met by Judge Rosenman, Special Counsel to the President, who advised me as to the nature of the President's request. Thus, it was on the first occasion of my meeting with the President that I first learned that I was being considered for appointment to his personal staff.

HESS: Before we take up our next question about your first meeting with Mr. Truman, as you know, of course, Mr. Allen later became a friend of Mr. Truman's and worked for him on the R.F.C. and in the White House. Did you work closely with George Allen at the time that he was a District Commissioner?

KEECH: At the time he was District Commissioner, I had a close relationship with him because there is a substantial tie between the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia and the Public Utilities Commission of the District

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of Columbia. At times they sit as a joint board, so I did have contact with him in that way. And, of course, many problems which came before the Public Utilities Commission were of vital concern to the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, so I think the answer's yes to what you say.

HESS: What type of man is Mr. Allen?

KEECH: Mr. Allen is a very unique man. He's a man of tremendous capacity. I think that's probably best demonstrated by the fact that he has served in many, many capacities not only in Government but in big business, and still is.

HESS: Could you tell me about your first meeting with Mr. Truman?

KEEGH: Well, World War II had just been completed. This was a very vital period, as I was to learn very quickly and clearly from President Truman.

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It is an extraordinary honor, indeed a most flattering one, to be considered for an appointment to the President's personal staff. At the particular time when this opportunity was accorded me I had made arrangements to return to the private practice of law. When I talked to the President I told him that, now that the war was over, I'd made plans to return to private practice. In his characteristically clear, direct and courteous way he said, "The need is greater now than during the fighting war." His great sincerity and feeling for the welfare of the country were what finally convinced me that my very definite conclusions and arrangements to return to private practice were insignificant, for if the President felt that I could be of service to him, that was where my duty rested. After a week's deliberation, I concluded to join the staff.

HESS: Judge, at the time you came to the White House

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what seemed to be Mr. Truman's degree of awareness of his new position, its responsibility, its authority, and his duty?

KEECH: President Truman was completely aware of the office he was holding and of the tremendous responsibility placed upon him, especially at the close of a great conflict, with the many problems incident to transition to what was hoped to be a peace-time basis. The President was fully conscious of the great authority vested in the office of President, the attendant responsibilities, and particularly the fact that the ultimate determination of vast international and national problems was his sole responsibility. From this duty he never flinched, and acted with dispatch and decisiveness after getting all of the available facts. I do not intend to imply that the President was not an executive with the ability to delegate work. He did possess such faculty, made use of his staff and the material assembled for

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him, and was always keenly appreciative of the assistance which he received. President Truman was a prodigious and effective worker, He was at it early in the morning and into the night. Notwithstanding his great burdens and heavy hours of work, he was always highly alert and showed no signs of fatigue. A brief nap at lunch time did more for him than a full night's sleep did for many. He had great energy and extraordinary ability to concentrate.

HESS: Judge, what stands out in your mind concerning the time you spent on the White House staff?

KEECH: The President's extraordinary knowledge of history. Indeed his knowledge was so profound that while it was a treat to be in his presence during a discussion of history, it was not infrequently embarrassing. I was enlightened on more than one occasion when the President and one of his secretaries, Mr. William D. Hassett, an old

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newspaperman and historian in his own right, would discuss the reign of this or that king or some other dignitary, This was not done in general terms but in specific terms. Equally outstanding was his integrity of purpose and loyalty to his country. His one desire was to serve his country well. Personal acclaim was indeed furthest from his thoughts.

Although of limited duration, my association with the President and other members of his personal staff was indeed a highlight in my life.

HESS: Judge, what were your duties as an Administrative Assistant to the President?

KEECH: My training had been almost exclusively in the legal field As a native Washingtonian I had not had intimate contact with practical politics of state or county, My work at the White House was, as you can readily understand, limited largely to legal matters. This embraced

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the preparation of opinions as to matters which came before the President, drafting of legislation and the coordination of legislative problems. My contacts in these fields were directly with the

President, with Judge Samuel Rosenman, Clark Clifford, and Attorney General, the Assistant Solicitor General, Cabinet officers and heads of various departments of the Government and others.

