

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

CLYDE A. WHEELER, JR.

In accordance with the Provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Clyde A. Wheeler, Jr. of Laverne, Oklahoma, hereinafter referred to as the donor, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of personal interview conducted on November 15, 1990, and prepared for deposit in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall not be available for use by researchers during the donor's lifetime. After the donor's death, access to the tape recordings shall be for background use only, and researchers may not cite, paraphrase, or quote therefrom.

(3) During the donor's lifetime the donor retains all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government. During the donor's lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcripts (but not the tape recordings) without the donor's express consent in each case.

(4) Copies of the open portions of the interview transcripts, but not the tape recordings, may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the interview transcripts, but not the tape recordings, may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

Clyde A. Wheeler Jr  
Donor

1-7-93  
Date

[Signature]  
Archivist of the United States

Feb 1, 1993  
Date

This is an interview with Clyde A. Wheeler, Jr. on the fifteenth of November, 1990 at his home in Clear Creek Ranch, Laverne, Oklahoma. The interviewer is Mack Teasley of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

Q: This interview is the fourth we've done with you and so, I think, what we want to do is concentrate on that period of time when you went over to the White House at the end of the second administration. Maybe you could just give us some background on how it came about that you were asked to come over from Agriculture to the White House. Who, and why, and where, and when. The date, for example. I don't think we've got it. You could recall the exact date or ....

MR. WHEELER: The date as I recall was January 1959. I was there about two years, a little less than two years. And I went over there after the reorganization of the White House, from the time when Governor Sherman Adams left and when General [Wilton B.] Persons came in as Chief of Staff. That's when I went, right after that. White House staff was changed a little bit, maybe the congressional relations part was changed. That's what I worked in. I went over there mainly because I had been around the President some and I first ran into him in Chicago at the convention in 1952. He didn't know me then. Bryce Harlow, who was from Oklahoma, asked me to come over. And there was an age-old problem of hiring Republicans, even back at that late date in the administration there was still some criticism of not hiring enough Republicans. And I'd been fairly successful in the Department of Agriculture in hiring Republicans. In fact, I

was able to--I kept lists of something like five thousand, but out of eighty-five thousand, well, that's not too many. And a lot of these were part-time committee appointments. So that was one reason. And then, I think, because Agriculture had had so many problems. I worked both the House and Senate, both sides. So Bryce needed someone who had worked both the House and Senate. Because he had one man--there were three of us--he had one man that worked the Senate, who was Ed McCabe who was a former labor lawyer, and Ed McCabe had worked on House Labor Committee. And then there was a congressman by the name of Jack Anderson from California, and he worked the House and House side. Since I'd been used to working both sides, they wanted someone who was used to doing that. That was a big plus for me, I think, from Bryce Harlow.

Q: And Bryce was the head of congressional relations at this point?

MR. WHEELER: Yes, he was.

Q: He was taken over from Persons, or had Persons ever headed that up?

MR. WHEELER: Bryce had always headed it up. Persons-- before he became Chief of Staff I don't know what his title was, because I wasn't over there. But he appeared to me to be a person that pitched, caught, and played first base. He

did everything, he was a trouble-shooter for the President. And of course, he had been involved with congressional relations, to some extent, most of his career in the army. But he was also involved in policy matters, issue matters, so ....

Q: So Bryce Harlow was the one who made the contact for you to come over and visit, face-to-face invitation or phone call ....

MR. WHEELER: I knew him. You see, back then people like myself who worked for the departments, for a cabinet officer, we met every Saturday morning in the White House, with Bryce Harlow. I don't know whether it was ever continued, but every Saturday morning, from like nine until twelve, every major department, their congressional person, like me, was over there. So we'd go over and General Persons attended those meetings. This was from the very beginning. I went with the Eisenhower Administration in 1954, so I really had seven years with the Eisenhower Administration. And it was an interesting meeting because we'd go around the table and each person would tell what was going on in his department and any problems he might have. General Persons and Bryce sat at the end of the table. So then they would ask, "Can any of the rest of you help Clyde with what he's doing?" Or Al Overton who was with Commerce or a fellow by the name of [Albert L.] McDermott who was

with the Labor Department. And so we helped each other. We brought a lot of strengths to the table because some of us knew some members better than others. About every time, where there would be a problem, some of the members, a senator or House member, there'd be someone around the table who would know that person better than the person who had the problem. So it was a good system. Plus the fact we were all fairly expert in the administration's entire program.

Q: That helped you in your own efforts to know where the administration is headed on all the issues.

