

INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM F. BILLINGS

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May 23, 1969

M: Let me identify the tape, first of all. This is an interview with Mr. William F. Billings. I am in his offices in Dallas, Texas in the Fidelity Union Tower. The date is May 23, 1969 and it's 10:10 in the morning. My name is David McComb.

First of all, I'd like to know something about your background, Mr. Billings. Where were you born, when, and where did you get your education?

B: I was born in Houston, Texas in 1918 and have lived in Texas virtually all my life except for a period of about ten years which I spent in the FBI, a special agent of the FBI, when I was assigned to various places all over the country and out of the country. Prior to entering the FBI, I had been a student at East Texas State one summer. I grew up primarily in Dallas, went to high school and prep school here. I went to the University of Texas where I took business courses and law and left there in 1940 to go into the FBI and stayed there until '51, then returned to Texas.

M: Did you get your law degree from the University of Texas?

B: I did not get a degree. I had completed substantially most of the work toward a degree, was offered a job in the FBI at the then-magnificent salary of \$3,200 a year, and I jumped at the chance. I had been married for a short time and it was like manna from Heaven. So I went to Washington and went through the training and was assigned and stayed with the FBI until I resigned in '51, while I was at the time a supervisor in Washington headquarters of the FBI.

Then I came down and went to work for an oil company for approximately three years in sort of a dual capacity, personnel work and legal work, and then resigned that position about '55, and entered private law practice where I've been since. That's about the--

M: You must have taken a bar exam somewhere along the line.

B: Oh, yes, I did not take the bar until I received an assignment to return to Texas. I was assigned to the San Antonio FBI office and then made a resident agent down at Brownsville, Texas on the Texas-Mexico border down at the tip end of the state. And I completed the study requirements with supervising lawyers which is provided by the Texas Bar rules, and took the bar and passed it in 1947, and stayed with the FBI another four years. As I say, at the time I quit, I was in Washington supervising civil rights, election laws, involuntary servitude and slavery cases--primarily the civil rights field and other related matters as a supervisor.

M: Then you returned to Dallas and began to practice law?

B: Yes, following the brief employment by an oil company. After getting back to Dallas, I became interested in local politics and I did on a number of occasions participate in precinct-type politics. That is, I was a precinct officer and was a member of the Dallas Democratic Executive Committee as a precinct chairman.

M: You were operating then pretty close to the grassroots?

B: Yes. I held no offices any higher than that, but was interested and participated in the local elections. You might, if you wanted to characterize it in a general way--I probably was one of the conservative group as opposed to the liberal group.

M: For the sake of the record, I suppose that I should point out that this was Democratic politics.

B: Oh, yes.

M: No telling what it will be like thirty years from now, so we'd better say that.

In your county work, in your precinct work, did you support the national tickets? Did you support Lyndon Johnson, for example, when he ran for the Senate seat? He ran in 1941 and he ran again in 1948 and later.

B: To the best of my recollection, I never voted for Lyndon Johnson. I may have refrained from voting for his opponent, but I don't believe I ever supported him directly.

M: Later on, when he was running for Vice-President and President, did you support him then?

B: I voted for Goldwater. In other words, I've bolted the ticket from time to time when I felt that the candidate of the other party was a superior candidate.

M: Did you happen to get involved in that 1956 fight with Shivers when there was a battle for the control of the State between labor on one side and Shivers on the other?

B: Yes, I supported Shivers at every opportunity and thought he was probably one of the better governors that Texas has had.

M: Do you have any firsthand knowledge of Johnson's tactics in that 1956 fight?

B: Well, when you say firsthand knowledge, this might be somewhat limiting. I had general knowledge of the fact that he pulled out all stops, politically speaking, to prevail and to get control. My ideas and my determination and decision as to who I would support, I think, not only had no relationship to what I personally thought of Lyndon Johnson. I think it was more of a fact I thought first of all, Shivers was a good man and he was close to home and I felt that Lyndon Johnson had become more of a national figure with respect

to where his allegiancelay as opposed to being primarily interested in Texas welfare. I considered it a sort of Texas versus national party type of thing.