The effect which the formal proclamation of the end of hostilities would have on emergency powers and authority of various agencies and departments of the Government was of great concern. Many departments and agencies were affected by legislation which ways to endure "during hostilities," "during the emergency," or "until termination of the war." At the conclusion of the fighting war, it was the President's desire that such legislation, as well as that vesting extraordinary powers in him, be terminated with all due speed, and that only such emergency

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legislation as was necessary in the wake of the fighting war remain in effect. To carry out this directive it was my function to contact members of the Cabinet and heads of departments, as well as the Budget Bureau, to insure that all emergency legislation no longer needed be revoked -- with dispatch where practicable, but in an orderly manner -- and to insure that none be terminated which was still needed during the postwar period. In this connection, the President requested that the affected departments and agencies make a survey of all emergency, national defense, and other war legislation to ascertain how much of the authority provided thereunder should be preserved. This was done, and thereafter a group consisting of the Director of War Mobilization and Reconversion, the Attorney General, and the Director of the Budget was charged with the responsibility of checking the compilations and conclusions of the departments

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and agencies and coordinating and procuring appropriate legislation, It was my function to work along with this group.

As would be expected, there was also much legislation dealing with our veterans. One bill which was introduced was entitled "Veterans Employment and National Economic Development Act." Its stated purpose was to promote maximum employment, business opportunities and careers for veterans. It was characterized as a "Veterans Reconstruction Finance Corporation." This particular legislation did not become law. President Truman, a veteran of the First World War and one who had maximum interest in the veteran, had this and many other proposed pieces of veterans legislation to deal with. He approached this problem as he did others -- with but one thought in mind, namely, to do equity, but without violence to the economy of the country.

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In addition to dealing with emergency and veterans' legislation I was given the assignment of checking with Cabinet officers and heads of departments when the Congress adjourned, to see what requested legislation had not been enacted and whether that which had not been acted upon by the Congress was still essential, and likewise to ascertain whether there was need for any other legislation or for repeal of any existing law. For example, President Truman, in September of 1945, sent a measure to Congress listing twenty-one points upon which action was requested. From time to time it fell my lot to check upon these proposals with the Cabinet and other departments affected.

I had my assignments relating to the Philippine situation. These dealt with Executive orders, proclamations and legislation, two subjects of major importance with reference to the Philippines required active consideration:

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One, Philippine independence, and the other, necessary steps looking to a rehabilitation of the Philippines, whose people and property had been severely affected by the war. There were many difficult and important questions which required timely action, It was known that financial aid was vital, but the amount thereof and the ways and means by which the funds were to be obtained and disbursed were more difficult matters, and, as I've already indicated, time was of the essence. The President's main desire throughout all of this period was to take such steps as were necessary to give political independence to the Philippines and to assure the new Republic a fair opportunity to perpetuate its existence. This resulted in the formation of a Joint American-Philippine Finance Commission to look into the ways and means of providing financial support and to determine what legislation was necessary. One major piece of

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legislation was the Philippine Rehabilitation Act of 1946, Title III of which provided for the restoration and improvement of public property and essential public services in the Philippines. Another created the Philippine War Damage Commission, consisting of three members (one Filipino and two Americans, with one of the latter serving as the. chairman). The President recognized the great good which could flow from this Commission, and he admonished the members of the Commission that its duty was to see that equity be done to all claimants. There was also legislation relating to a loan to the Philippine Government, and legislation relating to the rights, privileges and benefits of Philippine Army personnel, including guerrillas. While functioning in this field at the direction of the President, I had many contacts with the High Commissioner, and later Ambassador to the Philippines, the Honorable Paul V. McNutt, and with General Romulo, and later, President Roxas, of the Philippines.

Another of the many problems presented at the close of the war was the question of realigning or

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reassigning certain activities. A number of these changes required a balancing of the equities as between what was efficient and economical and what was politic in relation to our Allies. Such a situation was presented by a suggestion of the chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation that the activities of the U.S. Commercial Company in the Pacific Ocean area be transferred to the Navy Department. This, of course, involved contacts with the various proponents and opponents.

