

Oral History interview
with
DR. ARTHUR S. FLEMMING

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by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

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JOHNSON: Dr. Flemming, I'm going to start as I usually do by asking you for your birthplace and your birth date and your parents' names.

FLEMMING: I was born in Kingston, New York on June 12, 1905. My parents were Harry and Harriet Flemming.

JOHNSON: Do you have brothers and sisters?

FLEMMING: I have one sister named Elizabeth.

JOHNSON: What is her married name?

FLEMMING: Her married name is Sherbondy. She lives in Pennsylvania and part of the year down in Florida.

JOHNSON: So you're one of two children. Concerning your education, where was it you went to school?

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FLEMMING: Well, my undergraduate college was Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, and I took a master's degree at American University here in Washington. Then my final degree was a law degree which I earned at George Washington University here in Washington, D. C.

JOHNSON: I notice you have the LLD. from several institutions. What was your father's occupation?

FLEMMING: My father was a practicing lawyer in Kingston, New York. He was a very active trial lawyer, and very active in life in the community there, president of the school board, president of the hospital board, and president of the savings bank. He was judge of the circuit court for a period of time, and so on.

JOHNSON: In other words, would he have been the most important influence when you were growing up?

FLEMMING: He was a very, very important influence.

JOHNSON: What was your first position after you received your law degree?

FLEMMING: I came to Washington and accepted a position, a part-time position, really as a debate coach and instructor in government at the American University. It was just two years old at that time. This was the year 1927, and they were just getting underway . I had about three years in that position and then joined the staff as a reporter of the

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United States Daily, which was the predecessor publication to *U.S. News and World Report*. In other words, I was working with David Lawrence, and I was with him approximately five years.

JOHNSON: That brings us up to when?

FLEMMING: That brings us up to around 1934.

JOHNSON: Okay, right in the middle of the Depression.

FLEMMING: Then I accepted an invitation to return to American University to become the first director of a School of Public Affairs at American University. I was there until 1939 when President Roosevelt invited me to become a member of the U. S. Civil Service Commission.

JOHNSON: So you got into the manpower and personnel area of the Federal Government.

FLEMMING: That's right, in 1939, and of course, as you know, that was really the beginning of the defense program. Soon after I became a member of the Civil Service Commission, my two colleagues on the Commission asked me to accept responsibility for the Commission's role in the defense program, later the war program. Not long after that, the President established by Executive Order the War Manpower Commission, which was chaired by Paul McNutt, former Governor of Indiana. The President asked me to serve on that commission, representing Government in its

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capacity as an employer. Soon after the commission got under way, Governor McNutt, the chairman, asked me to serve as the government chairman of a labor, management, and agriculture committee. This committee was a working committee. We met virtually every week, and it was our responsibility to work on the issue of moving people from non-defense to defense programs without any loss of seniority and so on. We had to work by getting voluntary agreements between labor and management. There was no law giving us authority to order these movements and there was no executive order giving us authority to do that . So, everything we did had to be done through negotiation and through reaching an agreement.

JOHNSON: So you learned the work of both sides, management and labor.

FLEMMING: That's right. I became very well acquainted with some of the younger leaders at that time in both labor and management, the people who eventually became some of the top

leaders on both the labor and management sides. For example, one of the very active members of our committee was Walter Ruether. It was my first opportunity to get to know him.

JOHNSON: Okay. You were a member of the Advisory Council of the Retraining and Reemployment Administration in the Department of Labor from 1944 to '47.

FLEMMING: Yes, that was an organization that was set up to plan for the situation that everybody thought was going to confront the country immediately after the war.

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Namely, the feeling was that we would experience high unemployment, and consequently the administration felt that some planning should take place designed to alleviate that situation to the extent that Government could alleviate it.

As I look back on it, I recall with interest the fact that we had a lot of studies put before us, and a lot of facts and figures put in front of us, but no one mentioned the possibility of an electronic industry developing in this country. Yet, the electronic industry was just around the corner, and of course, it had a terrific impact on the employment situation immediately following the war. Actually we did not have a high rate of unemployment immediately following the war. However, the planning process was very worthwhile and it did enable the government to focus on some issues that it should have focused on.

JOHNSON: Did you get any specific instructions from Roosevelt on policy or planning.

FLEMMING: No, not that I recall in that particular area. Of course, at that time the Secretary of Labor was Frances Perkins. She was very active as a member of the War Manpower Commission and she was also very active in the work of this particular advisory council.

JOHNSON: You were well acquainted with her then.

FLEMMING: Very well acquainted with her at that time, and then when President Roosevelt died and was succeeded by President Truman, he brought in his own Secretary of

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Labor. But there was a vacancy on the Civil Service Commission and President Truman invited her to fill that vacancy. She accepted the invitation, so for three years I had the privilege of working with her as a colleague.

Of course, I had become acquainted with her work even when I was a reporter because one of the first things that President Roosevelt did was to set up a Cabinet task force to take a look at the question of whether or not this country should start down the road of social insurance in order, as he put it, to deal with the hazards and vicissitudes of life. The chair of that Cabinet task force was Frances Perkins. She was certainly a great lady, and an outstanding public servant.

JOHNSON: She had some influence on your thinking then?

FLEMMING: Oh, very definitely. We became close associates in connection with the work of the Civil Service Commission.

JOHNSON: Had you met Senator Truman?

FLEMMING: No, I had not met him. I was very much aware of his work as chairman of the investigating committee, along with everyone else that was in Government. I met him soon after he took over as President. I met him in this way. I should say this -- at that time, the members of the Civil Service Commission did not have a term of office. They served at the pleasure of the President of the United States. So the question came up as to whether or not we should automatically submit our resignations. What I would

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call the Civil Service constituency urged us not to do that. They said, clearly if the President wants to make a change he's got the legal right to do it, but we think that it would contribute to the bipartisan climate that has permeated the work of the Civil Service Commission if you did not just automatically submit your resignation. So we didn't.

About a year prior to that, Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, had invited me to accept the presidency of that college. I considered it, and decided that we were in the middle of a war program, that I had a key position in connection with that war program, and that it would not be right to leave the Government. They had not filled the position, so they came back to me when President Roosevelt died and President Truman took office, thinking that there might be a change. They asked me if I would reconsider. I said, "Well, I'll think about it," but I had reached the conclusion that I would make the same decision, because we were still in the middle of the war program. But a friend over at the White House, not in a key position, but yet someone working over there, said to me that he had overheard a conversation that indicated they were unhappy over the fact that we had not submitted our resignations, and some were particularly unhappy that, as the Republican member, I had not submitted my resignation. So I thought that I had better do a little checking under those circumstances, because I might find myself turning down a job and then being out of the job that I was in.

So I went up to see [Democratic] Congressman [Robert] Ramspeck from

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Georgia. He was the author of most of the Civil Service legislation at that particular period. He was actually chair of the committee that handled Civil Service legislation, but he was also Majority Whip of the House of Representatives, and he had been chairman of the speakers bureau for Mr. Truman when he ran as the Vice President. So I told him the situation that confronted me, and Mr. Ramspeck said, "I don't think there's any truth to that, but you ought not hear it from me, you ought to hear it from the President." He said, "I'd better get in touch with the White House staff and suggest that the President talk to you."

Well, within a day or two I did get a call from the White House, asking me to come down to see the President. I went in to see him -- went into his office -- and he greeted me by saying, "Bob Ramspeck tells me that some guy around here is trying to tell you that I want your resignation."

I said, "Yes, that's what I picked up." He said, "There's not a damn bit of truth to it." He said, "I don't know anything about Civil Service. That hasn't been a part of my background." He kind of said it with a twinkle in his eye, but he said, "I need somebody around here who does know something about it. Bob Ramspeck tells me you do know something about it. I want you to stay." I said, "Thank you Mr. President, I'll be very glad to stay." That conversation didn't take longer than three minutes, but I understood just where I stood with him, as other people did.

JOHNSON: Do you want to name this friend at the White House?

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FLEMMING: Actually, the name has faded.

