INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: BO BYERS

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start, Mr. Byers, by asking you to briefly trace your background and how you came in a position of covering Texas politics.

B: Okay. Well, I started out as a reporter in 1941 in Tyler, Texas, but that was interrupted by World War II when I was in the air force. Right after I got out of the service in August of 1945, I went to work in Marshall, Texas as a combination sports editor and general assignments reporter and shortly thereafter had a letter from Paul Thompson at U.T. [University of Texas] journalism school asking me if I'd be interested in a fellowship. Took the fellowship in journalism in January of 1946, became a campus stringer for Associated Press during that semester, was offered a full-time job right after that semester ended, took it and went to work I think it was July 1 of 1946 for AP. That got me into covering state government, state politics. In 1948 where I first started covering LBJ, the AP had a policy of assigning one reporter to stay full time covering that particular candidate throughout a campaign, only on a so-called major candidate. My best friend, who was also with AP and who had gotten me into the AP by recommending me, Mac Roy Rasor, he drew Coke Stevenson, I drew LBJ.

G: Did you literally draw them?

B: I don't really remember whether it was kind of a drawing or whether it was just by kind of discussion of, well, who would you rather cover. I think it was the latter probably, and Mac Roy had seniority and possibly--and this is just speculation without remembering any detail--I think Mac Roy may have picked Coke Stevenson because Coke at the outset was the favorite and of course was the incumbent governor. Mac Roy knew him. Mac may have felt like, "Well, I've got the winning candidate to cover, and it will be more fun to cover the winner than the loser." I think I probably inherited LBJ by default.

G: Let me ask you to recall as many of the people in the Texas press that covered LBJ during that campaign.

B: Well, it may be a little difficult to remember who covered LBJ. Let me stop and think about that.

G: Or who the principal press people were in the [Texas] Capitol then.

B: Yes. Well, if I think back just for a second on who were the bureau chiefs, I can probably do that pretty well. Of course, with the two wire services, Mac Roy Rasor and I covered for AP. I started to say Gordon Shearer, but Gordon Shearer was probably the bureau chief for UPI, but he was way up in years and I doubt he got out on the road and covered for UPI. Now, UPI did not make a habit then of really staffing campaigns very much. They were always short-staffed, typically. I believe that they probably did what so many have come to do later on, they only covered by handout or when the candidate came to a major city like Austin or Dallas or Houston, where their staff could cover

them there but not go out on the road with them. I really don't recall a UPI reporter being there.

I am certain that Bill Gardner probably covered--well, I say I'm certain and then I hesitate, because some of them that were older than I was came in later, to Austin, from their city. But I'm positive Bill Gardner covered the Senate campaign and I believe he covered LBJ, if my memory is correct, and possibly Bob Johnson for the Houston Post, I believe those two. For the Dallas Morning News, I can't remember a specific person with a particular candidate but probably people like Allen Duckworth, who was of course I would say the prime political correspondent for the Dallas Morning News, probably Dawson Duncan to some extent, at least in Austin, but I don't think Dawson--he may have gotten out on the road some. They're both dead now. I don't know whether Jimmy Banks was--no, I don't think he was even with the Dallas Morning News yet. With the Houston Chronicle it would have been Walter Manzel [?] from Houston and Dick Wall, who was the bureau chief and essentially was the only correspondent here in Austin they could put on the road, because Ed Rider was almost blind so he couldn't really get out on the road.

Who else? Roy Grimes. Roy Grimes kind of knocked around in it. I believe maybe he was with the Houston Post that time. I said Bill Gardner, but Bill was probably still in Houston. Roy Grimes was one of the best political reporters that I ever knew, just a tremendous writer and had great insights. Now that I think about it, he was with the Post at that time and he covered him.

Stuart Long would have covered him some in Austin, but Stuart had the kind of operation with that Independent News Service where he couldn't really get out on the road very much, as I recall. But he probably was kind of in and out covering him, was certainly covering him when he came to Austin. Stuart was one of the best news reporters that I ever knew in the business. I don't know whether he was then, he probably was because he didn't particularly like Coke Stevenson. Stuart Long, I don't know how much you know in his background, was kind of the liberal, the liberal reporter at the time. He was a very fair reporter, but I know he didn't like Coke Stevenson's ultra-conservatism. He may have automatically liked LBJ right then. Later on he was a very strong LBJ-supporter.

