

Oral History Interview
with
WESLEY MCCUNE

Writer and journalist before 1948; Executive Assistant to Secretary of Agriculture, Charles Brannan, 1948-53; member, Public Affairs staff, Democratic National Committee, 1953-56; Director of Public Relations, National Farmers Union, 1956-62; President, Group Research, Inc., 1962

Washington, D.C.
September 15 and 16, 1988
by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

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Summary Description:

Topics discussed include farming in Colorado in the 1930s; the Federal Land Bank; Farm Credit Administration; University of Colorado in the 1930s; Haxtun, Colorado; food stamp plan; farm lobbies, including Farm Bureau, Coop Council, National Grange, and National Farmers Union; Atlantic convoys in World War II; Truman Committee; Kiplinger's *Changing Times*, Office of the Secretary of Agriculture; Defense Mobilization Board; Production Marketing Administration; Farm Security Administration; Food and Agriculture Organization; Democrat farm program; "Brannan Plan; Hope-Aiken Act; McCarthyism; Gore bill; price controls during the Korean war; Presidential campaigns of 1948 and 1952; Keynesian economics; National Farmers Union headquarters; and Group Research, Inc.

Names mentioned include John A. Grant, Calmar C. McCune, Mary Stuart, Jacob Van Ek, Frederick A. Bushee, Bill Bartleson, Henry Weihofen, Phil Hornbein, Ernest Lindley, Charles Dana Bennett, Ed O'Neal, George Aiken, M.B. Palmer, John R. Beal, Henry Wallace, Harold Young, Frank McNaughton, Robert Elson, Willard Kiplinger, Austin Kiplinger, Charles Brannan, Norris E. Dodd, Clinton P. Anderson, Wilbur Kindig, James Patton, Louise Nylander, Margaret Ann Leavy, Nathan Koenig, Luna Diamond, A1 Loveland, C.J. McCormick, Knox Hutchinson, Allan B. Kline, C.B. Baldwin, M. L. DuMars, John J. Williams, Clifford Hope, Charles S. Murphy, Claude Wickard, Oscar V. Wells, Ralph S. Trigg, John Baker, Maurice Dumars, Albert Gore, Stephen Pace, Roger Fleming, Frank Woolley, Raymond Moley, Jack Cowart, Adlai Stevenson, William M. Blair, John Kenneth Galbraith, Ezra Taft Benson, Clayton Frithey, Stephen Mitchell, Leon Keyserling, Bert Gross, Lyndon B. Johnson, George Reedy, Bill

Moyers, Charles Shuman, Clay Cochran, Glenn Talbott, C.E. Huff, Gus Geissler, Orville Freeman, Gladys Segal, George Rucker, Gale McGee, Barry Goldwater, and Sidney Blumenthal.

Donor: Wesley McCune

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JOHNSON: Mr. McCune, I'm going to start, as I usually do, by asking you the date and place of your birth, and names of your parents, and names of any brothers or sisters.

MCCUNE: I was born John Wesley McCune June 6, 1916, in Kansas City, Missouri, technically, but my parents lived in Polk, Nebraska. I lived there with them, Calmar C. McCune, and his wife Grace Montgomery McCune, until about 1919, when the family moved to Haxtun, Colorado. Dad established the First National Bank of Haxtun. I have one older brother, Calmar M. McCune, who is a lawyer in Seattle, Washington, and we're quite close. There are now four generations of Calmar McCunes, and two are alive.

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JOHNSON: So you had just the one brother?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: And your father was a banker in Polk.

MCCUNE: Correct, in Polk and then in Haxtun. Then, during the Depression he took bankruptcy and went into the farm implement business and into farming. That's where I worked mostly.

JOHNSON: In Haxtun, Colorado.

MCCUNE: During high school and college, yes.

JOHNSON: How old were you when you moved to Colorado?

MCCUNE: Three or four.

JOHNSON: So you went to public school there, town school?

MCCUNE: Yes, town school, public school, in Haxtun; except that when Mother Grace died, when I was eight, father sent me to Denver to live with his sister, Eva Reedy. I went to school there in the public schools, Park Hill Grade School for two years, with a cousin my same age. We lived together. Then, I wanted to come back to Haxtun, and Dad brought me back and we lived as

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bachelors, the three of us for a while, and then he remarried.

JOHNSON: What was the name of his second wife?

MCCUNE: Ellen V. McCune; she was a local resident who used to work in the bank, and we became a very, very close family. She outlived my father by a year or two.

JOHNSON: She was born in Sweden, is that what you said?

MCCUNE: No, she was brought here as a baby, or born immediately after arriving from Sweden. She had many, many older siblings, all around Haxtun, and all of my generation's cousins became very close friends. We also farmed.

JOHNSON: As well as running the farm equipment business?

MCCUNE: Yes, that was off and on. Dad bought a couple of farms and was able to hold onto them, and I worked on those in the summer.

JOHNSON: What kind of farms were they; what did they grow?

MCCUNE: Just wheat and corn, plain old wheat and corn.

JOHNSON: Didn't raise any cattle?

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MCCUNE: Very few people had cattle of any kind, but we raised hogs and had work horses.

JOHNSON: Wasn't that a fairly dry area?

MCCUNE: Yes sir, right on the edge of the dust bowl.

JOHNSON: Was that dry farming?

MCCUNE: Dry farming.

JOHNSON: You laid it fallow every other year?

MCCUNE: No, we didn't; maybe we should have, but we didn't always.

JOHNSON: But you rotated those two or three crops.

MCCUNE: Wheat and corn; but rye, barley, and oats a little bit for feed maybe for the horses. We still had horses then.

JOHNSON: This was during the thirties?

MCCUNE: Correct.

JOHNSON: There were droughts in '34 and '36; didn't that affect you?

MCCUNE: Right. It hit us very hard there. The dust came

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over in clouds, but not as hard as, say, Oklahoma and some of those other areas that got it.

JOHNSON: But you managed to hold onto the land?

MCCUNE: Yes, thank goodness.

JOHNSON: As owners; not just renters, but owners?

MCCUNE: As owners. We had a hired man living on one. We still have one of the farms; we have put an irrigation pump and circular irrigator on it.

JOHNSON: How many acres were these farms?

MCCUNE: Oh, they averaged half sections, 320 acres, I'd say.

JOHNSON: Which added up to about 600 acres?

MCCUNE: It might have, in different locations.

JOHNSON: You lived in town, but you farmed these...

MCCUNE: Yes, I did. I was a city slicker; I'd go out every morning and spread grasshopper poison and what have you, and later drive a tractor.

JOHNSON: Did your dad milk any cows?

MCCUNE: Technically I have, but we didn't have a dairy. We

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did have horses. That was during the transition from horses to tractors, and we had John Deere tractors.

JOHNSON: When did you get your first tractor?

MCCUNE: My cousin got one of the first in town; it was a big old Rumley tractor, Rumley oil-pull, a monstrous thing. We'd go out and play on it. We bought our first tractor in the early thirties, to pull a combine for wheat harvest. We did not yet have corn harvesters, when I left. We did that by hand, with horses and wagon, but we plowed with tractors.

JOHNSON: So you picked corn by hand?

MCCUNE: Right.

JOHNSON: You were at an elevation there, I suppose. How high was it?

MCCUNE: I don't remember. Of course, Denver is a mile high, and we were about 150 miles northeast of Denver. We chose Haxtun, my father did, partly because of Mother's health. We left Nebraska for a higher altitude, and partly because some relatives were already there, but it didn't save her from dying when I was eight. It was a town with a thousand people and everybody knew everybody else. I'm going back in two weeks for the 100th anniversary of the town.

JOHNSON: Is that near Ault?

MCCUNE: No. It's on the Burlington Railroad and was founded as a railroad stop. I have been to Ault, yes. From Denver, you go up through Sterling and into Haxtun, and then Holyoke and you're in Nebraska.

JOHNSON: Oh, I see.

MCCUNE: As dry as can be.

JOHNSON: Your father was banking, and also operating these two farms?

MCCUNE: Well, later, after we went bankrupt in the bank.

JOHNSON: That would have been what year?

MCCUNE: I got out of Haxtun High School in '33 so that was about '31. I remember it because there was some nepotism involved. I was the janitor in the bank, and I had to go in and clean it up every morning about sunup. One day I found a notice on the door that the bank had closed and Dad had not even told me. He was that kind of a fellow.

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JOHNSON: Well, that's the way bankers operated, wasn't it?

MCCUNE: I guess so. His motto was "Safety, Service, Silence." I still have some of the note pads.

JOHNSON: So your father's savings, as well as those of the depositors, just went down the drain, so to speak?

MCCUNE: Well, as long as we've brought it up, I want to tell you something. I learned only about five or ten years ago, after my father had died, that he paid off every penny himself that went into bankruptcy. He didn't have to, of course, under bankruptcy laws, but he and my stepmother paid off every damn penny of that.

JOHNSON: Every depositor.

MCCUNE: And I did not know it until much later.

JOHNSON: They were their own...

MCCUNE: He was that kind of a guy. He was head of the church, chairman of the school board.

JOHNSON: What church was that?

MCCUNE: Haxtun Methodist Church. There were only a couple of churches in town and they were the social centers as

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well as religious centers.

JOHNSON: How about the farm equipment business? When did he get into that?

MCCUNE: That was partly because it was going broke and he sort of became a partner with the owner of it, right there on Main Street, a John Deere agency. He built it up and added a repair business. Then, when the grasshopper plague came in the early thirties we mixed grasshopper poison in a cement mixer. Farmers could come in and get it at cost, as a business promotion I suppose.

JOHNSON: How did they spread it; did they do that by hand?

MCCUNE: Yes sir, before sunup, off the end of a truck or pickup.

JOHNSON: Had some kind of nozzles, a liquid spray?

MCCUNE: They used their hands. It was mixed in bran. We bought hundred pound bags of bran, somewhere, and then we mixed amyl nitrate, I believe it was called, in cans; put it in the cement mixer and put wires through the cement mixer radius so that it would be broken up and not just become balls. Then, we'd dump that back in

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bags, or into a truck, and go out and one guy would drive around the edge of the farm, the wheat field, and the other guys just threw it out by hand.

JOHNSON: Take the sack and empty the sacks?

MCCUNE: Yes, well, you'd reach in and then swing it.

JOHNSON: Times have changed.

MCCUNE: I don't think it did much good, and I hated every minute of it.

JOHNSON: But the farm equipment business survived the hard times.

MCCUNE: Yes. Dad finally sold that. He had a little office on Main Street; happened to be next to his old bank. The bank now is City Hall. It's been fixed up and it's just beautiful. The town clock is on the bank building. He was next to it, and had real estate and was an agent for the Federal Land Bank on farm loans. Mother worked with him. She was a talented secretary. He was in that office most of the time.

JOHNSON: The Land Bank, what does that date back to?

MCCUNE: That was part of the New Deal, the Federal Land

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Bank. I think it was on the books even before, but it wasn't as active. And it saved an awful lot of farmers from really going down the tube.

JOHNSON: That would be like the Government being a banker to farmers?

MCCUNE: Part of the Farm Credit Administration, which is still operating out of the Department of Agriculture. It worked a little like the Federal Reserve system, as a central bank, with branches all around the country.

JOHNSON: That was low-interest loans, just to purchase land?

MCCUNE: They were also operating loans, but mostly to hold onto ownership.

JOHNSON: Did they have moratoriums on mortgages in Colorado, do you recall?

MCCUNE: I don't recall.

JOHNSON: Minnesota passed a law that allowed farmers a moratorium.

So you had two farms, plus the farm equipment business, after the failure of the bank.

MCCUNE: Yes. We had hogs on our farm, about a hundred head,

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and had to fence the corn fields to keep them out of that, or let them in after we'd picked corn. We had to slop those things. My specialty was helping the old sows give birth. You'd climb in a little shed; my hand was smaller than anybody else's and I'd reach right up the rear end and help them out.

JOHNSON: Wasn't that usually in the coldest part of winter too?

MCCUNE: I didn't apply for it.

JOHNSON: Didn't they farrow around January or February?

MCCUNE: We had two farrowings, I don't recall; but it was cold. It wasn't very successful.

JOHNSON: The hog farming didn't work out too well?

MCCUNE: No, we didn't expand it. It stopped before I went off to college in '34.

JOHNSON: You went to college right after high school graduation?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was there anyone in high school, teachers for instance, that you think were a strong influence on you?

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MCCUNE: Greatly so. I was kind of a rebel. I had good grades; I was salutatorian in grade school and was perfectly capable of good grades, but I was a little hellion, I guess. I'd get kicked out of class, and so on, but...

JOHNSON: This is the town school?

MCCUNE: Yes. Thirty-three in our class; in our senior class. The principal, John A. Grant, was just one of the greatest men who ever lived. I respected him partly because he threw me out of high school once for failing to report to his office, having been told to by the teacher of agriculture, no less. I chose to go to the boys room instead. He threw me and the other guy out of school. My father was chairman of the school board, and I had to go down to the bank and tell him. I thought he'd probably beat me. He had never touched me, but I thought this was it. Just absolutely ghastly. So I told him and he said, "Well, when do you get back in?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Call Mr. Grant and ask him."

So I called Mr. Grant right there at Dad's desk and he said, "I don't know; I'll let you know." I had to watch the rest of the kids go to school for three or

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four days until he let me back in. I was humbled, I'll tell you.

JOHNSON: What grade were you in when that happened?

MCCUNE: I was probably a junior, but I was president of the student body when a senior and I liked all the teachers.

JOHNSON: Mr. Grant taught some classes I suppose.

MCCUNE: Yes, he taught physics and chemistry, which were tough courses.

JOHNSON: Did you take them?

MCCUNE: Yes, they were tough for me.

In 1933, that summer, I was out running the tractor in the wheat harvest, came in and was standing out in the yard watering it, when Mr. Grant walked around the block, as he usually did. See, I was graduated. He said, "Have you thought about going to college?" I said, "Well, sort of. Dad told me once that he'd like to have me go to college. He had only one semester at Nebraska U, but he would like to have me go, and my brother had gone. I haven't thought about it, and I guess it's about time." He said, "Well, you know you have a scholarship, don't you?" It turned out that

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Colorado gave two full scholarships to the University of Colorado for the top two in each class in each town. I didn't know about it. I said, "Well, I have a cousin living in Boulder and I visited up there once and it sure is a pretty town. I'll ask Dad what he thinks about it." Well, I went to Boulder and stayed five years, with a four-year scholarship.

JOHNSON: Were you valedictorian or salutatorian then?

MCCUNE: Salutatorian. At the University, I worked for room and board, so I think in five years I spent \$500 cash. I kept books.

JOHNSON: At Boulder.

MCCUNE: You can't do that anymore, and the fifth year was law school.

JOHNSON: You mentioned taking agriculture classes, I guess, in high school?

MCCUNE: One. We only had it in the last two years I was there.

JOHNSON: Since you got into writing and journalism, that sort of thing, was English one of your favorite subjects? Do you feel a debt to your high school

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English teacher?

MCCUNE: I fought English; I didn't like it. I think I was typical in that respect, although the teacher I had, Mary Stewart, I respected very much. She was also drama coach and I was in school plays, as an excuse to get out of some work. Looking back on it, she was excellent. My freshman English teacher at Colorado U was also super.

JOHNSON: How about your high school history courses?

MCCUNE: I liked that quite well, but I must tell you that in my freshman year at Colorado U, I flunked the spelling test that was given all freshmen. So we had to take what's called "dumbbell English," which you had to pass before you could graduate. I passed it, mortally embarrassed, but it was one of the best things that happened to me.

JOHNSON: Might sharpen up your skills.

MCCUNE: And made me a good speller.

JOHNSON: You didn't have any idea of what your career would be when you were a freshman in college?

MCCUNE: No.

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JOHNSON: When did you kind of decide which direction to take?

MCCUNE: I did go to see about law school before I matriculated, to talk to the Dean. He happened to be there and you could just walk into his office. He told me about the requirements - at that time you only had to go three years before you could enter law school.

JOHNSON: Three years of college?

MCCUNE: Yes. And so I just visited with him. I didn't get interested in journalism until I had worked on the school paper.

JOHNSON: The university paper?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Had you done that in high school?

MCCUNE: We didn't have one.

JOHNSON: Your interest in law came from where?

MCCUNE: I don't know. It might have been my brother; he had entered law school at Washington U. He's still practicing out there. But I took an economics major

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because of the Depression. I thought, "There's got to be some way to stop this damn thing. It must not occur again. Why does it keep going like this?" I had a map on the wall of these cycles. Man has got to be able to stop this somehow. Partly through idealism, and partly interest, I signed up for that. But I wound up taking more courses in political science, partly because of an influential teacher, who was also Dean of arts and sciences.

JOHNSON: Do you remember his name?

MCCUNE: Yes. Jacob Van Ek. He is still alive and still comes to commencement every year to give the former president of the university's charge to the students. He's memorized it. A great man.

JOHNSON: You mentioned your idealism. Where do you think that came from, what inspired that?

MCCUNE: Well, I'm thinking I'm going to solve this business cycle; somebody's got to do it. That got away from me. I got interested in politics.

JOHNSON: But you'd seen farmers going bankrupt; your father had gone bankrupt.

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MCCUNE: I studied the cycles; just dumb, dumb, they've got to be stopped. There's got to be a way to stop them. And they had good economics teachers.

JOHNSON: There's some of this social conscience in the Methodist Church, at least in some circles of Methodism; did that have anything to do with that?

MCCUNE: Not at that time. We got none of that; we were just taught to be good and be moral and ethical.

JOHNSON: No talk about social issues, at that time, for the churches?

MCCUNE: No, I liked the preachers and their kids were my age. My dad taught me in Sunday School and was chairman of the board of the church. I went, read my Sunday School paper upside down while the sermon was going on.

JOHNSON: But no talk about the social or economic problems?

MCCUNE: My father did; he was a William Jennings Bryan Democrat, essentially, and a Roosevelt man.

JOHNSON: He had voted Democrat in the twenties?

MCCUNE: Except for Al Smith, as I told you, because Smith was a boozier. That would not do; there was no drinking

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or smoking. I took a pledge to my father not to drink or smoke until I was 21. I can't imagine anybody taking one now or even requiring it, but I stuck to it very well. That was just what you did in those days.

JOHNSON: It probably was a good idea when you think about it.

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: So then at the University of Colorado in Boulder, you began to decide, get a direction, as to your career. You declared a major in economics. This required what...

MCCUNE: Branched into political science, and then took law.

JOHNSON: The ones that taught economics, were they slanting their teaching at all toward, let's say, the newer New Deal type programs?

MCCUNE: I think that the head of the Department, Dr. Frederick A. Bushee, did. He was a very austere looking man, very prim and proper; wore the same black suit forever. I suspect, looking back, that he liked the new economics, the New Deal economics, but I didn't feel at the time that he was slanted. Maybe I didn't know what

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a slant was.

JOHNSON: Did they teach classic economics, including Adam Smith? Was there a kind of free trade philosophy or laissez-faire philosophy there?

MCCUNE: Yes, free trade was correct economics, period. Putting up a tariff was wrong because it screwed everything up, including the people who were putting it up. I got that in my head very simply and firmly.