Another question involving international relationships was presented when Justice Jackson was to return from the European War Crime Trials -- specifically, the serious question of whether there should be further United States participation in the international trials in Europe. I had a very small part in this correspondence and discussion.

Still another very interesting assignment was that of Secretary of the Medal of Merit Board. Here I had intimate contacts with distinguished Americans -- jurists, industrialists, members of the armed services, and others, including Justice Owen J. Roberts; General

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Knudsen; Stephen Early, former Secretary to President Roosevelt; and Chief Justice Lawrence D. Brandeis of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. The function of this board was to evaluate services of civilians who had performed extraordinary feats inuring to the betterment of their country. The Medal of Merit, as you may know, first came into use in George Washington's time.

HESS: Judge, were you also involved in the task of analyzing legislation sent to the President for his signature as well as the drafting of bills to be sent to the Congress?

KEECH: The answer is yes to that one, Mr. Hess. In fact that was one of the functions which I had: To see the scope and effect of such legislation and its relation to then existing laws.

HESS: At that time did you work with the Legislative Reference Service in the Bureau of the Budget on such matters?

KEECH: From time to time.

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HESS: At this time when you were working with this, did you take it in and discuss it with the President or would you discuss it with the chief counsel -- Rosenman at first and Clifford later?

KEECH: Did both. Let me just say this to you: It would come to me sometimes through either Judge Rosenman or Clark Clifford, or from the President. Sometimes the President might have something that he was interested in as of that time, and he might call, me, or I might discuss it with either Clark Clifford or Judge Rosenman.

HESS: For an example and to show historians of the future how the procedures in the White House were operating at that time -- this is asking you to remember back quite a ways -- but could you select a particular bill of a particular piece of legislation and show how the functions work -- what particular items you worked on first and who you talked to then -- in other words, to show the routine

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and the procedure: That's an awfully big question.

KEECH: The answer is, I cannot because I would be afraid to do it because I would not be accurate.

HESS: After this lapse of time.

KEECH: That's right. It's been twenty-one years now.

HESS: Judge, were you in charge of the liquidation of the FEPC at the time that Congress would not appropriate the money to keep the agency going?

KEECH: I was not.

HESS: You mentioned a very important message that the President sent to Congress, his twenty-one points message of September 6, 1945, and, as you know, this is the time Mr. Truman in his *Memoirs* states that he felt that he was really taking over the job as President. Who did you talk to on those specific measures -- those twenty-one

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points? How did you operate in that field?

KEECH: It was my function to get the legislation as it came in from the different agencies. Then from time to time I would talk to the different department heads with reference to its effect upon a particular agency, and in this field I had many contacts with the Cabinet, and heads of other departments as well.

HESS: Since Samuel Rosenman wrote that message, and he was still in the White House -- he left on February 1, 1946 -- did you work closely with him on the twenty-one points?

KEECH: Yes, I did and at his direction. Frequently, he would send me messages and memorandums with reference to this or that, and I would try to carry on what he was interested in.

HESS: Did you discuss any of your functions during that time with the President? What I'm really

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getting at here -- did you go into his office and discuss things with him?

KEECH: On many occasions. I think I might say this to you: In my case and I'm sure in other cases, too, it was almost regular procedure for his personal staff to have close and intimate contacts with him, or to better put it, personal contacts with him.

HESS: At a time that you wanted to see the President, would you work through the counsel or would you work through Matthew Connelly?

KEECH: Primarily through Matthew Connelly. Now let me say that notwithstanding the tremendous burden which the President was carrying, access to him, at least as to his staff, was pretty free.

HESS: It was not difficult to see him?

KEECH: No, sir, it was not. He was most gracious.

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I may say this too: I think that all of us were conscious of the tremendous burdens he had, and we didn't impose upon him unless we thought it was something he was interested in.

HESS: At the time you went in to discuss the matters under the twenty-one points, how aware was he of the progress that was being made? Did he pay pretty close attention to the twenty-one points?

KEECH: He was extraordinarily aware of every one of them, which also meant that you should also be pretty well advised.

HESS: Did he ever trip you up?

KEECH: Oh, yes, more than once.

HESS: Now during the time you were in the White House, one of the important things for the White House staff to do, and important things for the Government to do, was the attempt to reduce wartime controls. Just what were your specific

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duties along this line?