MR. WHEELER: Oh yes, that is right. And like the first extension of the Free Trade Act. It was a fantastic effort because it was not popular. We extended it for three years and we all felt so good. I can't remember what year that was, but that must have been about 1955 or so. But President Eisenhower was trying to promote international trade as free of barriers as possible. Agriculture had a big role in it because we were trying to export many commodities. It was a real team effort and the people on the hill said it would never pass. We got it extended for three years. That is the first major bill I remember--there was the Taft-Hartley Act and some others--but that was certainly a team effort.

Q: Now these Saturday morning sessions was there a title for the group or anything? I'm just kind of curious whether . . . .

MR. WHEELER: I can't remember any at the time. McCabe would know. There are not a lot of people around yet who went to those Saturday morning meetings.

Q: Where did you meet?

MR. WHEELER: We met in the cabinet room. It was a lot of fun. We had a good time and we learned a lot.

Q: When you came over and joined the White House staff, did you . . . .

MR. WHEELER: I was already pretty well oriented.

Q: And then these same meetings continued on and you just switched sides of the table or at the other end.

MR. WHEELER: That's right. That is exactly what happened.

Q: So everybody knew you and you knew them.

MR. WHEELER: Oh yeah, I knew all the people anyway. It was just like changing offices. In the years since then, we have heard the criticism that the administration was trying to do too much at once. We would get out of each others way, because the President had his timetable when he wanted

things done. So instead of having the budget deficit package bill and the farm bill and the clean air bill all come forward at the same time, we were able to have some order to it. It made it easier for the leaders on the hill, the congressional leaders. I'd like to think it made it easier for the President at the press conferences and other things when he'd face these major things, instead of having three or four come up at once.

Q: When you joined the White House staff was your area broadened beyond agriculture?

MR. WHEELER: Oh yes, I worked all issues.

Q: All issues in the House and the Senate. So basically they had one and a-half people in each body, whereas before they'd had one.

MR. WHEELER: That's right. That's exactly right. I worked with all issues. The Taft-Hartley Act came up fairly soon after I was there. That was one of my first issues. I remember Senator Griffin from Michigan and the Landrum-Griffin labor bill. That was a real team effort. [Cong. Robert P.] Griffin [R-MI] was a House member then, [Cong. Phil M.] Landrum [D-GA] was a House member from Georgia. The President went on T.V., went to the American people, said he needed help and it really came in.

Q: What do you think Capitol Hill's view was of Eisenhower's congressional relations?

MR. WHEELER: I think it was pretty good. In the beginning there was major criticism because there weren't many Republicans hired. But I think various areas had problems, and when there were major problems then that caused the American congress to have problems. Like the Department of Agriculture, we had low prices and we had droughts and housewives and farmers marched on the Department of Agriculture. Dairy people also marched on the Department of Agriculture. We had major problems but the President, to his credit, tried to hold to a free market system and Secretary Benson was the same way. I think in general it was pretty good. The President met with the congressional leaders fairly often too.

Q: So was it just a four person shop then with Bryce, Ed McCabe, Jack Anderson, and yourself?

MR. WHEELER: That's right.

Q: And did Bryce Harlow make the assignments of .... How was it determined what you were going to do?

MR. WHEELER: The time table sort of determined--what was on the congressional calendar really determined what we would do. We would work with the issues as they would come up.



In Washington, it's a one-pager town. Everybody wants everything on one page. In some of these papers that you have of mine, someplace there should be copies of these one-pagers I gave to Bryce. I would write a report at the end of the week also, on how things looked; just my estimate on how things looked. And I think Ed McCabe did the same thing and I think Jack Anderson did the same thing. But Bryce, of course, he was calling us in all the time. His office was right by ours. And we were in and out. It was a hot spot for him. And we were trying to help the agencies which is different in today's world where the agencies try to help the White House. The President, as I've told you before, tried to appoint strong people to the cabinet. And he let them have the responsibility of running their own departments. He'd talk with them at cabinet meetings, but he wasn't one to tell them how to run their departments.

Q: So you would have worked pretty closely with your counterparts in the various agencies?

MR. WHEELER: Oh yes.

Q: Were they usually the person on the point or were you a liaison between them and the White House or was it, they were working the Hill and you worked the Hill also.

MR. WHEELER: Here is the difference. They were the point people with the general membership. We were the point

people with the leadership. But we would occasionally work with the members in general, would meet with them.

Q: Did you meet with Bryce on a regularly scheduled basis or was it ad hoc as the issue required? I know there were legislative meetings with the whole--the President, probably sat in some of those didn't he?

MR. WHEELER: You see, where we discussed legislative matters with the President was on the Tuesday morning leadership meeting. We had congressional leaders in every Tuesday morning and I think that's been going on since George Washington. At that leadership meeting we had the congressional leaders in and occasionally we'd have a cabinet officer. Whichever cabinet officer had major legislation up that week like the farm bill, the Agriculture Secretary would be invited. There's where we would really get down to the nitty gritty on legislation, where the President would talk to leaders and he'd talk to Bryce, and we would sit just behind the conference table and all talked. We'd have input. Bryce would ask us what we knew about something. So that's the way that worked.

