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Interviewee: Francis “Frank” Valeo

Interviewer: Don Oberdorfer

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Don Oberdorfer: The one out in Japan?

Frank Valeo: Yeah. I tried to get them, the American contribution [unintelligible] never came out of Congress. I missed it by two votes, I think, in the Senate—very close.

DO: I didn't realize that the U.S. didn't contribute to it. I thought we had. I thought that the U.S. had contributed to the U.N. [United Nations] University in Tokyo or [unintelligible].

FV: Well, Jim Hastert came to see me. He was president [unintelligible] at the time, and then he was the first chancellor of the university.

DO: It's in [unintelligible].

FV: He came to me and said they'd like to try to get the money out of Congress that was pledged up at the one U.N. meeting. So he and I spent the summer really trying to get the votes lined up. They'd lost one vote—one attempt to do it—and then we tried it again. Carl Moss (?), he tried it once, and it hadn't worked. So he came down and said “We'd like to try it again,” and we did. The real problem was that the one person could have done it was the senator from Illinois, [Charles] Percy, and he was for it. I had no problem with him. but he didn't show up that day to vote. And that really threw it off. He just had to leave town for something, and he just didn't show up for the vote.

DO: He probably was chairman of the committee then, right?

FV: Yeah. I can't remember exactly what happened. I think he was. We would have had it. I even got [Harry] Byrd of Virginia to be quiet about it. He didn't say that he got out. He would have been leading the opposition to it earlier. But he was a good personal friend of mine. I think out of the friendship, if nothing else, he decided he wouldn't do it that year, and he left it alone. But we missed it. I wasn't much of a lobbyist, but it was interesting to try it.

DO: Last time we talked about these trips of Mansfield and you—'53, '54, '55. I want to ask you some things about him in China. Of course, as you recognize, and I think you recognize in your oral history—and I talked to him about this the last time I saw him, which was this morning—the '52 campaign coming after he had been to China that first time '44, really, it was when China was a radioactive subject in American politics.

FV: Really something, yeah.

DO: And they made him out to be—

FV: “China Mike.”

DO: —Communist and everything else for bringing on the China revolution and all this nonsense. But it seems to have put a big inhibition in his activities with regard to doing something about China, for quite a number of years, starting with the political fallout of that year back in Montana.

FV: That's right. Toughest election he ever had.

DO: Yeah, really the only tough one I guess. Except for the first time he ran, he didn't make it.

FV: It was about that time, I guess, when he shifted from the House to the Senate.

DO: Yeah. Did he continue to be intensely interested in China, even though he couldn't say anything much about it, or what was...?

FV: Oh, he never lost his interest in it. He joined, I think, something called The Committee for One Thousand or something.

DO: One Million.

FV: One Million, yeah.

DO: That was to keep China out of the U.N. if I remember correctly.

FV: That's right. I think that's what it basically was for. He wanted no part of it. It was the one subject he would flare up on if you talked to him. He was so afraid of them being top of that [unintelligible], and it cost him the election as it did in that first one. I don't know if it was just that; it was also the fact that he was running in the year of Eisenhower, when Eisenhower was running high (?). But it's true. He was very leery about China, but he never lost his interest in it anyway. He wanted to get back to it if he could. Whenever he had an opportunity, he tried to do that. But, you see, it was difficult. Whenever he was asked a question by the press, he would give the stock answers that everybody else was using at that time. He wouldn't separate himself from the mainstream on it. Not for a long time.

DO: When did he start shifting on China, do you remember?

FV: I'm trying to remember exactly when that happened.

DO: I think the first major utterance that I know about was in '68, in fact, just around the time of Tet [Offensive], just after [President Lyndon B.] Johnson had had this conversation with him

about the Tet Offensive—, just before Johnson announced that he wasn't running again. He made the first lecture of the Mansfield Lecture Series.

FV: I remember the one very well... That's a major break at that point. W had an interesting conversation that brought that on at the time. I had been out on a date—I was single at the time—I was out with a schoolteacher from somewhere else, not Washington. She was in town, and I mentioned something about McCarthy in China—in some connection. She said, "Did MacArthur have anything to do with China?" She said—not MacArthur, McCarthy. "Was that McCarthy thing about China?" [laughs] Then it dawned on me for the first time in my life, my god, here's a teacher—she was considerably younger—and she doesn't even know what this was all about and here we are acting still at this late date in our lives as though it was yesterday.