KEECH: I have already intimated to you, through legislation. You see, what he was interested in was to get rid of these extraordinary powers wherever possible and as quickly as possible but to do so in a manner which would not disrupt the transition.

HESS: On June 29, 1946, the President vetoed the Price Control Bill, stating that the choice presented was not a choice between continued price stability and inflation but, "It is a choice between inflation with a statute and inflation without one," and on July 25, 1946, the President signed the second Price Control Bill "with reluctance." Did you play any part in the deliberations and workings on those measures?

KEECH: I have no recollections of playing any part of any consequence.

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HESS: According to a letter printed in part in the book *The Truman Administration, A Documentary History*, edited by Bernstein and Matusow, Chester Bowles, head of the OPA, wrote to President Truman on December 17, 1945, outlining some of the difficulties he had encountered. Two of the things he complained about were the lack of support from the administration, and a poor relationship with John Snyder, the director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion. Do you recall anything in particular about those two problems -- the difficulties with the administration and the OPA and the relationship between Bowles and Snyder?

KEECH: I have no present recollection.

HESS: You indicated that you had quite a little bit to do with the Philippine situation. Just a general question, what type of men did you think that Paul V. McNutt and General Romulo and

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President Roxas were?

KEECH: They impressed me greatly. I had a greater contact with Paul McNutt. As you know, he was a very distinguished looking gentleman. He was very interested in everything he had anything to do with, and I think he was a man who made for good relations. I think he was in a good spot at that time.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about the problem of the demobilization of the armed forces following the war?

KEECH: No.

HESS: Do you recall anything other than what you have already stated about the question of whether or not the United States should participate in the international trial in Europe? This is when Justice Jackson had returned to the United States. What was the President's view? Did you

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discuss that with the President and were you in any discussions when the President was there?

KEECH: I have no direct recollection of being present when that was discussed with the President. As I indicated to you, there was some correspondence passed back and forth at that time. My recollection is pretty vague, except as to the matter as a major problem.

HESS: Following the First World War, various emergency agencies continued to function years after their apparent usefulness was gone. Were there any of the emergency agencies that tried to perpetuate themselves after World War II?

KEECH: I do not recall any of them that did try it. I think I should say this, there were situations which were presented as to the timing of it. Incidentally, in that connection, Mr. Truman was right on top of the situation himself, so he was pretty well advised.

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HESS: How did the President run his daily staff meetings during the year that you were in the White House?

KEECH: They would meet in his office and they would come in with certain matters which were peculiar to the individual and the President would sit, I guess you would say as chairman, and he would deal with them A, B, and C. -- right down the line.

HESS: Who attended those meetings on a regular basis?

KEECH: Well, I was not in regular attendance, I was in frequent attendance only, so I really can't answer that question. I can say this to you, that present when I was there, or most of the time, were practically all of his administrative assistants,

HESS: Were there any people who attended sort of an "as necessary" basis?

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KEECH: Yes, my recollection is that from time to time someone would be called in when the group was dealing with some specific problem, dealing with that particular department or agency.

HESS: I understand there was a time during 1946 when it was considered to curtail staff meetings because of some "kitchen cabinet" criticism. Do you recall anything about that?

KEECH: That must have been after my departure. I have no recollection of it.

HESS: Did you attend the pre-press conferences held on Thursdays before the President's press conference?

KEECH: I probably did, but I was not really a part of that.

HESS: Do you recall off-hand if any members of the staff sat in on the Cabinet meetings as sort of a secretary to the Cabinet?

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KEECH: No, I do not.

HESS: It's a question that arises once in a while.

Judge, I'd like to get your evaluation of some of the people who worked in the White House at the same time that you did. If you could give me just a brief run-down on their responsibilities -- if you ever worked with them on a particular task, what do you recall about that -- and anything that you might want to add about them. Shall I just call them off and see what comes to mind here?

