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WHEELER

WHEELER, CLYDE

(OH-388)

116 pages

OPEN

Confidential Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture, 1954-57; Special Assistant to the Secretary, 1957-59; Staff Assistant to President Eisenhower, 1959-60.

DESCRIPTION: Interview #1. Personal information: Oklahoma background, education, military service, first involvement with politics; removal to Washington with Congressman Page Belcher (1951) as administrative assistant; early contacts, experiences, impressions of Washington; early disappointments; Belcher's Oklahoma constituency; Wheeler's involvement with agricultural concerns; Wheeler's growing satisfaction with political affairs; relationship with Congressman Belcher; work with National Young Republican organization; election as a national vice-president for southwestern region (1952); contacts made with young Republicans across country; work for Senator Taft in Oklahoma as Young Republican organizer (1952); the Republican situation in Oklahoma; the Chicago national convention and the swing to Eisenhower; the pro-Taft—pro Eisenhower atmosphere in Oklahoma prior to state convention; Wheeler's run for Congress (1960) and the development of a two-party system in Oklahoma; Wheeler's observations on make-up of groups supporting Taft and Eisenhower in Oklahoma; assessment of Taft as a viable candidate; Taft's political stance; Taft's character; thoughts on the national convention and changes taking place in the Republican Party.

Interview #2. Work for Belcher and Eisenhower campaigns (1952); organizing and financing the Young Republicans of Oklahoma; differences of opinion between the younger and older elements of the party concerning party strategies; observations on Eisenhower's stamina; Young Republican push to attract young black voters in Oklahoma; Belcher's re-election and the return to Washington; preparations for the new administration and contacts with Sherman Adams; Charles Willis, Jr., and patronage jobs; general dissatisfaction over patronage handling; Eisenhower's non-partisan attitude; Wheeler's comments on two-party system and "new blood" needs; frustrations of getting a new administration into program of action because of entrenched interests; the "federal" party and change; voicing of concerns to White House staff regarding patronage (Belcher to Sherman Adams and Bryce Harlow and Wheeler to Charlie Willis); organization of the "Bull Elephants" (association of Republican assistants to Republican House members); Senator Andrew Schoeppel-Eisenhower-patronage; background to Wheeler's move to the Department of Agriculture: Ross Rizley's appointment as assistant secretary over the commodity programs and his need for an assistant, Secretary Ezra Taft Benson's interview of Wheeler, Wheeler's qualifications for post and appointment; Benson's assistant secretaries (Rizley, Ervin L. Peterson, and Earl Butz); Benson's courage as Secretary of Agriculture; desire of House Republican members that Benson resign post; meeting of Benson with representatives Walter Judd (Minnesota) and Arthur L. Miller (Nebraska); presence of Wheeler (now Benson's assistant) at meeting; Milton

Eisenhower's influence on Benson's becoming Secretary; Benson's philosophy of government service and refusal to resign; Wheeler's assessment of Benson's stance.

Interview #3. Wheeler's duties under Ross Rizley (an assistant secretary of agriculture); Wheeler's appointment as special assistant to Secretary Ezra Taft Benson; duties involving congressional relations/political considerations; Benson's lack of political background; development of liaison between Congress and Department of Agriculture; LeRoy LeMaster (assistant to Wheeler); Benson's philosophy regarding price supports and governmental control of agricultural commodities; problems inherent under a control system; Wheeler's comments on his job responsibilities; Wheeler's working relationships with Congressmen: Charlie Halleck (minority leader), Joe Martin (Speaker), Les Arends (Republican whip), Sam Rayburn (Speaker), Lyndon Johnson (majority leader—Senate), Cliff Hope (ranking Republican on House Agriculture Committee), Bill Hill (succeeded Hope on Agriculture Committee), Robert A. Taft (minority leader—Senate), William Knowland (Taft's successor), Everett Dirksen (Knowland's successor), George Aiken (ranking Republican on Senate Agriculture Committee), Hubert Humphrey (ranking Democrat, chairman of Senate Agriculture Committee), problems with Republican leaders and Benson; problems with Democratic leaders and Benson.

[Dwight D, Eisenhower Library Oral History, interviews 1, 2, 3 by Dr. Maclyn Burg, Nov. 14, 1974; Feb. 5, 1975; July 2, 1975]