

INTERVIEW II

DATE: MARCH 4, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: HORACE BUSBY

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Busby's office, Washington, D.C.

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G: Well, let's get into the campaign and his decision to run for the Senate. Do you recall how he made the decision?

B: I was not present. . . . Does the chronology here show when he announced?

G: Let's see. I believe he announced late.

B: Very late. Yes, he announced on May 12, and he went to Texas on May 5. This is in 1948. He went to Texas on May 8. Before he left the office here--

(Interruption)

The story rounds out better if I start with this, that at the time that I was presented with the decision or the opportunity to come with him, I was told then by Paul Bolton--I think this may be in the script--that he had not made up his mind about continuing in politics, not just a matter of House or Senate, that he had not made up his mind about whether he would continue and had been saying in fact that he did not want to run again for the House. This general subject of his political future did not enter my discussions with him in Washington for more than a month after I had come.

It was in late April at the time of the American Society of Newspaper Editors annual meeting in Washington, which is an event that still continues at that same time

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every year, he had a reception for the visiting Texas editors at the Statler-Hilton Hotel. [He] had a very heavy cast of Washingtonians there: the Chief Justice; Fred Vinson, of course the Democratic leaders in Congress, several cabinet officers from Truman's cabinet. It was a showcase audience of a kind that it was quite unusual for a congressman to command that. In those days, the status factor between being a senator and being a House member was still eschewed very much to the Senate. Senators were the equal of cabinet officers, and House members were not. So it was a showy audience. He also had some celebrity figures from press and radio from here. It is possible, although I am not certain of it, that Edward R. Murrow was among those in attendance. Because as a House member, he commanded that kind of level of folks.

Well, at this meeting, the Texas editors in my conversations with them--many of them were people that I had known for some time--rather opened my eyes, and I had not had any awareness of this, that as far as the state was concerned, the great issue was whether Johnson was going to run for the Senate. The situation in regard to the Senate was this: Senator W. Lee O'Daniel was still the occupant of the seat. Coke Stevenson, who had been O'Daniel's successor--when O'Daniel was elected to the Senate, Stevenson was lieutenant governor and succeeded to the governorship. They were both conservatives, Coke Stevenson being much more authentically representative of Texas political conservatism. O'Daniel was an Ohioan. He'd come into politics laterally from business as a showman and as a businessman and was substantially to the right. We did not speak so much of the right in those days as we did reactionaries, and the group that he served and ran with was the reactionary right. He was a pet of sorts of national

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organizations--the right-to-work groups and all like that, much in the same mold as some of the figures in the Senate today are either on the right or the left. The statehouse politicians in Austin had known Coke; he'd been speaker of the house, he'd been lieutenant governor, he'd been around there a long time, and they wanted him as governor. It was considered a very formidable move as well as a very threatening move for him to strike as he did against O'Daniel. There was no thought in January, which I've discussed, that anyone else would enter the race.

But there was dissatisfaction in Texas, which I was hearing from these editors. Now the editors of the conservative publications that were not sympathetic to Johnson anyway were not present at this thing--the *Dallas [Morning] News* was not there; maybe one editor was, but not the top people. They were dissatisfied by and large. They did not think that Coke Stevenson was the man of the hour, that he tended to be isolationist, that he did not know Washington and was too old to learn Washington, that Texas needed a [younger man], that Tom Connally, who was the other Texas senator, was himself older than Stevenson and obviously had a limited future--when in fact he did; he retired at the end of 1952. They wanted something more, both on the internationalist issue and somebody who could better represent Texas.

So there was this feeling among some of the editors and there was this feeling in the state, particularly among veterans of the war--people who had gone off in the forties and come back, they just wanted something different. That's where the talk was coming from about wanting Johnson. Now the editor of the *Austin American-Statesman*, a friend of Johnson's, was Charles E. Green, and Charles Green, at this ASNE meeting

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pulled me into a corner and said, "You must get a message through to Lyndon. This is not the place or the time for me to try to do it. Tell him I beg him not to make the Senate race, not to announce for the Senate." He said, "There is no prospect of him defeating Coke Stevenson. You know that as well as I know it." And I agreed with him. I thought there wasn't, that there had not been when I had left the state. He said, "Tell him that if he will announce for Congress and not announce for the Senate, the *Austin American-Statesman* will run a front-page editorial endorsing his candidacy for the Congress." Well, subsequently, several days after, I delivered the message to the Congressman, and it brought not whoops--he didn't laugh that way--but he laughed until he was almost crying.