M: In Johnson's political stance, did you look upon him as a conservative or a liberal or what? Did you ever try to classify him in your mind?

B: That, of course, is something that is difficult to do. I've always felt that he had liberal tendencies--he has supported many liberal things, of course, going on back to the first time that he was smiled upon by Franklin Roosevelt. And at that time and in that day, of course, most of what Franklin Roosevelt did was considered quite liberal, far-reaching, and innovative. However, now, Mr. Roosevelt might be classified as a conservative. You know, it depends on what time you're looking at what particular phenomenon in politics; but I think you'd have to look at a particular item and say what did he do on this, as opposed to giving him a general classification. But to try to answer your question, I think he was more conservative in his earlier years than he was in his later years, and particularly as President.

M: Since you generally opposed him, I was wondering what your motivation for this was.

B: Well, I'd say there were no personal animosities. I mean, I considered him, as best I could decide, not knowing him and of course this is always a disadvantage. If I didn't have an opportunity to sit down with you and understand why you felt the way you do about certain things, well, I might get a completely different idea than I would from reading something in the newspapers about what you'd done or what you thought, you see, or why you did it or how you did it. I would say that generally speaking I had the impression that Lyndon Johnson, well--properly motivated for the most part. I don't say there were any improper objectives, but I think he was to some degree power-hungry and I think he would

use any means, I don't mean illegitimate means, but any legitimate means to accomplish his objectives. And then the fact that I thought more of and felt more assured in supporting his opponents in a particular case such as Shivers.

M: Did you happen to go to the 1960 convention?

B: No. I've been to some state conventions, but I've never participated in any national convention.

M: And I would assume that you, if not actively, at least passively opposed his drive for the Presidency in 1960?

B: Well, as I say, I supported Goldwater. And there, of course, as between Johnson and Kennedy, I would have been quite happy to have seen Johnson nominated over Kennedy.

M: That's what I was thinking--when they were building up to this.

Now, you mentioned that you thought that Johnson, although not using illegal means, would do anything necessary to gain power and prestige in politics. Is this case in 1960 where Johnson is running for both the Vice-Presidency and the Senate position an example of that?

B: I think that's a perfect example of a man wanting to hedge so he can retain power. I mean, if Kennedy fell flat on his face, well, he's got a job in the United States Senate where he has always been and where he has been able to enjoy prestige and power, maybe from entirely noble motives--I mean, so he can stay up there and promote the general welfare of the people. I don't know what his personal motives are.

M: This might be the opportunity to get the background on this Schuille case that you mentioned. You were the lawyer retained in the case.

B: Yes, and worked with another lawyer by the name of James P. Donovan who is now deceased, who was a member of the Texas Bar and the New York Bar.

M: Can you tell me how this case started? How did you get into it?

B: Well, first of all, let me discuss one other aspect of my personal involvement with things that involved Lyndon Johnson. I was acquainted with, and I followed his history, you know, back to the Coke Stevenson days when Coke Stevenson and Lyndon Johnson were opponents for the national Senate. And I was acquainted with a lawyer who lives in San Antonio by the name of T. Kellis Dibrell--had been acquainted with him for many years. Kellis was a close friend and confidant of Coke Stevenson.

M: That was a very tight race.

B: Right. And Kellis was also in the FBI at one time. And we'd been in school together and I knew his wife and he'd come to Washington when I was up there, and we had a social contact. But Kellis had left the FBI and come back, and he got personally involved in the legal battle over the South Texas ballots following the election count which had a very, very close margin--of less than a hundred votes as you remember. So what the facts were about that I don't know except that I understand Mr. Johnson was able to get Mr. Fortas, who was his lawyer in Washington, to go over and get the necessary writ to free the ballots so that nobody ever found out what the merits or the facts were with respect to those particular ballots--subsequently destroyed, I understand.

But at any rate, I became fairly well convinced that the election insofar as that part of Texas was concerned had a fraudulent result. Were I in Lyndon Johnson's place, I don't say that I would have done anything different, I would have tried to protect myself legally at every aspect, especially since I came out ahead. But at any rate, that battle was one of those nip-and-tuck things that might have changed the course of our history, had Lyndon Johnson lost, you see. Whether he would have ever been elected to anything following that from

dog-catcher to President I don't know. He might well have, but if the facts had ever been disclosed in court, who can tell?

