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# Levinson, Lawrence E. "Larry" oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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## **Interview with Lawrence E. “Larry” Levinson by Don Nicoll**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Levinson, Lawrence E. “Larry”

### **Interviewer**

Nicoll, Don

### **Date**

September 20, 2002

### **Place**

Washington, D.C.

### **ID Number**

MOH 370

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### **Biographical Note**

Lawrence E. “Larry” Levinson was born in New York City, New York on August 25, 1930. Levinson attended Syracuse University and Harvard Law School. He joined the Air Force after college and then went to Washington D.C. where he was reunited with his old friend from law school, Joe Califano. He took a job at the Pentagon, and in July of 1965, Levinson moved to the White House where he began work on the Model Cities Program.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: educational background; working at the Pentagon; the White House; starting the Model Cities Program; Model Cities task force; naming the Model Cities Program; Demonstration Cities Program; Ed Muskie’s involvement in the Model Cities Program; and putting together a Model Cities task force.

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## **Transcript**

**Don Nicoll:** It is Friday, the 20th of September, 2002. We are in the offices of Verner & Lipfert, and Don Nicoll is interviewing Larry Levinson. Larry, would you state your full name and spell it for us, please?

**Larry Levinson:** Sure, delighted, Don. Thank you. It's good to see you again. My name is Lawrence, L-A-W-R-E-N-C-E, middle initial E, last name Levinson, L-E-V as in Victor - I-N-S-O-N. My date of birth is 8/25/1930.

**DN:** And where were you born?

**LL:** I was born in New York City, New York, and went to school in the public schools of New York City, Forest Hills High School. And then from there attended Syracuse University, upstate New York, and majored in political science. And after my *magna cum laude* departure from Syracuse ended up as a matter of tossing a coin between Harvard Law School and Yale Law School, and I probably picked the wrong one but I wish I had, maybe I did make the right choice. And [I] ended up going to Harvard and entered Harvard Law School in that fairly golden era of that university's last great ability of students to interact with the great professors of the thirties and the forties. The great authors of major text books like the one on, Fuller on Contracts, and Lewis & Scott on Trusts and the real great heroes of Langdell Hall at Harvard.

And so as it turned out, well, I will connect the dots a little later, as the random of class selection occurred. My classmate, my roommate actually, ended up being a Holy Cross graduate named

Joe Califano, whose paths in a sort of coincidental way merged later on in life that would set the predicate and the premise for my story about Ed Muskie and Don Nicoll and Model Cities.

**DN:** Now, were you always interested in the study of law?

**LL:** Well, it fascinated me for a couple of reasons. It was the broadest of all disciplines in the sense of requiring sort of clear thinking, good writing, a sense of history, a sense of sort of organizing one's thoughts, looking for the relevant and doing all the kinds of things that a good legal education would bring to you, as contrasted from some of the more business school or classical works.

I just thought the law had just a perfect interaction of logic, thinking, writing, exposition, history and precedent, and so for all those reasons it was a great choice. And looking back after many years of practice in corporate life and in this wonderful law firm of which I'm a partner over the last eight years is, was the right choice, right school, so I think I did okay.

**DN:** Did your parents encourage you in not just going to law school, but in the approach to scholarship and life work that you just described?

**LL:** Very interesting question. My mother, named Sarah, came from an immigrant family that came over in the early nineteen hundreds from somewhere in Lithuania. And she, in her own way, given an immigrant family, settled in a wonderful place I've actually gone to visit since down in the lower East Side called the Henry Street Settlement. Which was one of the wonderful, supported then, houses that young immigrant women or young women growing up in that part of New York could come to and read poetry and dance and act. And it was a great impact on my mother's life, who then took on from there a career in poetry and acting, and sort of a departure from her generation.

My dad, at the same time, was another interesting story. He ended up moving out to Denver when he was a young guy and spent most of his growing up life in Denver, and then was trained as an accountant. So it was sort of an interesting discipline between a mother who was sort of the world of arts and letters, and my dad who was an accountant, who sort of set a precedent for me in a way because he loved government service.

And accountants were kind of rare in those days, and for a guy who was out of the far west, Denver and parts therein, took an examination for civil servants. And he got a letter one day saying 'you have been hired by the Internal Revenue Service as a junior accountant'. And the jobs weren't all that great in those days. He was a graduate of the University of Denver, and got assigned to an IRS division back in the Denver region. And then not too long after that he got a letter saying 'we're building up our capacity in New York City and we'd like you to leave your post and go over and start working in the IRS division in New York', which he did. And he had a long, very interesting, successful government career, which of course made me very interested in government as well, seeing my Dad's preoccupation with IRS enforcement. So that's the sort of history.