G: Is that right?

B: He said, "I've always wondered why I win by 73 per cent of the district." And he said, "I guess if Charlie Green runs a front-page editorial, do you think I'd get a hundred per cent of the vote, or do you think I'd drop down to 25?" And I said, "Well, I think you might lose votes." But he was vastly amused by that, but basically, he did not greatly disagree with Charlie. The Belden Poll in this period was showing a favorable rating for him of no more than, I think it was about 22 per cent--it may have been as high as 27, but I think it was about 22 at this time. And he had a low recognition factor. He was known in his district, but he was not widely known outside the district despite the fact that he'd made the 1941 campaign.

So all of these things were on his mind. Now, prior to his departure on May 8, your chronology shows a letter to Senator Alvin Wirtz written around May 3 which says,

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"I'm coming down and got to make a decision and want your counsel." Well, I would guess in a period of perhaps no longer than a week--I'm sure it wasn't more than a week--he began to muse, and I use that word precisely, about his choices. And he asked me to write a draft announcement that he was announcing for Congress. As I recall, I made it very brief, and he wanted it longer. He wanted a platform almost, which I did that. If that paper exists anywhere in the file it was mostly because he dictated it. What's in it wasn't what I thought. After doing that, he next asked me to write a statement saying that he was retiring from politics at the end of [his term]. He was going to serve out his term and retire from politics in 1949, which is what I thought he was going to do. Then, oh, as I recall, perhaps on the day that he was leaving or the day before he was leaving--he nearly always flew in the daytime, he didn't like to fly at night.

As an aside, I was rather startled when I was in the office, never having been around an office like this before, where the office was making travel arrangements. And in this year in the House and then for the other two years that I was in his Senate office, anytime he was going to Texas or going anywhere, he would have his secretaries book him on as many as--well, on every flight that left Washington for where he was going for one day and sometimes for two days. And he continually was picking up a new option. He never knew when he was going to leave, and it was always chaotic. You didn't have travel agents in those days. It was just absolutely chaotic when he was getting ready to take off, because you were canceling reservations, and sometimes somebody would cancel one beyond when he was going to leave, and he would throw a fit about that because that might be the one he wanted. But one of his best friends, and I think you know this, had

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been killed in an airplane crash in St. Louis--I believe it was St. Louis, anyway it was in the Mississippi River--Tom Clark's brother, and this had haunted him quite a lot. And it affected his feelings about flying for a number of years. He finally became utterly indifferent to flying.

But he asked me to do this statement announcing for the Senate. Well, what I did was not really very good. I didn't have my heart in it; to be very mild in expressing it, I thought it was unwise, and I was sort of personally ticked off because I had begun to enjoy the experience up here, and I didn't want to have it come that abruptly to an end. I wanted him to run for Congress, and I thought that the Senate race was just a waste.

So he left, and he went to Austin, and others would have to tell you about the meeting that occurred there, and I think others probably have. I do not know whom all may have been present--John Connally, Pickle, Bolton, Ray--no, not Ray Lee--it was a fair [sized group]. Charles Herring, Mack DeGuerin I think was one, and several others were participating in these discussions, as well, of course, as Senator Wirtz. He went through the gamut of quitting politics. About the congressional race he had some concerns about who might succeed him in Congress. He didn't want to create a situation in which his successor was hostile to him or to his views. He also did not want a successor who appeared to be a surrogate for him, as there had been in December or earlier when he'd talked about this with pretty much the same group. He, for example, did not want John Connally to be [the candidate].

G: Did John Connally want to run for--?

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B: I couldn't answer that, but there were those in the group who wanted him to run if Johnson didn't. So I don't know how that matter of retiring from politics was ultimately resolved or anything much about the discussion. Finally, on the last day, I don't think he got all the way up to the deadline--at the time he made his announcement--this was significant--O'Daniel had not made any announcement. In effect, he was entering the race--you would anticipate at that moment that he was entering a three-way race--really a four-way race, because George Peddy of Houston had already entered, but was a candidate that you did not consider to be a factor--that he was entering essentially a three-way race: Stevenson, O'Daniel and Johnson. There was no strategic concept there of having them divide the conservative vote and he would win with a liberal vote, because his identity was too low.