So those are among the key reporters I remember. Of course INS was still in business, and Bill Carter would have been the reporter out of Austin but he still would have covered the campaign for INS.

G: Did the Capitol press tend to favor one candidate over the other in that Senate race?

B: The reason I hesitate is that my inclination is to say that probably the bulk of the reporters, as far as their personal feelings, probably leaned toward Coke Stevenson. A lot of those press men I mentioned were kind of old-timers that had been around a long time, and Coke was very well liked by the press. I thought he was overly conservative, and most people thought I was too liberal as a young reporter then, and I admit I was. By standards of those days I was probably a liberal reporter. I happened to have--this will sound like a caveat--

a damn good boss, Dave Cheavens, who was bureau chief for AP. AP at that time, and I suppose to a considerable degree today, was still hard nosed about kind of what I call the old-time American journalism of very tough, down the middle, quote "fair, objective, neutral, impartial," and Dave Cheavens personified that. He was one of the best reporters I ever knew anywhere; I'd put him up against any national reporter. And he really, he drew that line of objectivity, fairness, being as complete as you could, and yet he was a very tight writer and wrote a beautiful story. If anybody ever influenced me very emphatically to try to be fair, try to be objective, and not show any bias in your story, Dave Cheavens did. Whatever reputation I had for that, and a lot of people have told me that they consider me a person that was fair in his reporting, it was because of Dave Cheavens.

You know, every reporter gets criticized--I'm digressing a little bit from your purpose--but I always felt that people did respect my reporting, mainly because not that I was a great writer particularly but more that I was fair and they knew I would try to check my facts, I would come back to them if I had a question. I'm kind of trying to preach a journalism lesson I reckon right now.

So I think a lot of reporters ask why the press is catching so much flak is that not enough editors in the newspaper business these days are cracking down on reporters about this very point of being fair. The newspapers are letting reporters--and inherently that's because the editor lets the reporters do it--get too much opinion in

their stories, whether they call it analysis or insight or whatever. I think the press does a better job than their critics say, but the press does get a lot of criticism they deserve because they're taking young reporters, they're putting young reporters on stories that they're not even prepared to cover yet. You know, it's gone out the window this business about a five-year apprenticeship before you even became a reporter. When I joined the AP, I didn't have five years experience. They may have given some credit for my period in service, three years, but up till about that time you couldn't even apply for a job with AP if you didn't have five years experience on a newspaper. It was virtually a policy. And the reason was the AP wanted experienced reporters. The trend's kind of gone the other way and I'll get off this.

But UPI, of course they epitomized the other extreme of hiring kids fresh out of college, out of journalism school, at low salaries, working them real hard, always cutting corners on staffing and trying to cover too much. You can see I'm not a fan of UPI, even though they've had some good reporters who could do great jobs. But [they'd] burn them out. If the kid leaves for a better paying job, they don't care; get another one out of college, pay him low. They just reversed the business of having experienced reporters on the wire service.

G: Interesting point.

The preferences of the reporters is I guess one factor, the political preferences in this race. What about the preferences of their publishers and owners of the papers?

B: You know, you probably will check me against my memory on things like this. My memory is that I would say the great preponderance of newspapers were for Coke Stevenson, and basically it was on the theory that Coke was what Texans liked, as governor he'd been very conservative and Texas is conservative. My memory is that certainly the big newspapers and I suspect most of the smaller cities probably supported Coke, although I think as the race went along some attitudes may have changed. He probably had some newspapers. I'm not sure about, for instance, the Marsh-Fentress chain, Austin, Waco, Port Arthur. That chain may have gone to LBJ.

G: I assume that he had Marsh-Fentress.

B: Well, he was their congressman, for so much of that Tenth District at least. They may have tended to be a little more liberal than papers like the Dallas Morning News and the Houston Chronicle. I'm almost certain if you go back and look at the Dallas Morning News, [Fort Worth] Star-Telegram, Chronicle--if you find out I'm wrong, let me know--Post, I believe they must have all endorsed Coke. Have you checked? Do you happen to know on that point?