I remember the conversation—I told him the story about the date, and he smiles at it and then he decided because he—I think he spoke to me about what subject he ought to use. I said, , "Isn't it time to take a look at China?" or something to that effect. That's really where it went at that time. And he said, "Well, let's see what it looks like," and he ran, he did the speech. It was a damn good speech he did at that time and very courageous, considering the general atmosphere, and he didn't get but one single negative comment on it in Montana. I think that after that time, he knew he was over the hump of that issue, and he could approach it at least. He wouldn't have to just shut his mind the minute he came anywhere near it. That, I think, was the critical feature. We went to China with Zhou Enlai—met Zhou Enlai the first time—

DO: This is after, now, Nixon's breakthrough, right? [President Richard M. Nixon breakthrough in [unintelligible].

FV: Yes, after Nixon's breakthrough. We were immediately after.

DO: With [Hugh] Scott.

FV: That's right. Zhou Enlai was the host of that meeting, and he had a dinner forum. You know how they did it in China, you usually had the discussion before you went into dinner, then you went to dinner and forgot about it. Good. [laughs] So, we were sitting, and Zhou Enlai said to him, he said, "Somebody gave me a copy of your speech." He said, "The university had a copy of it." We don't know how they got it. Then he said, "I said to Mr. [Henry] Kissinger when he came, 'Now I know where you get your ideas from!'" [laughs] And that was—Zhou Enlai told that story.

DO: Before that happened, Mansfield says that when Nixon came in, Nixon said to him—well he knew Nixon. He'd been in the House with Nixon.

FV: Right.

DO: Didn't know him real well but knew him a little bit. Of course, Nixon had been vice president, presiding over the Senate. Again, knew him a little bit. Nixon said, "I'd like you to have lunch with me once a month," or, "have breakfast with me once a month."

Mansfield said okay to it. His recollection is that many of those breakfasts, if not most of them, the subject was China.

FV: I'm not surprised.

DO: Just the two of them, and there weren't any other people around there.

FV: I wasn't familiar with those as such. I thought he had regular meetings with him, but I didn't think it was just the two—one-on-one.

DO: But Nixon, of course, was very interested in making his mark as he did.

FV: Nixon's view, I think—my own feeling was Nixon's view was primarily dominated by the idea that somehow or other, we could broker between the Soviet Union and China. I think that's what his main interest in it was. I don't think he had that much direct interest in China, although certainly it may have been. I don't know I thought it was the other factor that concerned him the most.

DO: Also, I think he saw it as a way to get some leverage on the Vietnamese.

FV: That too, yes.

DO: Because we didn't have much, withdrawing forces. When you went in '72 on the trip with Scott, immediately after—shortly after the Nixon trip—other than having a dinner with Zhou Enlai, was there anything particular that came out of this?

FV: He used the trip to basically reinforce the position that Nixon had established on his trip. Beyond that, he brought back word to the House—I mean, to the Senate—about the trip, which was, I think, effective in bringing about an effort to repeal one of those Jackson-sponsored laws for boycotts or something that he was sponsoring at the time. I'm pretty sure that helped to get it through. There was no problem getting it through Congress at that time.

DO: Did you have, or do you think he had, any advance warning that Nixon was going to—that Kissinger was going to go there; they were going to make some big breakthrough regarding China?

FV: No, it came as a complete surprise. It wasn't planned together, so it was pretty—I think Nixon really apologized to him for going in ahead, because we were making our own arrangements for him to go when that had happened.

DO: Oh, really?

FV: Yeah. We were going through Sihanouk, I guess it was, who was his friend.

DO: Yes. Sihanouk was living part of the time in Beijing, I think.

FV: That's right. He was in Beijing already at that point.

DO: Because already you had been kicked out of Cambodia.

FV: At some point it happened there, but he started even before, while he was still in Cambodia. He agreed to deliver a letter I think to Zhou Enlai. I think he knew Zhou Enlai. My impression was that he knew Zhou Enlai from his stay in Chongqing (?).

DO: No, he didn't. He was there at the same time in Chongqing, but he actually never met him. Never had actually met him. I guess they knew of each other, in a sense. Certainly, Mansfield knew of Zhou Enlai, and whether Zhou knew about him, probably years intervening, certainly, he would have known about him. By the way, I checked up on this. Mansfield did not go to China a second time. He was there in '44. The speech you remember where he said, "Bring back the boys," and all that—that actually took place in Washington. It was publicized in China, but he made it in the House of Representatives.