So anyway, someone called the office late one afternoon, called Walter, and said that the Congressman had just met the press and had announced. And I had gone out to dinner--I took one of the secretaries in the office--since the Congressman was gone, we were allowed to leave, and I had gone to dinner in Virginia at the Graystone Inn [?], which I think is still there but which was a favorite Capitol Hill diversion at that time. And I got called. I knew that it had to be Jenkins, and he asked both of us to return to the office as soon as possible, and he told me, he said, "Mr. Johnson wants to talk to you." When I got back to the office, I learned that he had announced and that he had called for me. So I couldn't return the call because the line was busy, but he called again after I had come back, and he came on the phone laughing and "Well, Judge Busby," the "Judge Busby" thing was something that he called me. He used "Judge" rather freely as an address to

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people. He said something, and I don't recall it and I don't have notes, but as I say, he was laughing, and it was a quote that he attributed to his father. He attributed many things to his father that probably his father didn't say. But it's something about, you know, if a monkey climbs a pole, he's going to show his ass, or something of that sort. I don't remember. He was laughing and he said, "Well, the monkey's climbed the pole." And it was a fatalistic sort of laugh and comment, because he was being fatalistic about the fact that he had probably ended his career. He said, "Do you think we're going to make it?" And I said, "No, sir. I don't think that's in the cards." He said, "Well, do you want to try?" And I said, "Oh, yes, sure. I want to try real hard." He said, "Well, you get in your car"--at the time I drove his car--"You get in your car and come on. I want you here as soon as you can get here." And I said, "Well, I can't leave tonight." And he said, "Sure you can."

So it finally turned out I did leave that night. I got some money, and checked out of the Dodge Hotel in suitcases and left and drove somewhere in Virginia. It took me about two days to get there; I drove--I don't remember what time--but anyway, I got into Austin around noon, and I had the address of where the headquarters were being opened. So I drove up there and went in, and there was nobody around--no principals there, secretarial help, phone installers, things like that. So I waited around, and Connally, Pickle, Claude Wild, Sr. and the others finally came back from lunch. And I had no sense of what I was supposed to do. The Congressman was not there. So I finally went to John and I said, "Where is the Congressman?" or "When is the Congressman coming?" He said, "I don't know." And I said, "Well, where is he?" He said, "I don't know where he is.

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We haven't seen him." And I asked Mr. Wild pretty much the same question and got the same answer. They didn't know where he was.

So I thought this was exceeding strange, obviously. So this put me back down on the first floor in the reception room with--what they were doing, they didn't invite me to join in that. I don't know what they were doing. Mainly on the telephone. And so I went up to the reception room, and the switchboard operator handed me a message, and she said Mr. Johnson had called, and I was to come to his residence. I didn't know where he lived, and they gave me the address on Dillman Street and told me how to get there. I went out to the house--haven't I told you this story before?

G: No.

B: Well, the house of course had been an issue in the 1946 campaign. Why, I can't imagine. It was modest, it was a large lot, but it was a--they built it or bought it, I don't know whether they built it--

G: Bought it.

B: --because it had three apartments in it. It was not a commodious house, it was not a house for entertaining, it just had three apartments, and Connally lived in one, Dave Smith, an announcer at KVET, and his wife lived in another one, and when the Johnsons were not there, Bill Deason and his wife lived in the main apartment that they lived in. On the second floor of the house in the master apartment, which was all on the second floor, there was a large living room-dining room with an L-shaped thing with a kitchen back in the corner. And on the front side, the west side of the house, was a broad window--not a bay window, not really a picture window, but it was just all window. It looked out toward the

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Westlake Hills, which was--there was no Westlake Hills development. It just was hills.

Very attractive view.

Anyway, I went in, didn't know my way around. Rang the doorbell a few times, nothing happened, so I went on in, which I was to learn later in life was the way you did with the Johnsons. You never bothered with the doorbell. I went up and went in, there was stairs immediately, and I went up the stairs and so there he is. He's stretched out, had on a regular dress shirt without a tie, cuffs rolled up, and he was reclining on a sofa--there were two long sofas. He was smoking, and the ashtray was full in front of him. He was just doing nothing but lying there and smoking.

I came in and he just kind of nodded to acknowledge my presence, and so I sat down. And he didn't say anything, so I didn't say anything. This just went on and on. Finally, you know, in a low, very low voice that he could use often, he said, "Do you think we have a chance?" And I kind of, you know, waffled, I don't know what I said, but I was just kind of waffling, and he said, he was sharp, he cut me off, and said, "I asked you, do you think I have a chance?" I knew it was a yes or no question, so I said, "No." That's good; I'd passed. I had not told him; I had not been unrealistic, I'd not given him an optimistic view. He liked that. And he continued to lie there. I don't remember everything. I know I have some notes on this.