JOHNSON: Before we proceed further with Truman while he was President, you did have some recollections on the '44 Democratic convention, on the selection of a Vice-Presidential candidate for President Roosevelt, and Paul McNutt being one of the leading contenders from your point of view.

FLEMMING: Yes, of course, I was in the Government during that period and I was also over at the War Manpower Commission where Paul McNutt was the chairman. I was following that with some interest. President Roosevelt had kept people in kind of an uncertain state for quite a while as to whether or not he was going to run for a fourth term. He had really invited people to become candidates for the Democratic nomination for President. Paul McNutt was one of those who accepted that invitation and got out there to get delegates. And he was being quite successful.

Then when President Roosevelt announced that he was going to run, he also made it clear that he hadn't made up his mind as to who he wanted as a Vice-Presidential candidate. As we know, he really didn't make up his mind on that until the convention was held. In effect, he kind of invited those who were running for President, who were interested in doing so, to run for Vice President. Paul McNutt certainly did do that. He got a good many delegates pledged to him. In fact, when the convention took place and President Roosevelt announced that he wanted to have Senator Truman as his candidate, the McNutt delegates were stirred up. They were

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aroused, and it became necessary for Governor McNutt to appear before the convention and in effect say, "Look, the only person that should select his running mate is the man who is going to run for President." He urged his delegates to support the President's selection, and in effect, released them with the idea that they would do just that. And; of course, that is what happened.

JOHNSON: There was a letter that Roosevelt signed saying that either Douglas -- that is, William Douglas who was on the Supreme Court by this time -- or Truman would be suitable as vice-presidential candidates. Did you know anything about his candidacy or do you have any recollections of William Douglas as a possible Vice-Presidential candidate?

FLEMMING: No, I was not involved in any discussions relative to that possibility. Of course, I had known him. I was in the Executive Branch of the Government, and I had watched with

interest his nomination to the Supreme Court and the work that he had done on the Supreme Court.

JOHNSON: Paul McNutt -- how long did he stay with the Government, and was he involved at all with the Truman administration?

FLENNING: Yes, he became Ambassador to the Philippines.

JOHNSON: Oh, under Truman.

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FLEMMING: That's right. To the best of my knowledge, that was his last public office. He died soon after that. He developed cancer and died at a fairly early age.

JOHNSON: Then this Retraining and Reemployment group that you involved with from 1944 until -- when did that dissolve, do you know?

FLEMMING: I'm not sure just when it was terminated. It was still functioning I think when I left in 1948 to become president of Ohio Wesleyan University.

JOHNSON: But it was successful in doing what it was supposed to do?

FLEMMING: Well, I think it was a successful planning operation.

JOHNSON: In case there had been this postwar bust, or depression, as was sort of predicted because this is what happened in the past, and that was part of that cyclical idea involving free enterprise economics, what would have been done? The Employment Act, of course, was passed in 1946. Did you have any input into that Employment Act?

FLEMMING: I'm sure that some of our discussions, recommendations, and so on, did influence that employment act. And if we had moved into a high rate of unemployment I'm sure that, based on some of the work that we had done and so on, there would have been an acceleration of the opening up of public service jobs, not only at the Federal level, but at state and local levels as well.

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JOHNSON: Direct employment by Government at various levels?

FLEMMING: That's right, yes. That's right, in order to tide over what people envisaged as a transition period. Give the economy a chance to pick up so that normal employment rates would come back into the picture. But, to the best of my recollection, the major factor that made that unnecessary was the advent of the electronic industry, as I've indicated during our discussion.

JOHNSON: You're referring to the television, and of the expansion of radio.

FLEMMING: That's right, and the whole electronic industry. It's clear now -- it wasn't then -- that it was just around the corner, and that had a major, positive impact on employment.

JOHNSON: And of course, there was all of this pent-up demand after the war for all kinds of civilian goods. And the GI bill. Did you see the GI bill as not only a way to help educate veterans but also as kind of a pump primer?

FLEMMING: It contributed to the priming of the pump. Of course, it contributed to putting the educational institutions back on a better economic foundation.

JOHNSON: Did you have any input into the GI bill?

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FLEMMING: No, I was not involved in that. I was the beneficiary of that when I became president of Ohio Wesleyan in '48.

JOHNSON: The Civil Service Commission -- you were with them for a good long time, weren't you, from 1939 to '48. You resigned in '48 from the Civil Service Commission.

FLEMMING: That's right. It was early in '48 that I received an invitation from Ohio Wesleyan, my own college, to come back as president and I decided that I would accept it, in all probability. But I also decided, in view of the conversation I'd had with President Truman at the beginning of his administration, that I would like to go over and talk with him and tell him about my plans.

JOHNSON: After the meeting with President Truman in 1945, what were some of the major problems that you had to deal with as a member of the Civil service Commission? Do you recall what seemed to stand out as major problems and how did you remedy those?

FLEMMING: If I may back up just a little, and say that when it became clear that we were going to become involved in a major defense or war program, the recommendation was sent to Capitol Hill from the War Department to exempt all new positions from the whole Civil Service system. I went to the White House to talk with one of President Roosevelt's assistants, a gentleman by the name of McReynolds, William McReynolds. He was one of the six persons "with a passion for anonymity," that Roosevelt appointed. He was a career civil servant himself. He had been a special assistant to

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Secretary [Henry] Morgenthau over at the Treasury, but he had grown up really in the Post Office Department. I said to him, "Look, it is not necessary to take these positions out from under the whole Civil Service structure just because we're confronting a crisis." I said, "The President's got all of the authority he needs to authorize us to set up a system, by Executive Order, that could be adapted to this crisis situation." And he said, "Well, if you feel that way, go up and testify to that affect. You've got clearance; go up and tell them about it."

So, I went up before the committee that was considering this recommendation; as I recall, it was chaired by former Congressman [Andrew J.] May of Kentucky. I indicated to the staff director I

wanted to be heard. The hearing was drawing to a close and he said, "I understand there's somebody from the Civil Service Commission that wants to be heard. Who is it?"

So I stood up and introduced myself. He said, "Okay, tell us what you want to say." So I urged that they turn this request down, and then laid out how I thought it could be helped. Well, they accepted the recommendation by a margin of one vote in the committee, and they did it by using some proxies. So then I immediately got in touch with Mr. Ramspeck, and told him what had happened. He said, "All right, I'll fight it on the floor." He did fight it on the floor, and he beat it, by a close margin, but he did beat it. It never came up again, and as a result of that, the President did issue an Executive Order and we established war service regulations. Under those war service regulations, we organized a recruiting program which had, as an objective, getting the

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best qualified people we could on the job in the shortest possible period of time. People received what were referred to as War Service appointments. In other words, they were for the duration of the war. That worked reasonably well. We worked out partnerships with all of the major agencies. As the war came to a close in '45 and '46, it became clear, of course, that we'd have to have another transition period from the war service period back to a normal career civil service. So we'd have to get the Executive Order that would make it possible for us to do that. That was presented to President Truman. We did not have to present it to him in person. Don Dawson was on his staff.

JOHNSON: Was he your go-between?

FLEMMING: Yes, he was the go-between at that particular time. It was presented and it was signed. We worked on that transitional period. We'd, step by step, give the war service appointees an opportunity to take certain steps that would enable them to be converted over to a regular Civil Service status and so on. We did work out the transition, and I suspect that was the major issue at that time. But also, of course, during that period of time, we had this whole issue of the so-called loyalty standards and the Executive Order dealing with that, that President Truman issued. This is where my association with Frances Perkins was extremely helpful.

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JOHNSON: Okay, before we get into that subject, which is a very important one, you mentioned this McReynolds' "passion for anonymity." You had a little anecdote. Do you want to repeat that?

FLEMMING: Well, let me give you a background for that. Fairly early in the Roosevelt administration he set up a group which was headed by Louis Brownlow.

JOHNSON: You mean Roosevelt set this group up?