JOHNSON: Free trade, anti-tariff.

MCCUNE: But there weren't schools; we weren't made aware of any schools, like this is one way to teach economics and this is another. It was just primer stuff, I think. I had also gone to the Dean of journalism before I signed up and learned that one had to take two years of liberal arts before he could take any journalism, so I just skipped it, didn't think about it.

JOHNSON: You skipped...

MCCUNE: Journalism, as far as studying it. I never have studied it.

JOHNSON: How about your writing skills? You say you developed them. Were you on the paper?

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MCCUNE: Yes, it was called the *Silver and Gold*, and it came out twice a week.

JOHNSON: What kind of stories or material did you write?

MCCUNE: Sports at first.

JOHNSON: That's what I did when I was in college.

MCCUNE: Then, I was assigned to do a big story. It was the lead story for a couple of weeks, on getting ski slopes to Colorado. I concluded that there wasn't much of any way to do it. This is my best recollection, that it couldn't be done. I don't know; there were too many rocks or trees or something. Anyway, there still isn't one near Boulder, so I was...

JOHNSON: Right about that part.

MCCUNE: ...partly right. But I have one distinction. it has never been recognized, but I can prove it. My editor, Bill Bartleson, and I -- we were also very close and crazy friends -- decided to have a contest to name a mascot for the university. It had had nothing. We had not reckoned with the coming of final exams so soon and didn't get a chance to spend much time opening what few suggestions were sent in by students. So I said, "Bill,

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you know what we ought to be is the Golden Eagles." But, as we both knew, the Golden Eagle was the most disreputable, junky department store in Denver and all the West. It had just gone way downhill; it was a slum store, el cheapo. We were precluded from becoming the Golden Eagles. So I said, "Bill, I want the buffalo." There was a herd of buffalo between Haxtun and Boulder, and they were the most astonishing things. Sometimes they'd be up by the fence so that we could look at them and stop. He said, "I like that." And that's how they became the Buffalos, and still are.

JOHNSON: So you're the one that helped originate that.

MCCUNE: When I went back for homecoming once they had a huge buffalo, a girl named Ralphie for some reason, in a harness that took six men to hold, to get it to go around the track. And I'll tell you, I was a proud man.

JOHNSON: So you took no journalism courses as such.

MCCUNE: No. Then I write a column my fifth year, while I was in law school. I wrote a column on politics and anything I wanted to. It was a signed column.

JOHNSON: You were in law school, the first year of law school, but you were still writing for the University

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paper?

MCCUNE: Yes. And I was in love with the associate editor, and that helped.

JOHNSON: What was her name?

MCCUNE: Laura Lawrence. We were later married and had two children, but we've been divorced for a long time.

JOHNSON: Did you start to get into politics at this point? Commentaries on New Deal programs?

MCCUNE: There was one I remember. I was on the rebel side in the Spanish Civil War, and so were my immediate friends, who were quite liberal. One of the freshmen went to Spain and was killed immediately. We never heard from the other one; I don't know what happened to him. I wrote an obituary on him and I'm very proud of it.

JOHNSON: You were a pretty close friend of his?

MCCUNE: Yes, and I believed in the cause, still do. I was active in debate; always on the liberal side.

JOHNSON: Was he in this Abraham Lincoln brigade, by the way?

MCCUNE: I think so, but I don't know.

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JOHNSON: You say you were on the debate team?

MCCUNE: Yes. In law school and senior year.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any of the issues that you debated and what side you were on?

MCCUNE: We had an extemporaneous speech contest and an impromptu speech contest in oratory. I took second in the Annual Klinger Oratorical Contest, but I can't remember what subject. We had an honorary fraternity, in which the initiates had to get up and immediately start speaking on a subject they were handed. Great training, and fun, if you didn't take it too seriously.

JOHNSON: Just off the cuff, extemporaneous or spontaneous.

MCCUNE: Oh, yes, they just hand you a slip of paper and you start.

JOHNSON: And you weren't supposed to hem and haw.

MCCUNE: For the others, you had five minutes to go off in the corner and prepare. Excellent training. I was active.

JOHNSON: Were there any clubs?

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MCCUNE: I was a "Barbarian;" I wasn't a Greek.

JOHNSON: Barbarian, not a Greek, not a fraternity member. Were there independent clubs?

MCCUNE: Only a few. You were either a Greek or not.

JOHNSON: I see.

MCCUNE: I knew all the Greeks and they'd invite me for dinner once in a while. I pledged Sigma Nu at the end of my freshman year, went home and had a crop failure, came back and returned my pin.

JOHNSON: Did you think that they were snobbish at that time?

MCCUNE: They are snobbish, and they knew I felt that way. I repeat, they invited me. I just don't care for the fraternity system.

It's a good time to say I was the first person from Haxtun, Colorado, to get a degree from the University of Colorado. I mean a bachelor's degree. Now I think there are six or eight a year. I'm very proud of that.

JOHNSON: Well, it was uncommon in those days.

MCCUNE: A few got teacher's certificates at Colorado State Teacher's College, and a few went to Aggies [agriculture

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schools] including my brother, but...

JOHNSON: They didn't have a club for, let's say, political discussions?

MCCUNE: Oh yes, political discussion was in our debate groups.

JOHNSON: So this is where you sharpened your deductive, or logical argument, abilities?

MCCUNE: I guess that's fair to say because we didn't have much of it in high school, and I don't know any high school that did.

JOHNSON: It was current issues.

MCCUNE: Yes. Oh yes, we felt we were hot stuff.

JOHNSON: And you were on the pro-New Deal side, if we can put it that way?

MCCUNE: Yes. One of my girlfriend's mother took the *Christian Science Monitor*; she lived just a few doors away, and she'd save them and give them to me. I found, the other day, just piles of clippings that I had. The League of Nations was a big thing with me; I was very internationally minded and belonged to the International

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Relations Club.

JOHNSON: They had an International Relations Club?

MCCUNE: Very small. Also took a course in it.

JOHNSON: In law school, did you have some choices of courses?

MCCUNE: Yes. And it's significant that I went over in my senior year and got permission from the Dean to take a course in Constitutional Law taught by a young man named Henry Weihofen, who had been there one year I think. I was getting very interested in the Constitution and Supreme Court from Dean Van Ek's course. I got permission to take a course in law school, even though I wasn't enrolled, and loved it. That was the one exception. As I guess you know, I later wrote a book on the Supreme Court and Constitutional law.* It's always an interesting field.

JOHNSON: Your law school curriculum, was that a three-year program?

MCCUNE: Yes. My compatriots in class went in during their fourth year, which they were then permitted to do; I'm

*Wesley McCune, *The Nine Young Men* (Harpers, 1946).

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sure they're not anymore. I decided to take my fourth year in liberal arts, because I was getting my head full of international relations, political science and economics, and I didn't know for sure that I wanted to take law, so I just did another year.

JOHNSON: And a little history there too; you had some history courses?

MCCUNE: Well, one course for a year.

JOHNSON: Your scholarship ran out at the end of your senior year, so you had to find a way to finance that.

MCCUNE: Tuition at that time was \$22 a quarter.

JOHNSON: A quarter. They were on a quarter system.

MCCUNE: Sixty-six dollars a year, and I didn't have to pay it. Now how's that for getting rich?

JOHNSON: But now when you got into law school, you probably had to...

MCCUNE: I started paying some terrible sum like \$45 a quarter.

JOHNSON: By this time your father had enough money to finance your way through law school?

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MCCUNE: No, I was hashing at banquets. I got my meals working at Stoffle's Waffle Shop, if you can believe that, on the corner of the campus. I worked three hours a day, and got my meals. And then I started doing banquets at night and became the head waiter and dishwasher. Then, I would tutor ladies in a girls' dorm for tests in political science. For about an hour I'd go over and tell them what to look for on an exam, and they'd each pay me a quarter. There would be 20-30 girls and I was the richest kid on campus.

I also tutored athletes and got, I don't know, a munificent sum for teaching these guys who could barely read and write, although ours were a lot better than they are nowadays. I developed a conflict of interest, which I had to confess, because I was also grading those papers. So I had to go to my professor and to the coach, and say, "Look, this is ridiculous. I'm telling these guys what the course is about. I haven't seen the test, but then I grade the papers." And one of my prize pupils, who was later almost all-American quarterback, not Whizzer White, wrote such a lousy exam, a two-hour exam final, that I could only give him 15 out of 100, and I was stretching it to give him that. This was totally a different subject. They said there was no

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problem.

JOHNSON: So you worked your way through school, three years of law school.

MCCUNE: No, I took one there, and then when I moved to Washington, D.C. I took law at George Washington University, equivalent of about a year.

JOHNSON: You moved here then in what year?

MCCUNE: Well, I came here as an intern in government.

JOHNSON: Out of the law school.

MCCUNE: Out of law school. There was a program then for about 40 students from all over, the beginning of what now is a very common program of internships. I decided to come here for nine months; we got no pay.

JOHNSON: That was during your third year of law school?

MCCUNE: No. This was after one year of law school.

JOHNSON: In '39 you came out here?

MCCUNE: I got out of liberal arts in '37, and was in law in '38; came here, and then did an internship.

JOHNSON: Where did they have this program at that time?

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Where were you located?

MCCUNE: It was about three blocks from here, in the Investment Building. There were 40 of us; it was a great fellowship. They were from all over, deliberately, scattered.

JOHNSON: What was the address, do you remember?

MCCUNE: Room 400, in the Investment Building, at 15th and K, Northwest. I lived with five other guys, and then four other guys, and then three other guys, in some fabulous dumps.

JOHNSON: These were just flats?

MCCUNE: Yes, basement apartments. And we'd lose one each time we'd move. We're going to have a reunion next summer.

JOHNSON: Of the people you lived with?

MCCUNE: No, the whole class, 40 people.

JOHNSON: So that was how long, you say, a nine-month program?

MCCUNE: Yes. And I made a very bad choice. I went into the Economic Research Division of the National Labor

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Relations Board because I was interested in labor, economics and politics. The NLRB was a New Deal agency; it was on the griddle all the time, being fired at. I thought I wanted to learn something about it, but it was a corner; it was kind of a blind corner. I liked the people I worked with, but looking back on it, it was a largely wasted nine months.

JOHNSON: This is NLRB experience.

MCCUNE: Yes. Except that we also did the whole city and I knew all the other students in different agencies.

JOHNSON: So you got acquainted with the alphabet soup, so to speak, of the New Deal.

MCCUNE: Yes. Very much so. And learned what a beautiful city it was.

JOHNSON: About internships; that means you just worked in those offices as unpaid help?

MCCUNE: Right, doing memos.

JOHNSON: Learning their procedures.

MCCUNE: Right. And these were mostly memos on cases pending before the Board, when they wanted to do research.

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JOHNSON: What was the most helpful to you then so far as your experience is concerned during those nine months? You said the NLRB didn't turn out to be the best choice, but you were working other areas too weren't you?

MCCUNE: No, just visiting. The interns would meet once a week and we kept in touch.

JOHNSON: What did you find you were most interested in?

MCCUNE: Well, I got some more interest in the Supreme Court at that time.

JOHNSON: How about the ethnic and racial situation at the university in the 1930s?

MCCUNE: I had dinner most often with Phi Sigma Delta, a Jewish fraternity. I had rarely heard of a Jew, didn't know what one looked like; none were in Haxtun. I think I learned later there was one, and I didn't even know it. These guys became my friends in debate and in economics classes, and what have you. I learned what Jews are, in a very constructive, beautiful way. There were a lot of kids from small towns who would be just totally lost and wonder, "What the hell is all this about?" I've always been grateful for that.

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JOHNSON: So this got you acquainted with the Jewish group, so to speak, the ethnic.

MCCUNE: Yes, the first ethnic experience. It was a continuing and beautiful relationship.

JOHNSON: This, of course, was at a time when anti-Semitism, especially in Germany, must have been in the news, wasn't it?

MCCUNE: Well, not yet. If it was I've forgotten. I'm talking about '34 and '35 and '36.

JOHNSON: Did they influence your thinking on social issues?

MCCUNE: No. Only one was involved on the liberal side of debate with me, Phil Hornbein, who just died last month. His father was a prominent liberal Democratic lawyer in Denver, and Phil became one. We happened to be on the same side of things, but the other fellows -- I don't remember what they got into.

JOHNSON: Felix Frankfurter on the Supreme Court must have been an attraction.

MCCUNE: Yes, for a different reason. He was a Roosevelt phenomenon.

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JOHNSON: He had earned quite a reputation, hadn't he, by 1940?

MCCUNE: Yes, but [Justice Louis] Brandeis and [Justice Benjamin] Cardozo had preceded him.

JOHNSON: You mentioned your interest in the Supreme Court. Were people like Brandeis and Frankfurter among the most respected of those on the Court when you were here in '39? Well, of course, I guess Brandeis was off before then. Did you visit the Supreme Court; were you able to hear any arguments?

MCCUNE: A few, just a few. I just sat in the back row and listened.

JOHNSON: What did you think when they ruled on the AAA? Were you especially interested in farm issues by this time?

MCCUNE: Maybe a little more than others, but I doubt it.

JOHNSON: Didn't bother you then.

MCCUNE: Labor was interesting me more.

JOHNSON: So when they ruled the original AAA unconstitutional, it didn't bother you especially.

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MCCUNE: That had already happened, I guess. But it had had an impact in the sense that I came along later, with Secretary [Charles] Brannan, to try to write a program to replace the AAA.

JOHNSON: When did you first get interested in agriculture? The farm bloc, or lobbies influencing agricultural legislation, became, apparently, a prime interest. When did you first get an interest in that?

MCCUNE: As a journalist, I got interested in lobbies and was asked to do a chapter in a book on lobbying.

JOHNSON: Okay, you had this nine months of internship. Did you get your law degree after the internship?

MCCUNE: I never got a law degree. I've always said I got too busy covering the Supreme Court and Department of Justice.

JOHNSON: It was sort of like Harry Truman, you know; he had two years of law school, but never had time to do the third year.

MCCUNE: I don't remember that.

JOHNSON: At the Kansas City Law School.

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What's your first job after the internship?

MCCUNE: We got married and moved here, in 1939, I guess. I got a job with the Department of Agriculture in a visionary program called the Food Stamp Plan, which is still running.

JOHNSON: This is after the internship?

MCCUNE: Yes. There were six cities that were going to experiment within this program, and I went out to Dayton, Ohio. I was on the economic staff, research staff, to appraise the results. Then, I was sent to Seattle. It was the third city and then I came back here to the Washington office, in economic analysis. So I was with them a couple of years.

JOHNSON: The Ag Department?

MCCUNE: Yes. Started at \$1,440 a year, and got up to \$2,000, a P-1, Professional-1, rating. Henry Wallace was the Secretary.

JOHNSON: I notice from this resume, that after a year of law at the University of Colorado, you went to Washington and studied government and public affairs, and then worked briefly for the Department of Agriculture. In

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1940, you joined the Washington staff of *Newsweek* magazine. So this is preceding your work for *Newsweek*.

MCCUNE: We're right at that point now.

The food stamp job was excellent.

JOHNSON: What did you find out? What was your conclusion about the food stamp program?

MCCUNE: Oh, we were supposed to find out if it merely replaced consumption that otherwise would have been paid for, or did it add to the total consumption of farm products and sales.

JOHNSON: How about nutrition? Did they consider that angle too?

MCCUNE: Yes, but the surplus foods were not exactly ideal foods. Of course, later we had a cotton stamp plan to get more clothing for those people. It was a hell of a good program and I learned a lot. I had a sample of twenty stores, grocery stores, and I'd go around every week or two and talk with them and get their figures on sales. I never thought that they could be used statistically, but we gathered them anyhow.

JOHNSON: Do you remember how people qualified, or what were

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the standards for qualifying for food stamps?

MCCUNE: Well, they were welfare people, whatever that meant.

JOHNSON: These presumably were jobless people.

MCCUNE: They had to buy some stamps and then got some free. You didn't just go in and get stamps free. They had to match, in effect. It was a great experiment to be in on and I think it turned out to be a great program.

JOHNSON: Did it help with the surplus, help reduce surpluses?

MCCUNE: I don't know for sure. There was probably an official conclusion drawn to that effect, but I don't know for sure.

JOHNSON: I don't know that there has been much of a study done on that.

MCCUNE: While we were doing it, we had quite a staff. I left. I was in an old garage building downtown and made some very good friends whom I've kept up with. Ernest Lindley, bureau chief of Newsweek and a columnist, lived a half block away and we got acquainted. The war was coming and he needed some hands, and he said, "Hey, would you be interested in coming to work for me?" I

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grabbed it just like that.

JOHNSON: So you left the Ag Department then?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: But you helped write a report on this food stamp program?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you have some papers?

MCCUNE: I saved some of the things I wrote, yes.

JOHNSON: Will they be coming to the Library as part of the papers for the Library?

MCCUNE: I don't know where in the world they are. That wouldn't be in these files.

JOHNSON: So that's how you got connected with *Newsweek*. I remember the Ernest Lindley byline.

MCCUNE: Yes. And he had a very small bureau, but the war was coming and he needed to expand. I thought, "Boy, this would be interesting."

JOHNSON: This was the Washington bureau?

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MCCUNE: Over in the National Press Building. So I worked there about a year and a half before the war got me. I wrote *The Farm Bloc* while I was there, nights and weekends.

JOHNSON: This was published in '43. * Was that your first book?

MCCUNE: Yes. I covered a little of everything. We only had about three people at first to cover the whole city, so I got the Supreme Court and Agriculture and Interior. I covered State, War and Navy (we didn't have a Defense Department) the day after Pearl Harbor.

JOHNSON: Those must have been some long work weeks, since you also were working on this book.

MCCUNE: Oh, every night I would do so many words, and every weekend.

JOHNSON: Did much of this appear in *Newsweek*, what happened in your book?

MCCUNE: Well, I was fortunately covering the subject as I went along, and that helped.

*Wesley McCune, *The Farm Bloc* (Doubleday, 1943).

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JOHNSON: But you had to write on a variety of subjects.

MCCUNE: Oh yes. There was lots of variety; that was the fun of it.

JOHNSON: On these lobbies, how did you get so well acquainted with the lobbyists that were influencing agricultural legislation?

MCCUNE: Well, one specific way was that they had a luncheon club that met every other week of all the "farm hands." These were the lobbyists that dealt with food.

JOHNSON: Where would they meet for this luncheon?

MCCUNE: The Harrington Hotel.

JOHNSON: The Harrington.

MCCUNE: It's still there. I was invited as a reporter to go. So I got in more than just a story now and then about agriculture. I got to know them quite well and made some personal relationships. I was, you know, just a reporter.

JOHNSON: Did you get to do any investigative reporting where you really had to kind of conceal your objectives or camouflage yourself?

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MCCUNE: Oh, a little, I don't know. For example, the dairy lobbyists and the oleomargarine lobbyists both went to this lunch. We called it oleomargarine in those days; had to under the law. I got acquainted with them and wrote an article for *Harpers* magazine, my first magazine article byline. It was on "the great oleomargarine rebellion," and I predicted that oleo was going to change the laws and whip butter.