But we had been on there maybe the better part of an hour, I'm sure, almost nothing being said, I was just sitting, and the phone rang. All his telephones in this place were on jacks outside and inside, and they were on very long cords. Wherever he was, he had a--I don't know, twenty-five or thirty-foot cord, whatever the long cord of the

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telephone company was, because if he were talking, he would pick up the instrument as well as the receiver and, you know, walk the length of the room or walk all over the back yard. That was just his way of talking. So the phone rang, and I got up to go answer it; it was up by his head, approximately, and he motioned me to sit down and put his finger across his lips to stay quiet, we'd just let the phone ring. I was puzzled about this, because phones were so much a part of his life. The phone rang about ten times and quit, immediately started ringing again and it just rang and rang and rang--I have no idea how many times--and he whispered to me as though the phone could hear us. He said, "That's them." And he wasn't going to talk to them. Well, I didn't have a clue as to what on earth this was all about. I mouthed back to him, "Who?" Who is them?" And he said (whispering), "Headquarters." And he was careful not to speak while the phone was ringing, as though that was a microphone. So when the phone quit ringing, he said, "That's them down at headquarters, and they're trying to call me." And I said, "Well, aren't you talking to them?" "No!" (Laughter)

What had happened--now he didn't explain this to me at the time, and he would not accept this explanation, but on the morning after he had made this announcement, he came in to where the group was assembled, and they were all passing out assignments, and they started saying, "Now, you ought to make this trip; you ought to go to West Texas first, you ought to go to East Texas first," or something like that. He was being managed. I mean, dispassionately. There he was sitting there, and everybody planning his life, and he could never accept that; he could not delegate that. So he just blew up at them and told them they were trying to run him, that they were trying to plan his life, and he walked

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out. And that kind of an explosion was typical of him. It may have occurred sometime previously, I don't know. Connally took over the campaign and just went on without him and didn't care. So it became a test of wills then. He wouldn't answer their phone calls, and he wouldn't call them. So after the phone rang, we had some conversation. The phone rang a third, a fourth, a fifth time, and he looked at it--he was great for imputing human characteristics to inanimate objects--and he looked at the phone and he said, "I'll fix you, phone." And with that, he jerked the cord out of the jack, just triumphantly. He cut it off; he'd fixed the telephone.

This kind of gave him a sense of relief; he was triumphant, so he got up and he started walking the floor talking to me. He was just brimful, running over at this point, in a completely different mood than I had just seen him. He was talking about the people, serving the people, what the people wanted and all like that. And he got off on Roosevelt, that Roosevelt was the man that had the vision, and Roosevelt was the man that had the feeling for people and that we didn't have that kind of leadership. But we mustn't lose that. We had to have somebody leading the country who cared about the people and who let the people know that he cared about them, and that we had all these things to do. Then he took to reciting portions of Roosevelt in oratory. All of us who grew up under the influence of Roosevelt and radio in the thirties were given to that, "the hand that held the dagger struck it in the back of its neighbor," all those phrases, they shaped your life. Well, he ran through a number of Rooseveltian phrases. One of his favorites was the one-third of a nation, he said, ill-clad, ill-housed and ill-fed. Recently I saw on one of the Roosevelt centennial broadcasts, newsreel footage of Roosevelt saying that and those

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were not his words, it was ill-nourished, ill-housed and I guess ill-clad. It may have been ill-clothed. Anyway, Johnson thought that when Roosevelt said it was that he was talking about the South. My reading of the speech is that he was not necessarily talking about the South, he was talking about the whole country. But that's a matter of dispute, based on the TNEC [Temporary National Economic Committee] Report. Anyway, Johnson loved that.

But then he got right in front of me and posing as an orator on a platform, a podium, just as ebullient as he could be at this point, he got there in front of me and said, "You know what the greatest political speech that's ever been made in the entire history of the United States? When Roosevelt closed his 1936 campaign in Madison Square Garden." He started quoting from it. I won't attempt to do so now, but he quoted it exactly about the--that's the speech in which Roosevelt talked about the greedy people or something. Two things he said something about, that since he took over the White House there was only one key to the White House, there were no back door keys. "There was only one key and I have it in my pocket," a big applause line. Then he said, that--there's another bit in the speech that you can look up, a couple of paragraphs, and it ended with rhetoric that I'm not calling up well although I know it or did know it as well as I knew other bits of it. But it's that these moneychangers in the temple--well, anyway, two sentences that I can quote enough of to make them recognizable. One of them was that in such-and-such a way they met something, and now they had met their master, which was us, Roosevelt's majority. And the other was that he had earned their enmity or hatred or one or the other words, and that I welcome it. Remember that?