At any rate that was my firsthand contact, not firsthand really, it's sort of a secondhand contact with a problem involving Lyndon Johnson.

So, Mike Schwille, who was a young man--I'd say in his early twenties--came to see me, I think, at the suggestion of his father who was prominent prior to his death in conservative Democratic politics. In fact, I think he held offices in the Democratic committee over a period of years. He was engaged in importing from Mexico various farm products. At any rate, Mike Schwille came to us when it became evident that Johnson was running for two offices; and as the Democratic precinct chairman (which office he held at that time and I believe was automatically a member of the Dallas County Democratic Executive Committee, as such), asked us to file a lawsuit, and paid us to do so, as I recall, to attempt to have Lyndon Johnson removed by court order from being on the ballot for either one of the two places. To cause him to make a choice.

M: One or the other.

B: Right. We felt that he had a perfect right to run for any one office that he wanted to. So we told him that we would check the law and see what we could find out as to what the possibilities were--we didn't want to chase a dead horse and to run a race in which the only benefit would be some exercise.

So we checked the law, and we found two cases, as I recall, and I could be more specific on that on the transcript. We found a New York case of fairly recent origin involving somebody up there who had run for two offices simultaneously. And the Supreme Court of New York, in a rather blistering opinion, had said that this constituted an obvious fraud upon the electorate in that anybody that voted for the office that the candidate decided to reject completely

lost his vote. And it likewise worked a hardship and injustice upon the opponents, you see, and it completely distorted the voice of the electorate in that they had no effective choice except to decide maybe which one they'd rather have him in. Even that wasn't a clear choice, you see. So that was rather a compelling reason; at least there was some authority for the idea that this was illegal and fraudulent.

M: Was there any authority on the other side?

B: We found absolutely no authority on the other side. And then to top it off, we found a case by the Texas Supreme Court involving a similar situation--an opinion written by Will Wilson who, prior to that time, was a Justice of the Texas Supreme Court (Williams v. Huntress, 272 SW(2)84). At the time that we brought the suit he was Attorney General of the State of Texas, and is now Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice in the Nixon Administration. And a very competent man and a very good lawyer. He wrote an excellent opinion in that case. And his finding was exactly the same, although it wasn't quite as blistering as the New York case--I'm not sure, he may have cited the New York case, but at any rate, he came to the same conclusion that a man in Texas couldn't run for two offices simultaneously.

So, we filed the lawsuit, feeling at least there was a reasonable basis for success, and feeling personally strongly that it was a bad thing. So we were not only working for a client, but we were convinced the client was right.

So we took the case through the normal procedures and we lost at every turn.

M: There was a time factor here too?

B: Yes, there was a time factor. We had very little time to run this race, because the election date was approaching. Oh, there were various deadlines. There

were deadlines when they couldn't physically remove the names from the ballot. There were various mechanical problems involved. And, of course, the election day was approaching.

M: But you lost at every turn.

B: We went through the District Court--I don't recall now whether we had a hearing at the Court of Civil Appeals, which is the intermediate appellate court in Texas. I think we appealed directly to the Texas Supreme Court, and we were overturned there. At that stage, we went to the United States Supreme Court.

M: Did they accept it?

B: Oh, no, they didn't accept it, but again, we ran into Mr. Fortas, who was on the brief for his Washington law firm, which represented Lyndon Johnson in that matter. And incidentally wrote an excellent brief. It was well done; the only thing was we felt he was completely wrong--I mean, from a standpoint of raw justice.

But at any rate, we finally lost our last appellate review and I don't remember whether it was in the United States Supreme Court or the Texas Supreme Court, the day prior to election. So it was a close race all the way and of course we were emphasizing these deadlines to the courts. And we did get hearings which are provided by law.

M: Did the courts adequately move to meet the demands of your case? Did they give you justice?

B: Who can say? We must assume our courts are not arbitrary, capricious, or unjust, and not subject to undue influence.