Both my parents said, "Whatever you feel like you think will make you the happiest, fulfill you,

go ahead and pursue and to the degree that we can afford to do it we'll do it." And so believing in education, they were very nice to me, and I worked my way not a lot, but a little bit, through Syracuse and then went on to Harvard and spent most of my time studying with Califano.

**DN:** Was it really studying with Joe, or was it -?

**LL:** Well, we had a study group. And when I recall the movie *The Paper Chase* in the early seventies, it was sort of a stylistic version of how you got together and worked in groups. And it was interesting to see the interaction between our study group, preparing us for our exams, and our friendships that lasted for the rest of our lives. So Joe and I were, I think, as close friends as you can get just by the luck of the draw. And then after we graduated we were in roughly the post, Korea had, the war in Korea had just ended in June of 1955. However, we were deferred to complete our law school education, and immediately after graduating the draft boards couldn't wait to throw us into the service, so Joe went into the Navy and I went into the Army.

And then as, just to sort of fast forward a little bit to give you a little bit of the picture or coincidence, I hadn't seen Joe for a couple of years. And when I got out of the service I called my, the dean of the Law School and said, you know, "I think I probably want to follow a career in public service. I don't know whether I want to join a large law firm, I'm out of the service now. I think I really want to go to Washington and I would like to ask you to set up some meetings for me with some folks in the government that you know, and maybe give me a good recommendation."

So one beautiful day I came up from New Mexico where I was stationed, took a room at the Hilton, took my first hot bath that I could remember in a long time after being in the service, and then interviewed at IRS, my Dad's agency, and the FCC. And then one day while I was wandering around town, somebody said, "You ought to go over and see the General Counsel of the Air Force at the Pentagon. They're looking for lawyers and Harvard lawyers may be of particular attraction to this military department," that was really relatively newer than most of them in '55. It had been created by the NSA Act of, National Security Act of '47 as a separate part of the Defense Department. So I was just really fortunate. I ended up in the Air Force as an attorney advisor in GS-9 and had the most wonderful career in procurement. I had a little bit of background on that when I was in the service.

And one day in the library of the Pentagon, each of the services had, the Navy had the best library, and that was the library up on the third floor somewhere in the Pentagon, I was going through the stacks and I looked around and there was Califano. And I said, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "What are you doing here?" And Califano said, "I'm just here, Vance has asked me to, I've interviewed, I've left Dewey Ballantine, you know, when I got out of the Navy, and I really want to come to Washington. I worked on the Kennedy campaign and I really want to do public service. And now that you're here, and who are you working for?" I said, "Well, I'm in the Air Force." He said, "Not for long. You'll be getting a call from me and from McNamara, you'll probably end up working down at OSD." And I said, "Well, that sounds interesting." So indeed as it turned out, that's precisely what happened. And so Califano and I joined back together after that law school friendship and the gap of the service, and then the coincidence of being at the Pentagon, as life is.

And so one day I was busily working away, I did get the call as promised and Joe didn't waste a lot of time saying, "Okay, you're coming down and say good bye to the Air Force, and you're going to be working for me. And I have a group of three military officers that are going to be working with you, and you're going to be my civilian deputy working for McNamara. And let me introduce you to your new colleagues, and here is Air Force Captain, Alex Butterfield, we picked him, he's an outstanding graduate of the Academy," and whatever. "And I want to introduce you to Lt. Col. Al Haig," that was my military assistant. "And I want to introduce you to Commander Kraus of the Navy." So I, together with Joe and our three military assistants, Al Haig and Alex Butterfield, all who began as this wonderful world revolves, ended up back in other kinds of headlines and other kinds of government service. So to make a long story short, I had a wonderful time working for Joe and for McNamara at the Pentagon doing legislative work, defense reorganization.

And one day there was a sort of a very hush around Joe's office, which was right across the Pentagon from McNamara's office in the E-ring. And a young, very fast moving guy shows up and everybody's saying, "That's Jack Valenti," who was at that time special assistant to LBJ and had gone to interview Joe in some time in June of 1965, as I can pin the date down the best I can, Don, saying that the president has decided to make a change. "We are going to move Bill Moyers into the press office, and George [E.] Reedy is going to be taking some time off. And because of the fact that the legislative program is now in full swing, we understand from the way you have worked with the White House, Joe, that you are the can-do guy and we'd like you to come over to the White House and step into Bill Moyer's shoes and become the president's special assistant for domestic legislation."