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G: Yes.

B: Oh, he delivered it with--as I say, he was posing before me as though he were standing at a podium.

G: Did he mimic Roosevelt when he did that?

B: No, he never attempted to mimic Roosevelt in speech. He mimicked him in gesture. See, he had, when he was smoking--he was smoking his Sano cigarettes, but he smoked them through a filter. He had one filter which figures in the story I haven't told you about the night I arrived, that was extra long, that was deliberately an imitation of Roosevelt. But he didn't use it very much. But he did just normally use a filter. It was a filter that had come out after the war that ejected cigarettes. You pressed a button and it ejected. And he'd become quite good at ejecting from a distance, a trajectory sometimes awesome. Well, when he was on the couch there in this story I'm telling and was smoking, he was ejecting from the couch to the cocktail table, and I couldn't have done it. I don't know how he made his do it.

But on the matter of the imitation, when he was standing there he had the cigarette holder in his hand and he was punching the air with it, but when he would stop for the applause, which he would acknowledge with his hands up--just me--he would put the cigarette holder between his lips and tilt it up like Roosevelt. He was Roosevelt, he was being Roosevelt. But he just loved that Madison Square Garden speech above all other speeches. I'm sure he would have liked to have made it when he was president. I mean, I'm sure that when he was president later that he would have loved to have had somebody write some lines like that for him but there never was that kind of a situation.

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So he got all warmed up. We left the phone disconnected, and he had no contact with the office. That evening John Connally came home, of course, and Nellie and the kids were out on the back patio and several other people from the campaign were out there, too. We could hear them from this apartment, but we couldn't see them. They didn't come over and leave an envelope or even acknowledge his existence. So he motioned me to follow him down the back stairs, and the back stairs of this apartment led out onto a garbage place, little rock patio, and there's a great big bush that blocked it from the view of the patio. So he pushed me out there to spy on them through the bush, to see what they were doing. And the secondhand report wasn't good enough, so he got out there, hidden behind the bush and trying to overhear what they were saying and all like that. But he wouldn't go over.

Well, finally at some point a woman whom I did not know came in and turned down the beds. On the same side of the house as the living room there was a smallish, quite smallish bedroom that in the daytime was made up like a study but it had two built-in single beds on the same wall. This woman, whom I did not know, but who was Mrs. Willard Deason, came in while we were eating or something--I guess she brought some food, too--and she turned down the covers. Well, I think the reason the beds had been built in was because he was so long and he wanted extra length. So she turned down the beds. The beds were on the same wall, and the way she turned down the bed-covers, my head and his head would be in effect back to back. So, went on, slept through the night.

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I didn't stay with him all the time the next day, but he didn't reestablish any communication with the office. So I came back in that evening. I went to the office, came back and told him some of the things that I observed were going on down there.

G: What did you observe?

B: I don't have any recollection. It still was certainly not organized. So that night when we went through the go-to-bed thing, I went out and the beds had been turned down differently. This time we were feet to feet instead of head to head. So I thought nothing much about it, went on to sleep. About one o'clock in the morning I was awakened and here was the Congressman, a frozen smile over his face, standing over me in his pajamas and shaking me awake. He told me to get up. I was grumpy. I said, "Why?" He said, "I made you a nice pallet in the living room." I kind of shot up at this. I said, "Why have you done that?" He said, "Come on. Come on." So I went in the living room and sure enough, he'd gotten a fold-away bed mattress down and had made it up, put the sheets on it, a cover on it and everything, a pillow. He said, "It's very nice, it's very comfortable, and you have to sleep in here." I said, "Why do I have to sleep in here?" He said, "You breathe too loud."

So I made it through the night. He got up and made coffee. He left some coffee made for me, and he went somewhere. The phone was plugged back in and it rang and so I answered it, and it was Charlie Herring calling me from the campaign headquarters. He said, "Well, you've done it." I said, "What?" He said, "Well, you made him call us, and he told us the first order of business today was to get you an apartment and to get you out of his apartment, because you breathed too loud." (Laughter) Apartments were very hard to

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come by in those days. They used their connections and got me one, and that was the end of my stay with him.