FLEMMING: Yes. Brownlow had association with the University of Chicago and on it was also Charles Merriam, who was head of the Political Science Department at the University of Chicago. It was to take a look at the way in which the White House was operating. In those

days there was no professional staff at the White House, just really clerical staff -- some of them were high-level clerical staff -- but no professional staff. [The Brownlow committee] also was to take a look at other organizational problems in the Federal Government. They filed a report with President Roosevelt in which they recommended that he select for his own personal staff, six persons who as they put it, would have a "passion for anonymity." Mr. McReynolds was one of those persons. They also recommended the creation, of a number of new agencies such as the Federal Security Agency, which was the agency that Paul McNutt headed while he also was serving as chairman of the War Manpower Commission. That was the predecessor agency to [the Department of] Health, Education and Welfare.

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JOHNSON: Well, what was it Roosevelt asked of McReynolds, something about whether he kept a diary?

FLEMMING: No, this goes back to an earlier period in the Roosevelt administration. I happened to have as one of my close personal friends a person by the name of Charles West, who was a graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University but who was also a member of the political science faculty at Denison [University]. In '32, that's my recollection, he ran for Congress from our Congressional district in Ohio, and was elected. He was identified as a very promising younger member of the House and was placed on the Ways and Means Committee in his first term, which was an unusual thing to have happen. He was doing very, very well. But, as you will recall, around '36, along in that period, President Roosevelt became very unhappy with some of the Democratic members of the Congress and he decided to see if he could get rid of some of them. One of them was Senator [Victor] Donahey of the State of Ohio who was a very popular political figure. So he went to Charlie West and asked him to run in the Democratic primary in Ohio against Senator Donahey.* Well, Charlie West was very reluctant to do it because he could see that there was unfolding for him a very interesting career in the House. And he knew enough about Ohio politics to know that the odds would be very much against him in terms of defeating Donahey.

Well, he was right; he ran and he lost. But then the Government was just beginning to establish the positions of Under Secretary in the various departments, and

* Victor Donahey served as U.S. Senator, from Ohio, in the years 1935-41.

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so President Roosevelt offered Charlie West the position of Under Secretary of Interior, which would have put him under Mr. Ickes, Harold Ickes, but he offered it with the understanding he would be detailed immediately to the White House and would become their principal liaison with Congress. This was really the first position of that kind that we had. So he accepted that. In those days President Roosevelt would start the day with what was called the "bedside conference" because of his physical problem. His close staff, immediate staff, would meet him in his bedroom and they'd kind of plan the day. About the second day that Charlie West was a part of that group, President Roosevelt suddenly said to him, "Charlie, do you keep a diary?" Mr. West's reply was, "No, Mr. President, I do not keep a diary." And the President's response

was, "That's great; we don't like people who keep diaries, do we Marvin?" referring to Marvin McIntyre who was his right-hand person, one of his personal aides.

JOHNSON: Were you there for any of those bedside conferences?

FLEMMING: No, no.

JOHNSON: This came to you through somebody else?

FLEMMING: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: Now, getting up to the Truman period again, the loyalty issue created controversy, but before we mention that, according to the history of the Civil Service

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Commission by Van Riper,* one of your ideas, one of your projects, in that immediate postwar period was to decentralize Civil Service.

FLEMMING: Well, all that started before that postwar period. That was an idea that I had almost from the beginning of my service as a member of the Civil Service Commission, because I found that it was a highly centralized organization. I felt that an organization that was going to function effectively in the personnel field would have to be decentralized. So we started it even prewar, but when the war came along, then we made it a completely decentralized operation.

Now, in the postwar period, of course, we confronted the issue of to what extent we were going to recentralize, as contrasted with the decentralized operation of the war period. We decided to stay with the decentralized concept.

JOHNSON: Now, Van Riper says that that might have been more theory than practice because he said the Civil Service Commission did control procedural matters.

FLEMMING: Well, see, he's using "decentralization" in one sense; I'm using it in another here. When I responded to your question, I was talking about decentralizing the operations of the Civil Service Commission as an organization. The Civil Service Commission had field offices and so on. When I first took office, those field offices had very little authority to act and we did delegate a great deal of authority to act.

* Paul R. Van Riper, *History of the United States Civil Service* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1958).

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Now, he's using it in the sense of a willingness on the part of the Civil Service Commission to decentralize to the operating agencies of the Government some of our authority to act, recognizing that we had the responsibility. But we did recognize that we had authority to delegate authority to act with the understanding that there would be a monitoring of how those delegations were carried out and so on. During the war we did delegate a great deal of authority

to departments and agencies to act, subject to monitoring on the part of the Civil Service Commission. In the postwar period, my effort personally, and I had the backing of someone like Frances Perkins on that, was to continue that policy of utilizing the resources of the personnel offices of the departments and agencies to the maximum possible extent. You do have to keep in mind the fact that prewar, the personnel offices in the departments were very thin, with very few professional people in them. In fact, when I first went on the Commission, the personnel function was handled by what were called chief clerks. Today they would be called Assistant Secretaries for Administration. But the chief clerk handled budget, he handled procurement, he handled space, and he handled personnel. They were just beginning to get some professional people in those personnel offices.

Now that was accelerated some during the war because of the pressures of the war period. So, when you thought about delegating to the operating agencies, you had to take into consideration their resources in terms of professionals in the personnel field. So, postwar, it was spotty. We delegated more completely to some departments and agencies than we did to others.

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JOHNSON: I see. The competitive exam and the register of eligibles, was that introduced after the war, during the Truman period?

FLEMMING Well, you see, that was an integral part of the Civil Service system, prewar.

JOHNSON: That was prewar too.

FLEMMING: Pre-World War II. We did not use it to any extent whatsoever during the war period. We had to use other methods and other techniques. After World War II, it was reintroduced in connection with certain jobs, for example, with entrance positions.

JOHNSON: So the application might have changed a little, but the principle remained the same?

FLEMMING: We tried, consistent with the resources that were available all through the Government, to stay with that concept. That's right.

JOHNSON: And, of course, you had tremendous workload after the war.

FLEMMING: Oh, yes, particularly all of this conversion that had to go on; it was a very heavy workload for everybody.

JOHNSON: And, of course, you introduced the veterans preference, with the five points?

FLEMMING: Well, the veterans preference had been pre-World War II also.

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JOHNSON: Oh, it had?

FLEMMING: But when you began to apply post-World War II, obviously it was on a much greater order of magnitude, and had a much greater impact on the whole career service.

JOHNSON: Were there many complaints that because of this preference, that sometimes the best person might not have been appointed to the top jobs?

FLEMMING: Oh, you got that complaint and sometimes it might work that way. You see, veterans preference in the Federal service at that time, and it still operates substantially this way, operated so that whatever grade a veteran got, a non-disabled veteran, you'd add five points to his grade. For a disabled veteran, you would add ten points and he'd go to the top of the register. Well, he was qualified. I mean the whole objective of the system was to make sure that the person was qualified, but there might very well be some people lower down on the register that would be better qualified. Congress continued that, and decided that's what they wanted to do as far as the disabled veteran was concerned. And it still functions.

JOHNSON: Congress had to approve all these major decisions?

FLEMMING: Well, the veterans preference law was definitely a Congressional decision. The President still had a good deal of authority in the Civil Service field; he doesn't have as much today as he did then. I mean Congress has come in over the years with more and more specific legislation.

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JOHNSON: Did Truman kind of intrude, or did he take a strong role at all in Civil Service?

FLEMMING: No. I mean he certainly did not intervene at any point. I think he probably operated in accordance with a philosophy that he expressed to me in that first conversation. "This is not an area that I know very much about; I need somebody around that does." And as long as he had confidence in the way we were operating, he didn't feel that it was necessary to intervene.

JOHNSON: When you left in '48, do you know how many times you had met with Truman, by that time?

FLEMMING: I met him that first time when he first took office and then I met with him as I left. That was all. I did not meet with him in between.

JOHNSON: Well, how about on the Hoover Commission?

FLEMMING: Okay, in connection with the Hoover Commission, as a Commission, we did meet with him, but personally, I mean one-on-one, it was only those two times. I should say that you've identified one development that from my point of view was very important in terms of the opportunity it gave me. Under the law establishing what we now call the First Hoover Commission, the President was charged with the responsibility of appointing two persons from the Executive Branch; one Democrat and one Republican. He appointed as the Democrat, Secretary [James V.] Forestal who

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was then the first Secretary of Defense, and he asked me to serve as the Republican, so that put me on the Hoover Commission.