FV: Oh, really?

DO: Yeah.

FV: Isn't that funny. I thought he was the Speaker. I thought it was the racetrack in Shanghai.

DO: No, it was in Washington, D.C.

FV: Well, I know he said it here. I'm sure he said it many times. I thought he was there, passing through at that point. Because I was there, and I thought I read it in the local English-language newspaper there.

DO: But at any rate—

FV: You mean he made one trip—

DO: '44.

FV: —and that was for [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt.

DO: He actually wanted to make a trip for [President Harry S.] Truman. He wanted to go back but it never got it arranged. Did not get arranged.

FV: Isn't that interesting?

DO: That's what I think now. If I find out differently, I'll tell you.

FV: Yeah. I thought that he had been there when I was there because his name certainly was there because of the speech, yeah.

DO: Right. But at any rate, that was the '72 trip. Then he went back, I think, in '74. Did you go with him on that one?

FV: Yeah, I was on all of them.

DO: How many trips to China were there in the '70s?

FV: '72, '74, and '76. Just before he quit.

DO: The one—I have to look up when Zhou Enlai died, I thought he died—

FV: He died after the '74 trip.

DO: That's what I thought, yes. Because Deng Xiaoping—that was my first trip to China in '74, and Deng Xiaoping was temporarily lacking authority because Zhou Enlai was in the hospital.

FV: And he was filling in for him, that's right.

DO: Exactly. Then by '76—

FV: It was '74. '76 was—Mao's death. We were there just the time of the funeral, and they shuttled us to a different location. Originally, we were supposed to go to Beijing first, but I guess we went to Shenzhen (?) first, because of the—

DO: You were not there for the funeral, that just happened to be—

FV: That was a coincidence, actually.

DO: On those trips was there anything really... of course, he [Mansfield] described to me this meeting with Zhou Enlai at this hospital in '74. He believes he might have been—he and Mrs. Mansfield might have been—the last Americans to visit Zhou Enlai. It's hard to know but, probably among the last, certainly.

FV: That's right. He was among the last. No, not really that I can think of that would be a particularly memorable—

DO: I'll tell you an interesting story. I was covering the Nixon White House in '71, '72. I covered it from '69 when Nixon came in, until the middle of '72 when I went to Tokyo. They didn't tell me a lot. They didn't have terribly good relations with the *Washington Post*, even before Watergate. But I tried to get along with them. I mean, I'm not an ideological person, and we got along okay, I guess. But they really told us as little as they could get away with telling us. So, I developed a bunch of sources on the Hill, particularly Republicans. I figured, they've got to tell them—they've got to do something—they've got to tell the leadership, or else they don't have the maneuver room. One of the people I got to know pretty well was Hugh Scott. [Unintelligible] same Republican leader of the Senate.

FV: He's a very good friend of mine, actually.

DO: I went to see him one day—must've been around the spring of 1971. We were sitting there talking in his office. He said, "Don't quote me—and I don't know exactly what it's all about—but if I were you, I'd look into something between this administration and China." He said, "Something's going on regarding China." I knew that Scott was a big China buff. He had all these antiques [unintelligible].

FV: Yes, he had a great collection.

DO: So, I made an appointment with Henry Kissinger. We talked about this, that, and the other. Finally, I said, "Mr. Kissinger"—I exaggerated what I thought I knew—some reporters sometimes do. I said, "I understand there's a pretty good chance that before the next election, President Nixon may be sipping green tea in the Imperial Palace in Beijing."

Kissinger looked at me, and he said, "That is total bullshit." [laughs] He said, "That is total bullshit."

FV: [laughs] I can hear him saying it.

DO: "I don't know where you heard it, but it's total bullshit." By then, the whole plan was pretty well advanced, but of course, they weren't going to tip it off to a *Washington Post* reporter.

FV: The only thing I can say is that if he knew about it, I didn't know it from him. It would be very unlikely because that was the one subject we shared completely. I had no problem talking easily with him on China. It was something he had experienced, and I had experienced, and it was a common bond. He never moved, I thought—never moved without at least talking to me about it first.