G: Well, I'm not sure about the Post. I'm sure the others did.

B: Well, I started to hesitate maybe a little on the Post, which tended to be at least compared to the Chronicle, in some respects more liberal.

G: Well, did you have any association with Johnson before the race?

B: No. No, I really didn't. I knew who he was, of course, but I think

almost literally I probably had never met him until I met him as a candidate for the U.S. Senate.

G: How did you cover his campaign?

B: Well, as you know from that file that you showed me, it was a whirlwind campaign. Johnson, of course, then as throughout his career was always just full of tremendous energy and that was particularly epitomized by the helicopter, when he could use it. [It was] a very difficult campaign to cover for a reporter simply on the basis of trying to keep up with him. That was true whether he was in the helicopter, which meant you had to race from one town to another, and sometimes you couldn't even make all his stops, it was literally impossible because he was hopping from one town to another in the helicopter and no way you could drive in time to get to every stop. So sometimes you had to skip a stop and pick him up. . . .

G: Did you ever get to fly on the helicopter?

B: Never did. Never did. I don't believe that any reporters got to fly on the helicopter. If they did, it was unusual and probably just very briefly. Probably just because of the capacity. If there was anybody on the helicopter with him it was probably some of his aides.

G: Did the reporters travel together?

B: I almost always made it a policy, because I was with AP, a wire service, to travel by myself in my own car. I think some of the reporters who worked for the newspapers--well, for instance, AP, of course back in those days we called in a lot to make a kind of a constant deadline. In other words, it wasn't like a newspaper deadline where

you had a certain edition deadline. The AP, I know we were very competitive, always trying to have something on wire before UPI. So any time we got something that we thought was good for a new lead, as soon as we could, we got to a phone and called it in. That was an example of one of the reasons I always traveled by myself, so that I wasn't tied down and had to be with somebody else and not being able to do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it in that respect.

G: Did you also attempt to cover the headquarters?

B: I covered the headquarters a little bit, but not much because my coverage was pretty intensive on that campaign of being on the road with Johnson. I might have covered it a little bit when we would be back in Austin, but I don't have any vivid memory of having done that.

G: Now initially, of course when the campaign started, before he announced that he would run, there was a good deal of discussion about whether or not he should run and wanted to run and would run. Do you recall his dilemma?

B: I don't know that I recall the dilemma. I do remember that there was a lot of speculation about whether he would and there seemed to be a lot of waiting and delaying. But I don't know what all the factors were that he was weighing before he got in. It was obvious that a lot of people, a lot of his friends, were telling him to run, that they'd support him and they thought he could beat Coke Stevenson. But I don't know what all the factors were.

G: Miriam Ferguson came out in support of him right away. Do you recall that?

B: I do recall it.

G: Anything significant about that?

B: This may be just impression, but I think it was antipathy on her part toward Coke Stevenson. I don't know the exact background of that.

G: Did you expect W. Lee O'Daniel, the incumbent, not to run? He had not announced at the time either way, as I recall.

B: You know, I don't know why, but I think we never felt surprised for some reason that he didn't run.

G: LBJ opened his campaign in Wooldridge Park in Austin and came out on a platform of peace, preparedness and progress. Did you attend the speech? Do you recall any--?

B: Yes, I think I did. The reason I say I think I did, I don't have any specific memory that I did but I think I got in from the outset and I think I covered that speech. But there's nothing vivid.

G: Okay. Well, just almost as soon as the campaign started he had that kidney stone attack and was flown to Mayo's. Let me ask you to recall in detail as much as you can about that whole episode.

B: Well, I obviously should have prepared for this a little better by going back and dredging up my memory. I just remember the announcement that he was in Mayo's. I think he was up there before I even knew he had gone.

G: They did try to keep it from the press, as I understand.

B: I think that was it, that we didn't realize that he had had a kidney stone I think until he was already up there and then the announcement finally was made that he was up there. My impression is that it may

have been a day or so before we discovered that he was up there in the hospital and didn't know where he was.

G: Yes. Then he went to Houston, San Antonio and Corpus [Christi].