JOHNSON: In '47 I believe.

FLEMMING: Yes, '47. And that was a very exciting assignment. As you know, President Truman, in asking President [Herbert] Hoover to come back to be a member and chairman of the commission, was giving him his first opportunity to come back into public life following his defeat for reelection. I know that President Hoover deeply appreciated that. I had the feeling as I observed what was going on that a good relationship developed between President Truman and President Hoover. At times President Hoover would feel that he'd like to know how President Truman would react to a particular proposal, so he'd call up and go over and see him. I got the feeling that on those occasions and possibly others, President Truman also got President Hoover's reactions to certain things that he was dealing with. I was thrilled to see that kind of a relationship develop between the two.

Of course, President Hoover took the assignment very, very seriously. It was a full-time assignment as far as he was concerned. He put a great deal into it. Then, when we were getting down near the end of the work, he said, "If we stop now, and just file this report, it will gather dust and nothing will happen." He said, "We've got to take some steps to rally public opinion back of these recommendations." So he came up with the idea of having citizens committees for the Hoover Report at the national

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level, state level, and in many instances at the local level. He took the lead on getting that movement started. It did become a very, very substantial movement, and it did influence the actions of Congress in connection with these recommendations. Actually, at least 75 percent of those recommendations were ultimately implemented.

JOHNSON: On the First Hoover Commission?

FLEMMING: On that First Hoover Commission, which is an amazing record.

JOHNSON: Would you say that was more successful than the second one?

FLEMMING: That's right, it was. The First Hoover Commission was set up on a strictly bipartisan basis. I mean it was bipartisan, equally divided between the parties in terms of membership. The Republicans, you remember, at the beginning of the Eisenhower administration controlled both the House and the Senate, and they set it up in such a way that they would have a one vote margin on the Second Hoover Commission. Well, that created a different situation. It did make some significant recommendations and some of them were adopted. The score card wasn't as good in my judgment, as the first one. I think the people who have tried to make an objective study of the work of both commissions concur on that.

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JOHNSON: Were there any important changes in personnel policy that came about as a result of the First Hoover Commission, that kind of come to mind as maybe something really memorable?

FLEMMING: Well, the commission made some substantial recommendations in that field. Its most significant recommendation was to create a group of career officers at the top who would be subject to reassignment from Department to Department, something like the British Civil Service. That was not accepted. The fact of the matter is that that basic recommendation was not accepted. In effect, it was accepted in the Carter administration.

JOHNSON: Was this because there had been some criticism that there might have been over-specialization?

FLEMMING: Yes, and then some of the career people kind of got organized against it and so on. I mean there were a whole series of...

JOHNSON: This would have required more versatility or flexibility on the part of the top executives in the Department.

FLEMMING: And a willingness to shift back and forth.

JOHNSON: That would have meant broad training too, kind of a liberal arts background for many of them?

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FLEMMING: Well, by that time, you evaluate people more on the basis of their experience, and how they reacted to that experience and so on, than on the basis of their formal training. There were just some built-in resistance to it within the career service itself, but finally, during the Carter administration, that basic idea was put into effect.

JOHNSON: Well, it appears there were some people, taxpayers, or whoever, that felt that maybe it had become too difficult to fire anybody in Civil Service, and I think at some point you said, "Well, you have to use backbone. The supervisors have to show backbone. "

FLEMMING: That's right. Of course, that's always an issue in connection with any career Civil Service system, whether it's Federal or state or local. My feeling has always been that you must build into the system, provision for terminating services, but you must accompany that with provision for due process. The administrator will often feel that the provisions for due process are unnecessarily complicated and so on. Many administrators, because they feel that the due process provisions are complicated, will just say, "Well, it's too complicated for me to even start and I'm not going to start; and I'll just live with the incompetent person." My position always was that an administrator that really felt that he should come to grips with that kind of an issue within his organization could come to grips with it. If he was in the frame of mind to accord due process, he could carry it through to a conclusion, and if he decided that,

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after performing the due process, that the person should be discharged, they could discharge that person. He could make it stick.

JOHNSON: Due process was there to protect the individual from...

FLEMMING: Well, from arbitrary and capricious action. That's the purpose of the due process. Now, sometimes maybe that does get unnecessarily complicated. Well, then you can refine your due process; that's subject to examination all the time. You should be taking a look at it. But it's got to be there. You've got to accord due process to people who have Civil Service status.

JOHNSON: This loyalty board -- to pick up on that -- was one of the hot issues of the '46, 47, '48 period when you were still with the Civil Service Commission. The President established this Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty, by Executive Order, in November '46 to respond to this feeling that we've got to make sure that the people working for the American Government are loyal. Did you have any input into the Executive Order?

FLEMMING: Not into the Executive Order, no.

JOHNSON: Harry Mitchell met with the President on December 5th of '46, in connection with this loyalty issue. You weren't with them apparently for that meeting?

FLEMMING: No. I know that he met with him.

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JOHNSON: He was the third member of the Civil Service Commission....

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: He was chairman?

FLEMMING: He was the chair.

JOHNSON: And Frances Perkins was the other one, the second one, and you were the third one?

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: How long did Frances Perkins remain with that commission?

FLEMMING: Well, she came on in '45 and she stayed until '52. She was there about seven years.

JOHNSON: So she was still there when you left.

FLEMMING: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Who replaced you on the Commission when you left, do you remember?

FLEMMING: Yes. Jim Mitchell, not Harry Mitchell, but a person by the name of Jim Mitchell.

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JOHNSON: Oh, another Mitchell.

FLEMMING: That's right. No relation to Harry Mitchell at all.

JOHNSON: No nepotism.

FLEMMING: Really a person who had had a good deal of experience in the Government and in the field of public administration.

JOHNSON: The Loyalty Review Board was set up within the Civil Service Commission and with authority only to authorize recommendations coming before it on appeal. The first chairman of this Loyalty Review Board was Seth Richardson. By the end of 1948 there were 150 loyalty boards in operation at the regional and agency levels.

I don't know if you have much experience with Mr. Richardson, but he was considered to be a hard liner in terms of not guaranteeing individuals the right to confront accusers regarding the accusations made against them, and so on. Did you have experience with Seth Richardson and did you understand him to be that sort of person?

FLEMMING: Well, that characterization is probably reasonably accurate. Of course, because of that, a fair number of these cases would come to the [Civil Service] Commission.

JOHNSON: Was that a very difficult problem to

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FLEMMING: Very difficult. I mean it's was one of the toughest assignments that anybody could undertake.

JOHNSON: In other words, these loyalty review boards had to decide if persons were loyal enough to remain employees of the Federal Government or whether they would have to be released.

FLEMMING: Well, of course, some of the cases involved applicants for positions in the Government, and others involved people already in the Government. The Board had to decide in effect whether or not they constituted a risk.

JOHNSON: So you had to examine this list of subversive organizations? Did you ever have to deal with the list of subversive organizations?

FLEMMING: I've forgotten. I'd have to refresh my memory as to just how an organization went on or off that. I think it tied back into the Justice Department, and I think they were involved in that process.

JOHNSON: The Justice Department, yes.

FLEMMING: Well, of course, that was not controlling, by any means. Let's say a person belonged to an organization on that list; you had a perfect right to examine the facts relative to that individual. You didn't automatically thrust the person out because of his membership in one of those organizations.

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JOHNSON: Senator Hiram Bingham was on the Loyalty Board and apparently he was a Republican, as part of that bipartisan attempt to keep it a bipartisan committee, the Loyalty Review Board. Donald Hansen, in an interview, says he thinks Bingham wanted the loyalty program expanded and the standard changed from "reasonable grounds" to believe one is disloyal, to the standard of a "reasonable doubt as to a person's loyalty." He noted that juries require evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. It may not sound much different, but apparently there was a difference there in what kind of proof was necessary to decide on the eligibility of someone to be an employee of the Federal Government. Do you think they went too far, or not far enough, in applying these standards?