And so a week or so passed, and Joe said, "I'm going to the White House. I recommended to McNamara that you be my replacement as the The, capital T, special assistant," and he said, "but I don't think you'll probably be there too long, I'll be calling on you." And so as things turn out again in the great coincidence of life and how people get shuffled around and meet again and don't meet again and meet again. I took a week off before taking on my assignment as The special assistant and I was, I told the operator I'm going to be at a certain place for a certain time if you need to reach me.

And indeed, five minutes before I got to some place up in northern New York to take a couple, the week off, the hotel operator was very excited. She said, "Mr. Levinson, do you know that the White House has been calling you?" And I said, "Oh." And, "Here's the number, 456-1414" or some such number, I think I remember the number. And I called back and the operator said, "Oh yes, Mr. Califano's been trying to reach you." And I said, "Oh-oh, just a moment please." It must have been four in the afternoon, beautiful afternoon. And I could hear Joe panting, "When could you get down here? You got to get down here right away, you're on assignment now and we've got a lot to do. What's today?" "Joe it's Thurs---," "Well you have to be down here tomorrow morning." I said, "Well, I'll do the best I can."

And indeed I came to the White House in July of 1965 as the legislative program was in full swing, because the first great wave of the Great Society Programs, the '64 acts of the ESEA and the Civil Rights Act, Don, but we were right in the middle, sort of half way through the 90, the

program for the next year. And that's where the confluence of my coming to the White House, my involvement in the domestic programs, led us to the wonderful path on the road to Model Cities.

**DN:** Now, when were you first apprized of what was then called Demonstration Cities?

**LL:** Well, that's true, Don. As I recall it, we had a number of task forces at work on the different areas that had begun back in '64. And the way the task forces were arrayed, they were sequential in nature. The priorities of 1964, which led to the Civil Rights Act and the ESEA and the community action programs, the War Against Poverty, were all on the first level. But there were continuing task forces on other issues, not the least of which were a series of environmental task forces.

But the more interesting one was the one that dealt with an idea that had sprung from Walter Reuther who was then the head of the United Auto Workers, who had met with Johnson at one time. And then, through some earlier concepts of urbanization, told Johnson that the great next initiative now that civil rights and education were done, was housing and communities and restoring urban centers to their former glory. And so indeed, Reuther having instilled the idea of some sort of very large or interesting program to revitalize the American city, then led from that concept, that idea, to the formation of a task force which was set up to look at different ways in which American cities could be revived.

And you recall at that, point Watts had broken out in August of 1965, probably just a month after I'd gotten to the White House. And the plight of the cities at that point, the movement to suburbia, the erosion of the tax base, the aging infrastructure of city centers, water mains and other ways of public sanitation, public health. The fact that the cities then became virtually with the migration of south to north, mainly large ghettos, ghetto areas. No matter whether they were in the north, east, or in the Midwest, became a really striking issue for an interesting approach to what I would call the "cities initiative".

And then I remember talking to my colleague Harry McPherson and we were sort of reminiscing about Thomas Wolfe and some of the great, you know, works, You Can't Go Home Again. Well, Wolfe was writing about the cities, you know, what it was like to sit in a train at night looking through the window and seeing the lights of the cities vanish. And it was sort of this very metaphorical sort of picture of the American city, the sky scrapers with lights on, the small houses, you're rumbling through the, you know, out into the suburbs.

So anyhow, the task force got together, and if I recall it correctly, had a number of fairly important folks from city planning. But the heart of the approach was, we've got a program called Urban Renewal, and Urban Renewal had its problems. We had a program called Public Housing which began back in the days of the New Deal under [Herbert] Leeman and [Robert] Wagner. And the analysis was that all the things that America had done in the past to create a liveable important center of American life, being the American city, had sort of gotten defused in programs that were not really productive, so that there were really serious problems with Urban Renewal. There was a sort of a sidelight note to it, that Urban Renewal is Negro removal, you know, that African-Americans were forced out. And in its place, sometimes there was

commercial development and replacement.