M: Well, they could have scheduled you--

B: They could have scheduled us after the election or they could have said, "Nothing doing, we won't accept the case," one thing and another. But at any rate

there was absolutely no indication of anything like that, and we got a fair shake in the courts. I certainly wouldn't want to imply otherwise. Naturally, I would say, they all regard it as a very tender topic.

M: Yes.

B: I mean, everybody knows that courts are composed of human beings. And I'm sure they were quite aware of Mr. Johnson's power. But they're supposed to deal with those just like any other case and as far as we know and believe they did.

M: You got the opportunity to say what you wanted to say?

B: Oh, yes, we had fair hearings--there's no question about it. I would say that the courts were wrong in my opinion, and the only basis that I ultimately felt like they decided the way they did was that they felt like an individual, (not only a voter who had regularly exercised his privilege to vote and was qualified to vote at the time he litigated this question--I'm talking about Mr. Schwille--but a member of the Democratic Executive Committee in good standing) had no standing in court to contest the question. This is where I would disagree. So the courts never reached the merits of the essential question as to whether or not a man could run for two offices such as Lyndon Johnson was doing. And this is not an uncommon holding in courts. Often times litigants are thrown out of court or lose their cases because for one reason or another they don't have the legal standing or status to complain about whatever it is they're complaining about

But on this same score, and it occurred to me recently, the United States Supreme Court held that an individual taxpayer--and this was a major step forward, in saying that he had the right to question certain inequities of the tax law because he paid taxes. So it seems to me on the same principle a voter who votes, at least his vote is at stake, has the right to question whether or not a man has a right to run for office.

But at any rate, at that time the courts hadn't gone that far and may still not go that far if a similar case were presented, you see. Although I think the Supreme Court decision would be adequate to base a different decision on it this time.

M: In the handling of this case, was your contact with the opposition--Lyndon Johnson being the opposition, through him and through his lawyers? Was this all done in court at more or less arms length?

B: Decidedly so.

M: There wasn't anybody calling you up or anything like that, outside the courtroom and that sort of chicanery going on?

B: No, they dealt at arms length and so did we. We didn't contact them and they didn't contact us. It was a field day for the Lyndon Johnson legal team, including Mr. Fortas; Mr. Jaworski of Houston--a fine lawyer and former president of the State Bar of Texas, and I guess one of the outstanding people in the legal field in Texas, perhaps the nation--a partner in one of the leading law firms in Houston; the ex-Ambassador to Australia, Edward Clark; Mr. Will Wilson who was on that team at that time--

M: Sounds like powerful opposition.

B: If I'm not mistaken, Mr. John Cofer of Austin; and perhaps one or two other. The case was heard in District Court before Judge Davenport who is now deceased, here in Dallas--116th District Court, and one of the best loved and most capable judges we've ever had in Dallas, although he ruled against us. And of course our Texas Supreme Court gave us a good hearing. But as you say, we had excellent opposition; and this team pops up in Lyndon Johnson's history from time to time as you know.

M: But it was all handled--

- B: It was all handled at arms length, completely ethically; they were honorable opponents, and we so considered them all the way and hope they considered us the same. We fought it out in the courtroom in the conventional way. And they fought hard and they won and power to them, you know. Somebody's got to win or lose each time. So we had a fair fight; the courts provided the arena; and we lost. But there was no undue influence to my knowledge and no effort to go behind the court processes and influence our action or to compel us or to convince us to withdraw, that this was too skittish or too sensitive an area for us to be in, nothing like that took place.
- M: As a more conservative member of Texas politics, were you surprised or shocked when Lyndon Johnson became President after the shocking death of John Kennedy? Did this disturb you? Has it concerned you?
- B: No, it didn't. Of course, like everyone else, I was extremely sorry that President Kennedy met with assassination and I was very sorry it happened here. Because Texas--well, Dallas particularly, when the subject of unfortunate publicity, which I think was overdrawn, but at any rate I was sorry that happened. And when Johnson became President, I had high hopes that he would make an outstanding President.
- M: You didn't look upon it as a disaster then for the--
- B: Oh, no. I felt anybody who had been on the Potomac as long as he had and as familiar with the way our government works on the national level--we were in the hands of as well equipped a man as there has ever been in the Presidency by virtue of prior experience. I mean, he had worked with Presidents: he knew the way the Congress worked, both in the House and the Senate, both of which places he had served time; he had been in the high councils of government. So I felt like he had exceptional qualifications. And I felt like, having been

from Texas, he might prove to be outstanding if he showed some real independence of thought and action as President.