FLEMMING: Well, it's hard to generalize. You take the distinction that you just identified; my experience in dealing with cases was that no matter what particular words were used in a standard of that kind, it came down to a situation of evaluating the total worker and trying to arrive at a conclusion as to whether or not there was a real risk involved in having the person in that position.

JOHNSON: There were very, very few that....

FLEMMING: Of course, what we had in the FBI records in front of us, those records as you undoubtedly know are not records of evidence that has been established beyond a

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reasonable doubt by any means. It was just a collection of statements that had been picked up by FBI agents. You had to evaluate what was in the FBI records.

JOHNSON: Were you involved at all with decisions that were made by the Loyalty Review Board in the Civil Service Commission? Did you have some authority to second-guess them, or to monitor their decisions?

FLEMMING: Yes, there could be an appeal to us.

JOHNSON: Okay, they could appeal to the Commission.

FLEMMING: That's right. And we did handle some cases on appeal.

JOHNSON: What would you do like with hearsay evidence, rumors, that sort of thing?

FLEMMING: That type of thing we would discount, and not pay any attention to. This was an area where I had many, many conversations with Frances Perkins.

JOHNSON: And Mitchell?

FLEMMING: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you tend to agree with each other?

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FLEMMING: Oh, at times there would be a split, but she had had a type of experience, of course, in dealing with situations of this kind which we valued very highly. She would often drop into the office and talk briefly about a record in a particular case, compare notes on them, and so on.

JOHNSON: You weren't there when Joe McCarthy made his charges in early 1950; you were then president of Ohio Wesleyan, so you missed much of that furor around McCarthy's charges, I suppose. Or did you have any involvement?

FLEMMING: Well, that climate existed even when I was there, up to '48. What his charges did was kind of turn the spotlight on that particular point of view or climate that you're describing. It was not a good period by any means at all.

JOHNSON: Of course, there was evidence, you know, of the spy ring in Canada, and the revelations by Judith Copeland and Whittaker Chambers. That was starting even before you left the Commission; I think the hearings had started on Whittaker Chambers and Hiss.

FLEMMING: You see, I'm not in a position where I can recall specific cases or how we dealt with specific cases, but I can recall the process and the difficulties that were inherent in the process. Of course, personally, my approach was that if all we had confronting us

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was hearsay, to use that particular term, I was totally unsympathetic with the idea of separation and the idea that that person could not be qualified for a full appointment.

JOHNSON: In other words, you might have been a liberal on that issue?

FLEMMING: Well, I'm not going to....

JOHNSON: Would you have been in the same boat with Frances Perkins perhaps? Did you tend to agree with her more often than not, or visa versa?

FLEMMING: Well, we would see eye-to-eye quite often. Let me just put it this way. I was a person who was trying to do everything I could to make sure that the rights of the individual were protected. However anybody wants to characterize that, they can. I found it very, very difficult at times to pursue that objective in what I would regard as a satisfactory way, because of the system, and because of the nature of the FBI reports and so on, as well as the fact that stuff in the FBI reports would get leaked out and get into general circulation and so on.

You would often come down on a particular case to say that here's a situation that's so close in terms of trying to decide whether you're dealing with hearsay, or dealing with valid evidence and so on. One conclusion could be of great disservice to the individual, and the other conclusion could be a great disservice to the Government. I mean it wasn't open and shut.

JOHNSON: A gray area there.

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FLEMMING: Well, it wasn't open and shut because you did not have complete confidence in the kind of record that you were working from.

JOHNSON: I notice on April 7, 1947, you and the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission and Frances Perkins did meet with Truman to talk about the Loyalty Board. Do you have any recollection at all of talking to the President in the company of Frances Perkins and I guess Mr. Mitchell about the Loyalty Board or the loyalty program? Do you recall any conversations involving Truman about the loyalty program?

FLEMMING: No, I don't have a recollection of that. Have you run across anything which indicates at all the nature of the conversation? That might refresh my memory.

JOHNSON: The only thing I saw was the daily sheet that he kept. I think it just refers to the fact you were there to talk about the loyalty program.

FLEMMING: Right.

JOHNSON: I don't see any additional explanation or description of what transpired. Well, if it comes to mind later, we can always add on or you can add it on to the draft.

FLEMMING: I'd be glad to be of help on that. There may be a record at what is now the Office of Personnel Management, what was the old Civil Service Commission, on that.

JOHNSON: Well, how about your records, your office files?

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FLEMMING: I wouldn't keep that type of records.

JOHNSON: These are supposed to be confidential. These meetings?

FLEMMING: Well, my office didn't operate that way particularly, but the Commission secretary's office might have something there. We might have had a meeting of the Commission prior to that meeting with him and there might have been minutes of that. I'm not sure whether this was precipitated by a few cases that were hot at that particular time, or whether we were disturbed about something in the Executive Order that we wanted to see changed, or so on.

JOHNSON: Well, maybe in the Frances Perkins material there could be some comment possibly.

FLENNING: Don Dawson was probably in that meeting.

JOHNSON: It might be worth checking his material.

FLENNING: I was going to tell you a little earlier about my going to see him just before I left the Government. I told him that I'd decided to accept this invitation to be president of Ohio Wesleyan. At that time President Eisenhower was president of Columbia, and I think that probably because I was going into a presidency of a college, that he started talking to me about General Eisenhower. I was in there soon after General Eisenhower had announced he wouldn't run on either party at that point. My

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recollection is that President Truman said to me, "I knew that Ike wouldn't run against me." Now, [it was said] not in any egotistical sense, but in the sense that "we're too close to do that." Then he told me how he had asked General Eisenhower to go to China to talk with General Marshall about coming back as Secretary of State. Later on, President Eisenhower told me that same story.

JOHNSON: What was that? He planned to send Eisenhower to China?

FLENNING: No, no. He asked General Eisenhower to go over. Marshall was in China then, and he asked him [Eisenhower] to go over there to talk with him about the possibility of his returning as Secretary of State. He was a personal emissary of Truman's.

JOHNSON: But did Eisenhower go over there?

FLEMMING: Yes.

JOHNSON: He did go over.

FLEMMING: Yes, he performed the mission. And of course, Marshall did come back as Secretary of State. But that, to me, was a very interesting conversation, from that point of view.

JOHNSON: Yes.

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FLEMMING: Well, I did come back into the Government soon after the outbreak of hostilities in Korea.

JOHNSON: We want to get into that. That's with the Office of Defense Mobilization.

FLEMMING: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: But there's one other topic before we get to that, and that's the Fair Employment Practices Commission proposal that Truman made. I think there was some involvement of the Civil Service Commission in July of '48. This would have been about the time that you left then wouldn't it? Do you remember what month that was in '48?

FLEMMING: I was probably gone, but go ahead.

JOHNSON: In July of '48 the President ordered the establishment of the Fair Employment Board within the Civil Service Commission, and a Fair Employment Officer in each agency. A seven-member board was set up in October of '48. Now, did you have any involvement with that?

FLEMMING: I had left by then. I undoubtedly was involved in some of those preliminary discussions on it, because, you see, when I was on the War Manpower Commission I was very much involved in the discussions that led up to the first Executive Order that Roosevelt signed, setting up a fair employment practices group for the first time.

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JOHNSON: Yes, and that was just a wartime measure, wasn't it?

FLEMMING: It was an order that Roosevelt was kind of reluctant to sign, and Randolph said, "Look, if you don't sign it, we're going to march on Washington." He didn't want them to march on Washington, so he signed it. So, I've never been on one of those [boards], or had any special responsibility for it, but I was watching that with a good deal of interest.

JOHNSON: Well, wasn't there a rule on the books that there should be equal opportunity for minorities in Civil Service?

FLEMMING: Oh, yes. I mean we were working on that all the time. For example, when I went on the Commission the first motion I voted on was a motion to eliminate photographs from applications for Federal employment. The civil rights community was pushing for that because they thought that the photographs were used for the purpose of discrimination. It's interesting we have come a full circle. Today, they believe that photographs on applications help them, and serve a purpose.