Q: So would Bryce sit up at the table?

MR. WHEELER: Oh yes. He'd sit up at the table, the President sat there, of course, all the time. Well, he sat on the side. And Charlie Halleck sat on one side and

Everett Dirkson was on the other and Bryce sat right across the table from him.

Q: And did Bryce brief the President before the meeting or send him some of these one-page issue papers, maybe?

MR. WHEELER: At that Tuesday morning meeting, General Persons controlled the agenda and so he made up the agenda. And, of course, Bryce helped him make it up. We always had a written agenda. Bryce was seeing the President regularly. I'm sure he briefed him some, but that was a show and tell meeting, sharing and developing strategy for the week. And occasionally some of the leaders would want the President to call somebody, which he'd do.

Q: Now how involved was the President in this, or how responsive was he? Was he really ....

MR. WHEELER: He was really responsive. He was very responsive.

Q: And knowledgeable of the issues?

MR. WHEELER: Oh yes. Some people, I think, thought he didn't have hands on enough on the congress. But I heard him say over and over that we won't browbeat members of congress. And he'd tell people that we do not throw our weight around and he said, "They've got their job, we've got ours." And he said "we will explain our position," and we

all had the responsibility of making sure that the administration's point of view was understood. And we supplied all the facts we could. But it was different than today's world where you have angry exchanges because some member didn't want to go the way the White House wanted. And some of them didn't with Eisenhower. But, in fact, he'd tell them over and over, they had to answer to a constituency in the state, he had to answer to the whole country. So his point of view wouldn't always be the same as theirs. But I don't ever remember his really appearing angry or really unhappy. We did fairly well. He got knocked down, the administration got knocked down on an appointment, the Lewis Strauss appointment, which I worked on, and that was unfortunate. I can't remember the details right now. Lewis Strauss was arrogant, he was a difficult person. And brilliant, would have been brilliant at the Atomic Energy Commission, chairmanship, of it I think. But he ruffled the senators the wrong way, and Eisenhower couldn't pull that out of the fire. But we didn't have very many major defeats. I can't think of any others right at the minute. We're bound to have had some.

Q: We've had a recent president who sort of was reported to have gone over the heads of congress to the American people on issues when he knew that there was a consensus out there and I suppose Eisenhower had the popularity to be able to do

Mr. Clyde A. Wheeler, 11/15/90

that too. Do you think there was a conscious effort of him ever doing that?

MR. WHEELER: There was Landrum-Griffin that he did that, and with the support of the Republican leaders, and some Democratic leaders. He never, I don't think, would have done it without being some kind of team effort, but he did it several times. Of course, President Reagan did it quite a few times. I think every time that President Eisenhower asked the people to help, as I recall, they did.

Q: What's your assessment of Eisenhower as far as being a hands-on type of president, being knowledgeable of the issues of the day that were facing the congressional relations people?

MR. WHEELER: I always felt he was very knowledgeable. And he seemed to have a good rapport with his cabinet members. And I felt like on major issues he had a good knowledge, a good understanding, of what was involved. And seemed to be able to converse easily on matters. And Bob Anderson, who was Secretary of the Treasury, used to brief the leadership meetings and the cabinet meetings on the state of the financial health of the nation. The President asked questions all the time. We never did have a short meeting with leaders. And he'd ask them a lot of questions. And some of them would ask him questions also. Especially on

foreign affairs because he had a wealth of knowledge of the international situation. So on foreign aid and on international matters they were asking him a lot of questions that probably weren't on the agenda.

Q: So at those meetings, was General Persons conducting the meeting?

MR. WHEELER: No, as I recall he was sort of chairman, except that the President, of course, was the main player. Persons would have the agenda, I'll put it that way. He was chief of staff.

Q: And did the President give his philosophical view or the administration's official position on certain things?

MR. WHEELER: Yes, all the time. He, on most issues, would give his own point of view about every time, that I recall.

Q: And the other people in your office, I wonder if you could give me a brief assessment of your view of Ed McCabe, and Jack Z. Anderson, Bryce, their effectiveness, their strengths or weaknesses, what they brought to the job.