JOHNSON: As I recall it, the butter people kept them from even coloring the oleomargarine, until after the war wasn't it?

MCCUNE: I think it was after the war.

JOHNSON: They had that little orange button that you had to squeeze, to color the oleo.

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: That didn't put you on the good side of the butter lobbyists, I suppose.

MCCUNE: It didn't seem to matter much.

JOHNSON: Did you irritate any of the lobbyists to the point where they wouldn't give you information?

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MCCUNE: They are normally vain; they have the same ego all of us have, just so you spell their name right.

JOHNSON: Just so it's in print, one way or the other.

MCCUNE: That's a little harsh, but there's something to it.

JOHNSON: What were the reactions to your articles or to the book? Were there any particularly positive or any negative reactions?

MCCUNE: There was a coordinator for the right-wing side of the farm bloc, the conservative side -- that was the Grange and the Co-op Council, and the Farm Bureau. His name was Charles Dana Bennett; just died a few months ago. He had an office right across the street here with the Grange, and he was a character. He was a hardened Republican, conservative, but he didn't take himself or life too seriously. He had a lovely wife. He and I could have lunch and just laugh our way through, talking about the farm bloc. He knew about it and he was hired as a public relations man to run that side. The Farmers Union was the only thing on the other side. We just developed a social situation. He'd tell me anything. I got pretty good inside poop on all this.

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JOHNSON: Well, the Farm Bureau, as I understand from your books and also from Matusow's book* on agricultural policy, did support the New Deal programs for the most part, the agricultural program.

MCCUNE: Early.

JOHNSON: Yes. With price supports and production controls.

MCCUNE: It started veering off in Truman's time. Partly because they got more reactionary. In the South, when Ed O'Neal was president, from Alabama, they went along with Roosevelt. But the gravity of the Farm Bureau became right-wing in the end.

JOHNSON: Well, did that come about as a result of, let's say, the farmers becoming much better off during world War II, as prices were going up?

MCCUNE: They could afford to be Republican.

JOHNSON: Ninety percent parity. I think there was 100-110 percent parity on some commodities, during the war.

MCCUNE: I think so.

*Allen Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Harvard University Press, 1967).

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JOHNSON: As they became better off, they became more Republican; is that the extent of it?

MCCUNE: I think so; that sounds simplistic, but I believe it.

JOHNSON: The southern farmers may have been Democrat, but it was a conservative Democrat, is that true?

MCCUNE: Very much so. Ed O'Neal was president when I started studying them, and he was a real reactionary, but he was a Democrat.

JOHNSON: But he was a pro-cotton farmer.

MCCUNE: Almost totally cotton.

JOHNSON: He was really a lobbyist for the cotton farmers of the south.

MCCUNE: Right.

JOHNSON: Did the Farm Bureau chief have an office here?

MCCUNE: Always had a good office here.

JOHNSON: This Bennett, you say he was sort of the coordinator for the...

MCCUNE: He came down here from Vermont with Senator George

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Aiken, who was a hero of the farm bloc, and came to be a friend of mine. He was a very fine gentleman on most scores. And Bennett was a go-go, promoter type.

JOHNSON: But he was an aide to Aiken?

MCCUNE: No; he got a job with the Grange. He used to have dinner with Aiken, who never brought his family here from Vermont. He came to admire him. Dana was just a character, and he coordinated the three big groups, leaving the liberals out.

JOHNSON: Wasn't one of the Grange's objectives to help to preserve the family farm?

MCCUNE: Yes. They were more moderate than the Farm Bureau.

JOHNSON: Were they against corporate farming, or at least, did they favor family farms over corporate farms?

MCCUNE: Yes. The Farm Bureau would say the same thing, but their actions were quite different, I thought.

JOHNSON: You say the war caught up with you? Did you enter the Armed Forces?

MCCUNE: Well, I had been with *Newsweek* about a year and a half and my draft number was coming up. Most of my

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friends in journalism had become military PR officers somewhere or other, but this didn't appeal to me. I'm not being noble; I thought I'd probably go nuts. I didn't want to go into the Army and I didn't want to go into the Navy, and I didn't want to be a fly boy. The girl in the office -- we had been hiring girls though they didn't get bylines yet -- M.B. Palmer, whom I still see, was covering the War Shipping Administration and the United States Maritime Service, and the old Merchant Marine, among other things, and she was writing a book about it. She said, "Well, have you ever thought about the Merchant Marine?" I said, "The what?" She said, "You know, the ships that carry all the stuff around." There was one being blown up every hour on the hour. I said, "Well, I'm a little old for that kind of stuff, wearing overalls round a ship. I've never been on one, except the ferry boat." She explained it to me a little and got some material. I said, "Gee, this would be different," so I went right over here a block and signed up. They sent me to New York to Sheepshead Bay Training Station for six months. I learned to be a ship's doctor and a ship's clerk-purser.

JOHNSON: Like a paramedic, sort of?

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MCCUNE: Yes. Four months of medical training; it was a fairly new program. I think there were a thousand men at Sheepshead Bay. I came home nearly every weekend. I'm glad I did it. It was good; I kept a diary.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have to cross the Atlantic on a ship?

MCCUNE: Yes, a couple of times. This was getting pretty late in the war. Went across the Atlantic to England twice, carrying high octane gas on brand new tankers, two different ones.

JOHNSON: In other words, if a torpedo would have hit, it would have been bye-bye?

MCCUNE: Oh, Christ, we wouldn't even have known we were hit. We were in convoy with a hundred ships, and what worried us was that if one of the ships would break a rudder, it would cut cross us.

I enjoyed it. I took to the medicine just fine, just like being a Boy Scout. I had good captains, good crews. There were about 48 of us with a Navy guard also on board.

JOHNSON: Was this a liberty ship, or one of those victory ships?

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MCCUNE: No, a big T-2 tanker. I was telling somebody just yesterday about the first case I had. We were a day out of port, and the youngest, greenest kid on the ship came up out of the bowels of the engine room with an itch. I looked at it and thought to myself, "Well, everybody knows that's poison ivy. But you're not going to catch me saying that in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, on an all steel, brand new T-2 tanker." So I stalled him, and read a couple of books, and it had to be poison ivy. So I called him in and was putting some salve on him and I said, "All the books say this is poison ivy." He blushed and said, "Well, it could have been. I went on a picnic the day before I got on here." I said, "Well, how did you get it all over your fanny and your back?" He said, "Well, I was rolling around in the grass with a girl." So, my first case was a big victory.

JOHNSON: You treated poison ivy out in the middle of the Atlantic.

MCCUNE: And after that nothing mattered. That was a great experience.

JOHNSON: How long were you there in the Merchant Marine?

MCCUNE: Oh, let's say a year altogether, training and all.

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JOHNSON: This was in '44 or '45?

MCCUNE: Forty-five.

JOHNSON: So on V-E Day...

MCCUNE: I was in New York City. I changed stations. I finally crumbled. I got a job on *Mast* magazine, which was published by the U.S. Maritime Service, because we had a youngster by that time and I wanted to stay home.

JOHNSON: Do you remember April 12, when Roosevelt died?

MCCUNE: Yes, but where was I? I don't know where I was.

JOHNSON: You were on land though?

MCCUNE: I was in Times Square for V-E and V-J Day.

JOHNSON: It didn't strike you or bother you too much that "Harry Who" had become President?

MCCUNE: No, because I had followed the hearings of this young Senator, a new Senator, and I got up on the Hill quite often, but I was rarely assigned to that one.

JOHNSON: So you never attended any of the Truman Committee hearings?

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MCCUNE: I attended a couple. But *Newsweek* acquired from the United Press a man by the name of John R. Beal, who became one of my closest friends immediately. He had covered those hearings for the U.P., and I had been turning out an article or two for *Harpers* and freelancing a little. He said, "Let's write an article about the Truman Committee." So I said, "Fine." He had the facts and I had some of the technique of reaching the editor and stuff; so we wrote it and were rejected, about the time I left. Well, while I was in training camp, or somewhere in the Maritime Service, Jack Fisher, editor of *Harpers*, called my home urgently. Roosevelt had died, and Jack remembered this manuscript he had rejected. He came out of the Agriculture Department; that's where I had met him first. We found it and it appeared as the lead story under the title, "The Job That Made Truman President." He had changed only a few sentences.

JOHNSON: When did it come out?

MCCUNE: June of 1945. It was a damn good article.*

JOHNSON: It was about two years old?

*See Appendix.

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MCCUNE: At least a year.

JOHNSON: Do you remember seeing Truman in charge of that committee?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you have any impressions at the time?

MCCUNE: Yes, they were all favorable. He was well respected for the way he ran it. There was none of this stuff about Kansas City politics, or...

JOHNSON: Did you get a chance to talk to him at all?

MCCUNE: No. No, because I wasn't on regular assignment with that committee, but Jack knew him.

JOHNSON: Were you taking notes the two times that you were at these meetings?

MCCUNE: I'm not sure whether I was just gawking or whether I was covering. I think I covered one day of it when some witness was going to be there, perhaps Donald Nelson, head of the War Production Board. I have all those notes.

JOHNSON: I don't suppose you had any idea at the time that

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he was going to become President or be so important.

MCCUNE: No. Henry Wallace, I knew about, and I used to stop in his office. He had a staff of two people, a secretary and a guy named Harold Young.

JOHNSON: Well, apparently Vice-President Wallace never really cultivated relations with Congress. That seems to be the story.

MCCUNE: Oh, he was a little strange. He was kind of a strange guy; he wasn't gregarious and he really wasn't political. But I think he was good as Secretary of Agriculture.

JOHNSON: Did you interview Wallace at any point?

MCCUNE: I used to talk to Harold Young quite a lot.

JOHNSON: Who was Harold Young?

MCCUNE: He was a Texan, who, somehow, Wallace found and made his assistant. He didn't come out of the USDA. Amazing guy, and a lot of fun.

JOHNSON: Could he have been a friends of Garner's?

MCCUNE: I don't know. He just suddenly appeared as Wallace's assistant, and sat over there in the Senate Office Building. That's where his office was then.

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They just had about this much space for the Vice President; he had no office in the White House.

JOHNSON: Yes, times have changed. So, Truman, after these two sessions you attended, sort of was out of mind until Roosevelt died and he suddenly became President?

MCCUNE: Yes. The dumping of Wallace, of course, was big news, and I was an avid news reader.

JOHNSON: Well, when were you discharged from the Merchant Marine?

MCCUNE: When did I get out? Well, wait a minute; here are the two ships. Here are the ship articles. I was also purser; I wrote an article called "Purser Nurser." I never got it published. It's the best thing I ever wrote; it starts with poison ivy. This was my first ship.

JOHNSON: The S.S. *James Island*.

MCCUNE: Yes, but wait until you hear what the second one was, the S.S. *Bulkcrude*.

JOHNSON: *Bulkcrude*.

MCCUNE: One word. Wasn't that a beautiful thing?

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JOHNSON: It's poetic.

MCCUNE: There's my birth certificate. I forgot to mention to you that I was adopted, because it never made any difference. The folks told me when I was about four or five, and it was never mentioned again.

JOHNSON: You were adopted as a newborn?

MCCUNE: Yes, they lost a boy and they wanted a replacement. It's one of those things that really worked.

JOHNSON: I was just trying to establish when you got back into journalism. So from November 1942 until the end of August of '45 you were officially...

MCCUNE: In the U.S. Maritime Service, or Merchant Marine. Technically, you leave the Maritime Service and go with the Merchant Marine. Then you start getting paid, you see, commercial rate.

JOHNSON: So it was after V-J Day that you finally became a civilian officially. Then you went to work for, was it *Time* magazine, as a reporter?

MCCUNE: When I came back, this Jack Beal had left *Newsweek* and gone with *Time* magazine. They had a new bureau

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chief over at *Time* and they offered me a fantastic salary, I thought, not realizing that all salaries had escalated during the war. I was very naive about this thing. So I went with *Time* magazine with Jack.

JOHNSON: As a reporter.

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Fulltime.

MCCUNE: Covering Washington. Except they had a bigger bureau.

JOHNSON: How about *Newsweek*? Hadn't they invited you back?

MCCUNE: Ernest Lindley was on vacation a couple of weeks. It was poorly handled, and *Time* said, "You've got to tell us right now." I wouldn't do it over, but it was good.

JOHNSON: Henry Luce was publisher of *Life*. Was he also publisher of *Time*?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Your political orientation wasn't so strong yet that that made any difference?

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MCCUNE: The Washington bureau couldn't have cared less.

JOHNSON: So you were working for *Time* and you were covering what?

MCCUNE: Now, remember both at *Newsweek* and at *Time*, the Washington bureau did not write any finished copy and there were no bylines, period. We reported to New York; they queried us, or we would suggest stories. It went up as rough notes for research, not as finished articles. That's changed now, but that's the way it was.

JOHNSON: Were there any special areas that you covered, or did you cover about the same...

MCCUNE: About the same as I had; covered the courts, agriculture, some of the domestic agencies, but not military.

JOHNSON: The Supreme Court and agriculture were the two main areas?

MCCUNE: For sure.

JOHNSON: Did you know Frank McNaughton?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: We have the McNaughton papers, "McNaughton

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Reports." All his notes.

MCCUNE: Oh good. Frank was a hell of a guy. I had known him slightly before I joined the bureau at *Time*. Frank was an old pro there and one of the few who survived a badly needed housecleaning. About half the bureau was drunk most of the time, I learned, after I got there.

JOHNSON: You're talking about the New York or...

MCCUNE: The Washington bureau. And they came in and cleaned out, and I was one guy they were recruiting to...

JOHNSON: You were one of the sober ones?

MCCUNE: Yes, I was. They didn't know me.

JOHNSON: See, that pledge did make a difference. So, you worked with Frank McNaughton to some extent then.

MCCUNE: He covered the Hill, along with Jim Shepley. Shepley covered the Pentagon also.

JOHNSON: Well, I suppose they did with your copy what they did with everybody else's -- condensed it, edited it, rewrote it?

MCCUNE: Who knows?

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JOHNSON: You had no bylines at the time?

MCCUNE: Right. A very expensive operation, very wasteful operation, but that's neither here nor there.

JOHNSON: How long did you work for them?

MCCUNE: A little over a year. One of the people they had let go, an ex-bureau chief, who has worked all over the world as a newspaperman, had been hired by Kiplingers to start a magazine called *Changing Times*, in a townhouse up by the White House. He was a very strange guy. Everybody thought that he had great news sense, but he was a weird character, a sometimes alcoholic among other things. I was getting unhappy with my bureau chief, who later wrote a history of *Time* and *Life*.

JOHNSON: Who was that?

MCCUNE: Bob Elson, a Canadian chap. I felt I wasn't getting good assignments and that he didn't have much confidence in me so I thought, "Well, let's just stop this before it erupts." I later got a very nice letter from him and a bonus, so I guess I was wrong but I wanted to go into writing the finished product. This new magazine had started, and it looked good, and several of my friends had gone there. So I made that break and stayed there

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about a year and a half.

JOHNSON: At Kiplinger's *Changing Times*?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you got bylined articles?

MCCUNE: We didn't get bylines, but they didn't change a word ordinarily.

JOHNSON: Was that a weekly or a monthly?

MCCUNE: Monthly.

JOHNSON: Did you specialize in particular areas?

MCCUNE: I did one on the Supreme Court. They [Kiplinger's] were weird; they would send you around the country. Somebody would write in and say, "You ought to write a story about my company." I remember International Harvester was one in Chicago. They got an idea, "Why don't you go out and do a story about International Harvester?" "Sure." So I'd go out and stay in Chicago a couple of days, and meet the president and poke around. "Do one on the Chicago Board of Trade while you're there." "Sure." It was a different kind of writing.

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JOHNSON: You didn't cover [Preston] Tucker?

MCCUNE: No, I missed Tucker. I haven't seen that show either. It was good to write the finished product. And I was well paid.

JOHNSON: You must have been considered sort of an expert on the farm bloc; you had already published this first edition in '43. Did they try to aim you in that direction?

MCCUNE: No, they were more of a business publication.

JOHNSON: Agribusiness?

MCCUNE: Well, International Harvester.

JOHNSON: So you got some articles in *Changing Times* for about a year and a half.

MCCUNE: Yes, everything I wrote.

JOHNSON: Then you left *Changing Times*.

MCCUNE: Well, old man Kiplinger, Willard, who used to come in the office, would stick his head in about once a week. His newsletter was published up the street a few blocks. His son Austin was nominally editor of the

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magazine, just out of school, and he was one of my bosses. But I knew the old man from the Press Club and stuff, and one day one of the old man's minion retainers came over and was interviewing the entire staff of the magazine with the one question, "Are you loyal to the old man, or to the son?" I heard this before they got to me, and I couldn't believe it. I absolutely couldn't believe that anything like this would be pulled on us. It was just fantastic. So he finally got me in the closet and I told him I was loyal to both of them. I had written on the newsletter during vacations of other guys. I said, "This is unbelievable, and I hereby resign," which I did, I think the only one who did, and I'm goddamn proud of it. It was an outrage.

JOHNSON: In other words there was a feud going on between the father and son?

MCCUNE: Turned out, and what a way to tell people. I told Austin what I had done and he hardly even thanked me, but we're still friends. He wrote me a very nice letter and gave me a bonus. I still am shaking my head. So I decided to freelance for a while; what the heck. I am sitting at home in the suburbs freelancing, and got a call from Charlie Brannan, who was Assistant Secretary

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of Agriculture and from Colorado, and a friend of Jim Patton's of the Farmers Union. I had met him in his office on purpose, just because he was from Colorado; stopped in to say hello a couple of times while covering Agriculture. He called and said could he come out, and I said, "Sure."

So I had a drink or something ready and he brought his wife out. Well, Clint Anderson had resigned as Secretary to run for the Senate and I knew that there was speculation; Norris E. Dodd was the Under Secretary and the first in line, and Charlie Brannan was the only Assistant Secretary. In those days that's all we had. So he said, "I think I've got a chance to get the top spot, but if I do will you come and be my administrative assistant?" I couldn't think of any reason why not, and Brannan seemed to be a nice guy. I want to add that he turned out to be a great boss and one of the greatest Secretaries in history.

JOHNSON: That would be 1948. I would like to back up, for some of your experiences in covering Truman before then. Working for *Time* and then *Kiplinger's*, did you cover Truman in the White House at all?

MCCUNE: I covered Roosevelt a few times for *Newsweek*, a very

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small staff. I stood up around his desk with everybody else, and wrote on somebody's back, and they wrote on mine.

JOHNSON: In the Oval Office?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you get in on the press conferences that Truman by this time was having?

MCCUNE: Well, I'm trying to remember. I don't think so.

JOHNSON: You were covering the Supreme Court and the Ag Department, largely.

MCCUNE: All over town, the Justice Department...

JOHNSON: Yes, but you didn't get into the White House. Who was doing that for *Time* then?

MCCUNE: For *Time* it was Eddie Lockett. He was an old pro, contemporary of Frank McNaughton's.

JOHNSON: So you didn't have any strong feelings about Harry Truman, or did you, at this time?