Public Housing at that point, because of the way the housing was constructed, the way the housing was administered, had some fairly shameful histories to it in terms of the inadequacy of the housing and the ruthlessness of those who managed the housing projects. So a new approach was needed. And the germ of the idea that came through, that worked through a lot of the thinking of that time, was to say that if we needed to attack a problem, we need to look at it across a spectrum of needs, and it's not enough just to build a house, it's not just enough to create a commercial development. What really is needed to revitalize the American neighborhood, deal with it on a neighborhood basis is to apply, across the board, a sort of an amalgam of programs that were not just brick and mortar but attended the entirety of one's structured life in an urban community. From education to health, to social services, to the incorporation of Head Start which had been just a nascent program, but seemed to have been producing results.

So the theme of the task force was to apply to American cities, a cross-section of various programs that would be sort of melded together. And that the initiative would come from city planners, who would then apply for grants to the federal government based on innovation in drawing together various other resources that the federal government had made available but were not, per se, targeted to the renewal of cities. And so the concept of a across the board amalgam of federal programs to be matched by state and local funding, and a special supplementary grant formula, sort of a bonus kicker to the community is that if you come up with this plan we will pay you so much, eighty percent of your share of the new programs with a premium on innovation and doing things differently. Involving the community, essentially, in its own progress and its own planning. And so that was the concept, the idea, this sort of cross-sectional program that would be focused in on neighborhoods.

And so the task force reported. We, as always, then would prepare a summary of the task force report. And through the winnowing and through the processing of trying to get the program together for January of 1966, which was the big State of the Union message, Joe and I put together a briefing paper for the president. We actually had it on sort of big Pentagon type charts. And we did have a section on Model Cities, what was then called Demonstration Cities; didn't like the name. And Ribicoff, who was in the Senate, was very much involved in the preparation of the program. Johnson said, "Look," you know, "we got all these eggheads thinking about the ways to revitalize the city, you've got this guy from University of Pennsylvania. What do they know about the politics of Washington? Let's get Abe Ribicoff to give you a hand on that and have him take a look at it." So Ribicoff, who was the former mayor of Hartford, I believe, or -?

**DN:** He was governor of Connecticut.

**LL:** Governor of Connecticut, that's right, governor of Connecticut, knew a lot about urbanization. Connecticut was a very interesting state at the time because of [Edward J.] Ed Logue, I think up in the New Haven area. So there was a lot of information about the practicalities of the relationship with the federal government to the mayor to the communities, and how the funding would all sort of work together.

And then at one time we, as always, had to go over to the Bureau of the Budget and talk to Charlie Schultz and say, 'look, we're thinking about this, and this is eighty percent supplementary grant and we need to cost it out'. And there was this tremendous frown over there saying, "What are you guys doing over there at the White House? Do you realize that if you start to add all these programs together, and you add an eighty percent override," you know, "you're going to get at the huge budget numbers? And so maybe you'd be better off limiting the program to a few worst case scenarios and make it a pilot program. Don't, let's not go big, go small." At which point that was one of the government trade off issues. Do we go big, do we go small? And so forth.

Well, anyhow, as the program evolved we finally decided that we would think about it in five-year terms, so while we wouldn't be talking about a lot of money, by the time people would say are you really credible, are you serious about this, we ended up with a five billion dollar number as I recall. It was a billion per year over five years, which was the supplementary grant cost, the eighty percent override over what otherwise would be money you would get otherwise if you were running these programs.

Anyhow, that got to be a big feature of the State of the Union message in 1966. And I remember Harry McPherson, my partner, was charged with taking the task force report and writing the message on the American City. And if one would go back and take a look at, I think, one of the more remarkable documents of Johnson's commitment to the quality of life in America, you would have to look at the Model Cities, or the Demonstration Cities as it was then called, program. And in the course of the evolution of it, of course, folks were saying "Well, let's not call it Demonstration City because of what happened in Watts, you need to find a new name." And I don't remember who came up with the name Model Cities, it may have come out of one of our conclaves. And indeed the Model Cities program, drafted to some degree by Joe and I and some of our folks with the components in it, OMB, BOB helped us at the time. And then one might say, well, "Where is the new department of HUD, and BOB and Secretary Weaver?"