KEECH: Let me just deal with this in general and then if you have any specific questions, I'll give you what I have on them. You asked that I evaluate some of the people that worked in the White House at the time I served there. Basically it was my impression, that the staff as a whole was dedicated to serving President Truman. As I've already said, he, through his great personal

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efforts and desire to serve his country, inspired others to the same end. My contacts other than with the President were primarily with Judge Rosenman, Clark Clifford, George Schoeneman, Charlie Ross, William D. Hassett, and Dr. John R. Steelman. Some of my assignments would come directly from the President, and some through judge Rosenman and Clark Clifford. On occasion matters would come to me through George Schoeneman or William Hassett. On some

occasions my response would go directly to the President and on others through, and sometimes after collaboration with, men were efficient and dedicated public servants. I, of course, had contacts with other members of the staff, including Military and Navy personnel, which were happy and rewarding.

HESS: Just a general question first, Judge, on the special counsels to the President, Rosenman and Clifford, since you worked for both of them, did

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they conduct the business of their office in any noticeable manner?

KEECH: If you mean by that, did they have the ability to organize the work at hand and deal with it promptly and thoroughly, the answer is yes. Both of them were men of extraordinary capacity and they could dispatch business. I recall one particular instance as far as Judge Rosenman is concerned. I wrote a rather full report, and I was indeed amazed at his comprehension – he had a little mallet and he'd come down a page, two or three of them, and when he got through he said, "I agree – write the letter."

HESS: Do you know what the subject was on that?

KEECH: Yes, it was in connection with the so-called Elk Hills Oil Lease, which was a right touchy subject, and there was a question as to whether or not the statute had been complied with, and one of the particular problems which presented itself

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then was the question of succession in office -- the Secretary of Navy, the Under Secretary of Navy, the Assistant Secretary and so forth -- but his ability to go through page after page...

HESS: Absorb information.

KEECH: Impressed me. I must say, too, Clark Clifford had the same keenness of mind. He was as quick as a flash, and thorough, too.

HESS: What seemed to be their relationships with President Truman? Was it any different -- was Roseman's relationship with Truman noticeably different than Clifford's relationship with Truman?

KEECH: I think not. They both were serving as his counsel, and he was looking to them, and they were working for him. That's my observation.

HESS: Well, most of the men that we have on the list you have already mentioned, but there are

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a couple: David K. Niles, who was an administrative assistant.

KEECH: Yes, I had contacts with Mr. Niles and was very fond of him, but he was operating in a field which I had no contacts with, therefore, my relationships with him were less frequent than with the others.

HESS: George Schoeneman, we have mentioned.

KEECH: Oh, yes, George Schoeneman was an extraordinary public servant, and he's a man who had knowledge of the Government and the people of the Government, probably to the extent that very few of us had.

HESS: And Raymond R. Zimmerman was an administrative assistant at that time.

KEECH: Yes, I had dealings with Zimmerman from time to time but less frequently than with the ones I have suggested.

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HESS: George Elsey was in the White House at the time, even though he was not an administrative assistant. He was working with Mr. Clifford.

KEECH: That's right. I had contact with him from time to time.

HESS: What was your impression of Mr. Elsey?

KEECH: I thought he was a very competent man,, but, as I say, my professional contacts were less with him, because I would deal primarily with Clifford.

HESS: Did you have any contacts with Philleo Nash who was at this time assistant to Niles?

KEECH: Yes from time to time, but again he was in a field which was not my field.

HESS: And a couple of men we have mentioned who were secretary to the President, Matthew Connelly and William D. Hassett.

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KEECH: Yes. Matt Connelly was an extraordinary person. He knew everybody, he had the faculty of greeting them, and I can recall occasion after occasion sitting there waiting my turn to see the President, and various people from all over the world and elsewhere coming in there -- he always had the faculty of making them feel at home and at ease. I think he served an extraordinary function.

Bill Hassett, as I have already indicated to you, was an extraordinary scholar, and I had many very intimate contacts with him. He had a tremendous capacity for remembering history. He and the President had something peculiarly in common. They could go from one reign to another giving details and idiosyncrasies of the principals.

HESS: I've heard the same story from several people.

Now, the White House press office at this time was manned by Charles Ross and his Assistant Eben Ayers.

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KEECH: I knew them both.

HESS: Do you recall, anything in particular about those gentlemen?