G: Where was Mrs. Johnson?

B: She was still in Washington.

G: Is that right? I see.

B: She was coming. I guess the day I left the apartment she left Washington on the train with the daughters. He would not let them fly.

So that was my introduction to the campaign. Now once we got leveled out--well, by this time the headquarters had been furnished with desks, and telephones had been installed. I was set up basically as the press office on the first floor. My time from then until the opening in Wooldridge Park was just spent establishing contacts with my friends in the press room that I had left, you know, getting a press release operation going and things like that. Nothing of any great moment. I was not a participant in the discussions about his speech or about his platform.

G: You didn't write the Wooldridge [Park speech]?

B: No, Paul Bolton wrote it.

G: Did he?

B: Senator Wirtz advised on it, and whatever is in it that is conservative--like he criticized the Wagner-Murray-Dingell bill on health insurance, criticized the FEPC [Federal Employment Practices Commission], a few other things like that--I mean the positions that were inconsistent with where he ultimately came out, those were all written into the speech by Senator Wirtz. And Senator Wirtz felt that he had--Bolton was a reasonably

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liberal fellow and Wirtz was a New Dealer and had supported a lot of liberal things nationally, and in the state senate he had supported things. He led the fight against private utilities. But on social mores of Texas he did not feel that Johnson was closely attuned to those mores, and that against a candidate like Stevenson and/or O'Daniel, that he had no chance if he got himself positioned I would say where--if Johnson had positioned himself where Johnson himself felt, he was not viable as a statewide candidate.

G: I see. But it wasn't a philosophical belief on Wirtz' part, it was simply a pragmatic thing?

B: Extremely pragmatic.

G: Well, if he lost in 1948, he was out. He didn't even have his House seat.

B: No. He was out of politics in the way the traditions in Texas up until fairly recent times--I don't even know whether the tradition has changed. If a man started a public career and suffered a defeat, if he were elected and then at some point, any point, suffered a defeat, that was the end of the political career. You could not restart one. Some states have different traditions. A guy loses this time and runs for the same office the next time and wins it and all like that. That was not true in Texas.

G: Did people like George Brown, who had supported him, not want him to run in 1948 for the Senate?

B: I don't know about that. I was so new. I was accepted instantly within the structure close to Johnson, kind of operating structure. But it was not until after the election and during the following year that I began to see into the older men, advisers, money raisers and all like that. I just--I met them and knew what they were, but I wasn't interested in being in their presence. If I had an opportunity, like during the campaign, to sit in a room with

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George and Herman Brown, or any of the money-types, I just absented myself. I didn't want to. So I don't know how they fit in. I don't know what they were saying to him or anything.

G: How about the helicopter? Do you recall how the decision was made to--

B: No. Woody [Warren Woodward] would know about that. I don't know anything about it.

G: Now, you traveled on the helicopter though.

B: No.

G: I've seen pictures of the helicopter with you in it.

B: That would have been on only one or two days.

G: Really?

B: I traveled in a car on the road and was supposed to stay up with the helicopter. I wrecked one car somewhere. I mean, I didn't do any body damage to it, but in a rainstorm it ran off the road and I had to get the wheels realigned. And in that instance, then I got on board the helicopter. Then after the helicopter had started, the second week maybe, some strange phenomenon occurred of high and heavy hot winds blowing across Texas, just five consecutive days, and you couldn't operate the helicopter. And in that period, much of that period, I drove for him. He rode in my car. I was a nervous wreck.

G: Why? Was he a backseat driver?

B: He stayed in the front seat and he was copilot. This was true for everybody, not true--he rather liked my driving. He didn't like most people's driving. But he would sit on the right-hand side and lean forward, so you'd fall into conversation sometimes, and that was

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relaxed enough. But when there wasn't anything to talk about or coming into a town and there's traffic, he would lean forward--he did it here in Rock Creek Park, too--he'd lean forward and start talking to the cars, "Yellow car, get over there. Now brown car, it's not your turn, we're going to pass." All that.