So, [pauses] he may have known it, but I think the other thing that was going on was—at some point—my own theory was that Nixon picked it up, that he was...Well, he knew that Mansfield was trying to get to go to China, and he had always shared it with the administration. He always told them how he was going about it and everything else. Nixon always said, “Fine, you're doing the right thing. Just keep it up.” When he was discouraged about it, Nixon said, “That isn't such a bad response,” he said, “but you could still try.” So, I have a feeling that Nixon picked it up from him, not any other way.

DO: The bureaucracy was terrified about China.

FV: Oh, especially the State Department. [unintelligible], of course, they were hit the hardest by it. People like, you know, some of those names from after World War Two.

DO: [John Paton?] Davies.

FV: Yes, Davies.

DO: Vincent.

FV: I can't think of them all now, but I remember how they were hit so unfairly on it.

DO: But you all must have had some—maybe not all of a sudden from China—but you must have had some pretty good information coming out of the bureaucracy. I'm amazed when I look at these memos about Vietnam and stuff. You look them in the context of what was going on at the time. It seems so often, just when they were about to decide something, Mansfield writes this memo. Not that he convinced them to do what he wanted, but the timing was so pressured in a sense.

FV: Well, I think part of it was the fact that he talked with Johnson—I don't know about the others—and Nixon. Before that, it was somewhat sketchy, but it started with Johnson. He used to meet so frequently with him and always give him a hard time on Vietnam. Johnson finally got around to, you know, trying to jump him on it and say, “We're going to do this, don't you think it's a good idea?” as Johnson would do. Then you were supposed to fold at that point and say, “No.” Mansfield would never fold if he didn't think it was good.

He read the papers. Basically, he read the papers. He used to tell me, “I don't like those secret sessions of the committee, because what you get at the secret sessions, you'll find in the [*Washington*] *Post* three days before,” or the [*New York*] *Times*, or whatever it might be. So, he said, “If you go to the secret sessions, you shut up. You can't tell about what happened.” He said, “I'd rather read the newspapers and be free to say what I please.” That basically was part of his technique.

DO: So, you think it was more just keeping up from reading the papers than the bureaucracy telling you what's going on on the inside?

FV: Oh, absolutely. I don't think the bureaucracy [laughs] was that well informed on it. Part of the problem of the bureaucracy is that they repeat the same stories to each other, and it becomes a kind of a line of thought that you don't deviate from because of your fears that you might be on the wrong side of it. Something like that happens, I'm not sure.

DO: I spent two days last week in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. I happened to be in Boston for another reason, and so I spent a couple of days. I have to tell you, I found it rather disappointing. Kennedy apparently was not much of a guy for keeping any notes or records. He liked to do things kind of on impromptu basis. He talked to people, and when he would talk to a guy like Mansfield, who was serious, if the note in the file says 'off the record,' nobody had taken notes. Just be the president and the senator, or whoever else it was.

FV: Usually Kenny O'Donnell was there. Then you could get from him a lot of the stuff that you wouldn't get any other way.

DO: That's right. In Kenny's book, he tells about two meetings on Vietnam with Mansfield. Kenny's book says that—of course, he describes the situation down in Florida when Senator Mansfield gave his report of the '62 trip.

FV: Yeah, I remember that.

DO: He went out on a boat on Palm Beach on the lake and so forth. Then he says that in the spring of '63—I was unsuccessful in pinpointing this one date—Mansfield spoke up at a congressional leadership meeting about Vietnam in his typical way. He objected to troops and so on, and that Kennedy was irritated but he asked Kenny to bring Mansfield down to see him. That's when he said, "I'm agreeing with you more about Vietnam than I did last year. And I can't do it now, but I'm going to start withdrawing American forces from Vietnam."

FV: That's a reasonable account. I imagine something like that happened. I'm not familiar with the details of that, other than to know that he did at some point. The reason why I thought—the tip off to me on Kennedy's change was not too long before he was assassinated. I think it was his last press conference when somebody asked him about Vietnam, and he said, "Well, you know we can't do for them what they won't do for themselves." I thought the first time he ever said it that clearly. Up until then the whole theory was: let's go in and do it. That's exactly what Johnson did for them, in effect. But he saw it the first time and somebody—one of the press people—asked him, "Well—" [pauses] He said, , "We can't do it. What's our alternative?" or something to that effect. He said, "Well, there are other examples of what can be done." He said there's Burma and Cambodia. He mentioned those two places specifically in that press conference. Meaning neutralization, which of course, was basically what Mansfield wanted without being able to say it because neutralization was a dirty word and is still. That's

basically—I think if you look at Kennedy’s last press conference, you might get some insight into that.