KEECH: No, I do not except, personally. I was very fond of both of them. I might say one thing about Charlie Ross. Charlie Ross was an old time newspaperman, as you know, a man of great discernment and it was very, very interesting to see and be with him and to hear him.

HESS: In February, 1946, Dr. John R. Steelman was given the title The Assistant to the President. Do you know why he was given that title? Did you ever hear anything on that?

KEECH: No, I didn't, but he was an extraordinarily competent gentleman, He was a great man of letters.

HESS: And those are the gentlemen, outside of the Military and Naval personnel. Did you have

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any dealings with Leahy, Vardaman, Foskett and Rigdon or Harry Vaughan?

KEECH: Yes, indeed, but not to the same degree that I did with the ones I have already referred to.

HESS: Anything come to mind about those gentlemen, any instances?

KEECH: Well, I used to see General Vaughan, used to see Admiral Leahy with substantial frequency in the meetings and other occasions at the White House, and, of course, from time to time I was on trips with the President when they were also there, but their field was not my field.

HESS: On the general subject of Congressional liaison, just how was Congressional liaison carried on during the Truman administration? Just how did Mr. Truman seek to gain support for his proposals during the time that you were in the White House?

KEECH: As I have already indicated to you, I was not

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really in the political field. Let me say this, President Truman had cordial and effective contacts with the leadership in the Congress -- Speaker Rayburn, Representative McCormack and Senator Scott Lucas. The President was very close to Leslie Biffle, Secretary of the Senate, and I believe there was great mutual respect and admiration for the capacity and integrity of each. Of course, Mr. Truman by his service in the Senate knew the modus operandi there well, and was the type

of man who generated a desire to help, a desire to serve him, and I think in that way he was able to get a good bit of his legislation.

HESS: In 1949, as you know, there were two men put on the White House staff, Charles Maylon and Joseph Feeney, to act as Congressional liaison, but there had not been anyone with a similar title, or with a job of a similar nature until this time, would it be fair to assume that

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the President conducted a great deal of the Congressional liaison himself, between Sam Rayburn in the House and perhaps Lucas in the Senate, perhaps a great deal of Congressional liaison that now goes on between Larry O'Brien and the Hill -- there was no such man as a Larry O'Brien in the early years of the Truman administration -- would it be safe to assume that Mr. Truman did this himself? Isn't that a complicated question?

KEECH: It's not really as complicated as it seems. I think the answer is, yes, that Mr. Truman did a good bit of it himself when he had something he was particularly interested in, but I do believe, also, that Mr. Truman had a consciousness of the fact that his function was executive and the Congress was legislative, and that to a certain extent there should be that division. He did have legislation, don't misunderstand me, in which he was interested and which he exerted

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his very best efforts to put through.

HESS: Some historians are prone to show the President in a bad light because of some of the proposals and some of the legislation -- civil rights legislation for instance -- that he put forward but did not get through; they say that perhaps his civil rights proposals were made for reasons of political expediency and that he didn't really think that he could get them through -- he was just making a political action. What's your reaction to that statement?

KEECH: Mine would be that that was not so. As to the question you put, I should say to you that I was not involved in civil rights matters; on the other hand I have no hesitancy in answering your question as to the suggestion of some that the President's actions in that field were designed from the standpoint of political expediency. I do not subscribe to this suggestion.

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Mr. Truman was too forthright a man to deal in subterfuge.

HESS: On November 19, 1945, the President sent a special message to Congress recommending a comprehensive health program. Did you assist in writing that message or the legislation?

KEECH: I did not.

HESS: On October 23, 1945, the President made an address before a joint session of the Congress on Universal Military Training. Did you become involved in the matters revolving around that problem?

KEECH: No, I was not,

HESS: Did you assist in the writing of the President's State of the Union Message of January, 1946?

KEECH: Basically, no, I did have some little contact with it when Clark Clifford was working on it.

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HESS: Do you recall at this late date what that contact was?

KEECH: I cannot tell you. I can tell you it was a very snowy time.

HESS: On that subject, just how were the President's speeches written? Who worked on a Presidential speech, and just what was the procedure?

KEECH: I can't answer that.