MCCUNE: Well, yes, based on the job he had done on the Senate Committee. As I say, I wrote that up. In a

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sense it said, "This is how a Senate investigation should be run, and look who did it."

JOHNSON: Saved the taxpayers a lot of money and that sort of thing?

MCCUNE: Probably.

JOHNSON: And even I guess helped make some of the airplanes safer by pointing out certain defects.

MCCUNE: Oh, yes, I've forgotten the details, but we were targeting on the structure of a committee and how it should be conducted, in the light of some failures and some other successes.

JOHNSON: But you were not particularly partisan at this point, or were you? *Time* is supposed to have been somewhat pro-Republican.

MCCUNE: Oh they were. They were.

JOHNSON: You were aware of Truman's contempt for the Hearst and McCormick empires?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: And even perhaps for Henry Luce? He never let Henry Luce into the White House. You know there's a

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story about Mrs. Luce making a derogatory comment about Bess Truman, and so he never let Luce into the White House.

MCCUNE: I didn't recall that fact, but I certainly knew what the political wars were, yes. By the way, one summer, between my first two years in college, I went to Chicago with my high school teacher named Wilbur Kindig, who had gone into the business of renting bicycles on the near north side of Chicago. He said, "Come on out, I'll give you a job." I was exposed to the Chicago *Tribune* and the Hearst papers, and it made a decent journalist out of me inside. I used to get so goddamn mad reading those, how crooked they were, in my opinion, that it really made me more

interested in journalism. This is ridiculous; it shouldn't happen, shame on them, and I never got over it.

JOHNSON: So you did have pretty strong feelings about the McCormicks and Hearsts.

MCCUNE: I did, very much so, and I'm glad to say it's changed a great, great deal.

JOHNSON: The Kiplingers -- were they not pro-big business, or especially partisan?

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MCCUNE: Oh, those people were the customers, but they played it quite straight. I think they did a good, objective job. They chose subject matter that would be of interest to big business, but there was very little editorializing.

JOHNSON: You're saying that Charlie Brannan asked to visit you in your home. Where were you living at the time?

MCCUNE: Out in the suburbs, in Forest Glen, Maryland. And then he explained why he had come out, and I told him I was flattered. I guess I got to think it over, maybe not, but I also figured, "Well, it would only be a six month job, probably." I was aware that Truman wasn't given any chance to win. So I thought it would be a good experience, like everything else I had done, so I went with him.

JOHNSON: Who was it that got his ear, or drew his attention to you?

MCCUNE: Well, I had called on him as a Colorado person, just stopped in like you'd leave a calling card and chat, a couple of times, and we talked some business. He came out of the Farm Security Administration, in the Colorado office. I had never met him in Colorado; I met him as

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Assistant Secretary, just went in to pass some time with him, I think, twice.

JOHNSON: But you didn't interview him for any articles?

MCCUNE: Not specifically.

JOHNSON: And, of course, I suppose he was aware of your book on *The Farm Bloc*.

MCCUNE: I think Jim Patton of the Farmer's Union probably had told him about me, because I was covering Patton along with the other farm groups.

JOHNSON: Had you shown a preference for the Farmers Union, do you think?

MCCUNE: I may have. I may have; I don't know.

JOHNSON: I notice that Brannan had been an attorney for the Farmers Union.

MCCUNE: They [Brannan and Patton] were just friends. They were going down the same road. They were the same age, and they knew each other. I was having lunch with Patton every once in a while, and he was from Denver.

JOHNSON: Yes, how about Patton? How did he strike you; what kind of a personality was he?

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MCCUNE: Oh, a very forceful, very fine guy. A tough guy who was soft as a pussycat inside.

JOHNSON: What was he sentimental about?

MCCUNE: People, always people, including employees, but tough as a boot on policy.

JOHNSON: Did he come out of a poor farmer's background? He apparently had very strong sympathies for the lower income farmers.

MCCUNE: Always, but he didn't come out of a farm background. He was a schoolteacher, briefly, in a small western slope town, who just somehow got interested in the Farmers Union. It was lacking leadership, so he took over the Colorado branch. The other leaders were old and kind of tired, and he just moved in.

JOHNSON: But he thought the Federal Government should have a strong role in agriculture?

MCCUNE: Yes, very much for Federal intervention. A hell of a guy to work for.

JOHNSON: And you apparently felt the same way, that the Federal Government should be a strong partner of the

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farmers?

MCCUNE: I suppose so.

JOHNSON: Well, then apparently Brannan was aware that you were on the same wave length?

MCCUNE: I think so.

JOHNSON: The official title is Executive...

MCCUNE: Executive Assistant. Most of them call it administrative, or did, but it's Executive Assistant.

JOHNSON: So you had his ear more than anyone else?

MCCUNE: I suppose anyone else but his longtime secretary, Louise Nylander, who is still his secretary.

JOHNSON: His personal secretary.

MCCUNE: And has been since he hung out his shingle.

JOHNSON: Sort of like Rose Conway was to Harry Truman.

MCCUNE: She has been his secretary all of her adult life and all of his. She runs a beautiful office, and we just fell in love immediately, which helps a great deal, because we sat this far apart.

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JOHNSON: So you were right outside of Charlie Brannan's office.

MCCUNE: Here's the Secretary's office, and here's Louise Nylander, and an assistant who sat there.

JOHNSON: In the next room.

MCCUNE: In the next room I sat, an enormous thing; probably used to be the Under Secretary's office, I don't know.

JOHNSON: You mean you're in the office next to Louise Nylander's. You were in a third office, so to speak?

MCCUNE: And those doors were always open, both doors, free passage.

JOHNSON: You were by yourself in this room?

MCCUNE: I had a secretary in with me whom I inherited from Clint.

JOHNSON: Who was she?

MCCUNE: Maggie Leavy. Margaret Ann Leavy, deceased.

JOHNSON: Had worked for Clinton Anderson?

MCCUNE: Yes. And Charlie asked me if I would take her because he had made a deal with Clint Anderson, if you

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want to call it that, that he would keep Clint's executive assistant, whom I knew slightly, for something like six months, in some job, and two of the secretaries, maybe three, in the office. No problem. So Charlie introduced me to Maggie and said, "This is the situation, and you don't have

to have her, but you get first crack." She was a wild Irishman; we just absolutely went crazy over Maggie. She sat right there with me the whole time. So it was a happy office, I'll tell you.

I also inherited, in a way, Brannan's former staff assistant in the Assistant Secretary's office -- Stanley Williams. He was a savvy civil servant who also became a very close friend. When President Truman put out an order on non-discrimination as to race, Brannan named me Fair Employment Officer (I think it was called), but Stan did the staff work. We're still close.

JOHNSON: Were you acquainted with Clinton Anderson?

MCCUNE: Yes, I had met him; probably interviewed him when he was in the House. I knew his executive assistant, Nathan Koenig; he had been a journalist also. Nate Koenig's friend, Luna Diamond, was Clint Anderson's personal secretary. Nate Koenig came out of a

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journalism background also, out of *U.S. News* and the Bureau of National Affairs.

JOHNSON: Had you interviewed Clinton Anderson for any of your articles?

MCCUNE: Maybe, but minor. I doubt if he knew who I was. I doubt it.

JOHNSON: So you didn't cover his committee that investigated the food problem there in '45.

MCCUNE: No, not that much.

JOHNSON: So Agriculture was just one of a number of areas that you were covering; you hadn't really focused that much on it yet.

MCCUNE: I wasn't allowed all that much time; we were so thin.

JOHNSON: Now as executive assistant to Brannan, you had to refocus on it.

MCCUNE: Oh, totally. I wrote a press release in case he got appointed. He called me one day a couple months later and said, "Okay, I'm putting out the release. When are you coming to work?" And I came to work.

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JOHNSON: And you were still freelancing at that point?

MCCUNE: Yes, I was; I have forgotten what all I was doing.

JOHNSON: Did you get anything published as a freelancer?

MCCUNE: I guess I was working on this.

JOHNSON: Oh, *The Nine Young Men*?

MCCUNE: Yes, for one thing. It was put out in 1947. I also had taken some leave once and done this between jobs.

JOHNSON: *Who's Behind Our Farm Policy*;* that came out later though didn't it, in 1956? That's the one I was reading yesterday.

MCCUNE: Oh, that's the one; I thought you said *Farm Bloc*.

JOHNSON: Yes, I looked at that too, but this was the one I was reading.

MCCUNE: This one I got paid in advance far enough that I did it between jobs.

JOHNSON: This is sort of an update of your 1943 book.

*Wesley McCune, *Who's Behind Our Farm Policy?* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1956).

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MCCUNE: In a way, but it included much more of the "agribusiness" people; you didn't have to be a farmer to get in the book like this one.

JOHNSON: NAM and Chambers of Commerce?

MCCUNE: Yes. NAM had had a farm program.

JOHNSON: Yes, trying to influence farm policy.

MCCUNE: I had fun doing that one.

JOHNSON: So you came on board with Charlie Brannan, about May of '48 when he became Secretary of Agriculture.

MCCUNE: Oh, I went to work the next day.

JOHNSON: Oh, right after he became...

MCCUNE: The minute Truman gave him the nod. I think Don Dawson called him with the news.

JOHNSON: Did this give you an opportunity to meet Truman yet?

MCCUNE: No. I worked with his staff, like Charlie Murphy, and our friend from West Virginia, Ken Hechler.

JOHNSON: How about David Bell?

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MCCUNE: Yes; and Dick Neustadt. He may not have been there in '48 but I worked a lot with him later.

JOHNSON: Did you work with Clark Clifford before he left?

MCCUNE: Not personally. Charlie saw a lot of him; I didn't.

JOHNSON: How about George Elsey?

MCCUNE: Yes, I knew George quite well. I was wondering the other day, is he still running the Red Cross?

JOHNSON: I'm not sure; I haven't met him yet.

MCCUNE: The one that came out of the Budget Bureau -- that was Dave Bell.

JOHNSON: Who would you perhaps work with the most, or have the most contact with at the White House in that first year or two?

MCCUNE: Well, you remember they set up a Defense Production Committee of some kind.

JOHNSON: You mean after the Korean war started, I believe, in '50, the Defense Production Act.

MCCUNE: I was over there a good deal as a second level person. The second level guys would do all the work on

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it, only we did it professionally and scientifically. General Marshall would be a different level. If Brannan were out of town, I would sit in that, instead of our Under Secretary, because that was another story. They were changing and one was running for the Senate. I was a real deputy; that's what I was.

JOHNSON: C. J. McCormick was Under Secretary, under Brannan.

MCCUNE: Yes, the second one. Al Loveland was the first .

JOHNSON: Okay, Loveland was the first.

MCCUNE: They talked him into running for the Senate from Iowa; he got beat. He was a great guy. McCormick was brought in from Indiana and I worked closely with him. Then, Knox Hutchinson was the Assistant Secretary after a while; it took a long time to fill it. A great crew.

JOHNSON: Yes, Knox T. Hutchinson. Just briefly, what were your impressions of McCormick and Hutchinson?

MCCUNE: Well, also Al Loveland. The three of them were inexperienced in this kind of job, which a professional personnel man would hold against them, but I didn't. They were very intelligent guys; they were good symbols for the job. They came out of the farm

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committee system, the old AAA -- it was then PMA, Production Marketing Administration -- so that they the program in the field beautifully, which is a very good reason for bringing them into the top of the bureaucracy.

Hutchinson also knew the TVA story very well; public power.

JOHNSON: He came out of Tennessee?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: But they had worked with these local committee these AAA, which became PMA?

MCCUNE: Right.

JOHNSON: Which included local farmers who were elected the county boards?

MCCUNE: Right. They had statewide jobs with the USDA c program. They had worked their way up from just plain farmers.

JOHNSON: They had been state directors in the AAA? The been working farmers?

MCCUNE: You bet, they still had farms. Al Loveland, I

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a little better for some reason than the other two; loved the guy, a great man.

JOHNSON: He was an Iowa farmer.

MCCUNE: Yes. All three obviously were Democrats.

JOHNSON: Had they been associated with the Farmers Union?

MCCUNE: No, come to think of it, they hadn't. No. We were trying to get some balance there. They were probably all members of the Farm Bureau, but not leaders.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

MCCUNE: Probably.

JOHNSON: The Farm Bureau.

MCCUNE: Yes, this was quite deliberate to get a balance; just the way a President chooses a Vice President.

JOHNSON: The Farm Bureau changed color, so to speak. Well, around '47, '48, the center of power supposedly shifted from the Southern farmers under O'Neal to the Midwest farmers under [Allan B.] Kline.

MCCUNE: Something like that.

JOHNSON: And more recently, you know, I've heard that the

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membership of the Farm Bureau seems to be concentrated in Cook County, Illinois for some reason or other. I don't know just what the background on this is, but does that also mean a shift to agribusiness when the Southern base sort of shifted to the North, or Midwest?

MCCUNE: The Farm Bureau has never regarded the processors as the enemy in the way that the Farmers Union, and probably even the Grange, regards them. I think they got in bed with the processors and the Farmers Union regards them as a natural enemy. That's over-simplifying.

JOHNSON: Their interests don't necessarily coincide. In other words, the middle men, who used to be the villains, have become the friends of the Farm Bureau?

MCCUNE: Yes. Now, I haven't been into this for some time. I'm speaking of the period when I did know.

JOHNSON: Right. Do you have any comment on the decision to replace the Farm Security Administration in 1946 with the Farmers Home Administration, which diluted, apparently, the influence of the small farmer?

MCCUNE: That was Clint Anderson I believe, wasn't it?

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JOHNSON: Yes, it was Clinton Anderson.

MCCUNE: Well, Farm Security Administration was always regarded as the left wing, the alleged Commies, and what have you. It was under attack from Congress, and the Farm Bureau didn't like them. They were "Communist pinkos." And C.B. Baldwin was a symbol of the left, when he was running it. He later stayed with Henry Wallace. So, what do you do? You reorganize, you shuffle, you give it a new name. And Clint had the confidence of the Congress. He was an outstanding member of the House, very able guy from the beginning, and by God, he straightened them out. It was sort of that kind of a scenario. I don't think it changed it all that much.

JOHNSON: According to Matusow's book,* Clint Anderson actually recommended Charlie Brannan as his successor.

MCCUNE: Well, there may have been some friction between [Under Secretary Norris E.] Dodd and Anderson. I never knew what that story was, but it was apparently a happy solution when Dodd went with the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization]. Incidentally, I was in on

*Allen J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 171.

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the founding of the FAO; I went up there representing *Time* magazine, in Quebec, when it was organized. Lester Pearson was the organizer, a great man. Great man. He was then the Ambassador here and later Prime Minister of Canada.

JOHNSON: Well, you came in right before the '48 election, or campaign, I should say.

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: And, of course, Charlie Brannan made a lot of speeches; he probably had a strong influence on farmers opinion, and with the President himself. Do you recall him having quite an influence, perhaps, on that election, the results of the '48 election?

MCCUNE: Well, that's the common feeling that the farm vote went for Truman, and some other little guys. Truman got to the farmers somehow. He wasn't just a Kansas City slicker by any means; I guess they liked his blunt language. Brannan helped a great deal, although he is not an orator. He comes across as very sincere, earnest and competent.

JOHNSON: According to Matusow, as he went along he became more extemporaneous and more relaxed, more effective.

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MCCUNE: I hope so.

JOHNSON: Did you help write any of these speeches that he gave?

MCCUNE: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: You wrote many of those speeches.

MCCUNE: Well, the speechwriters were under me.

JOHNSON: How about the copies of these speeches? Do you still have them; are they part of your papers?

MCCUNE: No, not all speeches. I did not keep mimeograph copies of the speeches. Of course, those are available from the Department.

JOHNSON: The Department of Agriculture?

MCCUNE: Yes. Whatever influence I had was to get Charlie to be a little more natural and relaxed, and cut down the length; don't make a long speech.

JOHNSON: Were you his chief speechwriter? Would that be fair to say?

MCCUNE: I wrote very few of them, but I had three or four guys whom I inherited.

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JOHNSON: Who were the people that helped prepare his speeches?

MCCUNE: Well, M.L. Dumars was the head speechwriter. I still see him; nicknamed "Duke." A very fine person. He had been there when Charlie was Assistant Secretary, but I didn't know him. And there was a guy named Doc Enzler. These were the professionals in the Information Office.

JOHNSON: What was Doc's real name, first name, do you remember?

MCCUNE: Clarence. Doc stammered, so he learned to live with a typewriter, a great guy. They were first-class people.

JOHNSON: These two did most of his speechwriting?

MCCUNE: I had a hand in all of them. I picked a couple that I wanted to write and took a day off. I can't remember just what they are, but what may have become part of "Point IV" was one of them. I took an interest in that, because I believed in it.*

*Drafts of this speech, to the Food and Agriculture Organization in November 1948, are in the Papers of Wesley McCune, Truman Library.

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JOHNSON: How about McCormick's speeches? Did you help write any of those?

MCCUNE: Well, I was always in on "What are you going to cover?" and "What's the occasion?" and, "Yes, Clarence, you ought to do this one," or "Gee, I don't know, that looks marginal to me." You know, we'd have a huddle.

JOHNSON: Okay, the Brannan plan really didn't come up until after the election of '48.

MCCUNE: And for that reason we thought it was time to redo the whole mess.

JOHNSON: But at this point you were supporting the existing plan, which was 90 percent of parity, sort of fixed?

MCCUNE: Well, it was so mandated by Congress.

JOHNSON: Yes, this had been carried over from World War II, basically the same program, supporting 90 percent parity. What was your message to the farmers in the '48 campaign, at least the speeches that you were involved with? Do you recall what your major theme, or thrust, was?

MCCUNE: No, I'm sure it was selling the Democratic program

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as we know it, not dotting i's or crossing t's, but "Look what we've done for you and how good things are."

JOHNSON: One of the big issues that fell into the lap of Brannan in the Department was the cutback on the financing of storage facilities, storage bins?

MCCUNE: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: And that became a key issue when the prices dropped and they had a big surplus on hand.

MCCUNE: Yes. A couple of members of Congress wanted to save money and cut back on that, particularly Senator [John J.] Williams of Delaware, a reactionary Republican. And we raised hell. They were robbing the farmer, there was no place to store your grain, and we really hit that one hard; that was the grain storage issue and I'm sure I've got some stuff on that.

JOHNSON: Of course, this was a Republican Congress that had been elected in 1946.

MCCUNE: Eightieth Republican Congress, the do-nothing...

JOHNSON: And if it hadn't been elected in '46, Truman would not have been elected in '48?

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MCCUNE: Very likely.

JOHNSON: Because he had something to run against.

MCCUNE: We flailed them on that.

JOHNSON: Besides the storage bin issue, the Republicans were aiming toward flexible, instead of fixed, price supports, too?

MCCUNE: Yes, the Hope-Aiken Act was a compromise, flat out, between Congressman Cliff Hope of Kansas, the Republican chairman of the House Ag Committee, who was fairly liberal, and George Aiken, who was chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, who was a moderate, but believed in the sliding scale, and Hope didn't. He was the old-fashioned, rigid

support man. So we had to operate under the Hope-Aiken Act for a while. And the query was, "What do you do next year?" Will either of them be around. You've got a Republican Congress. A beautiful time, intellectually and practically, to examine the basic farm legislation that had been built like Topsy, and decide what is right, where it should be.