What was very interesting about Model Cities is that there was such an inbred resistance to it on the part of the established groups in Washington, because they were so wedded constitutively to their old programs. The Urban Renewal program had its constituencies, the New Deal folks, who were still around in the FHA had, were wedded to public housing. The mayors liked public housing. In a way it was sort of taking a lot of the monkey off their back, but there was a lot of initial resistance, which is one of the reasons why this became such a concentrated program at the White House, developed really over and beyond the departments. In fact, I don't even recall if we had a HUD representative on the, maybe a liaison, I'm not sure. But anyhow, it was typically Johnson, which was we're not going to get any fresh ideas out of the folks who have been around a long time in Washington, so you creative guys come up with something. Again, and that all goes back to Walter Reuther in that wonderful, inspiring meeting with Johnson, who immediately caught on the idea of doing a program for American cities.

**DN:** A minor aside here in question, when we came into the picture to work directly on the legislation, one of the first things that Senator Muskie objected to was the name. And my recollection is that we were told that the president is wedded to the name and not all of us like it, but we can't get him to change. Now is that a misrecollection, or a misapprehension?

**LL:** Perhaps so. I only recall that given the episodes of Watts and the sort of thinking that went on post Watts within the departments and within the White House, the programmers, demonstration did have a certain negative connotation to it. And the idea would be that you're basically going to put all this money into neighborhoods that are the poorest out of all the neighborhoods, and then you'll get demonstrations if the programs didn't work. So really what we were doing is experimenting at that time. Model Cities, for all that was said, the lineage of what we learned through community action was really a sort of an urban form of community action. The theory would be that each community would set up their Model Cities agency that would be the coordinating group, get the mayors to sign off on it, and to try to move the program forward.

And so as I recall, just sort of maybe fast forwarding this a little bit, we sent the legislation up and somewhere in the course of it, it got bogged down, it wasn't moving, it was stuck over in the Housing subcommittee and nothing was moving, and Johnson was getting more and more frustrated. And it came to a close vote and the House moved on something, the Senate wasn't going anywhere with it. And here you'd have these great promises in the State of the Union and followed up, and every time he had a chance to talk about his wonderful program for American cities, but it was just bogged down in inertia. Vietnam had really become more of a tolling factor on presidential power in the Congress in the middle of '66. And so things sort of became inertial with the program.

And somewhere and somehow, and I can't connect the dots, Don, you're probably better than I am at it, if I could take a look at my notes again. The idea came up that we needed to move the program forward, and we needed someone in the Senate to take the lead, somebody who was interested in the environment, somebody who was interested in city planning, who was seen as a leader on issues. Maybe not the best known person, but certainly a man of great repute and integrity. And in the mix, whether it was Larry O'Brien or someone else, I'm not sure quite how the paths lay, or maybe Ribicoff, I'm not sure, but the name of Ed Muskie came up.

**DN:** I think it was Larry, but uh.

**LL:** Yeah, (*unintelligible phrase*) O'Brien, I can just maybe hear Larry O'Brien, you know, in that pause, "Mr. President, if you want to move this bill forward there's only one thing you can do to get it moving in the Senate, you've got to get up and court Ed Muskie." And so I remember one day sitting in the office mooning over the fate of our great program, and Joe said, Califano said, "You know," he said, "I think I'm going to take a, go up and see Senator Muskie up in Kennebunkport. I'm going to talk to him about this program. Would you prepare for me just an outline of where it is, because I want to make sure I can present it?" As I recall sometime, I can't remember the date and I probably have it somewhere, that Joe actually went up to Maine.

**DN:** It was a July 4th weekend.

**LL:** July 4th weekend, thank you.

**DN:** He and Larry O'Brien, and a fellow from the Bureau of the Budget whose name escapes

me at the moment, and I.

**LL:** Okay, and you, you placed it (*unintelligible phrase*) my recollection. And Joe went up with this little briefing book or paper I put together, you know, where it was in the House, where it was in the Senate. And the job was to convince Ed Muskie to take the leadership and the initiative to help to move this program through the Senate, despite all the obstacles and criticisms and carping, and Republican intransigents and what have you. So Joe flew up there, and you were at the meeting. I only remember when Joe got back he said, "I think we've got him. I think he's going to do this, but it's going to be on his terms, on the senator's terms, because there are things he thinks he can do to improve the bill and ease it through to get more constituent support for it, political support for it. And so Levinson, you're going to have to work with a guy named Don Nicolls [*sic* Nicoll], who's the chief of staff to Ed Muskie. And, he's going to come over to see you," or whatever the appointment was. "And you guys sit down. And he's got all, he's got the version all marked up or something, or he's giving it some thought and getting some instructions from the senator about what the senator would need to have in the bill to accommodate his concerns and make sure that he was comfortable with the legislation to stand behind it and to move it.

