

SJP RECOLLECTIONS OF TRIP TO THE JOHNSON RANCH

At about 9:15 on Friday night, September 29, I received a call from the Attorney General. He said that I should be at Andrews Air Force Base at 8:50 in the morning to go to the Ranch. He said there would be Barefoot Sanders, Eddie Weisl, and himself and perhaps another and that he was not sure what the purpose of the trip was. I am now back from the trip to the Ranch on Saturday. The purpose was for the President to announce the appointment of Dean Griswold as Solicitor General, Ed Weisl as Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Division and myself as Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Rights Division.

We flew down in a Jet Star taking three hours and fifteen minutes. The President and Mrs. Johnson met us when we landed, and we drove back to the Ranch house. The President went in to change from his western clothes for a family picture, and Mrs. Johnson chatted with us on the lawn. Then she left for the picture, and we continued chatting. Bloody Marys were served.

One by one the President called those who had come down in to speak with him. The Attorney General came out and asked me if it would be satisfactory for me to come over initially as a Special Assistant and then to be appointed Assistant Attorney General as soon as John Doar had completed the trial of the criminal case against those charged with the Neshoba County murders. I said it sounded good provided the President would make clear that I would assist during the transition to the new D.C. government.

The President then called me in and said that he would be announcing my appointment as a Special Assistant to the Attorney General for urban problems, civil rights and crime. The President asked Ramsey what my pay would be, and Ramsey said he could give me no higher than an 18, which was \$25,600. The President asked me what I was earning, and I said \$26,000.

He said that I could stay on the White House payroll until I moved to the Assistant Attorney Generalship. Shortly thereafter we gathered together with the President, Mrs. Johnson, his two daughters, Pat Nugent, and Chuck Robb, and went over to the outbuilding where the press conference was to be held. The President was joined by Dean Griswold and Ed Weisl on his right, Mrs. Johnson and I on his left. He made the announcements, and I will attach to this a copy of the transcript.

I recall a feeling as the announcements were made that it was a thrill to be a part of this activity and present.

After the press conference, we drove with the President to greet some visiting legislators who had been touring his birthplace home.

After that, we returned to the ranch house where I called Walter Washington to tell him of the President's action. Walter was out on a walking tour and I advised Banetta. She asked if I was pleased and if this was what I wanted. Those were questions I expected, and I said that it was the right decision and the right action and it would be right. I also called Ruth and told her. I cut that conversation short as the President was about to talk to Chief Justice Warren to tell him of the actions on a call placed by Ramsey Clark. We were in the President's office there which is a pleasant, ranch-style room with the President's desk and two secretary desks at the other side of the room.

After the telephone calls, we were invited to stay on for lunch, or indeed had been invited earlier. We went into the dining room which was very colorfully set in Mexican china with Mexican food to be served. Mrs. Johnson sat at one end of the table and the President at the other. I was on the President's left, Dean Griswold on his right. Ramsey Clark was on

Mrs. Johnson's right, and Ed Weisl on her left. Also at the table were Lynda Bird and Chuck Robb, Barefoot Sanders, and a friend of Lynda Bird's boyfriend. The luncheon discussion was informal and pleasant.

The President was quite friendly to me and seemed interested in me. At one point in the lunch, the President turned to me and addressed the entire table saying how proud he was of me for having successfully steered the Reorganization Plan for the District of Columbia through the Congress. The President said that it was a magnificent job and that the people of the United States and the nation itself owed me a real debt of gratitude. The President said that I had exceeded his expectations and had done more than he had expected. He said that it was very rare that this ever occurred as he generally found that people did not do as much as expected. Mrs. Johnson then asked why when this Congress was so difficult the Reorganization Plan had gone through. I advised her that there had been a number of crucial decisions including the President's own decision to delay sending up the plan until we had talked to each of the Congressmen about it. The President commented that he felt that the Reorganization Plan had bypassed the District Committees and felt somewhat sheepish about this. He said in a humorous vein that he had campaigned for Congress on the court-packing plan and then when he got to Congress, it had already been defeated. He drew from this the parallel that it was not wrong to proceed by the Reorganization Plan if this was the only way to get the job done.

After lunch, we went in the ranch house living room and chatted with the President for perhaps one-half hour. He wanted to know what the reactions of the District Committee members were and urged that I make certain that each of the nominees to the City Council understood

the conflict of interest laws and were in compliance with them. There was discussion, of course, of other matters at lunch and after lunch.

After about thirty minutes, the President got up, we said thank you. He said to me I will be seeing you, and then Mrs. Johnson drove us to the plane.

On the way back, both Barefoot Sanders and Ramsey Clark commented on the nice words the President had said about the work that I had done. Ramsey particularly said that it was very very rare for the President to make the kind of statements he made to me. He said that rarely did the President think someone had done more than he had expected, and rarely did he make such a comment.

SJP