B: I remember San Antonio, and the only reason I remember it is that I remember cooling my heels in San Antonio while he spent a great deal of time meeting with some of the political powers in San Antonio. I'm trying to remember who the black was that he met with. There was a very powerful black leader there.

G: [Valmo] Bellinger?

B: Bellinger. Yes. I remember that he went to see Bellinger. It seems to me--but this may have been something I just realized later [because of] how close they were--he met with John Peace in San Antonio. I would assume--this is an assumption--that he certainly would have met with Maury Maverick, Jr.

G: Maury, Sr. was still alive then, too.

B: Yes, probably Maury Maverick, Sr. because he was still alive. Maury Maverick, Jr. came along later in the legislature. That's right.

G: The first day of helicopter--

B: I remember Corpus. I'm sorry, for some reason, the only memory I have there is of being in--what was the old hotel there?

G: Breakers? Nueces?

B: All I remember is an old hotel. It wasn't Driscoll, was it?

G: No.

B: Mrs. [Clara] Driscoll owned it? But I remember the old hotel that they always used when he went there, while he was in Corpus.

G: Any significance to that?

B: No, I just remember the fact of going there.

G: In mid-June he started using the helicopter, started in I guess Terrell and Canton and ended up in Marshall. Did you travel along then?

B: Yes, I'm certain I traveled with him just about everywhere he went on that campaign. I might say, it made it almost impossible to keep up with the guy. We had to just jump, you know, we'd say well, he's going to be here and we can't get there by then, so we'll go on to the next stop or whatever.

G: And then you would be there before he arrived?

B: Be there by the time he arrived, yes.

G: What sort of advance work did he have done in these towns before he got there?

B: I wish I could remember the names of the people that were doing advance for him. I don't know whether [Horace] Busby was doing advance work for him or not. Probably not. But he had good advance work done because they always had I think sound trucks going around saying that Lyndon was coming to town and he was going to be out at such and such a point where the helicopter was going to land. And of course, just the fact of the helicopter itself got crowds out, because that was certainly novel. As far as I know nobody else had done it, certainly not in Texas, maybe somewhere else.

G: How did you know where the helicopter was going to land at each stop?

B: I suppose they gave us a briefing, their advance man or whoever told us where he would be landing.

G: So they had it all planned in advance, I guess.

B: Yes. And of course it was to their advantage to try to get reporters to the spot for coverage.

G: What was Johnson's speaking style like?

B: I would call it kind of bombastic, very fervent, waved his hands a lot. This may not be a very kindly way to express it, but I always had a feeling that he was kind of bellowing at people. Partly probably to--well, I think it was a tendency of his throughout his career to speak loudly, particularly if he were addressing an audience out in the open. And I think he did this on the telephone, too. If he was speaking from Washington to Austin or to Houston, it was like he was trying to make his voice heard from Washington to Houston without benefit of the telephone line, like he was always kind of yelling more to make himself heard, like he felt he had to do that to make himself heard. I remember that was one of the impressions I had of him as a speaker, particularly out in the open, that he was saying, "Well, I want to make sure I'm heard, whether these loudspeakers get it to them or not."

G: What was the crowd reaction to him generally?

B: Lyndon was good, much better on the stump. Most of the time on the stump, in the campaign, I'll say this, he rarely used a prepared text on the campaign trail. Because of that--and I think others have said the same thing--he was much better extemporaneously. He really warmed

up to it, and the crowd warmed up to him. He'd get them going, get the crowd going. He was pretty typical of the old school type of politician. He never was, in my opinion, a great orator, but he would harangue the crowd and he could seize on a phrase or something that he would see they responded to, and he would really work at that phrase or that theme and the crowd really would warm up to Lyndon. They'd start yelling, you know, "Pour it on, Lyndon." I thought he was good when he was extemporaneous.

G: Did he tailor his speeches to the different sections of the state? For example, would he speak one style or emphasize one thing in East Texas and another in--?

B: I think he did a little bit, but the theme you mentioned there, he was pretty consistent on that theme. He may have worked it a little bit for the local angle because of the area, but I would say he was pretty consistent and didn't try to really tailor a speech to an East Texas audience or to a West Texas audience as much as a lot of politicians did. What was it, peace, preparedness and progress, or prosperity?

G: Yes, progress.