M: There's a great deal of writing that came out about Lyndon Johnson, both good and bad, and one of these was J. Evetts Haley's book, A Texas Looks at Lyndon. And you apparently had some connection with that. He mentioned you in that book didn't he?

B: Well, I and James P. Donovan, another attorney, who worked on this dual candidacy lawsuit, were mentioned in the footnotes somewhere in that book. Frankly, I've never read the complete book. I did get a copy of it. I don't know who sent it to me, but I think many people got a copy of it, unsolicited in some cases. Evetts Haley claimed to be a historian and maybe the claim is valid. I think he had some background in teaching at the University of Texas or other institutions and at one time, was on the board of trustees of Texas Tech University out at Lubbock. But Evetts Haley I'm acquainted with and I'm acquainted with his son, Evetts Haley, Jr. At one time, and this background should be mentioned to give the full history, Evetts Haley is a defeated candidate for governor of Texas; he may have run for some other offices, and he would be classified as ultra-conservative if you have to put a label on him.

I was contacted at one time by his son, Evetts Haley, Jr. and it turned out that Evetts Haley, Jr. owned a farm up in Oklahoma. Evetts Haley, Jr. employed me, and at that time Donovan was my associate, and he and I represented Evetts Haley, Jr. in a case that achieved some notoriety down here. It was tried in the Federal District Court of Judge Davidson at Dallas. And this was a case that grew out of alleged violations of wheat allotments on the farm which they owned in Oklahoma. The Agricultural Adjustment Act, a federal statute, sets out that people are granted allotments under prescribed procedures to grown various farm products--

you may be familiar with that. But at any rate, Haley was accused of growing more wheat than the allotments provided for him. He never had participated in the government program, as I understand it, had never received any benefits, nor had he applied for any benefits or subsidized payments under any farm programs, so he felt that the government shouldn't tell him how much wheat he could grow, especially where he grew the wheat and fed it to his own livestock and the wheat never went into the channels of commerce; that is, at least of interstate commerce. You might argue that if he fed it to his cattle and his cattle were sold in interstate commerce, well, maybe that wheat affected interstate commerce. Or you might argue and the Agriculture Department did argue that the fact that he did not put his wheat in interstate commerce affected interstate commerce for the reason that it withdrew from the channels of interstate commerce a certain amount of wheat that had some minute affect on interstate commerce. At any rate, you don't have to affect interstate commerce to any great degree under most of the court decisions; today, they stretch it way out so that nobody knows really what interstate is any more. In fact, almost anything is interstate commerce. Perhaps your talking to me is interstate commerce, I don't know; and I don't believe any lawyer really knows.

But at any rate, we handled this lawsuit for Evetts Haley, Jr. and we won in the District Court; Judge Davidson rendered the decision in a very dramatic ceremony in District Court at which both the Haleys were present. And he, in effect, told the government that they were wrong and that a man still had a right to grow wheat on his own farm, especially where it didn't affect interstate commerce, and that the federal act was unconstitutional. A rather unusual holding for a District Court Judge. So the government immediately appealed that to the United States Supreme Court, and the United States Supreme Court

reversed Judge Davidson in a rather brief opinion. It said, "Judgment reversed Wickard vs. Filburn," which was the old decision in which the act had originally been held to be constitutional. So there was an interchange; they sent back this decision to the District Court, and Judge Davidson again told them they were wrong; they had misinterpreted his opinion. So the next time it went up, the Supreme Court issued rather specific instructions to Judge Davidson. It finally ended up with Evetts Haley, Jr. having to pay the penalty involved. I'd say it involved probably, just say conservatively, \$10,000 worth of legal work, probably on each side--the government's side and Haley's side. And the penalty amounted to, I think, \$621.