And so interestingly enough as I recall it, and this is a very vivid memory, the way the White House was set up in those days, up on the second floor, we had a conference room which was sort of where we all tended to meet from time to time. It was near the, where the legal counsel to the president sat. And so, maybe late one afternoon, Don, I think it was, you came over and I sat with you, and we exchanged notes and drafts and pieces of information about the bill. And I remember saying, "What a very pleasant and informed person Don Nicoll is." He certainly does know a lot about, a lot more than I do about some of this stuff, especially in the area of metropolitan planning. And that planning was really the, you can't move too fast, you've got to really have a plan first.

And so the whole concept of planning, not just for neighborhoods but sort of a more broader scope of metropolitan planning, that what we really need to do is put in some funding at the initial stage for planning grants. And so that instead of, you know, rushing headlong into programs, the key would be to have intelligent plans. So we need to have a component of the measure dealing with planning, urban planning, and we'll provide planning grants as an initiative. And also to get sort of more coalescing support around it, you got to do something for the folks in the smaller states, and you got to do something for folks in rural America. And here we are thinking of, you know, these big cities, Detroit, New York, and what are we going to do about rural America? Well, we're going to have to figure out something for that as well.

So as it turned out, I think you and I had maybe one meeting, maybe two meetings, I'm not sure, but we exchanged drafts and points. And the one item that just sticks out in my mind after these years is the planning, the metropolitan planning piece of it. I think we worked around the language on the civil rights issues as well, so it didn't look like it was another civil rights bill coming out at a time when we were having some difficulty, temporally, with yet another civil rights measure in the form of a city renewal bill. But anyhow, as it turned out, I think, you and I had worked out a sort of a common ground on the issues. And I had to take them back to Joe and say, "Here's what Senator Muskie needs, and this is what Don is recommending. I don't

think it, in fact I think it actually improves the bill, with all due respect to all the thinking we put into it, and I think we ought to go along with these suggestions.” So we revised the bill, and we worked with you. And as it then turned out Senator Muskie, sometime after that, maybe it was in August, maybe September as that session was moving along, came out front on it, and now the rest is history.

**DN:** Did you, do you recall whether we continued to work both with the White House and with the, we had the Bureau of the Budget and folks from HUD coming over, were you involved in those?

**LL:** Yeah, you could remind me, I think at that point, HUD had already been set up as an agency at that point, had it not?

**DN:** Yes.

**LL:** Okay. And then I think the two folks that were very instrumental, and this is another interesting sidelight, if my memory is not too inaccurate, is that one of my professors, this again, it's a small world, as I go to law school I meet Califano, shows up at the Pentagon, he and I work in the White House together. Well, when I went to Harvard, first year, we had a course in property and there was a young professor who had never taught but was a very distinguished scholar in land use planning, had just come back from the U.K. on a Sheffield Grant on urban planning. His name was Charles Harr, who was my property professor at Harvard. And he and I, actually as it turned out, I sat in the front row for some reason, I was late coming one day and the only seat that was left was right under the lectern. So he'd always look down at me and every once in a while would throw a question, you know, about property issues. Anyhow, Charlie became a fairly renowned expert in metropolitan city, metropolitan design and city planning, that was his specialty. And when the Model Cities task force was put together, Bob Wood, who I believe was a professor at MIT or Massachusetts?

**DN:** MIT and Harvard, they had the joint urban studies.

**LL:** Joint urban studies. And as it turned out, I hadn't, I had not known Wood, but I knew Charlie from law school. As a matter of fact, we created a debating club. Every once in a while the students would get together and they'd form this moot court club, and here's poor Charlie Harr, who was just a first year professor. In fact, there was so much he didn't know that he used to audit the class of Professor Kasner, who was the leading, you know, professor of property. He used to sit in the back taking notes so he could prepare himself for his class. Anyhow, we formed the Harr Club, a group of us, as the debating club and moot court, and Charlie was so pleased with it.

So life moved ahead, and there we are later, ten years later, eleven years later after I got out, and Charlie comes to Washington as an assistant secretary of HUD for metropolitan planning, new cities. He had all these great concepts. And Wood, as his colleague in that area, ends up as the under secretary. And Weaver, you know, had been the secretary. But all the thinking of the innovation, the new drive really came from the Harrs and the Woods of the world, because they were not, you know, inbred in the former iterations of the department before they were, the

department was consolidated. HUD, you remember, was a group of fiefdoms all over Washington, that got finally put together under the departmental reorganization. It's just like Homeland Security today; we had to figure out which pieces to put in, which we did as you know. And so Harr and Wood and, I think, were then deputized to start to work out the fine points and to go up and testify and move the program forward.