Did you normally write or call in a story after each speech or did you--?

B: Well, I think almost throughout my career as a reporter that both with AP and with the Chronicle later--there was a little difference--but essentially you did the same thing. Back then were the days when a lot of newspapers had more than one deadline. Of course, there was radio so you were always saying it would be on the radio news first

before the UPI. We would do an overnighter story to get us started for the day. Then the next day, as you went along, you'd listen or watch to see any particular incident or hear any sort of a new phrase or a new theme that might be injected. If you thought you had something that was really a lot better than you'd written the night before for your overnighter, we'd call in and dictate a new lead. Virtually never dictated a complete new story during the daytime, partly because you didn't have time to. So you just dictated a new lead, maybe four or five paragraphs, new top, and pick it up in the story that you had, the carbon that you kept from overnight.

G: Was LBJ aware of the stories that you wrote?

B: Very much so.

G: Did he object to any of them?

B: Typically, throughout his career, he always found out as fast as he could apparently, and I think it really reached its peak as president, but always LBJ always knew what you had written. (Laughter) Obviously he got hold or had people call and dictate when he was maybe on the road or something. But he knew very early the next day what the Dallas Morning News and the Houston Chronicle and the wire services, he knew what you'd written. He was probably as bad as any politician I ever knew about jumping you about your story.

G: What did he object to about stories, typically, or in this campaign, for example?

B: He would bitch about almost anything that he didn't like, whether it was your crowd estimate or a phrase, the way you quoted him, "that

wasn't what I said," or sometimes flatly deny he'd said something. Or, "Well, goddamn, Byers, are you for the other candidate?" you know, that sort of approach.

G: Was there anything in particular that you'd written that irritated him?

B: You know, it's funny, I don't recall anything in particular. I remember just characteristic of him to let you know if there was anything in the story--on the campaign I don't remember anything in particular that he criticized that I wrote. I only had one really vivid memory of Johnson, not jumping me, but of calling the editor of the Chronicle--this is much later--to let the editor of the Chronicle know that he didn't like the goddamned story that Byers had written about whether Johnson was going to go back to the Pedernales, sit on the porch and rock instead of running for re-election. The editor called me and said that Johnson stayed on the phone an hour chewing him out about my story. (Laughter)

G: That was Everett Collier?

B: No, this was Bill Stevens, who was editor from about--I can't remember the exact dates, but a relatively short time, from about 1963 to 1967 or 1968.

G: Well, were there reporters on this campaign that he especially objected to in terms of their coverage?

B: I'd really turn it around and probably say that there were more reporters that he liked, that he got along with and he kind of buttered up.

I don't remember any particular [ones] as far as anybody he singled out.

G: How did he and Allen Duckworth get along, for example?

B: Well, in an odd sort of way, my memory is they got along pretty well. Duckworth was a unique reporter. I thought he was an excellent reporter. He was working for a very conservative newspaper and basically he was, I think, very conservative himself. But he was an excellent reporter in that he really was very perceptive. I think he had a knack for being very fair, despite the fact that he might make a candidate feel that he was being unfair in some of the more or less analytical remarks he would throw in. But he was a good reporter in letting the reader know what a guy was saying and how it compared with what the other guy was saying. He was a good analyst of what the issues were and what each candidate basically was driving for. He was just excellent. I think that he had the respect of LBJ, maybe respect because LBJ knew the Dallas Morning News certainly at that time was the paper of influence.

G: Was Johnson's staff helpful to you in getting your story or your information? Did they make scheduling information available to you?

B: They made the basics available. In other words, they didn't give you a hard time. I would say that--I don't know whether it was because of Johnson or what--they did not generally go out of their way to be helpful, but they would tell you, "Here's the schedule and here's where he's supposed to go." But they were never very helpful about making sure you got a text of a speech.

G: Was Johnson himself helpful to you in that?

B: Not particularly. I think he kind of took the idea that, by God, you ought to be doing your job and you ought to be covering him well, but not with any particular help from him to do it.

G: Did he expect you to help him in the campaign?