JOHNSON: That was abolished then.

FLEMMING: Yes, that was abolished at that point. That was '39.

JOHNSON: Did you get a number of complaints about discrimination?

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FLEMMING: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Was that one of your chief problems, to resolve those complaints?

FLEMMING: Well, no, I can't recall it was a major problem, or a major issue that we spent a lot of time on, but it kept coming up and we were receptive to dealing with issues as they came up. The regulations were such, that there was no question about our authority to do it.

JOHNSON: Apparently, Truman tried but failed to get Postmasters, collectors of customs, and U.S. Marshals under the merit system, but the Senate balked on this. Do you recall this being any...

FLEMMING: That was one of Ramspeck's efforts.

JOHNSON: He was trying to get them into Civil Service, into the merit system?

FLEMMING: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: But other Senators apparently didn't agree.

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: Because it was up to the Senate to decide on that?

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FLEMMING: Your notes undoubtedly are right on that. That's part of Civil Service legislation history, and Ramspeck was always pushing to expand the Civil Service, to expand the number of jobs under it. What year was that now again?

JOHNSON: Well, there wasn't a year on that, but it probably was not before '46.

FLEMMING: That was probably post-World War II.

JOHNSON: Oh yes, postwar. You were involved with the Office of Defense Mobilization which was established in December 1950. Of course, you recall very well Charlie Wilson, or "Electric Charlie," who was the first director. On February 8, 1951 you became Wilson's assistant in charge of manpower problems as director of the ODM's Manpower Policy Committee. The *New York Times*, for instance, said one of your major jobs would be resolving problems of deferring essential workers from military duty. It was also said that labor leaders were expected to object to your appointment since they had favored this role for Secretary of Labor Maurice Tobin. Do you recall anything about that?

FLEMMING: Well, actually they did not object. This is where a reporter had missed the experience I had had with the labor leaders during world War II. Actually the way that worked out was that General [Lucius] Clay was Charlie Wilson's deputy in the Office of Defense

Mobilization. I was invited to come in to talk with General Clay, and Charlie Wilson asked if I would come back and head up the Manpower side of it, and

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set up this committee and so on. I agreed to do it, and at that particular point, there was some real tensions between Wilson and George Meany, some of which I guess went back to his General Electric days and so on. They weren't seeing eye-to-eye at all. So, I told both Mr. Wilson and General Clay that if I took the job I was going to set up this committee and I was going to have labor and management on it, and I would ask Mr. Meany to detail somebody to me so that I could keep in close touch with labor. They said, "Okay, go ahead. Best wishes," or something of that kind.

So one of the first things I did was go over and talk with George Meany. I had come to know him, but I knew even better some of his close associates. He said, "Sure, I'll assign somebody to you," which he did, one of his top people -- whose name escapes me at the moment. I told him my plans for this committee and he thought that was great, and so on. I had good working relationships with labor throughout that period.

JOHNSON: So you probably used your World War II experience very much.

FLEMMING: Oh, very much. See, General Clay had been made aware of that background. That's why they sent for me and asked me to do it. I mean it was clear that they wanted me to build on my World War II experience.

JOHNSON: During World War II there weren't that many deferments, but I suppose now, because there was going to be partial rather than full mobilization, you did have to draw the line to decide who would be deferred and who wouldn't be.

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FLEMMING: That's right. An important part of the set-up was General [Lewis] Hershey who was Director of Selective Service. What we needed to do was to work with him in dealing with that particular issue, and he was very sympathetic. I mean we did not have any tension there at all, and he did set up a program that resulted in his giving local boards certain instructions which meant that normally a person was permitted to complete their undergraduate program before they were called into the service.

JOHNSON: An exam was established for college students, wasn't it, to decide whether you should be deferred or not? Do you recall an exam set up for college students to decide on deferments?

FLEMMING: No.

JOHNSON: You didn't have anything to do with that?

FLEMMING: I don't think that there was an exam there. If they were enrolled and in good standing, then they were permitted to finish.

JOHNSON: In 1952, according to Shaw Livermore, pioneer work was begun on civilian planning, a dimension beyond civil defense it says. This was a plan for carrying on after various degrees of destruction of the U. S. economy. You might call it war planning for the civilian sector. Later this was carried on by the ODM and the OEP (Office of Emergency Planning). Livermore says you were a major supporter of this kind of

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civilian planning. Now we have the atomic bomb, and that has entered the picture. We're getting into civil defense too, but this is something beyond conventional civil defense. It involves what kind of management could there be after partial destruction by a nuclear war. Did you get into this

FLEMMING: That comes into the Eisenhower administration. You see, we have the bomb but...

JOHNSON: Well, in '49 the Soviet Union did explode their first A-bomb, and then we went to H-bombs. So they did have the bomb when the Korean war started, the Soviets.

FLEMMING: Well, let me say this. During the Truman administration, I was not involved to any significant degree in that kind of planning. I probably sat in on some meetings and so on where it came up.

JOHNSON: Were you on the National Security Council?

FLEMMING: No, I wasn't in the Truman administration.

JOHNSON: That wasn't until Eisenhower?

FLEMMING: Charlie Wilson, John Steelman, and Joe Fowler were on the Security Council. I attended one meeting of the Security Council for, I think it was, Joe Fowler, which turned out to be a fairly routine meeting. You see, in January of '53 I took over as Director, Acting Director, and automatically came on the Security Council.

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JOHNSON: Okay, this is at the end of the Truman administration.

FLEMMING: Right. Well, right after the Inauguration, the day after the Inauguration, I was Acting Director, and automatically came on the Security Council. I immediately began to get briefings on the issue you're talking about, and other issues.

JOHNSON: Before we get into the Eisenhower period, an issue in '52 was the seizure of the steel mills and Charlie Wilson resigns as director because he apparently didn't appreciate a wage settlement that had been agreed upon by the Wage Stabilization Board. What do you recall about that controversy?

FLEMMING: I recall very definitely the tension that developed between Wilson and the President over that particular issue. I was not a personal advisor to the President, by any means, at that point. But there was a fellow by the name of Charlie Stauffacher who was also on the staff of the Office of Defense Mobilization, who had come from the Budget Bureau and he had become an advisor to the President through his Budget Bureau operations. He and I worked very closely together. He thought that I may conceivably have had a little bit more influence with Charlie Wilson than he had, so between us I tried to persuade Wilson not to resign and he [Stauffacher] tried to convince the President that he ought to make a move that would make it easier for Wilson not to resign, not to change the policy of the steel situation, and so on. But we didn't succeed, obviously, and he resigned.

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However, in connection with the steel strike, we had an arrangement with the steel workers whereby they would permit steel to move if we would certify that it was essential for the defense program. I was involved in that certification process. That's when I first got to know Arthur Goldberg. He was then General Counsel for the steel workers, and Dave Stowe was involved in that at that time. See, he was on the White House staff with Steelman. He was very much involved in it. That was a very tense period.

JOHNSON: What did you think of Truman's seizure? Did you think it was hasty, or rash?

FLEMMING: I'm sure under our form of government, the Supreme Court reached the right decision about that.

JOHNSON: Do you think he got the right advice? There has been some question as to whether he got the kind of advice that exaggerated the problem concerning the supply of steel. There was a backlog of steel.

FLEMMING: Well, I'm not in a position to evaluate that. It's conceivable that he didn't. I am clear that the Court came out at the right point on it. But while it was on, it was handled in a very orderly way. Of course, John Steelman was at the heart of that.

JOHNSON: Steelman succeeded Wilson...

FLEMMING: That's right, as acting director.

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JOHNSON: And then Henry Fowler came in to take Steelman's place.

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: You were working with Steelman and with Fowler.

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: Fowler resigned when Truman left office; so then you took Fowler's place.

FLEMMING: That's right, as acting; fully expecting that Eisenhower would appoint somebody like Electric Charlie Wilson, you know, somebody from the field of industry.

JOHNSON: Well, what did he do?