DO: Okay, I’ll look at that. He said that the thing about, we can’t do it for them. He also said just before the coup that ousted Ngô Đình Diệm—and this is one of the statements along those lines, one of the signals that the U.S. is kind of washing its hands of Ngô Diệm. Which brings up something else—

[phone rings]

FV: Excuse me a minute.

[Break in audio]

DO: You had several meetings with the Vietnamese ambassador and his wife—

FV: Trần Văn Chương.

DO: Yeah, Nhu’s, I guess Madame Nhu’s [Trần Lệ Xuân] father and mother [Thân Thị Nam Trân], and those are recorded—I mean, recorded, you made notes. One of them is in the Foreign Relations of the United States State Department document series memorandum from Senator Mansfield’s legislative assistant Valeo to Senator Mansfield, June 15th, 1962. Then you met them again in October, him and his wife. Both times, they were saying that the Diệm administration is in very deep trouble.

FV: Yes.

DO: And that Nhu [Ngô Đình Nhu] has gone off the reservation and so forth.

FV: I’ll never forget that one interview with the two of them there, was at a dinner, I guess when we were sitting and talking, just the three of us. His wife [Thân Thị Nam Trân] was a very charming woman, in some ways, and she had this look of consternation on her face. They had just been in Vietnam, and she said to me, “You know, you have to do something about these people. You have to talk to them”—meaning her daughter [Madame Nhu].

I said, “This is this conversation for your daughter. She’s your daughter. Can’t you talk to her?”

She said, “Me?” She says, “I’m afraid. I’m afraid to talk to her.” It gave me a sense of the tremendous power that the daughter had. She had her mother scared to death!

DO: Later they were killed.

FV: It sounds a bit like the old Chinese—the last empresses of China—China with the empress.

DO: Yes. This is the thing that's printed in the Foreign Relations series.

FV: Oh, yes. [pauses]

DO: I don't know if this was the one, or maybe the other meeting you had.

[long pause]

DO: Bring that back?

FV: Yeah, a little bit.

DO: The other meeting, the last paragraph—this one was in October. You met them again at dinner, just the three of them. Last paragraph, I suppose is what you said:

I asked the ambassador's wife whether or not she mentioned her concerns particularly in respect to the danger of assassination to her daughter. Her response was that, quote, she didn't dare, unquote. At this point, she emphasized again the need for the highest confidence with respect to the conversation, noting I was the only person to whom she and her husband had communicated this concern. She seemed to be almost in deadly personal fear of her own daughter and her daughter's husband.

FV: Right. It amazed me because I just don't think of a daughter being that kind of a threat to a parent.

DO: Did you ever meet Madame Nhu??

FV: Yeah, met her on the trip with Johnson, when Johnson was there. She was at her glamorous height at that point.

DO: Whatever happened to her? She wasn't killed with her husband, was she?

FV: No, the last I heard, she was in Italy living in Rome. But that was so many, many years ago.

DO: Another thing I want to ask you, this sort of comes up to the whole question about Mansfield's posture towards these administration events. Harry McPherson wrote his book [*A Political Education: A Washington Memoir, 1972*] about—his kind of memoir or whatever, which is pretty good. I like it, anyway. He's got a section in there [leafs through book], oh, here it is. He has this to say about William Knowland, California—that Knowland was Republican leader in 1956.

[reads from *A Political Education*] “When an issue arose on which his views were in irreconcilable conflict with Eisenhower's, he exchanged his leader's chair for one at the back of the chamber. From there, he launched a heated attack on the administration policy. It was a respectable and perhaps logical thing to do. Undoubtedly, it served notice to the man in the White House that in Knowland they dealt with an independent spirit. But they knew this already, and the effect of his performance was chiefly to demonstrate through a role play, sharp cleavage between traditional and moderate Republicans. Afterwards, I wondered about the best course for a Senate leader when he could not stomach a policy that he might normally be expected to defend. Knowland had chosen a clean break. Though he might sleep more easily at night, he'd also weakened his party.