It's something we referred to as the Walter Bayer maneuver, Walter Bayer being from Dime Box of Swedish family. Walter still spoke with an accent because English was a second language in Dime Box. Bayer came to work for him as a patronage job as a policeman and then he got out the mail every afternoon. Johnson got to thinking about it, thirty-five, six years old, and here he was in his own eyes an important congressman, but he didn't have any perquisites to show for it. He thought it would be dandy if he had a driver. So he nominated Walter Bayer for the job, and told Walter to drive him home. Walter drove him back and forth maybe a couple of days. Finally, one afternoon they left the Capitol going out to Thirtieth Place. They were going through Rock Creek Park and here between the P Street Bridge and the Connecticut [Avenue] Bridge. Johnson was sitting up in the co-pilot's seat giving instructions to all these cars, and Walter was an unassuming kind of lad, but he was just petrified with the responsibility of driving an important congressman and driving a big car. So he'd be very, very cautious. And the Congressman would sit there, he would give him room, he would get the car pulled over, it was time to pass and Walter wouldn't pass. This has been characteristic of two or three afternoons of driving, so the Walter Bayer maneuver was the following: not a word spoken, just gestures on the Congressman's part. He motioned to Walter, signified what he was going to do, and in mid-traffic without stopping or slowing down or anything else,

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they changed seats. Johnson slid under him and Walter slid out over him, and they managed not to have a wreck. And Walter was never invited to drive him again.

I'm going to have to stop before very long.

G: Did he feel that the helicopter was an effective way to campaign?

B: Yes. I spoke to him about it once and he said that the difference between a helicopter and any other mode of campaign, he said that, "Everybody including the village idiot knows I've been here. If I came in a car, only the people that saw the car would know that some congressman was here." He said, "I think the helicopter impresses on them Congressman Johnson. What I want to communicate--what I think I am communicating--they may not know who I am or where I'm from or what I stand for, but I think they come out and they watch me talk and they think, 'this fellow is sincere and means what he's saying, and cares about what he's saying.'" I agreed with him. I thought that that was something he communicated. No question the helicopter helped him in that first primary showing. Now, he abandoned the helicopter in the runoff. It wasn't feasible to campaign that way.

G: Well, he was using it more in the rural areas than in the [cities]. I guess it wouldn't have been that applicable.

B: Well, in the closing week of the first primary he used it in the urban areas. But you see, there was a conflict in that campaign which would continue in all his politics up until he got to the presidency. He still wanted to campaign in the Texas of his boyhood--not just of his boyhood, but of his pre-congressional period--in which politicians took great pride in knowing that this town went this way and that town went this way, and traditionally all campaigns were won or lost within a hundred and fifty miles of Waco, Texas. Towns like

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Teague and Marlin, and a lot of places that are not consequential politically today, to a state race, you had to go to those towns and campaign, and he still wanted to campaign in that kind of town.

In 1948 there was enough suburban development on the perimeter of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston--we didn't go to any suburbs in San Antonio--but Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, we did, and we went in the helicopter. We went at night. The shopping centers, they only had strip shopping centers then, but that was showing up. He didn't like to campaign in shopping centers. He wanted to go down to the courthouse, you know. Well, there was nothing down at the courthouse. He could campaign at the courthouse or city hall in San Antonio, but that's the only place in the big cities that he could do that. But he missed it. And as late as 1958 he was still doing that. He made a trip through Texas, probably it was 1959, shoring up things for 1960, for the Senate race in 1960. And he left it--nobody else planned it, he planned it through Cliff Carter, but he did the planning himself. He went to Sulphur Springs, he went to Lamesa, he went--I had no part in it, but I'd read the paper and see where he'd been. I was in Austin, and I was heartsick because he didn't understand. The suburbs around Dallas were growing--in the fifties they grew, some of them like Richardson or Irving, where the Texas Stadium is, grew 1400 per cent in the fifties, and he didn't know it. He didn't understand that's where the vote was. It was still at Sulphur Springs.

G: But his district men or county men didn't steer him to the suburbs?

B: I don't think his machine was that bright.

G: How good was the organization in 1948, the campaign organization?

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B: Well, considering how it was thrown together it was pretty good. It was made up, of course, mostly of John Connally's friends, contemporaries, district attorneys, people like that. They were all of that generation that had fought World War II as young officers. They were tired of what Coke Stevenson represented in the state as well as in the nation. They were fighting the establishment. Lord knows, it was clearly drawn. Nobody ever heard of the word establishment in those days, but that's what Stevenson was. Establishment law firms, establishment corporate structure, establishment banking, and establishment politics.