FLEMMING: Well, I was acting for about two months, and then he sent for me one day, and told me that he would like to send my name to the Senate for confirmation for the post. I said to him, "I thought that you would select somebody from the field of industry." By that time I'd come to know him. You see, I didn't know him until after the election, that is, President Eisenhower. But I had been appointed before the Inauguration to what was called the President's Advisory Committee on Government Organization. Nelson Rockefeller was the chairman of it. Milton Eisenhower and I were the other two members, and we had begun to function in that capacity up at Morningside Heights. Then we continued to function in a very informal way after he came in office.

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JOHNSON: Was that during the transition?

FLEMMING: What was that?

JOHNSON: Was that to help Eisenhower in this transition?

FLEMMING: Yes. On organizational matters, that's right. Incidentally, that committee stayed in operation for the entire Eisenhower administration -- eight years. I was on it the entire period. When Nelson Rockefeller became Governor of New York, I took over as Chairman of it. My point is I had gotten to the place where I was on a basis where I could chat with him about something, and he said to me, "Well, I know this area." I said, "Yes, I understand you do; you've devoted your whole life to it." He said, "I want somebody in it who knows Government, and how it functions." He said, "You do, and that's why I want you there." He said, "Yes, we need help from business and industry, but I know how to get that. I'll help you get it if you have any trouble getting it," and so on. So, that's why he sent my name up, and of course I served for the entire first term in that position.

JOHNSON: Director of ODM.

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: How long did that last, ODM?

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FLEMMING: Oh, that lasted throughout his administration. Throughout his administration it continued to be a Cabinet position and of course the incumbent was always on the Security Council.

JOHNSON: You were meeting with the Cabinet?

FLEMMING: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: And on the National Security Council under Eisenhower.

FLEMMING: That's right. Full Cabinet status, that job had, and then I was on the Security Council. In those days I was meeting with him once a week as a member of the Cabinet, and once a week as a member of the Security Council and so on. So I got a good chance to get a feel of how he was operating and so on.

JOHNSON: Then you resigned at the end of his first term?

FLEMMING: Yes, I did, because there was an understanding. My board at Ohio Wesleyan asked me if I could have an understanding with him that I would resign at the end of the first term and return. They said if you can have that understanding, we'd like to have an acting [president] and keep it open. So, I talked to him about that, and he said, "Yes, that's okay." That was the understanding, so I did resign. But I had been back for about six or seven months when Marion Folsom, who was secretary of Health Education and Welfare, had a slight stroke and felt that he should resign. He did

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resign, and then the President sent for me. He said he'd like for me to come back and go in as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

JOHNSON: You were the second one then to be...

FLEMMING: I was the third. Olveta Hobby was the first.

JOHNSON: Oh yes. Now, wasn't that an outgrowth of the Truman period too?

FLEMMING: No, HEW was created as a result of a reorganization plan that President Eisenhower sent to Congress right after he was inaugurated.

JOHNSON: But did that come out of the Hoover Commission?

FLEMMING: Well, we may have made a formal recommendation. We probably called it the Department of Welfare or something of that kind.

JOHNSON: But Truman had wanted to make that Cabinet level, hadn't he?

FLEMMING: Yes, I think you're right. I think he tried to elevate FSA [Federal Security Administration], and got into trouble on it for some reason. I don't know just why. Eisenhower, during the campaign in '52, had made a commitment that if elected he would take FSA and put some others in with it and elevate it to Cabinet status. That meant that we worked primarily with Senator Taft; he was the Majority Leader. Of

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course, this was interesting because he'd been Eisenhower's principle opponent for the nomination.

JOHNSON: Conservative, to the right.

FLEMMING: Theoretically. As we look at it today, he was a moderate. I'll never forget when Mrs. Hobby and I went up to have a conversation with him about this reorganization plan one Saturday. He said, "What are you going to call this department?" I said, "The only name I've heard of so far is 'Welfare.'" "Well," he said, "this could give me a little problem with some of my people up here." We played around with some names, and finally he said, "Why don't we call it Health, Education and Welfare?" He said, "It's long, but it tells the story." So we liked it, and we took it back to President Eisenhower and he liked it. So, I've always said that Bob Taft named the Department. But he did get it through. It was actually a reorganization plan put through by April '53.

JOHNSON: But, Social Security is still now separate from....

FLEMMING: No, Social Security was part of my plan. It was a part of the Federal Security Agency under President Truman. See, it was a three member board when it came into existence, and it was a three member board until '46 when we were brought under the Federal Security Agency. Then when HEW was set up, it discontinued.

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It's very interesting. Right now there is legislation beginning to move through Congress which would reestablish the three member board outside of HEW to administer Social Security.

JOHNSON: And separated from the general budget.

FLEMMING: Oh, no.

JOHNSON: Wasn't it separate from the general budget in those days?

FLEMMING: It was in my day, and it is now separate from the budget. It's not a part of the overall budget now. That happened in 1985.

JOHNSON: Where they apply the revenues of Social Security against the Federal deficit?

FLEMMING: The only relationship between it now is from the mathematical point of view. When they announce what the deficit is, they can include the reserves in the Social Security Trust Fund, but those reserves cannot be used for anything in connection with the overall budget.

JOHNSON: They didn't do that in the Eisenhower period did they?

FLEMMING: No. In the Eisenhower period it was completely separate. I mean it was outside, and they did not utilize it. It was brought in, under, by LBJ in the late 1960s in order to make the Vietnam budget look better, because there were reserves there at

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that time, and that's why he did it. He brought it all the way in. But Congress in '85 took the Trust Fund out from under the overall budget completely. But they did leave in a provision saying that until 1993, when you're figuring out what the deficit is, you can use it. It's really a dishonest way of dealing with the deficit.

JOHNSON: I don't want to keep you too much longer. You were involved with the National Council of Churches, and we do have a little documentation about that. I think what I'll do is bring this to a conclusion by coming to some conclusions on Harry Truman and his role as a manager and a leader in the Government. You know, Van Riper in his book says that he has some reservations about Truman as a leader and manager, but describes the Civil Service Commissioners, including yourself, as competent as those appointed by any President. Yet he accuses the President of refusing, in his words, "to recognize much responsibility for ethical standards in the Federal Service." He's referring to the scandals involved in RFC [Reconstruction Finance Corporation], the Internal Revenue Service, which was the Bureau of Internal Revenue in those days, and other problems. There were problems in that there was the perception that there were some ethical deficiencies among some of Truman's associates. There were the "five percenters," and some influence peddlers. Matt Connelly actually went to jail, after the administration was over.

Well, how would you compare Truman with Roosevelt? You were acquainted with three Presidents. First, how would you evaluate Truman as an executive, as a

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chief executive, as a manager, so to speak, compared with President Roosevelt? Then, I'll ask the same question, comparing him with Eisenhower. How about Roosevelt?

FLEMMING: Well, I like to avoid making comparisons. I like to think of how a President functioned. Personally, I felt that President Truman emerged as a strong chief executive and that those who were associated with him, in the executive branch, did not have any difficulty in determining what his goals were, what his objectives were, and they did not have any difficulty in convincing him, within reasonable boundaries, as to the resources that they would need, and the authority to act that they would need in order to help him achieve the goals and the objectives that he wanted to achieve. In other words, I would characterize him as a strong chief executive.

You referred to some personnel problems that he had, and that's essentially what they were. In an organization the size of the Federal Government you're bound to get some personnel problems of that nature. As you think of the way he responded to those problems, I would say this, that as one who was in the Government during a portion of that time, you did not get the impression on the basis of his response, that he was the kind of a chief executive that was going to tolerate people continuing to do some of the things that you've identified. I think quite the contrary. I guess that's the way that I'd sum it up.

JOHNSON: For instance, the President got some bad press because of Harry Vaughan. Were you acquainted with Harry Vaughan at all?