HESS: Judge, did you accompany the President on any of his trips, Key West, Shangri-La or aboard the *Williamsburg*? What do you recall about those?

KEECH: It was my great fortune to accompany the President on a number of occasions on the *Williamsburg*. On these trips the President's party would frequently be joined by outstanding men. I recall on one occasion General Eisenhower's joining the President's party immediately after his return from a NATO

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conference. I had the good fortune on another occasion to be a member of the President's party which left Washington on the *Williamsburg* and boarded the aircraft carrier F.D.R. for maneuvers, in addition to Fleet Admiral Leahy, Major General Vaughan, Secretary of Defense Forrestal and other high ranking officers of the Government.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular, any incidents that happened on board the *Williamsburg*? Was this where the President liked to discuss history?

KEECH: Yes, he would discuss history and he would a: do a lot of work while he was on the *Williamsburg* but as you suggest, it would be there in the evening, all sitting around in the cabin, that discussion would ensue in which the President and Bill Hassett particularly would come to the forefront.

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HESS: What percent of the time was spent on work when they were on the *Williamsburg*? Do you recall? Was it mostly vacation, or twenty-five percent work, or something of that sort?

KEECH: I would say a good deal of work was done. I don't think you can measure it. Mr. Truman would always rise early in the morning, in fact, he could do a good part of a day's work

before he had his breakfast, and then he would do more in the morning before noon, he'd have his lunch and then he'd take a little nap and then he'd come back at it again; but he did have pleasure on these trips as well.

HESS: Did you ever go down to Key West?

KEECH: No, I wasn't down at Key West with him.

HESS: Judge, where would you place Mr. Truman on the scale from a liberal to a conservative?

KEECH: I'm not in a position to characterize Mr.

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Truman as a liberal or a conservative. It is my feeling that he was more of a "middle of the road" man. He recognized the need for change, but he, in my judgment, believed that it should be done by evolution and not revolution.

HESS: How do you think of Mr. Truman as a former boss?

KEECH: This is the easiest question that you have propounded. I can truthfully answer it in one word: Ideal.

HESS: What is your estimation of Mr. Truman's place in history?

KEECH: Mr. Truman was a great President. He was extremely forthright. Probably the most outstanding characteristic of the President was his ability to assemble facts, consider them thoroughly and promptly decide a given proposition in unequivocal terms. He had many momentous questions to deal with and he answered them.

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I believe the passage of time has already shown most of his answers to be correct and with the further passage of time, it will be likewise shown that certain decisions that were questioned can no longer be. It is my view, and I sincerely believe the view of most people, that Mr. Truman will occupy a place of high distinction in history. It has been particularly gratifying for me to note, as already stated, that recognition of his distinguished service has grown with the passage of time, and I believe it will grow still further.

HESS: Judge, one last question. Did you think Mr. Truman was going to win the election of 1948?

KEECH: I hoped so but I can't say that I was too positive. I think that he and Leslie Biffle were probably more sure of that fact than others.

HESS: That was a time when Mr. Biffle dressed up as a chicken farmer and took his truck out to the grassroots. Did you ever hear Mr. Biffle

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say anything about that?

KEECH: Yes, he talked about it on a number of occasions, as a matter of fact, he was not whistling in the dark either -- Biffle. He'd gotten to feel the pulse of the people, and he came back with a great belief in the success of the President.

HESS: What kind of a man was Leslie Biffle?

KEECH: I think he was one of the most extraordinary people I have ever known. I knew him not only when I was at the White House, but many years prior to going there when I was serving on the Public Utilities Commission, and when I was Corporation Counsel for the District of Columbia -- General Counsel to the Public Utilities Commission -- which meant that I went up on the Hill on many, many occasions, the Congress being the District of Columbia governments legislative body. I found him always willing and ready and anxious to help and do that which was right. The fact

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that he was held in such high regard by not only Democrats but Republicans as well, I think, is a monument to his manner and efficiency.

HESS: One more question, what type of man do you believe Mr. Truman to be?

KEECH: That's an all encompassing thing. I think he's a man, and I think that's probably as good an answer as I can give you.

HESS: Thank you very much for your time, Judge. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

KEECH: I have nothing, sir.

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