MR. WHEELER: Ed McCabe was a lawyer's lawyer. He was a labor lawyer, knew a lot about labor law. He knew the senators. Ed McCabe was more of a technician, I guess, than I was. I was more of a pragmatic kind of person, but Ed had been a committee staff member on the Hill. I had been an

assistant to a congressman where I was a generalist. Ed was able to analyze legislation, the technical side of what things would do, what they wouldn't. So he was good from that standpoint in our little group. He was also good when we had to change legislation, had to amend it, and things like that. Now Jack Anderson, of course, had been a house member, from California. He was a very popular house member, knew all the .... He was very popular with Democrats as well as Republicans. So he spent a lot of time up there, in fact. We had a staff meeting every morning, as I recall. It seems like--it's been a long time ago, I'm trying to think--General Persons didn't conduct the briefing, I guess Andrew Goodpaster did, because it was more foreign affairs. We had briefings all the time--the White House staff--on what was going on. But back to Jack Anderson. I'd go to the Hill about 10 o'clock and get back about five. Jack would go early in the morning. Ed spent more time on the telephone, but I'd worked on the Hill before and was in the habit of stopping at the leaders office, also the members office. I was talking to them all the time.

Q: And so McCabe used the phone a lot?

MR. WHEELER: He used the phone more than I did. I used more personal contact.

Q: And Anderson was personal contact?

MR. WHEELER: Yes, he did. Of course, Bryce was on the phone an awful lot. The poor guy was on the phone all the time, because he had to. He was always busy. Even back then when things seemed to function fairly well, it was hard for him to get away before 7 or 8 every night. I'd go by his office and he'd still be there. He'd wave me on. My cake was a lot smaller than his and I tried to get out of there by six or seven. We had breakfast meetings often.

Q: We talked sometime in the past year about examples of certain Eisenhower traits and so forth. His temper was one thing, I guess you've seen that in action. Do you recall any anecdotes about Eisenhower's temper?

MR. WHEELER: Well, I was trying to remember what would set it off. I must say not very many times. Probably two or three times in the time I was there when he'd really be completely unhappy about something. I don't ever remember seeing that more than two or three times. He would ask for reports from staff people on what the problem was. Something would go wrong that looked like it shouldn't have. I'm trying to think of an incident. There was a House member named Leo Allen [R-IL], who was chairman of the Rules Committee and he seemed to bring up things that should never have happened. I mean something crazy, illogical, like



something happened in his district, or perhaps something that the administration was doing and it would get announced in his district without his knowing about it. Stuff like that that is pretty basic and shouldn't happen. It seemed like he was the one who would bring up things like that. And that would really irritate the President. Not Leo Allen, but just because it happened. But it didn't happen very often and he pretty much left people alone if they would do what they were supposed to do.

Q: And how did he show his temper other than asking for  
....

MR. WHEELER: Well, it would just be sharp words.

Q: Did he use some "army language" too?

MR. WHEELER: Yes, once in a while.

Q: You've read the description where his face would turn red.

MR. WHEELER: Yes, it would.

Q: Start fidgeting with his front teeth or something and  
....

MR. WHEELER: Yes, I think he did. And then he'd talk a little bit but when he got started he pretty well said what he wanted to say.

Q: People knew where they stood with him.

MR. WHEELER: Oh, yes, they did. I don't know whether it was to his credit or General Persons or who, but we didn't have overlapping turf. And maybe it was because we didn't have so many people. But we didn't get in each others way. Everybody knew what his job was for sure. That was a mark of his administration. And I think it was the last time.

Q: I was going to ask you about his management style. I guess you've already indicated that he was a very effective delegator. Get good people and let them do the job.

MR. WHEELER: He did. We seemed to have a lot of harmony. I don't mean to say we didn't have any major problems, but the people he selected seemed to work in harmony with everyone else. It wasn't like, it seems like today where someone gets overlooked or something like that, we just didn't have that. And, you know, I want to tell you something. I just happened to think of something.

President Kennedy came in right after Eisenhower as you know. I received a call from someone in Orville Freeman's office, at the Department of Agriculture--and I was back in Oklahoma then because I came home to run for congress and I was in Tulsa--asking me how we got things to work smoothly. This was four or five or six months after the beginning of the Kennedy Administration and I was surprised to get the

call. They were having a difficult time making all the horses go down the same path and he spent an hour on the phone, asking me what we did to make things go as well as they did. I thought that was quite a tribute. In fact, I think I told Bryce about it. But it was kind of funny that they would call and ask how we did it.

Q: At the time of the transition had there been any real-- had you left early to run for congress, you weren't there for the actual overlap?

MR. WHEELER: No, and it was the only inauguration I missed since 1952. I attended them all except that one. There was one heck of a snowstorm at Kennedy's inauguration and we had little kids and I just couldn't see getting back up there for it. I was already settled in Tulsa.

Q: To follow on what you were saying there was, I think I've read that in the Kennedy administration there was a little bit of arrogance there in the terms that we don't need to ....

MR. WHEELER: Yes, yes.

Q: .... sweep, new broom, sweep it clean.