JOHNSON: A longer-range plan for the future?

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MCCUNE: Yes, a long-range plan; that's why it became called "The Plan," I suppose, because we projected. By the way, it came as a great, great surprise to all of us that it was called the Brannan Plan. We were very naive; we couldn't believe it. It should have been given a catchy name so it would have been called something impersonal, but...

JOHNSON: Okay, I think we might save this for tomorrow, the Brannan Plan and the consequences.

In the '48 election, we mentioned the Dexter speech. Did you contribute to that speech in Dexter, Iowa?

MCCUNE: Yes, basically.

JOHNSON: Albert Carr, I believe it was, was considered one of the important authors of that particular speech, especially of the more vitriolic or stronger phrases used in that speech, like "pitchfork in the farmer's back."

MCCUNE: I don't know him. I think all I did was send over some ideas; I know I didn't do any drafting.

JOHNSON: Do you recall if any of your ideas ended up in the speech?

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MCCUNE: I don't recall. They did in Adlai's farm speeches.

JOHNSON: In '52.

MCCUNE: Yes, and in '56. I worked on '52; he had me come out to Springfield.

JOHNSON: In '48 you were contributing to Brannan's speeches, and I suppose his speeches were having an influence on those writing speeches for Truman.

MCCUNE: Oh yes. We were in constant contact, an excellent staff. They'd say, "Look, this is what we need. What ideas have you got?" And we'd shoot them over; it would be a paragraph or a page, or a draft, or ideas, and it didn't matter whether they were used or not.

Here's a note to Charlie Murphy; "Here's something which Charlie Brannan and I thought might be helpful in the months ahead. Just before he left town for a few days he asked me to send it

over to you. I would be glad to talk it over with you or your staff at any time." And it's a thing called "Positive Peace," which I wrote.

JOHNSON: That's in '48?

MCCUNE: A foreign policy speech, in '51.

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JOHNSON: Did you try to relate farm policy to our foreign policy, to international affairs?

MCCUNE: Well, in this sense, we tried to get the basic commodities off of the stilts which were keeping them from being sold abroad.

JOHNSON: This 90 percent?

MCCUNE: Yes. And let them go to the marketplace. In that sense, we were free-market, Republican, Herbert Hoover guys, and we never got credit for it.

JOHNSON: But then you were going to use Federal subsidies to make up the difference, weren't you, between a fair price or a parity price, and the world price.

MCCUNE: Yes. "Production payments," we called it. That became "socialism" and "communism."

JOHNSON: Yes. But you didn't foresee that being labeled that?

MCCUNE: Oh, I think somewhat, yes, but not to that extent.

JOHNSON: Perhaps you didn't realize, too, that the cold war was going to get hotter, and McCarthyism was going to emerge.

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MCCUNE: I worked on McCarthyism; I worked on that.

JOHNSON: That started in '50, the McCarthy charges, and these trials and hearings about communism were already occurring in '48 and '49. Did McCarthyism have something to do with perceptions of the Brannan Plan as socialistic, and that sort of thing?

MCCUNE: I don't think so. It was partly because when any government starts paying individuals money for something, it's a different ballgame, whether you like it or not; it's socialistic, somehow.

JOHNSON: Is it just a matter of being direct or indirect?

MCCUNE: Yes. We called it that.

JOHNSON: Ever since '33, the government had been making loans to farmers, giving them credit on their corn, wheat and so on?

MCCUNE: Well, those were "loans;" they were pretty well repaid.

JOHNSON: But the subsidies or guarantees of 90 percent parity involved payments didn't they? And conservation, for instance, did they get direct payments on

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conservation programs?

MCCUNE: Yes, but that's for conservation.

JOHNSON: Conservation is different, apparently.

MCCUNE: Well, anyhow the Reagan administration has put direct payments on several commodities and nobody has called it the Brannan Plan, or socialistic, or anything else.

JOHNSON: Getting back to the preparation of speeches for Mr. Brannan, is it correct that you were supervising the speechwriters?

MCCUNE: Yes, I would know what they were doing and what we were going to cover, and I'd read them for language. He'd put three or four speechwriters around the table once in a while, and we'd plan a month ahead, and take notes. Sometimes I'd sit in on those and sometimes I wouldn't, because I did not want to be a layer between the man giving the speech and the guys working on it. I felt quite strongly about it.

JOHNSON: You didn't want to be the editor, so to speak, that much?

MCCUNE: That's right. Only when they really needed it.

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JOHNSON: But this is something that was one of your first jobs. This began early?

MCCUNE: Oh, that was just one finger; see, many other papers came through me.

JOHNSON: All the papers?

MCCUNE: No, not all; there were two other assistants inherited from Clint, and they would take the dockets of the legal actions on milk orders, and whatever. I was rarely involved in those.

JOHNSON: You didn't have to get into legalities too much, even though you had the law background?

MCCUNE: Once in a while; the solicitor was quite a guy, an old career man. Yes, I worked with him on some things.

JOHNSON: Of course, Charlie Brannan was a lawyer; he was acquainted with the law. Were any of the others in there lawyers or trained in the law; just you and Charles Brannan?

MCCUNE: Yes. He had a whole solicitor staff.

JOHNSON: Okay, solicitors for legal opinions.

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MCCUNE: And remember, Claude Wickard, the ex-Secretary, was sitting downstairs running the Rural Electrification Administration.

JOHNSON: Oh, he was; after he left as Secretary of Agriculture?

MCCUNE: Yes. Apparently, he said to Truman, "You're entitled to your own man," and they made a deal. "What do you want to do, Claude?" "I'd like to run the REA." It was an amazing arrangement, and beautiful.

JOHNSON: So now he became a subordinate to the...

MCCUNE: A bureau chief. And beautiful.

JOHNSON: And did a good job?

MCCUNE: He sat in on all the Brannan Plan meetings, as a bureau chief with the others. A great man.

JOHNSON: He was running the REA all this time.

MCCUNE: Yes.

I had barely known him as Secretary, but later when I was at the DNC, Claude was chairman of my advisory committee. It's on the letterhead. He was a great old guy, a real farmer. He always looked like a farmer, and

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by God he was. And then he moved back to his farm.

JOHNSON: In Indiana?

MCCUNE: Yes. He never lost it. He had a great wife. I found myself out in Indiana at their farm on my way to something or another, and we got drunk.

JOHNSON: You were really celebrating out there on the farm?

MCCUNE: I don't remember anything at all.

JOHNSON: It dimmed your memory, huh?

MCCUNE: Reminiscing.

JOHNSON: When did he finally leave the Government?

MCCUNE: Oh, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Almost died with his boots on?

MCCUNE: Yes. Just a genuine salt of the earth guy, and I think he was a pretty good Secretary.

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Second Oral History Interview with Wesley McCune, Washington, D.C., September 16, 1988.

By Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library.

JOHNSON: We might back up a little bit, Mr. McCune. In those first few weeks, or months, with Charles Brannan, in the Ag Department, what do you recall him emphasizing, or stressing at the outset, for the Department?

MCCUNE: Well, we had to put off any long-range plans for reorganization or substantive change because the immediate problem of any Cabinet officer was the 1948 election. He couldn't involve civil servants in it, but of course, the three top men are exempted for political activity. I had just come in, didn't know him very well, and had to jump in pretty fast, both in writing and supervising political material, and in helping when he was out of town. We were a little late in getting an Under Secretary appointed -- that was vacant -- and picked Al Loveland, of Iowa. We didn't really replace Brannan as Assistant Secretary for quite a while. I'm not sure how long it took, probably after the election.

JOHNSON: Did he talk at all at this point about, let's say, rigid supports versus flexible price supports, or was that something that came up later?

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MCCUNE: No, the problem, as I recall, was centered on what Congress had done in the compromise Hope-Aiken bill. Clifford Hope (Republican -- Kansas) had continued the legislation, at least; he had not cut down or put in any so-called flexible supports, but he had to compromise with Senator George Aiken (Republican -- Vermont), who was for flexible supports. I recall the compromise was that the rigid 90 percent of parity supports stayed in the bill for one year, through the election. Then, we faced the sliding scale, it was called, and things would go down by...

JOHNSON: It was supposed to start in 1950.

MCCUNE: Okay, anyway, there was handwriting on the wall. But there was another chance to change it, of course; after the election maybe everybody would change their minds. It had raised very seriously the idea of changing the whole program to a sliding scale.

JOHNSON: What were the arguments for full parity or 100 percent parity payments instead of a sliding scale or flexible supports:

MCCUNE: Well, one was that if parity was the proper scale, there should be 100 percent of parity, not 90 percent of

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justice. It's hard to defend 90 percent of what one's entitled to. The other was that there was building up an accumulation of surpluses -- and everyone called them surpluses -- that couldn't be handled. We had been pretty lucky; if there had been larger crops, we would have been in even bigger trouble. I'm talking about '48 now.

JOHNSON: This is after the big crisis in Europe was over, or nearly over?

MCCUNE: It was getting over, yes. We had to start thinking about it being over. The program had worked fine during the war, but it had been relaxed in order to get more production. It was still on the books. Also, he was a great believer in the family farm, and the old New Deal program, like it or not, attracted corporate farming, because there was money there for a guy who could buy up land and get his quota of production, under the law, and just keep adding to it. The family farmer meanwhile was pretty well squeezed and having trouble making and getting enough production off of a so-called family farm, which had never been defined -- and we did that. So he [the family farmer] would be the core of the program, instead of letting it run away and, say, have all of California in big corporate farms. This was work

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undone, and was part of Brannan's philosophy from the Farm Security Administration. I think everybody knew that it hadn't been a great issue in the '48 election, but it was in the back of the head all the time. If we won, this was one of the things that we were going to do.

JOHNSON: Those were the sorts of ideas then that came across in those first few months that you were with Mr. Brannan?

MCCUNE: Yes, they were. They didn't have to be told in any kind of drill, and I'm not sure that he could have called me or anyone else in and said, "Now, here's what we're going to do after the election." I knew him that well.

JOHNSON: How was this supposed to help reduce the surpluses that were beginning to accumulate?

MCCUNE: You mean getting more emphasis on family farms?

JOHNSON: The plan, the Brannan Plan.

MCCUNE: It wouldn't per se. On the Brannan Plan, your price supports would be allowed to slide on the perishable commodities, but not on the storable commodities. It

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was a distinction we found was necessary to make, and also a good one, so that we didn't have to store the perishables. Also, the perishable commodities had been neglected in the old program, and they were a major product of many family farms. They had been neglected because they were difficult to handle, and we proposed putting them up in the same status as wheat and corn and tobacco -- ahead of tobacco. It was almost scandalous to have a crop like tobacco getting first-class treatment compared with the others. Also, cotton was a bit out of hand.

So you had to decide, well, how do you support perishables? And that's where the direct payment came in. The idea was that if the farmer was not making a proper income, you pay the difference -- make up the difference -- between what he received and what he should have received on a farm-to-farm basis. It was not just buying up all the cotton, say, until every cotton farmer was getting what he was entitled to, and then having to store the stuff and find a market for him, and inducing an even bigger crop next year.

JOHNSON: How about the prices for the consumer? If you're going to pay 100 percent parity, was it felt that this would increase the price to the consumer? Were you

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going to let the market price still determine the selling price to the consumer, a free market?

MCCUNE: Essentially, it's a free market, and as I said, it's ironical that we didn't get accused of being free-enterprisers. We were called "socialists" of some kind. But the market would have determined the price, and then the taxpayer would make up the difference, rather than as a consumer.

JOHNSON: I guess the idea is that the taxpayer is both a producer and consumer.

MCCUNE: Right; they overlap of course.

JOHNSON: Do you remember these seminars, in January, February, and March of 1949? Apparently, they were initiated under Brannan's direction, by O.V. Wells in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics?

MCCUNE: Very well. They were held in the Secretary's conference room across the patio from my office and his. All the bureau chiefs were involved, some more than others.

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JOHNSON: Christenson in his book on the Brannan Plan,* says that after the seminars were over he'd bring in five of his closest advisers which were you, O.V. Wells, Ralph S. Trigg, John Baker and Maurice DuMars. Is that the group of advisors?

MCCUNE: Chief advisors.

JOHNSON: Is there anyone that's not mentioned here?

MCCUNE: Is this after the seminars and in shaping the product? Sounds about right; I would hate to leave somebody out. Trigg was head of the guts of the Department, the Production and Marketing Administration, PMA, which had to carry out all the price support programs, and had for years. It had replaced the old AAA [Agricultural Adjustment Administration] many years before, so Ralph was in on all of them. Baker had been brought in as a trained economist and friend to make this his special project, what became the Brannan Plan. We didn't know that's what it was going to be. O.V. Wells was the highly regarded professional economist, and head of the BAE [Bureau of Agricultural Economics],

*Reo M. Christenson, *The Brannan Plan: Farm Politics and Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959).

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who was perhaps the chief resource man. We'd say, "Well, if you did this, what would happen?" And he'd try to tell us. "Duke" DuMars was assigned to write up the product. It was a luxury to have him sitting in on all these. We could have just handed him a bunch of stuff and said, "Make us a document out of it," but we chose not to.

JOHNSON: His expertise was...

MCCUNE: Writing; policy writing. As a matter of fact, Brannan and DuMars had the final draft of the introduction to what became the Brannan Plan well before the plan was written. They wanted everybody to know the objectives. I believe that stuck until the very last press release, two or three pages of the objectives of the plan.

JOHNSON: Apparently, Brannan stated his aims as being, as you mentioned, 100 percent parity, instead of what he called "fractional justice," and no flexible supports. The second one was equal support for as many commodities as possible including these perishables.

MCCUNE: We figured that out by putting down the gross national value of each commodity and then deciding what

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was major. Tobacco barely got lost in that shuffle. Of course, that alienated all the Southern Congressmen. I believe it was added in the first draft of legislation and thereafter.

JOHNSON: And then this promotion of the family farm and conservation; these seemed to be the major objectives?

MCCUNE: They were tied to it -- to price support. For really the first time, almost scientifically, you didn't get any benefits from this program, unless you followed good soil conservation. The bureau chiefs who sat in on this included the Chief of the Forest Service, the Chief of the Soil

Conservation Service, and the Bureau of Agricultural Research, who had really never been in on policy meetings before. They just ran their own shops and reported to the Secretary. Now they were brought in, in REA [Rural Electrification Administration]; Claude Wickard sat through all this. So you not only had a consensus but you had a contribution of tangential ideas of what this is going to look like when you're all through. It isn't going to be some lopsided, highly specialized program that forgets about other farm problems.

JOHNSON: Did the group think about the impact this might

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have on the party; on the Democrat Party?

MCCUNE: I don't know; they were probably all Democrats at that time. There had been Democrats in office for so long. If I had to guess, I'd say the Bureau chiefs I mentioned were Democrats. But it was rather coincidental. The politics were inserted in the Secretary's office, where they are supposed to be. But I don't think the other fellows had to be told that something that helped the Republicans couldn't be very welcome.

JOHNSON: Was there any conscious intention with this program perhaps to establish a more friendly partnership, or a union of interest, between the farmers and labor unions?

MCCUNE: Yes, there was. I'm not sure that the Secretary of Agriculture and Secretary of Labor had ever sat down together before, except in Cabinet meetings. Brannan made an effort to talk to Maurice Tobin, who was Secretary at the time, and to show Labor that the farmer is not his enemy, that we were going to try to get a decent, reasonable program, and not screw the consumer, who was also a member of a union. There was some effort made along that line.

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JOHNSON: How did you see this as benefiting labor, or working people?

MCCUNE: Getting the prices off of the stilts and having more in storage rather than dumping grain on the ground. That wasn't helping any working man, or aggrieved consumer, whichever way you want to read it.

JOHNSON: Christenson says that you told him that the planners did not anticipate the hostile reaction from the Farm Bureau and the National Grange, and then he questions whether you were candid or using good judgment in not anticipating the kind of reaction that the plan did receive from the Farm Bureau and the Grange. What's your reaction to that?

MCCUNE: We definitely did not anticipate that strong, hostile reaction. I may have been naive. I don't know about Secretary Brannan. We had a reasonable program for changing what had been an embarrassment to them, to everybody. It had just grown like Topsy and it was just all out of whack, and somebody had to do it, sometime. On the farm politics of the situation -- and I should have known better having been an authority on the subject -- I still thought up to that day that we could bring them together, but that was wrong.

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JOHNSON: On this idea of 100 percent parity, do you think that sounded -- in retrospect, looking back -- do you think that many of America's taxpayers thought this was like a handout or something to the farmers?

MCCUNE: Well, you can't be against justice. Like a minimum wage -- is it fair to hire a guy for 75 cents an hour? Well, Congress has said no.

JOHNSON: You saw this like a minimum wage possibly, a parity price?

MCCUNE: Well, I don't see how people who are getting minimum wage by law can be mad that the farmers are trying to get parity, or justice. I don't think that was...

JOHNSON: How would you establish what is a fair price for the farmer, a 100 percent parity price?

MCCUNE: Well, as an index, it was still valid; we didn't destroy that.

JOHNSON: You went back to that 1910 to 1914 price-to-cost level?

MCCUNE: We essentially kept that. But we went to an income basis rather than a specific artificial price basis, as

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a final standard, and that was new. That was pretty blunt, and pretty strong stuff for some people -- to support income rather than the price of peaches tomorrow morning.

JOHNSON: And to do this directly?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: The direct payment?

MCCUNE: Yes, we were too honest for our own good, I guess.

JOHNSON: The direct payment, do you think that was the most vulnerable part of the program?

MCCUNE: Looking back at it in the political arena, I suppose so.

JOHNSON: That was part of the questioning, or the criticism, from some of its critics, but also there is this question of cost. Apparently there were many critics who felt it would be a lot more costly than what you or Mr. Brannan was estimating. Do you think that was a valid criticism?

MCCUNE: I guess they questioned our cost figures. We tried to point out that the old program was costing an awful

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lot too. I don't know, and I hope you've noted somewhere that I have not refreshed my memory on this for years, until right now, and I'm enjoying it. I'm going to have to pass on that. I don't know about that one. It was charged that it would be too expensive, whatever that means.

JOHNSON: Then, of course, that was responded to. Mr. Brannan did try to indicate that there was no way of knowing exactly, and no program had a way of predicting exact costs.

Production control -- some economists believed it would require production controls, which was considered a questionable device, and of course, would interfere with the free market. Some said it would not help the rural poor. Do you remember anything about production controls and this not helping the rural poor?

MCCUNE: I'm afraid I don't, one way or the other.

JOHNSON: But production controls had been used in the thirties.

MCCUNE: Oh, indeed they were still intact.

JOHNSON: Those had been, of course, eliminated during World War II, with the huge demand.

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MCCUNE: Essentially, yes.

JOHNSON: Was there a sort of a consensus that Agriculture should not go back to restricting production in 1948 and '49, that this was not the way to go, to restrict production?

MCCUNE: Nobody liked it.

JOHNSON: Didn't like that idea.

MCCUNE: They were kind of stuck with controls; they were still on the books, but I don't think anybody liked the controls.