Mansfield faced the same dilemma in the '60s over the issue of the Vietnam War. For a long time, he simply avoided taking a stand in direct opposition to his administration. But as his active support was needed, his silence was almost as irritating to the White House as an exposed confrontation. It was not enough for a Democratic leader to look the other way as the line was being drawn in the dirt. In a parliamentary system, a cabinet member caught in such a position would almost certainly resign. Alben Barkley, when leader, once did so in a conflict with FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], but that was unusual. In America, the two branches were, after all, separate and unequal and co-equal.”

Brings up the whole question of how Mansfield dealt with this business of being majority leader, yet on a matter of very great importance—not just Vietnam narrowly, but Indochina generally and so on—he was really in strong opposition to what the administration was doing. And he was saying so privately, and at times, saying so public. Yet he never really drew the line. He never really tried to make it a face-off type of thing.

FV: No, he almost played it dumb when he got questions, which would have brought him to that line, where he would have to choose one or the other. He would either deliberately misunderstand or something of the sort. That was his usual approach to that on the public aspect of it. He felt that he'd be more useful by privately trying to influence the president. It was the only way he could do it and still remain as majority leader. Otherwise, he's right—Harry's right—he would have had to resign at some point. Not because we have a parliamentary system, but because it would have been an untenable situation for him to be in if he couldn't at least avoid bitter criticism of the president in public. There was no way. He would not have done that, and he didn't do it. He never really aimed his criticism directly at Johnson. It was always at the policies themselves. In terms of—he was still the president, he was still responsible for conducting it. Until the very end, when he finally decided to make the pitch and change policy by legislation. Which he fought doing up until the very end, because he thought he could do it another way, and he didn't have the votes the other way. He knew that too.

DO: The issue was Cambodia finally turned him, right? Nixon in Cambodia.

FV: I think that was the main one. That appalled me. For the reason again, because he thought Nixon was running in the opposite direction at that point, that he was running to get back towards the neutralization of Cambodia. Of course, it didn't turn out to be that way at all. He was doing exactly what Johnson had contemplated doing in the previous administration, but didn't, which was to extend the war to wherever it was, wherever the Viet Minh might have gone and that included Cambodia.

DO: Did Mansfield ever talk about his anomalous position as majority leader and how he would deal with this issue?

FV: No, he never talked about it as such. He never made much of it. He never talked about it even to me—that he felt he was in an anomalous position.

DO: But it really was clear that he was.

FV: I know, but there wasn't any point in talking about it. No point. If you can do nothing about it, why talk about it? That was his view all the time. He didn't like just to be doing things to be doing them. Unless he saw a chance, really, to accomplish some clear-cut end that he had in mind, he would avoid it. He never saw that in the Senate, and certainly in the Congress as a whole, until after that election in which it brought a whole flock of new congressmen in who were opposed to the war. When that happened, then you had, potentially, the votes to change policy, but only potentially. Even then, it would have been an incredibly difficult job. And it was. But partly because Johnson himself saw he couldn't go on the way he was going, and it was no point in pushing him any further. Basically, that's when the change came.

DO: So, the election that you're talking about, the election of '70 when Nixon...

FV: Nixon, I meant, not Johnson.

DO: Yeah, 1969, or '68 election.

FV: Yeah, right.

DO: Which brought in Nixon, but brought in the new congress.

FV: Then the '70 election—

DO: The '70 election was a big thing.

FV: Yeah, the big turnover.

DO: Yeah, that made a difference too.

FV: It did. That's when he decided—it was beginning to approach the point where the only hope he had—he used to say that, he said, “The Congress are all the people have got now.” He said, “That's why they're writing to us,” he said, “because we're all they've got.”

DO: Then in '72, Nixon won again in a big landslide.

FV: Yeah, that's right, but the Congress stayed the same.

DO: But then Watergate was just starting—was—

FV: Beginning to develop, yeah.

DO: Beginning to develop. By the '74 election, Nixon was out of there, and [President Gerald] Ford was running.

FV: Ford for president.

DO: Yeah, against Jimmy Carter.

DO: So partly, this then was a calculation of how much support you could get on the Hill.

FV: I say it was calculated every day in trying to figure out where we stood in terms of votes if anything came to a vote. I know that he must have been doing that his own mind, if no other way.

DO: Do you have any close relatives or anybody who was out there in Vietnam?