But at any rate, we were paid a fee to do that and we did it. We believed it was right, and that's another one we lost. You know, lawyers don't like to talk about the ones they lost.

M: No, I can understand that. Is that your connection with--

B: This morning, you've let me tell about all of them.

M: Doesn't seem quite fair does it? Well, then that was your connection with the Haleys.

B: So, that was my connection with the Haleys and I've had no contact with them in the last--well, really, since that case expired.

M: When was that? Do you remember the year?

B: Oh, I can furnish that when I look at the transcript and will be glad to do so. I might even be able to find some of the old opinions that related to both of these cases and if you like, I could attach those. Otherwise, you might have to go to independent sources to get them if you're interested in them.

M: Yes. That sort of thing would be a good thing to place in the Library.

B: Yes, document some of the things I've been telling you. The Texas case forbidding dual candidacy was Williams v. Huntress, 272 SW(2) 87. The New York case was Rurus v. Wiltse, 303 N.Y. 319, 102 N. E. (2) 569.

M: Good. Did you have any connection with John Tower?

B: No, except that I've been generally pleased with his record. I think he has made a good record; I think he has made a good Senator for Texas.

M: He got that Senate seat that Johnson vacated.

B: Right. I believe he beat out Blakley in the election.

M: I think we've pretty well touched bases with your connections with Lyndon Johnson, have we not? Is there any other connection you had with him on the politics of the day?

B: I don't think so. Nothing specific. I might say this so that there'll be no conclusion that Evetts Haley and I are big buddies. We're not. In fact, my feeling about Evetts Haley is one that I wish to have nothing whatever to do with him. His son was our client and not Evetts Haley, Sr.

M: Do you have any general statements you'd care to make about Lyndon Johnson and his Presidency from your point of view? Has he been damaging, do you think, to the country?

B: I don't know. I was concerned with this. Again, I don't think he has been unique in this. I think he was unwise in either encouraging revolutionary activity by words such as "we shall overcome," in one of his speeches to the Senate. I don't know which one it was. By this lack of foresight or political opportunism, or both, he encouraged revolutionary activity. I think he and other politicians of both parties have been most unwise in failing to see that once started, the type of revolutionary activities that we are now witnessing would take place. Perhaps from noblest of motives, but through lack of wisdom, I think Mr. Humphrey has been guilty of it, and I suppose you could name Republicans and other independents who have been guilty of it, of failing to have the wisdom to see that if people are encouraged to take steps that

involve winking at the law or actual violations of the law, that once stopped and once condoned, it cannot be easily controlled. And I hold him to task for that.

Another thing that I would say as to his Presidency is that, again this is common to many people who live on the Potomac--they get what has been called "Potomac fever," and they get to thinking they're citizens of the world, and at least they lose somewhat touch with people. I believe that politicians, Lyndon Johnson included, once they're exposed and isolated in Washington from the people that are down in the grassroots, they tend to lose touch and they're advised by people who have also lost touch, with a result that they sometimes are the last to know what the people think. And in my opinion, the people are the more often right than wrong. The longtime politicians and intellectuals think they know what is best for the people, and seek to force them to accept their remedies, usually at the behest of well organized pressure groups. I think the people in the grassroots often know what direction the country is taking in the wrong way before the people in Washington do. I think Lyndon Johnson was guilty of that too, despite his intensive use of the telephone, I don't think he really had touch with the people to the extent that I think a President should. How to solve this, I don't know. I don't suggest any answers except some mechanism ought to be found so that the top people in Washington can stay in touch with the feeling in the ground-roots. And I don't think Gallup polls are the answer either, although Mr. Johnson placed some reliance on polls when he was running for office.