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FLEMMING: No, I didn't know him at all. It was just what I read in the press and so on. You know, after all, all Presidents have some problems of that kind. I say I don't like to make comparisons, and I won't -- in terms of saying this one's better than the other one, in dealing with this particular aspect -- but President Eisenhower had the issue of Sherman Adams, which was a very difficult one for him, because Governor Adams was a very effective chief of staff. Really, no one had any doubt as to his integrity and so on, but he developed a blind spot as far as this one individual was concerned and acted in such a way as to embarrass the President. The President finally did get word to him that regretfully he felt that he would have to go. He did go. The country got the impression from that, that as tough as it was for him to do it, he did it. But my point is it did develop -- a problem of that kind did develop -- in that administration.

As I think of the various administrations I've been in or been able to observe, it is possible if a person is not a strong chief executive, you're going to get more of those situations than you will get if the perception is that he's a strong one.

I think the Reagan administration is an illustration of that. The perception was that you were not dealing with a strong, tough chief executive. Consequently, there are quite a number of these situations, some of which are still in the process of unfolding. These instances that you referred to, they are kind of vague in my own memory at the present time. I suppose somebody could have made a case that at the time they happened, the President might have been firmer in taking action and walking away from the person who was responsible for them, and so on.

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JOHNSON: He was loyal to his subordinates. I suppose that...

FLEMMING: Well, you get that tension with loyalty to subordinates, particularly if the subordinate is just faced with a charge, and the charge has not been yet proved. I assume that our judicial system will work in a fair, objective way when you consider all of the checks and balances we've got built into it, and all of the opportunities for appeal and so on and so forth. I don't think that I would ever come down on the side that somebody had been railroaded or something of that kind.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Herbert Brownell, that you found him to be a person who was upright and was not necessarily attempting to get revenge on Truman with the Harry Dexter White case.

FLEMMING: With that specific situation, I'm not going to comment on it specifically, but I did have a close association with Mr. Brownell in the first term, and he was on the Second Hoover Commission. He and I were appointed to the Second Hoover Commission together, so I worked with him in that connection. But then I also worked with him as the Attorney General, and as Secretary of HEW. My feeling definitely was that he was moderate to liberal in the terms of the

views that he would take on the issues. I thought that we were deeply indebted to him in terms of the types of persons that he recruited for service in the judiciary, including his recruitment of Earl Warren, and then many of the U. S. District Court Judges who later became heroes as far as the

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civil rights movement is concerned. Also, my feeling always was that he was an Attorney General, a lawyer, that would be very zealous in making sure that the rights of somebody who was accused of something were adequately protected.

JOHNSON: You finished as Secretary of Health Education and Welfare at the end of Eisenhower's second administration?

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: And when Kennedy came in, what did you do?

FLEMMING: Well, I went out to the University of Oregon as president, as president of the University of Oregon from '61 to '68. However, during the Kennedy administration, he asked me to come back and handle a particular job. He had made a commitment during that campaign to get legislation through dealing with the health care of older people. It had gone through the House twice and had been defeated in the Senate. One day Senator [Jacob] Javits called me in and Eugene [Oregon] and said he and Senator [Clinton] Anderson of New Mexico had been talking with the President, and they decided they should set up a commission of citizens to take a fresh look at this. They wanted to know whether I'd chair it. I said, "I'd be very glad to." So I took that on for a year and a half or so, not fulltime, of course, part-time. We did come up with a report, and we presented it to President Kennedy just one week before he was assassinated. I remember I happened to be the last person out of the Oval Office and

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he wanted to know if I was going to testify on behalf of it, and I said, "Yes." I'd spent this time on it, and he shared with me his frustration of not being able to get it through.

As far as President Johnson was concerned, during that period he had a very active labor-management committee, and he asked me to serve on that.

JOHNSON: This project with Kennedy, isn't that what led to the Medicare Act?

FLEMMING: Well, yes.

JOHNSON: In '65.

FLEMMING: That led to the Medicare legislation in '65.

JOHNSON: So you were instrumental in that. You know the signing was out at the Truman Library.

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: Were you there?

FLEMMING: No, I wasn't there. But I know that's where it took place, right. Of course, we're working on expanding it nowadays, and I happen now to chair a national health care campaign that's working to get universal right of access to health care which President Truman tried to get in '47, and lost out in the Senate.

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JOHNSON: They called it "socialized medicine," his national health plan. What did you think of that epitaph that was used in those days?

FLEMMING: Oh, I thought that his effort was right on target and I thought it should have passed. I think now we're at long last at a point where we may get action on it. We've got a good chance of getting action on it in the second session of this Congress.

JOHNSON: The American Medical Association helped shoot it down in '48.

FLEMMING: That's quite a different situation now. They did, and they did a very effective job. They're the people that put the label on it, and they probably had the support of 90 percent of their membership. But today, 50 percent of the doctors are no longer members of the American Medical Association, and the 50 percent that are, are anything but monolithic on this particular issue. They're a divided camp. I don't know what AMA may decide to do as an institution, but they will not have the political muscle that they had in Truman's day. If we could get that through, why, that would be a real tribute to the fight he put on, along with Oscar Ewing, who was his head of the Federal Security Agency and put on a terrific fight.

JOHNSON: He was considered rather ultraliberal. What was your opinion of Oscar Ewing?

FLEMMING: Oh, he wasn't an ultraliberal; he was a good moderate-to-liberal lawyer. I mean, after all, he was a member of the Charles Evans Hughes law firm, and I don't call

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that ultraliberal. I think he was a good moderate to liberal person, no question about that.

JOHNSON: So we may have a health care plan under a Republican administration, you're implying?

FLEMMING: Well, of course, we're going to have to pass it, the Democrats will have to pass it, and I think that it's altogether possible that President Bush might sign it. I'm not going to make that as a firm prediction, but I guess I'll put it as a hope.

JOHNSON: In '68 then, you finished as president of the University of Oregon?

FLEMMING: I went to Macalester College as president for three years, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Then, in '71 I came back as a Counselor to President Nixon and his staff in the field of aging and as the fulltime chairman of the second White House Conference on Aging in '71. In 1973 I became U.S. Commissioner on Aging, and functioned in that capacity until '78. In 1974 I became chairman of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, and functioned in that capacity under Nixon, Ford, Carter, and for one year under Reagan when he decided to fire a bunch of us because he didn't like the reports we were filing.

JOHNSON: You were one of those that was released?

FLEMMING: I was released. I was the first to be released.

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JOHNSON: And you've been retired ever since?

FLEMMING: Well, since then I have offices here in Washington. I chair a coalition of over a hundred national organizations, called SOS, Save our Security; that's in the field of Social Security. Wilbur Cohen was co-chair of that until his death. We work on maintaining the integrity of the Social Security system. Then I chair a national health care campaign, which is made up of another group of over a 100 national organizations. It has as its primary purpose achieving the objective of a national health plan with universal right of access to adequate health care. Then, I also chair a Citizen's Commission on Civil Rights, which is a bipartisan group made up of former Cabinet officers, former heads of enforcement agencies at the Federal level in the civil rights area. I travel the country a good deal on behalf of those causes.

JOHNSON: You're as busy as ever.

FLEMMING: That's right.

JOHNSON: Just one final comment. Did you have any role in the '48 campaign?

FLEMMING: No, I was not in the campaign at all.

JOHNSON: And if you'd been on the Civil Service Commission, of course, there would have been no way that you could be involved in this.

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FLEMMING: That's right. In '52 I was at Ohio Wesleyan, so I wasn't in the middle of the campaign, but as an individual I supported Eisenhower, and obviously supported him for reelection. In '60 I supported Nixon. I was in office then as Secretary of HEW, and so on, but in '64 I supported LBJ, because I could not go with Goldwater and his views on civil rights and other matters. In '68 I went along with Nixon, but when it came to Reagan running the first time, I could not support him, because, basically, of the positions that he had taken in California and took on the campaign and so on on civil rights. Obviously, I did not support him for re-election in '84.

JOHNSON: How about the Carter-Ford?

FLEMMING: I was for Carter in '76, and I supported Carter for reelection in '80.

JOHNSON: I do appreciate all this time, and all the information.

FLEMMING: I was happy to do it.

JOHNSON: I am pleased to do it too.

FLEMMING: I have tremendous respect for what is being done at all the Presidential Libraries and I am just delighted to chat with you about what I consider to be a very, very fine administration under President Truman.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

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