FV: No. But I had a nephew who was in the navy; he was on patrol—a naval officer—he was on patrol off the Vietnamese coast, but that was all.

He does it all night long if you want to know the truth; it'd drive you crazy. [referring to a pet?] [laughs]

DO: What was the story about the eulogy [Mansfield' eulogy for President John F. Kennedy] and the ring thing business? You know, after Kennedy's death?

FV: He wanted to do it. He had read something in the paper, and he wanted to do it. He said, “Why couldn't I base the eulogy on something like this?” It was his own idea to do it that way.

DO: Did you write this thing?

FV: I did most of the writing on it. We had some—[unintelligible name] came in and threw on some words, and he himself went over it. Yeah, it was essentially a job I did for him, but it was an interesting response. I think it was *Newsweek* that said it was in very bad taste. [laughs] That was their reaction to it. It amused me because we probably got more favorable mail on that than any other single thing we did in all the years, and it came from all over the world.

DO: Mrs. Kennedy thought it great.

FV: Yeah, Mrs. Kennedy thought it was great. I guess it was translated into about 12 different languages. It was put to music that somebody did a tone poem the National—NBC Symphony, I think, played it, and somebody narrated for it on the first anniversary of Kennedy's death. Another fellow put it into a popular song, and there were several ballads written on it. There were a number of things like that.

DO: It was almost like poetry—almost like a poetic—

FV: Well, that was the only way, it seemed to me, that you could do that. In connection with the theme of taking a ring from a finger of the deceased. Otherwise, I don't know how you would have done it except that way.

DO: But basically, you wrote it with him, or what?

FV: Well, I used to draft stuff, and then he'd go over it, and then I'd draft some more, maybe. Eventually, he'd say it looks all right, and it'd go.

DO: Must have been quite a day.

FV: Yeah, I worked the night on that one. I think I worked through the night on that one. I had a young son then. He was only one child, and he was very young. He was kind of an inspiration because we had an Irish housekeeper, and she only came to work for us because we had something to do with the Kennedys and so on. [laughs] When she said she'd come to work for us, she said, "Do you have something to do with the Kennedys?"

"You might say that," I said. [laughs] Then she decided to come and work for us.

She says then, "Well then, I'll come and work for you." She had been crying all day long with the kid. Then that night, we were sitting at dinnertime, he said "[Unintelligible] Kennedy is dead." He was about three or four years old. He said, "He's not dead. I saw him on TV just now!" It was interesting.

DO: Were you living on the Hill, or where?

FV: No, we were living in Mount Pleasant.

DO: I have one thing to ask you. [William Conrad] Gibbons, this is guy who did these things on Vietnam [*The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War* (5-volume series)]—and I've got copies of them all.

FV: It's good. It's a good job. Mansfield didn't like him as a person for some reason or another. But it's good. It's a good job. If you're going to do that kind of a job, that's the way it ought to be done. He did a real good job on it.

DO: Well, he is a historian. He's still working on it. He's still writing, and he's still working on it.

FV: Is he still working on it?

DO: Yeah. He's finished up through the beginning of '68, I believe. But now he's got another volume.

FV: He put his whole life into that.

DO: He lives down somewhere near Charlottesville.

FV: Yeah, he lives in Virginia or somewhere, I knew that.

DO: He and I are going to get together in October because—

FV: Well, give my regards when he is.

DO: You could get an oral history for him.

FV: Well, it wasn't so much an oral history. He was doing one of the volumes, or getting ready to do them, and he talked to me about it at that time.

DO: He considers it an oral history because he's footnoting this in some of these volumes: "Frank Valeo, Oral History, Such-and-Such Date." He said on these things that he will make them available to me, but he has to get the permission of the person who gave it.

FV: I didn't recall doing an oral history with him—

DO: Well, it's probably just an interview.

FV: —his basic notes for it, yeah.

DO: Which he considers an oral history.

FV: Could be.

DO: At any rate, do you mind giving me permission to look at your thing?

FV: No problem. Sure, by all means.

DO: Let's see. [rustles something]

FV: That would be even fresher than the one—the one that—

DO: Yeah, it was closer to the time.

FV: Yeah, it was right after I got out of—I had an office downtown then.

[Long pause]

I'm sure there's nothing very terribly incriminating in there.