I suppose, given time to think and go back over the history of his Presidency, I could come up with other things. Overall, I don't think he did a bad job; I think he did an average job for the most part, certainly not an outstanding job. He may be proud of all of the rush of legislation that went through in the orgasm of reaction to Kennedy's death, particularly in the civil rights field, but I don't think he can claim any great credit for it other

than the fact that he took advantage of the mood of the Senate and the Congress and people--I think almost any civil rights bill could have been passed at that time if it had a little emotional appeal. Because who would oppose it? Who had the guts to oppose it? I don't say the legislation is per se bad; it was perhaps needed. And my thoughts on civil rights are probably more liberal than most people's. I think every man ought to be judged on his individual merit, I don't think he ought to be given privileges because he's black, yellow, green, or blue. I think he ought to be judged on his merits like anybody else. And I certainly think that everybody is entitled to equal opportunity and government has to encourage that. As long as they have an equal opportunity--I'm not for the handouts because they are a member of a particular class unless we do it to all classes. If you're going to do it to the blacks, let's give it to the Indians, and let's give it to the Latin Americans, and finally, then, maybe it'll filter to the great group of the middle-class, where they're not members of minority groups.

But at any rate, his record, I would say, is average. I can't recall a single thing that I would consider outstanding. I think Lyndon Johnson is probably as patriotic an individual as any citizen of the country. I think he had an outstanding wife--I have the greatest respect for her--

M: Do you think she played her role as First Lady--

B: I think she played her role gracefully and I think she has been a real credit to him and to the nation. I think she has handled it with dignity, as well as ability. I think he has a fine family. There's a lot of kidding about the Birds you know, the Lyndon Johnson family, but I have a real respect for her. And the girls have been equally dignified in their public meanderings, you know.

I don't know of anything crooked Lyndon Johnson has ever done, although there were rumors that there was a lot crooked went on in that Coke Stevenson Senate race. Whether he knew about it, condoned it, or arranged it, I have no facts, although there were a lot of rumors around.

John Connally represented him incidentally in that deal as a local attorney. You, of course, know who John Connally is. He is now with-- I don't think he went with Jaworski's firm in Houston, but he went with one of the other-- He went with one of the major firms there, maybe Baker, Botts, which is one of the major firms in Texas. And he of course was Secretary of the Navy and Governor of Texas et cetera, a very distinguished public career, and a very good Governor of Texas.

M: I've exhausted the questions I have. And you pretty well summed up your thoughts.

Do you have anything else you wish to comment on?

B: Well--

M: While you're talking to history?

B: Actually, I don't think of anything else. Of course, Lyndon Johnson's decision not to run for a subsequent term was somewhat shocking to me and somewhat conflicting with the general thought and accusation you've sometimes heard against him that he was power-hungry, because he voluntarily turned loose of the most powerful job in the world. And again, the reason people have questioned Johnson's actions, it seems to me, is a lack of credibility; and just precisely why that lack of credibility exists, I don't know. Some people get the impression--I mean, most people elected him as President after he served out Kennedy's term, so certainly not most people have this idea, but some people have the idea that you can't look at what Mr. Johnson said, you've got to kind of guess at what his real motives are. What are his real reasons? Is he sincere? What is

his real motive for doing this or saying this, you know. It may be that that's just one of those unfortunate things that grow out of some personal personality trait.

M: But it was surprising to you to hear.

B: Oh, it was very shocking. I heard the announcement on television like everybody else did, and apparently he kept it a good secret and those who habitually detract from him, I guess, say they felt like his decision was made because he felt like he was going to get beat and didn't want to lose. But he was a tough opponent in a political race, and I wouldn't be one to predict that he would have lost. If he wanted that nomination, he'd have got it; and he might well have won it again! So that's just speculation.

M: Do you think it was a wise decision, given the politics of the day?

B: Well, I think we needed the change. I certainly agree with the law that makes it possible to be there only two terms as President of the United States. Of course, in some unusual case, if we got an extremely wise and capable leader up there, we might want to change the law. But for the centuries of history, I think it's a good law because everybody is human and getting up there and holding that powerful job--You know, Roosevelt, I think would have stayed there--Well, he did stay there until he died. Well, I guess there's no feeling like being President of the United States although not many of us will ever have it.

M: Well, I thank you for your time.

B: All right. I'm glad to talk to you about it.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By William F. Billings

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Wm. F. Billings, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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William F. Billings

Date

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Date

October 4, 1974