JOHNSON: Were there acreage allotments at this time, say, in '47, '48, '49?

MCCUNE: There were on some crops.

JOHNSON: There were still some acreage allotments?

MCCUNE: Yes, there were in some. I feel sure there were in cotton.

JOHNSON: But not marketing quotas?

MCCUNE: Some, I think.

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JOHNSON: Which meant of course, that by fertilization and technology, one could keep producing more and more on the same acreage.

MCCUNE: Yes, we were fighting science there, in effect. There was a head-bumping of those two things, and that was part of why the whole program needed reform.

JOHNSON: Do you think the Brannan plan took into account adequately the technological progress and the ability of the farmer to produce more and more on the same, or maybe even less, amount of land?

MCCUNE: Oh, I think so. I can't swear on a stack of Bibles that we talked about that, but I bet we did. That's one reason the research people were in on it too.

JOHNSON: Well, Brannan did point out that the Hope-Aiken Act provided for acreage allotments and marketing quotas. So, you know, that was something that certainly wasn't new.

MCCUNE: Yes, marketing quotas on some crops; I was thinking more of the acreage allotments.

JOHNSON: And then Albert Gore introduced a bill to continue 90 percent parity. Did you have any connections with

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Congress on this issue or with Albert Gore?

MCCUNE: No, very few. Brannan ran his own relationships with Congress. He would go up there when there was a question. I would draft mail, policy mail; if a leading Congressman, friend or enemy, wrote us a letter, I was always in on the answer. But we had no Congressional liaison or lobbyist like they now have; there's a whole staff that now does that sort of thing. The Gore bill was to sidetrack the sliding scale, as I recall.

JOHNSON: Right. This was an alternative to it.

MCCUNE: He was a highly regarded Senator at the time.

JOHNSON: I think Representative Stephen Pace was the one who introduced the Brannan plan into a bill, didn't he?

MCCUNE: Yes, that took some doing. He was a cotton man, and a highly respected veteran. But he, too, wanted to reform this thing and get it sound and reasonable. I think he was a little tired of defending the old one, and I think he did make a qualification -- that it was a trial, and let's see what happens.

JOHNSON: There was a consensus among these people we mentioned who were discussing the new program, that all

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these things were good ideas, that ended up in the Brannan plan? And Brannan himself, did he kind of guide this along, or did he wait until you had come up with your ideas and then he looked them over and said, "These are fine with me," and then his name got attached to it? Was he constantly involved in this?

MCCUNE: He was involved a good deal; I don't know whether you'd say constantly. I expect he was, but he didn't just wait for four or five hotshots or a hundred to come with some ideas for him. He was there and participated quite heavily. But it was in the form of asking, "Now, what would happen if we went this direction?" and quizzing his bureau chiefs and staff.

JOHNSON: This 100 percent idea, 100 percent parity, was that Charlie Brannan's, or was that something that came from one of these other advisors, and he then decided to accept it? Was he the initiator?

MCCUNE: I don't know; I think it was just logic. Why go for part of a goal; if you've got a goal, that should be the goal.

JOHNSON: This was considered then a reasonable standard.

MCCUNE: I think so; and now what do we do about it?

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JOHNSON: How about Senator Anderson? After he became a Senator he was kind of put on the spot with this introduction of this new program. Do you recall Senator Anderson ever coming down to the Department, or did anyone from the Department go to see him personally on this?

MCCUNE: Yes, I was in on that one. I don't know whether we initiated it; we probably did, because the press would naturally want to know what the predecessor thought about it. He had been close to Truman, and had been a Democratic politico also. As I recall, Anderson didn't say anything at first, and that was interpreted as not supporting it. So we talked to him and he went over it. In a car, I don't know whether Secretary Brannan was in it or not -- I think it was the Secretary's limousine -- Senator Anderson and I came down from the Hill and Anderson said, "Well, I've looked it over and I think I can go along with you pretty far." He didn't say "I'm enthusiastic;" he never did. He wrote out on the back of an envelope, so to speak, a couple of paragraphs, or maybe I wrote them as he said them. We put out the release. I still have the notes, I think, somewhere in this material, because I realized it was kind of an

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historic document.

JOHNSON: So you had this discussion with Senator Anderson, and you were in...

MCCUNE: Yes. "Can you go along with us on this?" And this was a while after the press release had been publicly unveiled.

JOHNSON: He apparently did agree to at least allow a trial run on hogs.

MCCUNE: I don't recall that.

JOHNSON: But otherwise he favored the sliding support, 75 to 90 percent.

MCCUNE: It wouldn't surprise me, but I don't remember it.

JOHNSON: You apparently didn't even get a chance to try it on a limited basis, did you, the Brannan plan?

MCCUNE: No. It's being tried now by the Republicans. They even have the direct payment in effect on several commodities.

JOHNSON: You say the present program has some of these same features of direct payment?

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MCCUNE: Yes. The one they damned us for so much.

JOHNSON: Okay. This created more and more friction apparently between Brannan and Kline of the Farm Bureau. Did you get involved in this controversy between Brannan and the Farm Bureau?

MCCUNE: I was probably in the room when some of these meetings were held. The head of Kline's Washington office was Roger Fleming, a professional Farm Bureau staffer, who had come from Chicago to run the Washington office. I was in some of these meetings with them and got to know them. Well, I repeat, I had reason to believe that they were coming along on this new approach, and that this was constructive, and it was generally a good idea to do something. So I was surprised when they zapped us. Then it got more and more bitter. A year or two later, they hired the number two man under Trigg to be a Washington lobbyist. He got very mad because we had fired him, and that just exacerbated the whole relationship.

JOHNSON: Do you remember his name?

MCCUNE: Frank Woolley.

JOHNSON: Apparently farmers are not getting behind this even

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though their income for 1949 had dropped 25 to 30 percent under what it was in 1947. Well, the Farmers Union would be an exception.

MCCUNE: The Farmers Union liked it very much.

JOHNSON: Can you think of any other groups that got behind you on this?

MCCUNE: I don't recall what the Grange did; I think they didn't go along with it, but I think they were more moderate about it. They are a more bashful group; they were against anything radical in the way of change and so on. No, the division got deeper and deeper, rather than covering over.

JOHNSON: Did you know Raymond Moley?

MCCUNE: I knew who he was, yes.

JOHNSON: He wrote a rather derogatory commentary about the Brannan plan, and encouraged the defeat of it.

MCCUNE: Oh, he would; he's very, very conservative. I think he broke with Roosevelt in the early New Deal.

JOHNSON: His claim is that the plan was altogether too complicated to be understood generally, and then I'm

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quoting him, "It provided so many restrictions and possible controls that it frightened the farmers. And since it gave the Secretary so much discretion and potential authority it aroused immediate antagonism of the Farm Bureau Federation and the Grange. Instead of seeking a compromise with these powerful organizations, the administration, swollen with confidence after the 1948 election, went to war with them, centering its fires on Alan Kline. In this Kline has clearly prevailed."

MCCUNE: Well, I don't give Ray Moley credit for much of anything. He decided first to oppose us and then figured out, well, what can I say about it. I just don't think he has any integrity. Still, others did similar things. They were against it more sincerely, no doubt about that.

JOHNSON: The Korean war, of course, comes into the picture in 1950, in June of 1950. Do you think that had something to do then with the Brannan plan's final defeat, and just becoming a footnote?

MCCUNE: Perhaps so; I hadn't thought of it that way. I find myself agreeing. It became much easier just not to hold so many hearings on it; we're all involved. But I don't

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know.

JOHNSON: Well, the Gore bill apparently was adopted, which more or less continued the current program. Of course, then the Korean war created a new demand which had not been predictable.

MCCUNE: Right.

JOHNSON: The elections in 1950, in November, were pretty much a victory for Republicans. They won 28 seats in the House and 5 in the Senate. Did that come as quite a surprise, the Republican victory in that off-year election?

MCCUNE: I don't remember specifically, but it must have. Some of the Republicans were stinging; I would guess Alan Kline's in that category, because we had beat them in '48. They were being very gracious about it, to put it one way. I don't think anything we did, that they would have had their arms wrapped around it very cheerfully.

JOHNSON: And, of course, price controls came back in. The Office of Price Stabilization was established under Michael DiSalle in November of '50. Did you ever have any dealings with DiSalle?

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MCCUNE: Yes, I knew him fairly well. I thought he was a great guy, to take an impossible job and make everybody sort of like him and feel sorry for him. We just went along like troopers; the President said, "We have got to have price control and that's an order."

JOHNSON: For instance, in May of '51 he imposed ceilings on live cattle and rolled back prices 10 percent, with other rollbacks planned, and the meat lobby rose up in arms. Do you remember the cattlemen declared a producer's strike? It didn't last very long, but this planned rollback on cattle prices for July was rescinded. Do you think the meat packing and the cattlemen's lobby was very powerful?

MCCUNE: Very powerful, but they got no help from the Department of Agriculture, I'm sure of that. They were very powerful; for one reason their base is strategically spread into many political areas. It's not like, say, wheat just being all out in the Great Plains. They were a very powerful lobby.

JOHNSON: Even in wartime now they seemed to be saying that the farmers and the cattlemen should be able to get whatever price the market will pay?

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MCCUNE: I guess so; I don't remember.

JOHNSON: In other words, they didn't feel there was a patriotic duty to accept these lids on prices?

MCCUNE: Well, they'd be among the last. They were the old free booters, the real free enterprise guys, always were.

JOHNSON: Would they argue that wages were going up, so their prices had to go up? In other words, who would they blame?

MCCUNE: Well, it was a common argument; you can't get help on the farm, and our costs are going up too. Everybody was bitching about his own situation.

JOHNSON: How about the labor unions? Did they tend to be the scapegoats for many of these farm lobbies?

MCCUNE: The farmers in general, excepting the Farmers Union, regard the labor union as their natural enemy. They don't care whether he spends more for food because he gets a better price or not; it's just a natural enemy. It violates their spirit of free enterprise. I'm pontificating now. The National Farmers Union, on the other hand, started in bed with organized labor. It was

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totally a different thing.

JOHNSON: Is that why "union" is part of their title, the Farmers Union, because they were trying to identify with the labor union?

MCCUNE : I'm not sure about that, but obviously union wasn't a dirty word to them. It was a very friendly word. it was the National Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union; that is the full name of it.

JOHNSON: They would not blame executive salaries, or white collar salaries? They would tend to focus just on union wages?

MCCUNE: At this time, you mean, in 1950.

JOHNSON: Yes.

MCCUNE: That's my recollection.

JOHNSON: There's mention here that during the Korean period, there was revolt in the PMA, and that Brannan quelled it by firing two top PMA officials.

MCCUNE: That's Trigg and Woolley.

JOHNSON: Trigg and Woolley. What was their problem with the Department?

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MCCUNE: They didn't seem to be fitting in and cooperating, and they were doing some things without clearing them. See, I haven't thought of this in quite a while, but I was certainly there. We thought there was some deviousness going on. They had an operator in their office with no defined job, named Jack Cowart, whom we forced them to fire. We thought he was good for nothing but stirring up trouble. I wasn't aware that Brannan was going to fire them for quite a while, and was quite surprised when he said, "Okay, we're going to fire them." This was especially ticklish because Trigg had been brought in cold into the Department of Agriculture by Clinton P. Anderson, in his outer office as an assistant, which is fine. They all have people who

handle mail and do this and that, from New Mexico. Then, when the Department was reorganized under Anderson, the key agency was PMA, Production Marketing Administration, and Anderson put Trigg over there in that very key role, where you've really got to know what you're doing. I guess after a few years it didn't work out. I can't remember all of the specifics of it. It was quite a wrench because they had been very helpful, and we saw a lot of them.

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JOHNSON: They apparently were not supporting the philosophy of Brannan, is that correct?

MCCUNE: I wouldn't want to say that, because I don't know. They weren't as cooperative with the other bureaus in the Department; they were pretty arrogant, I remember that. After the Brannan Plan, the Secretary reorganized USDA and it did not go down well with those two.

JOHNSON: In early 1951, the family farm issue came to the surface, or let's say, it came to the front. Mr. Brannan, in January of '51, created a commission to review all programs of the Department, in light of their contribution to the family farm. They involved not only agencies in the Ag Department, but organizations such as the National Council of Churches, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the Association of Land Grant Colleges, the Grange, the Farmers Union, and the Farm Bureau. Out of that came a Farm Family Policy Review, a 121 page report. There were these grassroots meetings around the country. Did you have anything to do with those, relating to the family farm?

MCCUNE: Yes, I was involved; I wasn't in charge of them or anything of that sort. I was all for them and helped in any way I could. But, as you indicated, the meetings

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went on for quite a long time, and were all-embracing. I liked that aspect of it.

JOHNSON: Did you attend any of these?

MCCUNE: Yes, I attended some.

JOHNSON: Whereabouts?

MCCUNE: We're talking about hours and hours of these, you know. Those were in the Secretary's Conference Room on the second floor.

JOHNSON: Did you go out to any of these grassroots meetings outside Washington?

MCCUNE: No, I didn't.

JOHNSON: But you got reports back from these meetings?

MCCUNE: I knew what was going on, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you have anything to do with collating, and maybe editing, or writing up this report'?

MCCUNE: I feel sure that I looked it over. I don't know who was assigned to do the writing on that. John Baker was certainly a staff man on it, but not as a writer. I don't know whether DuMars did it, but we assigned

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somebody early.

JOHNSON: At some of these meetings there apparently was some criticism of the Brannan plan, and in a few cases some critical even of soil conservation payments, made directly to farmers. And other meetings, according to Matusow, came up with a hodgepodge of ideas which were not very coherent...

MCCUNE: Undoubtedly.

JOHNSON: Do you recall whether this was considered a success or a failure, or something in between?

MCCUNE: I don't think it was judged either a success or a failure. I think it did a lot of good to get outside groups into farm policy, instead of just sitting around talking to ourselves. It was "uplifting" and it had some moral judgments in it, of what America is supposed to be about, but it also had some practicalities like, "Well, how can we achieve that, and not do things that would be against it?"

JOHNSON: We have talked a bit about the family farm, and how the Brannan plan was supposed to encourage the owner-operator type farm. But in a broader sense, what was the feeling, the philosophy about the value of the

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family farm? What were some of the broader implications, and broader arguments?

MCCUNE: Oh, it was very basic; you might say we started from that precept, that it had great value.

JOHNSON: In what ways?

MCCUNE: Well, in the history of the country there was a lot of sociological argument that it is better than a corporate farm, the way of life. There was some bleeding heart stuff there, too, I'm sure.

JOHNSON: How about democracy? Did you feel that American democracy actually depended on the family farm being the most widespread type of ownership?

MCCUNE: Probably. I don't remember. It would be consistent.

JOHNSON: Was it aimed not only at the corporate farm, but how about the South, the sharecropping? Was that considered something that had to be...

MCCUNE: I think we got into that; I can't remember.

JOHNSON: That wasn't family farming, under your definition, or was it, the sharecropper?

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MCCUNE: I doubt it, but I don't recall.

JOHNSON: I don't recall coming across any barbs directed directly at sharecropping, the Southern tenancy system.

MCCUNE: I don't know, but I'd be surprised if we weren't.

JOHNSON: If it wasn't expressed, it was at least implied?

MCCUNE: I would have thought it was expressly put in there.

JOHNSON: How would that go over with Southern Congressmen, attacks on the Southern tenancy system?

MCCUNE: Not very well, but at that time it wasn't as wicked as it had been years before; at least that is my recollection. But I'm not a sociologist, and I'm not familiar with the South.

JOHNSON: In the '52 election there are a number of issues, and the issues apparently get submerged under other issues. Do you recall any involvement that you had in preparing speeches or assisting Mr. Brannan or President Truman in that 1952 campaign, or Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate?

MCCUNE: Yes, I was very much there and working with them and anybody who needed speech material, or what have you.

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JOHNSON: You were still working as executive assistant?

MCCUNE: Yes, right up till the last day, January 20th. We pretty much kept doing what we were doing, except it got more political after the Democratic convention, of course. Candidate Stevenson was quite a different operator than Harry Truman had been. Even though he came from a farm state, he was a city boy and born to some privilege. I don't think he knew anything about the Federal farm program; he was not part of it. He didn't come out of it. He was a totally new personality to try to work with. But I was sent out there. I think he invited Brannan to send somebody, and I was it. I went to Springfield to the State Capital to talk with him and his very small staff. Like most of the campaigns in those days, the first speech was the so-called "farm in a day" speech, where they would pick a farm for the whole country and would demonstrate soil

conservation and all the proper practices, and maybe even rebuild a house for them. It was a good old barn-raising fitted into modern government programs. I sat there with a couple of staff around the Governor's desk, mostly getting acquainted, and then we went to lunch upstairs in his quarters.

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I will digress briefly to show how difficult it was. We had the soup served by a couple of servants in the formal dining room, and they would remove each bowl one at a time. They'd bring in the salad one at a time, and they'd remove the salad one at a time. I noticed the Governor seemed to be getting antsy about something and I thought, "Well, maybe he's got another appointment and he's running late." He finally said to his top aide, William McCormack Blair, slapping the table, "We just can't go on like this; we're in a campaign. We're in a campaign for the Presidency, and we've got to start speeding up these meals." I wanted to laugh so hard inside, and of course, I didn't dare, but it made a great impression on me. By the time he ran the second time, he was quite a different person. But, boy, was he naive at first. Anyhow, I helped on the speech.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what policies you were promoting in 1952?

MCCUNE: We were under no orders. I don't think there were any departures. I think there was some boasting about the Democratic farm program.

JOHNSON: But how about the Brannan plan; was that now history?

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MCCUNE: I wonder if that was even included. I doubt very much that it was named.

JOHNSON: I think you're right. I believe that Matusow claims that it ignored the Brannan plan, and was promoting the 90 percent parity program.

MCCUNE: I would doubt that it was ever mentioned. An interesting point; I should know.

JOHNSON: Yes, they were silent on the Brannan plan. But do you recall Eisenhower coming out in favor of the current program for 90 percent parity, and did that steal the thunder of the Stevenson farm program?

MCCUNE: Yes, it did. I think it surprised everyone. I believe his advisors had put Cliff Hope of Kansas, the leading Republican member of the House Ag Committee, into a position of advising on this point. I don't know whether they had a big argument, and had to thrash it out or not, but I believe that Hope's advice was taken, and he was the author of continuing 90 percent.

JOHNSON: The Republican platform, do you recall its position?

MCCUNE: I don't recall. I certainly had it memorized at the

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time.

JOHNSON: So it came as a surprise when you heard Eisenhower coming out for the 90 percent.

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Rather than the flexible?

MCCUNE: Yes, and it stole a lot of thunder; there isn't any doubt about it.

JOHNSON: How long did you work with Stevenson on this campaign?

MCCUNE: On January 21st of '53, I went with the Democratic National Committee as their Agriculture and Natural Resources staff person, in the Research Division.

JOHNSON: How about before that, during the campaign? You said you went to Springfield.

MCCUNE: I was still in Secretary Brannan's office.

JOHNSON: How long were you in Springfield with Stevenson?

MCCUNE: Oh, just a day, maybe, just to get his thinking on the speech and then I mailed it to him.