MR. WHEELER: Yes, I think that's true. They changed their tune about five or six months afterwards though because a

few months after, they began to think they better ask some people.

Q: They had the Bay of Pigs by then and a few other things.

MR. WHEELER: Yes, that's right.

Q: .... so the wheels were coming off the wagon.

MR. WHEELER: They were calling Bryce. Orville had called Bryce a lot and they called him, well, all the time. Everybody called Bryce. That's true. I was asked about five or six months afterwards. Orville Freeman was the Secretary of Agriculture for Kennedy.

Q: Speaking of agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson stayed on the whole administration. Did you ever serve as a liaison between the White House and him or the Agriculture Department? What was the administration's feeling about Ezra Taft Benson? I know he was a lightning rod out there with the farmers to a certain extent.

MR. WHEELER: Well, I did to the extent that I was over there every Saturday morning and I was liaison for Benson to that extent. But Benson had a lot of criticism. He was a lightning rod for the administration because of the price situation and about everything, and drought. I was there five years and my counterparts on these Saturday morning meetings weren't as tolerant of Benson because Benson was

causing problems for the administration. So some of them would just say flatly, "Well, he ought to resign, get out of the way." But the president supported him all the time. And I was with Benson when the congressional delegation came down from the Hill to ask him to resign, that's on one of these previous tapes I told you about that. But they both felt like getting the government out of agriculture was the best way to go. And I felt the same way.

Q: Do you recall any of Eisenhower's views on agriculture in addition to this one?

MR. WHEELER: No, I really don't. I have a feeling he felt a compassion for the hard times that the farmers were having. I have a feeling he understood farmers. He came down to Woodward (Oklahoma) during the drought, during the worst times of his administration, came himself to Woodward in the middle of that drought and low prices. He wanted to see for himself. He made several trips, made one to Iowa. So he got out to see for himself how things were going. I don't recall too much about what he had to say about agriculture itself.

Q: Mentioning Iowa reminded me of Khrushchev's visit to an Iowa farm. I don't know whether, that probably wouldn't have been handled by the congressional relations people

obviously, but I wondered if you had any knowledge about that trip at all.

MR. WHEELER: Well, I was in the White House when that happened. I didn't have much to do with setting it up of course. But I was in on the edges of it. It was the first time we'd had a Russian leader visit the United States since World War II. And Eisenhower was very hopeful, he talked about it a lot. About what he hoped to accomplish. And the first Camp David talks took place at that time. So we were all aware of the fact that he was worried about our relationship with Russia. He would ask the staff people a lot of questions about the tour Khrushchev was going to take after he left Washington. Because you see, he went to Camp David, I forget now how long, two or three days, and then he came back and then he went to Iowa and I think he went to California, I'm not sure.

Q: He went to California. He wanted to go to Disneyland.

MR. WHEELER: They wouldn't let him because of security. But we had back then, I recall, I can't remember when the Hungarian crisis was.

Q: In '57.

MR. WHEELER: '57. Well, it wasn't too long before he came over here and Czechoslovakia ....

Q: It was '56. It was '56. That's right.

MR. WHEELER: I got over there late '58, early '59 and it hadn't been too long, because before Khrushchev came it was a common sight to see on the streets a car with a skull and crossbones displayed on a big sign on top of the car, driving around Washington, D.C. with comments like, "Remember the Children" because there were a lot of young people who fought and who were killed in Hungary. After it got overrun there were kids out there in the trenches. There was a strong feeling about not having Khrushchev over here in the first place. The White House got a lot of calls. And there was strong criticism of the President for inviting him.

President Eisenhower would bring letters to the leadership meetings that the staff had given him from people who would say that they were praying for him. For the success of the Camp David meeting, and then later for the success of the summit conference in Paris in March of '60. Just as we saw President Reagan read letters to the press, he would bring those letters to leadership meetings and staff meetings to show how much he appreciated them. And, which I felt good about myself.

Q: So that was a sincere--I mean, he was sincere?

MR. WHEELER: Oh, yes.

Q: It made him feel good that people were praying for him?

MR. WHEELER: Oh, yes. No question. He really had a sense of .... I mean he was really burdened for the hope of accomplishing something. Because he had tremendous hopes of getting some things done. And he went to Camp David, I think, and he got eighteen points on paper. Eighteen things he wanted to get settled. The Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall, and I forget what all they were. When he came back from Camp David he thought he'd gotten most of what he wanted, had a pretty good understanding with Khrushchev on most of those points. But then after the Paris Summit, everything just came apart as far as getting some of these points of conflict worked out. It was the tail end of his administration so he was disappointed. No doubt about it.

Q: And did you sit on the cabinet meetings?

MR. WHEELER: No, not very often. Maybe one or two, and that's all. Bryce sat in on them.