So Ribicoff was the one I think that was very instrumental in trying to say, 'you've got to have a broader program, you've got to deal with more than one city, you've got to deal with a group of cities. They should be selected on the basis of the excellence of their plans as they submit them, in terms of focusing these array of federal programs into the blighted neighborhoods'. And so, to sort of come to the conclusion of it, sometime, Don, you probably remember better than I did, the measure was passed. And were it not for Senator Muskie taking the leadership on the program, I think one of the, probably the more underrated and sort of somewhat misplaced views of the Great Society sort of focusing great on civil rights and on education, you don't hear a lot about what the cities program was about. I mean, in its time it was THE program. I remember the *New York Times* at one point, maybe it was Bob Semple or somebody, wrote a huge chronology of how that bill got put together, you know, how it got developed. It was really a wonderful case study of legislative process at work.

Adam Clayton Powell was involved over in the House side to try to move it, and so forth. But it was really, I guess, a triumph of its time, because for the first time it did consider the fact that you can't approach the problem of building a city only on just creating a housing stock, you had to really integrate a number of programs that go along with the quality of life. And that was the genius of the Model Cities approach. And it's been replicated, you know in theory, in other contexts. And then of course the time came when the law was in effect, the president signed it, and then there was an organism in HUD that was responsible for implementing the program. And indeed there were a number of really good grants issued in the first round, as I recall. And the program began to have some life and vitality to it.

And then Nixon came along. And one of the first things he was talking about essentially was, 'the one thing I'm going to get rid of, one thing we're going to do away with is that crazy program that the Johnson people put together. I don't want any demonstration, I don't want any Model Cities program'. And little by little, the program got defunded, withered.

And I remember, just as a postscript to this, John Ehrlichman took over the domestic side of the practice, called me when I was, at that point I had left the White House and I was working in the corporate world. And he called one day and he said, you know I, "The president's very upset about this Model Cities program, you know, it's all Johnson. We're going to get rid of it, but I think there's a lot of merit to it and I'd like you to tell me a little bit about it, you know, politically." "And," he said, "we get a lot of complaints about it, it's all community action, it's all these, you know, the mayors don't have control over it, and the governors don't like it and," you know, "it's not worked well and there are too many people that are getting paid and," you know, "there's too much administration. It's not the kind of program that Nixon really likes, you know." I'm thinking, there's Moynihan sitting over there, you know, who's in the Senate at the time, and I'm saying, "Well, I think you ought to go over and talk to Pat about this."

But as you know, it did become an early casualty of the Nixon program. Although, as you look back now in terms of some of the good successes and the experimental nature of the program, it was a great step in its time, a great tribute to Senator Muskie, a great tribute to the fact that the president put on the agenda the fate of the American cities. Had not been done before, and it sort of created this new ground and new thinking about how federal programs can mesh with local programs and local initiative and try to create an improved quality of life for the poorer citizens. So it was a, it was just classic Johnsonian approach, aided and abetted by some extraordinary thinkers in urban planning, and with the great support of Senator Muskie in moving the measure forward.

**DN:** I'm intrigued with both your eloquent description of that program and how it reflected the Johnson administration's approach. I'm intrigued by one question, this has always intrigued me: the working relationship that was established in deciding how to modify that legislation to get it through between the White House staff and the Senate staff, was that something repeated in other areas as you and Joe were working through the last years?

**LL:** It would never have been repeated, because Johnson always, he wouldn't want to tell, well, Model Cities was interesting because he had Ribicoff involved early as a governor with the Connecticut experience, with Logue up in New Haven. And there were a lot of counter, earlier sort of iterations of it, very small. But I don't recall an instance where that sort of reshaping took place in that way, in which where you actually came over as the senator's rep to the White House, which sitting down in the White House, redoing and, you know, repackaging the measure. There was a lot of interaction with Congressional staff, but I don't think I've ever recalled in all the programs that I worked with over the last, I don't know, four years that I was there, this sort of more intense, personal interaction.