JOHNSON: And then you come back to Washington and you worked

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on speeches here in Washington, and sent them back to Stevenson?

MCCUNE: There was just that one major farm speech. The occasion was also sometimes called the National Plowing Match.

JOHNSON: Was that when he used your speech?

MCCUNE: I don't think he gave another farm speech in the '52 campaign.

JOHNSON: So you were a key person in that one farm speech that he gave.

MCCUNE: Yes, I was.

JOHNSON: In '52.

MCCUNE: Then, on the next campaign Ken Galbraith...

JOHNSON: You're talking about '56 when [John Kenneth] Galbraith became involved?

MCCUNE: Yes, and I was asked to do the draft. They sent it to Galbraith who wrote me a little congratulatory note and said he had only made a couple of small suggestions, or something. I felt very pleased, and it was delivered that way. Galbraith wanted to hear the man deliver a

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speech, so we went out to Kasson, Minnesota; that's where the second one was held.

JOHNSON: In 1956.

MCCUNE: Yes. So, I met Ken somewhere and we got on a bus to go out to the -- I've forgotten the name of the town -- to hear the man deliver his speech. We were armed with a mimeograph copy of it. It was about an hour or two ride on the bus, and we marked a copy of the speech as to what would be applause lines, and/or laugh lines. I think we bet a beer against each other. We'd initial our predictions, and I don't think either of us won a single beer. It was just devastating to a fellow who was trying to learn what gets applause. It just nearly killed me, not because it was my speech, but absolutely uncipherable. I think he only got about two laughs.

We just absolutely were whipped. I don't think we won a point. It was a huge thing, maybe 100,000 farmers, and this was just not Stevenson's style, everybody knew.

JOHNSON: Well, now going back to the '52 campaign, did you do anything for Truman who also went out, of course, on a speaking tour in '52?

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MCCUNE: Well, it was in the form of supplying the White House staff. Sometimes they'd ask for ideas. They were well organized and they'd do it in advance. There were no crises that I recall. I would huddle with the boss and/or a couple of writers, sometimes did it myself because I enjoyed it when I had time, and would send over suggested paragraphs or drafts. Then, the White House staff might send it back with a note, "We've decided to emphasize this more," or "Thanks a lot, here's the way it's going to the boss." We were in close contact.

JOHNSON: But you never huddled personally with the White House...

MCCUNE: Some of the staff, yes; I'd go over and have lunch with them.

JOHNSON: How about David Stowe; was he one of them?

MCCUNE: Yes, but I don't think he worked on agriculture. It was more Dick Neustadt, whom I just corresponded with last month, and Ken Hechler, Dave Bell and Charlie Murphy. George Elsey was another, I would go over occasionally and sit around the Cabinet table with them when we were right down to the nub of something. They were all very friendly.

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JOHNSON: On the final draft?

MCCUNE: Yes. I also attended meetings of the Defense Mobilization Board. I was Brannan's deputy and we met frequently around the Cabinet table with all of the departments. I didn't have much to contribute, but I did a lot of that.

JOHNSON: So you represented the Ag Department sometimes in these meetings?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: When did you first meet Truman personally?

MCCUNE: Well, if I didn't meet him in the Senate as chairman of that committee, he would come in at the end of a drafting session around the big table. Occasionally, he would sit at the end of the table and rehearse it with us.

JOHNSON: This was in the Cabinet room, around the Cabinet table?

MCCUNE: Yes, occasionally, not very often. On those occasions they would always introduce anyone he didn't recognize.

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JOHNSON: Do you have any idea what year that would have been, the first time, that you were around the table with Truman there?

MCCUNE: Well, I got to know those guys in the '48 campaign, but that was kind of hectic.

JOHNSON: So the '48 campaign would have been the first time.

MCCUNE: I don't think I met Truman in the '48 campaign. I just worked through staffers.

JOHNSON: How about Charlie [Charles S.] Murphy?

MCCUNE: Charlie Murphy was somewhat of a liaison. I found some speech material he sent back, with a note to me thanking me and saying, "Here's what we're going to do."

JOHNSON: Did you ever work with John R. Steelman?

MCCUNE: Yes, but only as a reporter. I may have a little bit in Departmental relationships.

JOHNSON: So it was really in the '52 campaign where you had this personal meeting with Truman?

MCCUNE: I think so.

JOHNSON: Anything else before we get into the post-Truman

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period here? After that election of '52 did you have anything to do with the transition to the Eisenhower administration? You mentioned something about Ezra Taft Benson.

MCCUNE: My function was extremely important! I was told by Brannan to go downstairs one flight and receive Mr. Benson in the Secretary's car, which had been sent for him. Truman had instructed all Cabinet officers to be gracious and receive them and to help them. So I had to go down because I had met Benson in my writing work. (This was before I wrote a book about him.) I received him, we came up the stairs, I introduced him to Charlie Brannan and then left.

That was plenty important [laughs].

The next report I got on him was after he was sworn in. A friend, a career man who had been in the Secretary's office for many years, became a very close personal friend of mine -- I can see no reason to name him -- and he was retained by Benson's crowd to show them the ropes. He was kept on; he was a civil servant. He called me one day about a month later and he said, "Wesley, do you remember where Charlie Brannan had that picture of Harry Truman on his office wall?" I said, "Yes." It was right by the Secretary's private head.

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he said, "Would you like to know who's hanging up there now?" I said, "I sure would." And he said, "Jesus Christ is hanging there now."

JOHNSON: This is in Secretary Benson's office; he had replaced Harry Truman.

MCCUNE: Oh, they prayed at staff meetings you know.

JOHNSON: Well, what was...

MCCUNE: I often wondered if Mr. Truman would have liked that; I never told it to him.

JOHNSON: You knew Ezra Benson rather well, then, before this '52 transition?

MCCUNE: Only as a news source, as a farm leader, in the Co-op Council, which was not as much involved in politics but was in pressure lobbying.

JOHNSON: Had he been involved in lobbying against the Brannan plan?

MCCUNE: No, he had gone back to Utah and became one of the twelve disciples of the Mormon Church after he left the Co-op Council. I don't know just when that would have been, but it was after I wrote my book about farm

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lobbying. So he was out in Utah on the Quorum of Twelve, when Eisenhower tapped him.

JOHNSON: Okay. That's after your second book on the farm bloc?

MCCUNE: Yes. *Who's Behind the Farm Bloc*.

JOHNSON: How did Ezra Benson differ from Brannan, briefly, if possible.

MCCUNE: It's hard for me to say. He was a little more methodical and serious. I only interviewed him a couple of times at the Co-op Council and probably saw him at some lunches for farm people. He was liked well enough. He wasn't very gregarious; I wouldn't say he was popular, but he was all business.

JOHNSON: Had he ever been a family farmer, in his background?

MCCUNE: Yes, he was reared on a farm in Idaho.

JOHNSON: What qualified him?

MCCUNE: When Eisenhower tapped him, he was working fulltime for the Mormon Church. Some of the apostles just go on with their regular lives and some are managers of the

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church. He was in the latter category.

JOHNSON: I suppose maybe it's written down somewhere. Do you have any idea why Eisenhower picked him to succeed Brannan?

MCCUNE: Why did Eisenhower pick him?

JOHNSON: You're now looking at your book on Ezra Taft Benson. It's titled *Ezra Taft Benson...*

MCCUNE: *Man With a Mission*.

JOHNSON: Okay, and what's the date of publication?

MCCUNE: This was done when I was working at the National Farmers Union in Denver in 1958. It started out to be a pamphlet of about eight pages, which Jim Patton said, "Yes, it would be a good idea, why don't you write it?" So I went up to a mountain cabin of my family's, took a portable typewriter, and sat outdoors in the beautiful mountain scenery. It got to eight pages, and it got to nine, and it got to nineteen. So I told him what was going on, and I wound up with 117. I did it in two weeks. Took a few more days off, and here's how it came out. It was based on his first four years. I had been at the Democratic National Committee and had every

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speech and every paper, and clippings, all about him.

JOHNSON: Okay, let's lead up to that by noting that after Truman left office, you took a job as...

MCCUNE: Farm specialist, resources, public power.

JOHNSON: For the Democratic National Committee.

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was that headquartered here in Washington?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you didn't have to move.

MCCUNE: No.

JOHNSON: Who helped you to get that position?

MCCUNE: I did not know the man who became my boss, the two men who became my bosses. I think that the White House put in a word, and I'm not sure I applied. I didn't know what I was going to do.

JOHNSON: You hadn't applied for this?

MCCUNE: I don't think so. I was planning to go back into journalism.

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JOHNSON: Now who were your two bosses?

MCCUNE: Well, Clayton Fritchey was the deputy chairman, and Phil Stern was the director of research. My title was Assistant to the Deputy Chairman.

JOHNSON: Assistant to the Deputy Chairman. How long did you have that position?

MCCUNE: Four years.

JOHNSON: Four years; from '53 to '57.

MCCUNE: Right. And worked through that '56 campaign.

JOHNSON: Yes, right.

MCCUNE: I had complete freedom then.

JOHNSON: So you were following Ezra Taft Benson's policies in those four years, and critiquing?

MCCUNE: And writing our farm platform, drafting it for the '56 convention. I had a Democratic Advisory Committee with Claude Wickard and others that I staffed. They'd have Midwest meetings, and there was that sort of thing. I didn't just sit there and clip.

JOHNSON: Did you prepare the final draft of the farm planks

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in the '56 platform?

MCCUNE: Probably. I don't remember. But I did run across recently a draft for it. We'd put out public statements. We'd have a farm meeting, say, in Des Moines over a couple of days and open to the press and people would come in,, and talk, and we'd issue something.

JOHNSON: What was happening to farm income and farm policy in those four years?

MCCUNE: It was falling -- and we pointed that out.

JOHNSON: Were you trying to resurrect the Brannan Plan at all?

MCCUNE: I just had a free hand to do something, and it was the old Truman Administration crowd essentially, including Brannan and Wickard.

JOHNSON: Were you still promoting rigid, high supports, like 90 percent versus the flexible?

MCCUNE: I'd have to look at it again, Niel.

JOHNSON: The flexible was in force under Benson wasn't it? And do you recall that being a success or pretty much a

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failure?

MCCUNE: His was not working.

JOHNSON: One of the objectives probably was to help reduce surpluses, but didn't we have a surplus problem throughout the '50s?

MCCUNE: Still do, yes.

JOHNSON: The sliding support did not change that?

MCCUNE: No.

In regard to the DNC, Steve [Stephen] Mitchell was Chairman of the Democratic National Committee; he was a Stevenson man from Chicago. He served for two years and then he was

replaced by Paul Butler who was the National Committeeman from Indiana. He came to Washington to head up the whole operation; he was an excellent man, and gave me full support.

JOHNSON: Frank McKinney, earlier head of the DNC, was a Truman man, and Mitchell was a Stevenson man.

MCCUNE: Yes, definitely.

JOHNSON: And I don't believe that Harry Truman thought as much of Mitchell as he did of McKinney.

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MCCUNE: I would think not. Mitchell was quite a different man; he was lost in the job, a perfectly sincere guy, but he was lost in the job.

JOHNSON: Then, of course, in '56 Truman turned away from Stevenson and tried to promote [W. Averell] Harriman.

MCCUNE: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: Did you get involved at all in that?

MCCUNE: Yes, a little bit with Harriman. I helped him on agriculture a little bit. Jim Sundquist was in his office up in Albany and I notice some material here I sent them. They asked me for ideas or something.

JOHNSON: But you tried to remain neutral more or less in these primaries?

MCCUNE: Oh, I had to, yes.

JOHNSON: And just help whatever Democrat candidate was running?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: And so you worked through the '56 campaign, and this is when you did some collaboration with Galbraith?

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MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: On this agricultural speech in Minnesota?

MCCUNE: At least a couple of major farm speeches.

JOHNSON: That's the only involvement that you had with Ken Galbraith?

MCCUNE: Yes. We became good friends.

JOHNSON: You felt you were on the same wave-length with Galbraith on economic issues?

MCCUNE: Yes, I admired him a great deal. He was also very innovative, not just right in my opinion, and a good phrase-maker, and innovative. It wasn't the old hackneyed crap that we all get mired down in if we're not careful.

JOHNSON: Did Keynesian economics enter the picture much, the theory at least of Keynesian economics, either while you were in school or while you were with the Agriculture Department?

MCCUNE: No. I knew what it was, I guess. I worked some with Leon Keyserling in the Truman economic council [Council of Economic Advisors].

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JOHNSON: Oh, you did work with Keyserling?

MCCUNE: Yes, and the Secretary of the Council, Bert Gross. I worked with Bert quite a little.

JOHNSON: You know Keyserling died not long ago. Do you recall what kind of contribution you made to the Council of Economic Advisors?

MCCUNE: No, I don't. This friendship continued afterwards. Keyserling was hired by the National Farmers Union to do a big economic study. I would guess it's fair to say that some Keynesian economics got in that.

JOHNSON: The fifties are considered sort of the rise of agribusiness, and the farmer began to think more of his vocation as a business rather than a way of life. Is that a valid perception?

MCCUNE: Yes. That's putting it very simply, but I guess so.

JOHNSON: Is agribusiness getting more and more control of farm policy in the fifties?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: The large fertilizer businesses?

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MCCUNE: The Chamber of Commerce.

JOHNSON: The grain traders.

MCCUNE: The National Association of Manufacturers started taking an interest in policy. There was the grain trade, the cereal manufacturers, food trade, general processors; yes, definitely.

JOHNSON: And the Farm Bureau reinforced this trend?

MCCUNE: Yes, that's a good word for it.

JOHNSON: Did the Farmers Union tend to resist it?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: But the Farm Bureau did not resist?

MCCUNE: It was an enemy of the Farmers Union; as far as I know it still is. I don't see their material regularly, or get to study it.

JOHNSON: But who were the farmers most influenced by, the Farmers Union or the Farm Bureau?

MCCUNE: Well, I don't know. The Farm Bureau keeps increasing in membership. Some say it's because they're paying dues for insurance rather than going along with

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policy; that's one charge. The Farmers Union is doing worse, I guess, certainly not any better.

JOHNSON: You mean in terms of membership?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, James Bonnen in his book *Farmers, Bureaucrats and Middle Men* says that by the late 1950s agribusinesses were exerting great influence, creating policy conflict and forcing more decisions to the level of the Secretary of Agriculture. He said that the triangle of lobbyists, administrators of commodity programs, and Congressional committees having legislative authority on Ag programs -- that this was becoming a four-way relationship and the focus of the policies was shifting from the farm policy in 1950 to an entire food and fiber industry policy by 1960.

MCCUNE: I'll buy that. In my book *Who's Behind the Farm Bloc*, I bring in the food trade, and maybe it was the first time it had been written about in that context.

JOHNSON: Do you think that on political issues and economic issues, that the majority of the farmers may be led more easily by the big corporate interests?

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MCCUNE: Oh, I'm afraid so. One thing I never learned was what makes farmers tick and vote. I never did and never will. Lord knows I tried, but I'm very humble about my success on it.

JOHNSON: It takes a calamity perhaps for them to restructure their thinking.

MCCUNE: I'm afraid so. You know, you can get psychoanalytical about it, and psychological about it, that they regard themselves as an individual enterprise, first and foremost. There is a lot to that, and they don't want to be helped or they don't want to know that they are being helped. They don't want other people to think they're being helped unduly. They want to be rugged individualists.

JOHNSON: In 1980 one of Reagan's slogans was to "get the government off the backs of Agriculture." But in the meantime, since that time, haven't about \$160,000,000,000 been spent on farm programs?

MCCUNE: Yes, more than ever.

JOHNSON: In other words, without the Government actually being on the so-called "backs of agriculture," what would the farmers' status be now?

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MCCUNE: Very, very bad. We would have had many, many farms lost.

JOHNSON: More than have already been lost?

MCCUNE: Oh, no doubt about it. The big money that they put up, a lot of it was for credit, and there is no doubt about it. They wanted to hold on until, hopefully, we get some crops.

JOHNSON: In other words, the attitudes of farmers toward the Government, toward the programs of the Federal Government, do these tend to go in cycles, tend to fluctuate? Are there times when they do see the Federal Government as their best friend?

MCCUNE: Yes, I would agree with that.

JOHNSON: In 1956 -- was that the last political Presidential campaign that you were involved in?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: When did you leave the DNC?

MCCUNE: I left the DNC in '56 and then went with the National Farmers Union.

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JOHNSON: Was that during the campaign?

MCCUNE: Right after it.

JOHNSON: Right after the campaign, you took a job with the Farmers Union?

MCCUNE: Out in Denver as Director of Public Relations.

JOHNSON: At the headquarters.

MCCUNE: Right outside of Patton's office, yes.

JOHNSON: How long did you do that job?

MCCUNE: Four and a half years.

JOHNSON: Up until the time that Kennedy was elected?

MCCUNE: Yes, I went to the San Francisco convention with Patton. We weren't as actively in politics, but we were certainly interested, more than just bystanders. Also, Brannan was there as NFU General Counsel. We remained very close.

JOHNSON: Were you a delegate?

MCCUNE: No. Just an observer.

JOHNSON: Patton too, just an observer?

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MCCUNE: Patton appeared before the Platform Committee, I'm sure.

Then, I may have told you, but it is pertinent to this, I believe. Everyone was so surprised that Lyndon Johnson was chosen for Vice President, including me. Right after he had been chosen he went back to the LBJ ranch and collected himself. Congress was in recess. Suddenly I got called into Patton's office and he said, "Lyndon Johnson is over in Cheyenne in his private plane and his first speech is going to be on agriculture" -- again one of these "farm of the day" sort of things. "And he asked if I'd send you over to help him." So I packed my bag quickly, went to Cheyenne and got on the private plane out at the airport. There were only four of us on the plane: Bill Moyers, whom I met for the first time; George Reedy, his press man whom I knew slightly from the National Press Club; Lyndon Johnson, who was undressing and getting ready to eat his box dinner; and me.

George took me up to say hello to him, and I sat on the edge of the seat beside him, just to converse. He started telling me what he wanted, and he started poking me in the chest. I just pulled out an envelope, literally, out of my coat pocket, started taking notes

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and hanging onto the seat. He was just spouting. I had the envelope very full on both sides, and he's still eating and changing into his pajamas. He then said, "Brought a typewriter didn't you?" I said, "Yes, sir," and he said, "Get going." Bill Moyers was tending bar, a very liberal bartender. I don't know whether he had a drink, but I had several. I put the typewriter on the table in the rear of the plane; Lyndon went to sleep and I wrote all but the last paragraph before we landed at the ranch. They had me stay around a couple of days. I ate with the family, and enjoyed two or three

days of idleness. He finally looked over the draft and said, "It looks good to me." I came back to Denver. So I was involved, that much I know.

JOHNSON: In the '60 campaign.

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: For Lyndon Johnson.

MCCUNE: I don't think we did anything for Kennedy.

JOHNSON: Now was that your only personal contact with LBJ, in the '60 election?

MCCUNE: I think so; we may have been asked some questions by

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the staff.

JOHNSON: He was a friend of the Farmers Union, I take it?