Q: Your office was in the west wing?

MR. WHEELER: Yes, it was. West wing.

Q: Second floor?

MR. WHEELER: Second floor. Romer McPhee, who was assistant to Bob Kendall who was the General Counsel, was in one



corner of that top floor, or second floor, the very corner. He was right over the President's office. And then just a short distance down, my secretary and Ed McCabe's secretary sat in the same office. So we had two little offices. I was on one side and Ed was on the other. Jack Anderson was down around the corner. And Bryce Harlow had a big office on the second floor. James Schlessinger, who later became Secretary of Defense for Ford, and then he was Energy Secretary for Carter, had that office. I've been in that office many times, with different faces behind that desk. It has been changed, and most of those other offices have been cut up differently. I can't really find my old office anymore.

Q: Well, when did you decide to run for congress? Was that an abrupt decision, or ...?

MR. WHEELER: I really hadn't thought too much about it and Henry Bellmon, who was Republican state chairman, called me in the fall of 1960 and said that I had to run. Said he thought I could win and thought President Nixon was going to win. He was a very popular Vice-President, Nixon was very popular down here. I had had it in the back of my mind, maybe, that I would run sometime, but I thought it would be later on. And I said, "Well, I'll talk to my wife about it." I talked to Barbara and she was not very enthused about it. We were thinking about coming back to

Oklahoma anyway, moving to Tulsa. And we were sort of looking for a little different kind of lifestyle, a little slower pace. And, in fact, she was pretty much against it. And so we talked about it for quite a while and then Henry Bellmon called Bryce. He actually called him before he called me. So Bryce talked to me two or three times. He urged me to do it. He said "the administration wanted you, you should do it."

Q: He was a fellow Oklahoman so he knew ....

MR. WHEELER: He had some feel for the situation.

Q: So when did you depart the staff?

MR. WHEELER: Well, I think it was late August of 1960. We didn't have long to campaign, we had like two months. And the White House staff had a wonderful farewell party for me. It was wonderful. I'll tell a little anecdote that I never did tell until about seven or eight years after I left the White House. I think it was about the time we were getting ready to move back to Washington, D.C. in 1969. The White House staff had given this party for Barbara and me and everyone was there. They gave us a little box as we left, a present to open whenever I felt pressure or despair or something. And I didn't think too much about it. I don't know why I didn't look at it then but I was riding pretty high. I was thinking about getting down here and getting

with it. In the late '60s when we were getting ready to move back to Washington, D.C. from Tulsa we were going through some stuff in our attic, some boxes that were never unpacked. I told my wife, it was the worst mess I ever saw. We had unopened boxes we had moved down there, that weren't unpacked. I said, "Let's just throw the boxes out without even opening them." We sure didn't need to move back boxes we'd left there several years. Well, I opened this one and here was this little box that the White House staff had given me. And here was money, two hundred and some dollars, from secretaries, people I had worked with every day. They'd passed a hat evidently. Notes said, "This we hope you can use." Some of these secretaries, had taken little bottles and put in pills. "Use these when you get stagefright." And another bottle said, "take this when you get blisters on your hand," stuff like that. In fact, I'll show it to you. But the bad part of it was, here was this money that had been in that box for a long time. And I didn't know to whom we should write thank you letters because it was cash and as they had just passed the hat. Barbara and I agonized over this because we felt the group must have thought, "What an ungrateful ...."

[Interruption]

MR. WHEELER: .... Bryce was in Washington by now representing Proctor and Gamble. I told him about

discovering this box and I felt terrible. He said, "Well, I remember it." I said, "I never did thank a person." I'd written a thank you note to him and to Ann Whitman, I think, and two or three people just to thank them in general. But there must have been seventy-five or eighty people there. And he said, "Forget about it." I said, "What should I do with the money?" And he said, "Spend it, it's your money." He said, "We wanted to give it to you." So what I did was, as I saw people through the years, like Ed McCabe and his secretary, and, of course, Jack Anderson went back to California, but I would see the people occasionally. And a fellow in Chicago, I can't think of his name, Bob Merriman, he had a secretary who was a real good friend. She was one that came from the Hill and I had a chance to tell her. I told her to tell Bob Merriman that I was just a real dummy. And I was able to thank twenty or thirty people. All those years I didn't know I had that box. [Laughter] It was really interesting.

Q: That's quite a story.

MR. WHEELER: They were pulling for me. When we got counted out in a special recount completed December 19, 1960, it was a sad day. Bryce said, the president would ask about every time he had a meeting how I was doing. Dawson Nail, who helped us with the campaign, he worked for Television Digest, went to White House press conferences after the

campaign. He was at a press conference right after I got counted out and I don't know whether somebody in the formal press conference asked him but, Dawson heard the President say "They counted out my boy." He was very concerned about the race.