DO: [laughs] I wouldn't say anything incriminating.

FV: Okay, take that out [laughs] with that understanding. I can't imagine what it would be.

[Long pause]

DO: Why don't I just write that, and you—

[Break in audio]

DO: I will see him in October because I'm going down to Charlottesville for some meeting and I called him. He's going to come over to Charlottesville and spend the afternoon together. Because he's got great—on Vietnam, I mean, he's got—

FV: A collection.

DO: Not only just a collection, but a great sense of what the whole progression.

FV: Is he at the university down there or something?

DO: No. He was at this university out here in suburban Virginia. Then I think he just retired to some small town near Charlottesville.

FV: He's a loner, basically. He was a loner then, I remember, yeah.

DO: He sounded perfectly delighted to get together with me. He'd read articles of mine in the [*Washington*] *Post*. He'd read my book on the Tet Offensive, and he was quite familiar with that and so on. So, we'll see.

One of the things I did get out of the Kennedy Library—they had an index card for every time some outsider would come see the president, and there were about at least three dozen index cards for Mansfield because almost every week was one of these leadership meetings, leadership breakfasts. Bingo, bingo, bingo, week after week after week after week, he [unintelligible].

FV: That went on, as I as, it as a regular pattern.

DO: Then there would be other meetings—

FV: Special.

DO: Special meetings, which oftentimes if he was with some one or two other senators, or sometimes with LBJ—

FV: Or with a group, over with the House leaders. A combination.

DO: Yeah, the House leaders. But he was in that place; he was in the White House a lot during the Kennedy years.

FV: All the time. Well, see, the problem was that the Kennedy administration had more the Senate, more than the House in terms of their legislative program.

DO: He must have worked very closely with him.

FV: Who? Kennedy?

DO: Mansfield and the Kennedy White House must have worked very closely. We've got—there's a thing in there from Larry O'Brien who work with this, and Mike Manatos, who was the—

FV: Manatos, yeah. He was a liaison. Much of that came out of—well no, that was later. No, a lot of it came out of the legislation on civil rights. That was a difficult one, and it went on for months on end. Mike was always around, and Larry O'Brien would come occasionally to the Hill for that. Bobby Kennedy would come down. They sort of touch base with the majority leader—that we had arranged a deal with them.

DO: Do you think the job of majority leader was satisfying to him, or just something he worked at?

FV: Oh, yes. He didn't accept it at first, and he grumbled at it and everything early on, but basically, when he once did it, I think he liked to do it. He got better and better with it. I think it was more satisfactory to him after Johnson took over than before, because Kennedy was really on top of the situation in a way that Lyndon never was. Lyndon was Lyndon, that's all. He was different.

DO: But Kennedy was closer to the legislative process?

FV: Not so much to the legislature process. He was closer to the issues, and he was closer to the reality that we were dealing with at the time. You couldn't compete with Kennedy, for one thing. Not that Mansfield wanted to compete with Johnson, but in effect, you had—it had the result because Johnson was so damn dug in on this thing, and Mansfield was convinced he was going in the wrong direction. So, he had something to fight against. You couldn't do that with Kennedy.

DO: You're thinking particularly now of Vietnam and [unintelligible]?

FV: I was thinking particularly of Vietnam, yeah.

DO: I'm going to talk to some of those Kennedy people. Ted Sarge is still around.

FV: Well, Ted was, of course, one of his real assets—Kennedy's real asset. He was a great writer for the sort of thing that we're doing.

DO: Manatos may still be around.

FV: No, he's dead.

DO: Did he die?

FV: Yeah, he died some years ago.

DO: Of course, O'Brien is gone

FV: I didn't know that Larry had died.

DO: Yeah, and I had a great friend who handled the House, Henry Wilson. He's dead.

FV: I didn't know Henry.

DO: He was a House of Representatives guy. Mike Manatos was in the Senate, more or less.

FV: How about Claude [unintelligible]?

DO: Jesus, I hadn't thought about him for years.

FV: Yeah, and the only reason I thought of him is because my son used to go to school with his daughter, and they were friends.

DO: He dealt with the Senate too.

FV: He dealt with the Senate. Mostly the Western senators. [sighs] They were great times.

DO: Anyway, thanks for your help.

FV: Okay, I hope it's helpful.

DO: Yep, and some future time when I get further along, I'll probably—

[End of interview]