MCCUNE: Yes. We got along all right with Lyndon. That wasn't the surprise. You know the surprise; he was just so different from Kennedy and Stevenson.

JOHNSON: Was the Farm Bureau backing Nixon in '60?

MCCUNE: I believe they did. I believe so.

JOHNSON: How about the membership of the Farmers Union while you were the head of their public relations department in '56 to '60?

MCCUNE: Those were good years. They had just built a new headquarters a block from the capital in Denver. Their insurance company, like the Farm bureau, was doing well. Patton was very active in all kinds of policy, especially international. He was very much of an internationalist and went to world meetings. There is an International Federation of Agricultural Producers, IFAP, and he was president of that. I never went to those with him.

JOHNSON: Was the Farm Bureau involved at all in those?

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MCCUNE: I think so. I think they went.

JOHNSON: So he had to deal with whoever the president of the Farm Bureau was at that time. Was it Shuman?

MCCUNE: It was probably Charlie Shuman by then.

JOHNSON: Did you have to deal with your counterpart at all in the Farm Bureau while you were at the Farmers Union?

MCCUNE: No, I can't remember ever being called on to. I've told you I have four volumes, loose-leaf volumes, indexed, of the material that I worked on for the Farmers Union, press releases...

JOHNSON: In those years from '56 to '60?

MCCUNE: Right. Press releases, policy statements, what have you, speeches.

JOHNSON: Looks like it is well organized. Apparently then you left the Farmers Union after the campaign in '60.

MCCUNE: In '61 the Farmers Union ran into financial trouble. I don't know just why, but they did. I think the business enterprise went downhill.

JOHNSON: You mean insurance?

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MCCUNE: Yes. And Patton had to retrench, in the headquarters. They also had a Washington office and always have had. He let some people go. See, Brannan was General Counsel there, and I had two or three speechwriters and information specialists -- at least two. We had a heck of a good library, a first-class library, a youth department, education department, it was called. We had to retrench some. About that time an old friend of mine, who comes out of Agriculture, named Clay Cochran, deceased, had been getting memos from me about "Why don't some of you guys in Washington start this project, or start that project." It was mostly based on exposing lobbies and muckraking, in a sense, not wild stuff but responsibly doing it. He was then with the AFL-CIO, and one of my suggestions was what became Group Research, to keep track of the right wing. So Cochran said, "If you'll come back from Denver for a year and start it, I can get support to get it off of the ground."

So Patton thought that would be a good idea, and would save him another salary, the munificent sum of \$14,000 I think. I came here, and then he got broker, and I never returned.

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JOHNSON: You say he got what?

MCCUNE: More broke. Just abolished my position, and retrenched all the way.

JOHNSON: But they kept the headquarters, they kept the building?

MCCUNE: Oh, that got sold, I don't know, ten years ago maybe. They got out into suburbia.

JOHNSON: Oh, suburban Denver.

MCCUNE: Yes, and they're still out there somewhere.

JOHNSON: Retrenched.

MCCUNE: I've lost touch with them. Yes, it was a retrenchment, but it's still there and has a flag flying.

JOHNSON: I think Farm Bureau not only had insurance, they had fuel to sell to the farmers. I think they had a fuel operation.

MCCUNE: I'd forgotten that.

JOHNSON: The Farmers Union never got into selling anything but insurance?

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MCCUNE: No, they were affiliated with co-ops.

JOHNSON: They did have co-ops.

MCCUNE: They'd buy grain and they would sell farm supplies. The biggest one was in the Twin Cities.

JOHNSON: But that was on shaky ground then, that part of the business?

MCCUNE: I don't know the whole story. They did buy into fertilizer with a private company, and that went sour. I don't know the details, so I shouldn't say much about it.

JOHNSON: But they were in strong competition with the Farm Bureau?

MCCUNE: Their areas were a little different. The Farmers Union tried to break into Farm Bureau territory, the Midwest, but never made it. They had a symbolic organization, but it never scared them.

JOHNSON: Where was their strength centered, the Union?

MCCUNE: The upper Midwest -- Dakotas, Minnesota.

JOHNSON: How about the Rocky Mountain states?

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MCCUNE: Yes. They did well there.

JOHNSON: California?

MCCUNE: No. They tried New York by merging with a group already there, and that was kind of peculiar. They tried Pennsylvania, the same thing, peculiar leadership.

JOHNSON: How about Southern farmers?

MCCUNE: Texas had a good operation, good leadership, new, not the old creation. They tried in Alabama, and couldn't get anywhere.

JOHNSON: The sharecroppers were not an important segment?

MCCUNE: Didn't really make it, no. Kansas.

JOHNSON: The wheat farmers?

MCCUNE: Yes. Oklahoma and Arkansas. Patton went to California after his wife died. He lost some interest in Denver. It was time for him to move on. Glenn Talbott of North Dakota took over -- a very fine leader.

JOHNSON: Glenn Talbott. Do you have any idea about when that happened?

MCCUNE: Approximately mid-sixties. Jim moved to California

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in retirement and couldn't sit there. He remarried. He couldn't sit still, so he got a job in San Francisco. I don't know whether he got paid, consulting with the state labor federation, helping any way he could, mostly on senior citizens. He kept in touch through correspondence.

JOHNSON: What were the fortunes of the Farmers Union under Talbott?

MCCUNE: Well, Glenn had to preside over some decline and I've never asked anybody why, or what happened.

JOHNSON: But they are still functioning are they not?

MCCUNE: Yes, I still have insurance.

JOHNSON: Were you in almost at least weekly contact with Charles Brannan in the years when you were at the headquarters of the Farmers Union?

MCCUNE: It was a square building and Jim Patton's office was here looking over the mountains, and the secretary, Tony Dechant, was there. He later was president for a while. He was a veteran of the organization, a pro, secretary-treasurer. Over here was C. E. Huff, who had been president before Jim Patton, and helped him come along

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as a young fellow. He was a very great old man, and that was kind of an honorary. I'd put my feet up and talk with him. Then over here was Gus Geissler, who came out of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation by way of North Dakota. He had run the Government crop insurance

program, and later ran PMA when Trigg was fired. He later came to Denver to run the Farmers Union insurance. He was a great man, and then there were the secretaries and then me.

JOHNSON: And Mr. Brannan?

MCCUNE: Oh, excuse me, Charlie was on that floor; he was there as General Counsel.

JOHNSON: So you were in daily contact with him.

MCCUNE: So that was the top floor, just that simple. The doors were always open.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have any correspondence, or any contact with Harry Truman after January 1953? After he left office?

MCCUNE: Well, Brannan and Patton took me with them to go out to Independence, and President Truman showed us through personally on a guided tour.

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JOHNSON: Oh, is that the picture you have here?

MCCUNE: Yes. And then he had us at the house for tea with Mrs. Truman, and Margaret was there also, so we got to see the house. Very gracious.

JOHNSON: About what year was that?

MCCUNE: It was in the middle of my time out there.

JOHNSON: You had that visit for, what, a half hour, an hour?

MCCUNE: Or more.

JOHNSON: You and Patton and Charlie Brannan met with him. Was that the only time you met with Truman then?

MCCUNE: Yes; Brannan's on the Board of the Library Institute.

JOHNSON: Yes.

MCCUNE: I don't think he misses many meetings. And then he comes here once or twice a year; we always have lunch or something. I'll be seeing him next week in Denver.

JOHNSON: Do you have any correspondence with Truman in that post-Presidential period?

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MCCUNE: Well, I told you about this one thing Patton sent out asking liberals to scratch their heads and come up with some new material. He sent a courtesy copy to the President. I don't

know. Jim was a great letter writer, a great personal friend of people. He might have sent Harry a letter on every birthday for all I know.

JOHNSON: You mentioned writing up this thing for Johnson, LBJ, in 1960, this farm speech. Do you recall what the thrust of that was or what kind of policy you were promoting? This would have been Farmers Union policy, no doubt. Was it, again, the rigid price support, versus flexible? Did they ever accept the idea of flexible price support?

MCCUNE: I certainly don't remember how that was handled. I don't remember agonizing over it. He had voted quite liberally on the farm program; the Farmers Union liked Lyndon, and he dictated many ideas for it.

JOHNSON: The Agriculture Secretary under Kennedy was [Orville] Freeman, from Minnesota, wasn't it?

MCCUNE: Yes, Orville Freeman, whom I had known from Democratic politics.

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JOHNSON: Were you personally acquainted with Freeman and did you do any work at all with Freeman on speechwriting?

MCCUNE: He was very active in the Democratic Party, before and after being Governor, before and during. I knew him on a first name basis. I was just delighted when he got that job. I don't think we were in on it; I'm not suggesting that.

JOHNSON: Had he been a member of the Farmers Union, do you know?

MCCUNE: Well, he wasn't a farmer. How did he make a living? He might have been a member technically, but no, he wasn't an official or anything. Close friends of mine were in his immediate office.

JOHNSON: Did you have any input into Kennedy's farm policy when he was President in that first term, before he was assassinated?

MCCUNE: Well, here again, Galbraith comes in. That doesn't mean we had an input, but it was a circumstance of history, that Kennedy and Galbraith were close. I don't know when it started.

JOHNSON: In the meantime, you come out here to establish Group Research, in '61.

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MCCUNE: February of '52, I opened the door of this place.

JOHNSON: In other words, there was a gap there of about a year when you were sort of freelance?

MCCUNE: No, I left Farmers Union at the of '61, you know, or January of '62.

JOHNSON: And you set up Group Research then in '62, in an office here in Washington.

MCCUNE: By coincidence it was the Bond Building, which had been the Farmers Union Washington office for many years. I was familiar with the office and it was "el cheepo," rundown, two blocks from the White House, at 1404 New York Avenue, N.W.

JOHNSON: Was the Farmers Union Washington office still there in that building?

MCCUNE: Yes, on another floor.

JOHNSON: And they never closed that down?

MCCUNE: Well, we stayed there five or six years before they gutted the building.

JOHNSON: So the Farmers Union was close by?

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MCCUNE: Yes, when Jim came to town I probably saw him; stayed there until they gutted the building.

JOHNSON: Do you want to quickly explain what your purpose was, in establishing Group Research, Inc.?

MCCUNE: It was to monitor the right-wing, to identify the movements and the leaders, just plain conservative groups like Chamber of Commerce or real kooky group; the Ku Klux Klan or what have you, anything the right of center. We developed a newsletter immediately, which still going -- *Group Research Report*.

JOHNSON: How often is that published?

MCCUNE: Theoretically monthly; we're having problems right now. And special reports; I did one on the Farm Bur I recall. But our work really doesn't involve agriculture. We monitor the so-called right-wing an new right; we got here just bout the time it really began to take off into a more respectable, conservative day-to-day movement.

JOHNSON: Who helped you capitalize this?

MCCUNE: Anybody we could find, and we sell our newsletter We charge \$100 a half day for helping research.

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JOHNSON: Did you build up an endowment to start with?

MCCUNE: A couple of years ago I organized a tax-exempt foundation and got one grant for \$25,000, but that's gone. We had a public fundraiser last year which you read about in the *Washington Post*, so we just scratch around.

JOHNSON: Do you have a membership, or a distribution list?

MCCUNE: No, just a subscription.

JOHNSON: Subscription list. How many are on that?

MCCUNE: That I don't tell anybody, but it's very small.

JOHNSON: Were there any other sources of income for this kind of operation?

MCCUNE: No.

JOHNSON: Just donations, grants.

MCCUNE: Right. Research fees and subscriptions, \$40 a year. Gladys Segal has been with me 26 of those years. She was Jim Patton's secretary before she left to have a baby. When she came back to work, she came to my office. We're like siblings.

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JOHNSON: She started in what year?

MCCUNE: She started in '63.

JOHNSON: So you were by yourself until she came?

MCCUNE: Oh, no, I had a staff of six or eight people when I was getting the files organized.

JOHNSON: How did they help you?

MCCUNE: Well, they were secretarial, except for one, who wrote reports just like I did. That was his fulltime job, research and write.

JOHNSON: What was his name?

MCCUNE: George Rucker.

JOHNSON: Well, the AFL-CIO had encouraged this. Did they also finance it, at least to start with?

MCCUNE: They helped. Cochran's friends over there did.

JOHNSON: Have you had any connections with the AFL-CIO in the intervening years?

MCCUNE: Oh, I still send them stuff, and they subscribe, yes.

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JOHNSON: Now, the information you put out, does this end up in policy speeches by Government people, or by lobbies?

MCCUNE: I doubt it. It shows up in a few newsletters. I've often wondered where it goes. I sometimes feel like I'm dropping water in a well.

JOHNSON: Do you have Congressmen on your list?

MCCUNE: Yes, liberal Congressmen.

JOHNSON: Do you get published in the *Congressional Record*?

MCCUNE: Yes. In the early days I did, especially. The John Birch Society went after me, and a lot of other right-wingers went after me. One of our chief defenders was Senator Gale McGee of Wyoming, who took an interest in us. The Democratic Study Group on the House side, the liberals, used to buy it for every member.

JOHNSON: How about the '64 election, Goldwater-Johnson., did you give any assistance to Johnson in that election? Of course, now you have Group Research.

MCCUNE: I don't think so. We studied Goldwater. We had a beautiful background on him, and kept track of all the...

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JOHNSON: Do you still have a good-sized file on Goldwater?

MCCUNE: Yes. he was so blunt, and surrounded himself with such ardent right-wingers that that wasn't hard to do.

JOHNSON: How about the speechwriters, and let's say columnists and biographers, both scholarly and freelance; don't they use your facilities, your materials here for their research?

MCCUNE: Yes, the media is in here quite often, including book authors.

JOHNSON: Now you charge a fee for them to use your...

MCCUNE: I don't charge the media; I want it out.

JOHNSON: Free use. Just like a public library.

MCCUNE: For the media, if they've got a reasonable something to do.

JOHNSON: Do you copyright any of your material?

MCCUNE: No, I've never gotten around to it.

JOHNSON: I guess Ronnie Dugger's book...

MCCUNE: He spent a lot of time here.

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JOHNSON: On *Reagan: The Man and His Presidency*, a very thick book, 620 pages or so.

MCCUNE: Well, I started on Reagan before I left Denver. He came through Colorado Springs with General Electric and made a speech that was so outlandish, that I had to read the story twice and put it in a file, "Reagan, Ronald," about '61. And it is outlandish.

JOHNSON: Well, his first public prominence was in '64, wasn't it, when he gave speeches for Goldwater?

MCCUNE: Well, he was prominent because he covered the country for General Electric. He wrote his '64 speech for Goldwater right at the end, which I heard. I heard it; it was a hell of a good speech.

This author was in the other day; he writes about the right-wing, but I hadn't met him until recently. He wrote a book on it.

JOHNSON: What's his name?

MCCUNE: Sidney Blumenthal.

JOHNSON: Oh yes.

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MCCUNE: He just paddled around and did a lot of work -- a very intellectual approach, but a good reporter as well. He was in the other day working on something, so I had him autograph my book, and he called me "The Prime Archivist of Democracy." I thought that was very nice, because I don't know him that well.

JOHNSON: I would hope that the newspapers at least make donations for the assistance they are getting.

MCCUNE: Some of them do. Some subscribe; those that want to help and have an expense account subscribe; and a lot of libraries.

JOHNSON: What's your subscription fee?

MCCUNE: Forty bucks a year.

JOHNSON: And that gives them 12 issues, monthly issues.

MCCUNE: Eleven now. And they can have an annual index if they request it.

JOHNSON: How long do these monthly newsletters run, how many pages?

MCCUNE: They have been four until this year; I've had to skip some months, so they have been six.

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JOHNSON: How about the National Press Club? Do they subscribe to your services?

MCCUNE: I think I gave them a free one, because I'm so active up there. I'm not sure. But a lot of libraries have been on it since Volume I, college libraries.

JOHNSON: These right-wing groups, are they defined as those groups who are opposed to the interests of labor, and to the small farmer?

MCCUNE: Well, it's a cop-out, but anything right of center.

By the way, they subscribe, the right-wing groups do, several of them, some of the key ones do. Their checks have never bounced, and they don't attack me anymore.

JOHNSON: How about all these think-tanks, the Heritage Foundation, the Brookings Institution...

MCCUNE: I think Heritage gets it. Brookings, I doubt it; American Enterprise Institute, I don't think so.

JOHNSON: How about the liberal think-tanks; are they regular subscribers?

MCCUNE: Maybe, I don't know. We can't always tell; they don't subscribe as such, maybe.

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JOHNSON: They have their own libraries which they think are adequate?

MCCUNE: Oh, huge; like Brookings which is enormous, but I have no contact over there.

JOHNSON: But you apparently have information that probably some of the others don't have.

MCCUNE: Well, yes, we subscribe to all the right-wing publications and read them carefully, and cross-reference each one. If a name pops up in a byline or in the article, or a subject that we're interested in, we put it on 5 x 8 cards so we can find it.

JOHNSON: How about these Congressional hearings; didn't they draw from your files?

MCCUNE: We used to monitor the *Congressional Record*, but we had to stop; we just can't do it.

JOHNSON: But Congressmen do draw on your materials to some extent?

MCCUNE: Well, we get requests from Congress, but to be honest with you, it's more about campaigns. When they're running against a right-winger, they learn we've

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got some stuff here and they'll call and want to come up and look at it.

JOHNSON: How about the Democratic National Committee?

MCCUNE: I've lost touch with them, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Didn't they have any involvement with you?

MCCUNE: The two Congressional Democratic campaign committees, the Senate and the House, use us a good bit.

JOHNSON: The DNC is not really in the picture?

MCCUNE: I don't know anybody over there currently. Once in a while they call.

JOHNSON: Okay, so technically you were out of partisan politics after you got this operation going, but your support I would assume comes from the liberal Democrats, the liberal side of the political spectrum...

MCCUNE: Oh, yes, when strangers ask me what I do I tell them I write a newsletter about the right-wing. They immediately assume I'm a right-winger. So I had to discover it the hard way; now I always say, "It's about the right-wing, but I'm not a right-winger myself." Then I go ahead and say, "Some people do insurance

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letters, some do business letters, like tire manufacturers; I do one about the right-wing."

JOHNSON: I think I read in the newspaper something about a \$35,000 a year budget, which seems incredible.

MCCUNE: I haven't had a penny out of Group Research for five years. I'm on Social Security. I'd take it if I had it.

JOHNSON: It's kind of a brave course to follow I would say.

MCCUNE: Well, it's fun.

JOHNSON: You're still living here in Washington, D.C.

MCCUNE: Yes, right in town. I'm up on Capitol Hill, right in the middle...

JOHNSON: You have an apartment up there?

MCCUNE: No, we have a townhouse, old one that's been rehabbed.

JOHNSON: You're married, remarried?

MCCUNE: Yes. And my wife, Jane Moss, fortunately, likes this too.

JOHNSON: You had two children?

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MCCUNE: I have a boy and a girl from my first marriage. They live in suburbia.

JOHNSON: What are their names?

MCCUNE: Mack and Sherry; Malcolm Stuart McCune, and Sherry Hessel.

JOHNSON: Those are the only children you have?

MCCUNE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, if there's nothing else, I want to thank you for all the time you've given us.

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