Now, you know, the bill was a very complex bill, had numbers of titles in it, and you know, the president of the United States wasn't going to sit there and think through every title. He was looking at the broader picture and sort of left it to his lawyers and his staff to work out what was best. And I don't think we had, if we had sent a memo to the president about our prog-, he kept asking, "Well, have you worked this out with Muskie, have you worked it out with him, where is he on this?" you know. And I'd say, "Well, we're working along on it and we think we're going to come up with something that's satisfactory." And everything, I think, and you can remind me, Don, in addition to the planning grants and some of the smoothing of the civil rights language, I don't remember the articulation of that. What were the other parts of the measure that we looked at that you had some concerns about?

**DN:** Well, the major concern was providing some diversity in the cities that were covered so that it wasn't just the Detroit and the Watts and so forth. And integrating several, part of the planning related to the possibility of integrating it with regional planning.

**LL:** Right. I recall that now, yeah.

**DN:** And also ensuring that it was linked, really effectively linked to other programs. I'd have to go back and reread the legislation.

**LL:** Yeah, I could tell you, I remember now, you just refreshed my recollection. We, one of the discussions we had was, well okay, you've got a bunch of programs running in, you've got HEW here, you've got HUD over here, you've got labor over here, you've got the Department of Justice over here, you've got, you know, you've virtually brought in the whole government. How do we implement the program? Who's going to be the coordinator? And we came up, I don't remember who thought about it, but we came up with a theory called the convener, you know, it would be like an executive convener among the departmental agencies. And of course the logical place to put it was in HUD. And I think we ended up at some, either implementation of the statute or an executive order that came out that said, okay, since we've got to draw together resources of different agencies, and since the agencies have to get together, and since they had to look at the plans, we needed a convener. And I think the administration of the plan across the spectrum of the government was critical to its development. I think that you were the one, or the senator was the one that was looking at the, how do you organize it, the structure of it, aside from, you know, broadening its base with broader communities, how should we organize it.

*End of Side A, Side B*

**DN:** This is the second side of the September 20, 2002 interview with Lawrence Levinson. We were just talking about the parts of the Model Cities legislation that dealt with conveners.

**LL:** Conveners, okay. I think one of the concerns that the senator had, and you had expressed those concerns to us, was the fact that we needed to have a government central coordinator that would sort of tie the different agencies together. And I think in the end it moved from the convener, which was sort of an interim activity, to another assistant secretary position that was established in HUD to deal with Model Cities. I think a gentleman named Ralph Taylor came in, if my memory is correct?

**DN:** Right, Ralph's the one.

**LL:** You remember that name, okay, to become the assistant secretary to administer the program. And Taylor was a great salesman, and he really loved the program, understood it. And if I could sort of remember, the planning grants came in, the program started, it began to work its way through, there were Model City agencies established. Some of the finest, most interesting folks in the area of municipal government ended up getting their first jobs in a Model City agency, that were created to be the planning focus. And so in addition to at least approaching the problem of blighted neighborhoods and a planning, as you mention, Don, regional, it was a terrific training ground for folks who were dedicated to renewal of the cities through the agencies that were established to create the planning interfaces with the community.

And I remember interesting stories about, even today, every once in a while I run into somebody saying, "Oh yeah, I was on a Model Cities agency in Detroit or in St. Louis." And the agencies themselves were somewhat modeled after the Community Action Program agencies, but for some reason took on a more professional planning, city planning. MBAs who came out of, people who got degrees in urban planning sort of drifted into the program. It was really good, excellent public administration training. I was very pleased to see that.

At one time what I did, when Taylor completed the first year we had to do a progress report, you know, as we were getting toward the end of the presidency. And I believe one time I did put down a sort of a schedule of how many cities applied for grants, who got them, what were the results. And in some instances, there were a lot of strikingly positive results, you know, in terms of the program actually getting executed and carried, and being carried forward. I think it did for all time sort of put Urban Renewal and Public Housing off in a sort of, well there were improvements interstitially within those programs as well, they didn't go away, they were just sort of rolled in as part of Model Cities, but not in a way that made them more coherent.

So, you know, but getting back, when you think of that housing, housing stock and the neighborhood situation, it started back with the Wagner Acts of the New Deal, there was a concern about the destruction of the standard of living in cities, and so we had public housing for the first time, a Depression measure. And urban renewal which then tended to be captured by the commercial developers. And so eventually, sooner than later, the advent of Model Cities was great on the continuum of improving the quality of life. It was a wonderful experience and a wonderful experiment, and one of the great joys was working with you. And then after all these years when we saw each other again, it was like it was only yesterday.

**DN:** Thank you very much, Larry.

**LL:** Okay, thank you.

*End of Interview*