Q: That's a nice tribute, to say that.

MR. WHEELER: I saw him two years later and when he got off the plane in Oklahoma City he wanted to know how I was doing. He said, "I'm still mad about what happened to you down here." So you know, he was getting old, but he had a better memory than I've got right now. And I wasn't that high a level. I was just about a third level staff person. And he remembered.

Q: In retrospect, what do you think were the major contributions of the Eisenhower administration in the area of agriculture policy?

MR. WHEELER: Well, agriculture was fouled up as anything. I'd have to say he held the line against lots of people who wanted to raise price supports and wanted to lower crop quotas, to cut down acreages that could be planted, but pay more to the farmers for doing that. He held the line on that and not going that direction. My father was a small farmer. Those programs were designed to help the small farmer. They actually hurt the small farmer because the

programs helped the big farmer more. It was really the beginning of getting the small farmer off the farm. And the government helped do it when they gave him a little cash but they gave his neighbor so much more money that they could buy out the little farmer. So he held the line on that. I think he strengthened, well, I don't think, I know he strengthened the Soil Conservation Service. We didn't have a lot of "green" members, or we didn't have a lot of people who were ecology experts then or we didn't have demonstrations over the environment. But we were getting concerned about erosion and soil conservation, so he strengthened that. He, for whatever it's worth, strengthened the school lunch program. We expanded our exports like everything. Secretary Benson had been to Japan early after the war and a lot of people forget that Secretary Benson played the role in World War II that Herbert Hoover played in World War I. Benson was sent to Europe to try to help feed the displaced people. He had been to Japan also. He had seen the Japanese people, what they looked like in 1945, then as Secretary of Agriculture from 1953 on. He said the kids were like two or three inches taller using our wheat and milk products. And so, I don't know, we've been blessed with this tremendous agriculture plan and people forget that Eisenhower had the first "Food for Peace" program. We gave surpluses to hungry nations all over the world; South America, Africa, India.

Gee whiz, we sent shipload after shipload of stuff over there and they didn't, they were so, not to say stupid or anything, about getting it off the ship and using it. They'd leave it on the ship and their mores or religious culture would prevent getting this stuff off the ships, so a lot of it would spoil right on the ships before it ever was unloaded, even though people were starving to death two hundred yards from there. That's a little bit overstated. But we did use that food for peaceful purposes. We had a successful barter program where we traded surpluses for strategic minerals. We have about everything we need in this country, but there's certain minerals we don't have and we had a shortage of them. A lot of the minerals were in Africa and so we traded surplus commodities for these minerals that we were short of. That made a of a lot of sense to me. In the Reagan administration I worked very hard to get that program going again but was never successful.

Q: You know when it was discontinued? Was it ....

MR. WHEELER: Well, I think it was pretty much discontinued with Eisenhower because when Kennedy came in they continued the Food for Peace, but they didn't continue the barter program. George McGovern had been a House Member and he was appointed by Kennedy to manage the Food for Peace program. The Kennedy Administration made a big thing out of it. They

built on what we started. And they were taking advantage of it politically also. There were people, large grain dealers, I won't name the names who thought this barter program interfered with case sales. I never could see how trading wheat to some country for "millinium" or "carbillionium" or whatever the Sam Hill we would trade for, that we were going to have to pay dollars for, interfered. Because it wasn't a deal we ever were going to make anyway. It just made a lot of sense. But if I were thirty-five years old, I would give that another run, real hard. I never did get a satisfactory answer from the Reagan Administration. "Oh, Clyde, just don't worry about it, it won't work, and it's the wrong thing." The State Department was against it. It may have gummed up normal trading, but not in a bad way. If we had Earl Butz here, Earl could tell you about it, because he was in the department of agriculture at the time.

Q: The soil bank was another thing, was it?

MR. WHEELER: Yes, it was.

Q: Was that introduced in the Eisenhower administration?

MR. WHEELER: Yes, it was. It was developed by Eisenhower, and Secretary Benson. In fact, Oklahomans Bill Sallee and Forrest Beal were brought to Washington to write the manual on how the soil bank program was supposed to work. It



worked fairly well, if the crops were good. At least the taxpayers had the satisfaction of knowing that their money was conserving the land, having it replenished, and helping the farmers, too. We are doing it again now. We call it a different name, but were doing the same thing.

Q: Any other things you can think of?

MR. WHEELER: I was trying to think of the major accomplishments of the Eisenhower administration. President Eisenhower settled the Korean War; and he restored confidence in the government. Things were in turmoil to a large extent because war was not very far back. I have the feeling he helped the American people get used to the idea that we had a long run of strained relations with Russia but that we could handle it. There were a lot of people who thought, well, we just can't have this. They wanted to do something. I think that he made us realize that we might be in for a long haul with Russia before they would quit taking us on at every turn. He always emphasized the fact that we had to stay strong militarily.