This was an insurrection. It was typical of the mood in the group that one of the phrases you fairly often heard in discussion would be a phrase to this effect, applied to different places, that the best thing that could happen to Houston is twenty-five good funerals. In a way that has not happened since; World War II cut off a world and a new world was starting on the other side of it, and there was an overlap. The thirties were not--in Texas they were not desperately poor times, but they were stagnant times. You couldn't start a business without basically the consent of the banking community. There wasn't growth, there wasn't anything. That was one of the places where the hard feeling against the New Deal came in. But the New Deal was bad in the eyes of such people because it was letting people who should not do things, do things. And I don't mean poor people, but people who should not be Chevrolet dealers were becoming Chevrolet dealers. There had always been a power structure, the Chevrolet dealerships and the Coca-Cola dealership and the banks and a law firm and the dry goods store, jewelry store, that type

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thing. And that structure was still hanging, but the foundation was being swept away in 1948.

Now the small towns were still there in 1948 and that summer, traveling around the state, I was fascinated, rarely went [to] more than three towns, and we'd stop at five to eight of them a day, that I didn't run into somebody working on a local paper, usually a weekly, that I'd been in journalism school with. I got from seeing those people whom I had known at university and seeing where they were--little birds--it began to hit me. They're not going to be there long. This is not where they want to be. Well, right after the 1948 campaign the great depopulation of 239 of the Texas counties began, you depopulated about that many and the population concentrated in fifteen counties. Politicians continued trying to run the Johnson-style campaign up through 1952. From 1952 forward there never was another attempt to run these small-town campaigns.

G: What was a typical campaign stop like in the small towns?

B: Well, he would land at some vacant space, either a vacant lot, stadium, park, something like that, where you had the helicopter clearance. After circling the town he would be calling out on a speaker himself, "This is Lyndon Johnson, come to the speaking," or whatever. He'd circle the town until he got the crowd or saw it was on the way, and a sound truck was going around doing the same thing, and when there was enough crowd he came down and got out and sometimes stood on the bed of a truck or on a fender--cars still had fenders in those days--or sometimes just on the ground, and made a speech, and then shook hands.

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He often gave offense in shaking hands. I know people who have gone on to eminent positions in life who tell me--one guy told me about this just last year--that they attended a speech and he called for people to come by and shake hands and so they were converted. They went up to shake hands with him and he threw them. He first of all said he couldn't--his hand during the campaign would get bloody from shaking hands. But he said, "You must never let them grasp your hand, you've got to grasp theirs first." So he was reaching way out before they were really expecting to shake hands, and he had that--he was on the offense and he had that advantage and he would take their hand and squeeze it, get a real grip on it to protect his hand, and then he'd just hurl them past. I've seen little old lady types, you know, stagger, and one or two instances where people fell or nearly fell off of a platform.

(Laughter)

G: I guess the idea was that he could shake more hands if he could carry them through that way.

B: Well, both that, but it was basically the strategy to protect his hand. Anyway, he'd make his speech and then always he'd get back on the microphone and say, "Now you know, I want you folks to get back. There's a telephone wire--they reminded me--five hundred yards away." There's always a question about whether we could get out of this safely. "Now, you all stand back." Well, you know, he was just compelling them to stay, that was his object. He always, if he could, if he could do it plausibly he'd create a sense of imminent danger.

G: Did they ever have any close calls?

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B: They changed helicopters and pilots in the middle of the campaign. The first pilot, the first helicopter was one of those big Sikorskys and it was not really highly maneuverable in some situations, couldn't do a lot of banking with it when you were going over a town and the pilot was I'm sure a good pilot. He was strictly a book pilot and he didn't like all this jazz.

G: Jim Chudars was his name.

B: So Joe Mashman came in, and of course Joe has an executive mind. He was an executive at Bell, a test pilot, a little bit--I don't think he ever took a risk, but he had more confidence. The Bell helicopter was an easier plane to handle, much more maneuverable.

G: A smaller plane, too, wasn't it?

B: Smaller. You had more sense of where you were because in the Sikorsky you had to look like that to see the ground. This, the ground was right there. And Joe, he understood what he was doing. I mean, what the game was, and when he came around it was just fresh air, because we had real shows with the helicopter. He wasn't stunting, he wasn't being experimental, but he made the whole thing different.

I've got to stop it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Horace W. Busby, of Santa Monica, California, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted with me on April 23, 1981; March 4, 1982; July 2, 1982; July 29, 1988; August 16, 1988; November 17, 1988; December 21, 1988; and April 2, 1989, in Washington, D.C., and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library..

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