Q: Did the civil rights issue, and I know ....

MR. WHEELER: I feel strongly about that because I did my master's thesis on civil rights and I felt President Eisenhower didn't get the credit, hasn't gotten the credit since then, for what he did on civil rights. I remember

working on the civil rights bill. I can't remember the year of that first civil rights bill.

Q: Fifty-eight.

MR. WHEELER: Fifty-eight. When it was finally passed.

MR. WHEELER: Well, we all worked on it. I remember two other major things I was involved in, in the Eisenhower Administration, statehood for Alaska and Hawaii. A lot of people thought statehood for these two territories would bring lots of problems. But it turned out this was not the case. The civil rights issue, though, I feel badly about because this was a Republican administration. I feel good that the President accomplished this, but in the years since I would hear people talking and it sounded like we hadn't done anything. I told you a while ago, the first blacks that were hired in the Department of Agriculture, the first black lawyers, were hired under Benson. And the first black loan officer, because there were a lot of black farmers, was hired under Ezra Benson. The first black mail carrier was right here in Oklahoma. There were all kinds of firsts for civil rights. I've gotten to where I worry less about the criticism today because I think history will take care of this. I think at some point, twenty-five years from now, I would like to think that Eisenhower will have been given

credit for a lot of things, like civil rights. And he was very sensitive about the race issue.

Well, it was a different day. I'm biased about the whole thing, of course, but I treasure my days in the administration. I worked there seven years. And of course, I was very involved in all these other issues for two years, about two years in the White House. But I think the interesting things are the friendships that you make, they're lasting. You have to look back and say, well, something good was going on then to cause that friendship to last forever. Well, I have those White House friendships, people, a lot of them, I have not seen for a long time. Like Rocco Siciliano. He sent word to me through a lawyer in California whose parents live in Tulsa and he checked to see how we were doing. Well, I had written him a letter, he had written me a letter and I haven't seen him for, I don't know how long, twenty years at least. But you see, we still consider each other friends. And it wasn't a matter of being involved in a desperate effort because it wasn't that. Since then I've been in the Washington area and I, on occasion, feel like gee whiz, the hay's really down. But we never had a time in the Eisenhower Administration when I thought the hay was down completely, we never did. Of course, again I would say I was at third level. I might not have had all the facts, but there wasn't that sense of desperation anytime, or panicking like I have seen in the

White House since then. The Vietnam War, if Eisenhower'd stayed put or if Nixon had gotten elected, either one, we would have never wound up like it did. Absolutely not. Nixon was elected in sixty-eight, that is when I went back to Washington, D.C. the second time. Sometime, I want to look to see what the tie was with some of these appointments Eisenhower made because I had no tie with him. In fact, I was Senator Taft's Young Republican for Oklahoma. I was helping him get delegates for the '52 convention. My boss, Congressman Page Belcher, was for Taft, so I don't fit in that category at all, because I was, like I said, down at a lower level. But his first team, the selection for that first team was unusual.

Q: There's some cohesiveness to.

MR. WHEELER: Right. It could not have been any major, outstanding brilliancy on the part of the President. I guess it could have been; something did happen. He chose people that were completely loyal to him and worked well together. It was just that simple.

Q: He must have inspired their loyalty.

MR. WHEELER: He really did. You've heard things like Kennedy was the one that brought in new faces, new blood and all that sort of thing. That he tapped a source of leadership that Eisenhower never did and no one else ever

could have since. That's untrue. Because Eisenhower started the program of trying to get business to release people for two years, and then go home. I don't know what the numbers are, but I would say President Eisenhower probably brought in more business people from the outside world than Kennedy did. And Kennedy used to brag about that, as you may recall.

Q: That's very good summation.

MR. WHEELER: He put a stop to major conflicts in Latin America and, poor Lebanon, he had to send Marines over there once. I remember another thing, I think I was in the White House when this happened. He sent the Seventh Fleet over to sail up and down between Quemoy and Matsu and China. You may recall China used to bomb across the straits every now and then. You may have been over there. I never have been over there, but the map shows China within sight of these two islands. President Eisenhower decided that had gone on long enough so he sent the Seventh Fleet over there to stop it. I'm convinced that in these world trouble spots speaking with a strong voice is vital. That's the way you avoid trouble.

Q: And he had the credibility, the military credibility because of his own background.

MR. WHEELER: Yes, he did.

Mr. Clyde A. Wheeler, 11/15/90

Page 37

Q: Well, thank you very much.

MR. WHEELER: Thank you.