B: Yes, I think Johnson did. I think most candidates expect you--my experience with most candidates in major races--well, of course, we only covered kind of the so-called major races, governor, U.S. Senate. But down through the years I found that most candidates somehow feel that when a reporter is assigned to cover them that for some reason that reporter ought to be favorable to them. And Johnson almost demanded that you be favorable to him.

This is getting away from Johnson, but one of the most thin-skinned candidates I ever knew was John Hill in that respect, who never could quite understand why a reporter would write something that he felt put him in a bad light or that wasn't favorable or in some way he thought was something that a friend wouldn't have written. He almost would say something like, "Well, boy, I thought you were my friend," because of something you'd written. He might seize on something--I say seize, see that the guy had said something that is subject to question. As a reporter you say, you know, the guy is just off base on saying that or the reader needs to be told that, look, here's the statement, but here's the facts of the situation. You inject something like that, and you don't do it to deliberately hurt a guy, but you do it to tell a reader, look, here's more than what the

candidate says, if you really want to see a thing in its true light. Hill particularly resented that sort of thing. And I would say Johnson did, too.

G: What was the status of the reporters who shifted each week or so? They'd cover Stevenson one week and Johnson the next.

B: Well, it probably made it easier for them because--and in retrospect, at the time I thought it was a good idea. Of course, I was a fairly young reporter, but I thought the AP had a good idea keeping me on one candidate, because you got to know him and you kind of followed him on the issues that he was harping on. In retrospect, I think that was a mistake. Of course, they finally shifted and quit doing it, just like most newspapers. Then they started rotating reporters from one candidate to another. Of course, the reason is obvious, that's to keep you from just getting one viewpoint and getting kind of overwhelmed by what this candidate is saying, and hearing his friends and his crowd always cheering what he says. And I think that virtually everybody does that. It makes for better coverage.

G: Do you think that the reporters ever served as conduits of information to the other camp in terms of issues and what the other candidate was saying or doing?

B: You know, maybe it was because I never really paid much attention to the other reporters. Oh, sure, I was friends [with them] and we'd buddy around while we were together. I would say that I would have been surprised. I'm not aware that any of them did it, honestly, and I would have been surprised to have learned that any reporter did

that. I think probably from what I've heard there were some reporters that were in the business, and I'd say most of them before my time, that might have done something like that, but I think they would have been rare.

G: Were you allowed to attend campaign stops that were not necessarily speeches but strategy meetings or meetings with local leaders?

B: Well, I mentioned the Bellinger thing in San Antonio, and wherever there was a strategy meeting, you were excluded, certainly with LBJ. I know Coke Stevenson was the same way. That's the way politics was and probably still is to a large extent. You know, reporters always try to find out what went on in strategy meetings and try to find somebody that they know was there to tell them what went on, what was talked about. But Johnson was always very secretive. As a matter of fact, he tried lots of times to get away from reporters, to hold meetings, strategy sessions, with people without their knowing about it.

G: Is that right?

B: Yes.

G: Let me ask you a little bit more about his speaking. Did he ever mimic Coke Stevenson in these speeches?

B: I think in a way you could have called it mimicking. Or at least he would poke fun at Coke and I reckon it was probably in a mimicking sort of way. I wish I could remember some of the phrases he used, where he took advantage of the way newspapers characterized Coke. I do recall his saying things about, "Well, you don't see me sitting

around puffing on a pipe and waiting for people to come see me," you know, kind of saying this is the way old Coke is, he's just sitting there calculating, drinking coffee and waiting for his buddies to come tell him how he's going to win the election. And of course Lyndon was pretty shrewd in that respect. That was very characteristic of Coke. Of course, what Johnson would seize on is Johnson is just the opposite, you know, always on the move, a whirlwind. I think he was certainly always the astute politician. He saw that Coke, even though he was the favorite and presumably had a big lead going in, I think he realized very early that Coke was vulnerable to that kind of a whirlwind campaign, that Coke was going to sit around and think I've got it won and let people tell him how he was going to win and not campaign very intensively. And that's exactly what happened, Coke did not campaign very hard. I'm sure that he thought he had the damn thing locked up. Of course, he was very bitter about it afterwards, because of the circumstances under which he lost.

Maybe this summarizing is getting ahead of the story too much, but I always had the feeling that while Coke--and to me the evidence was kind of clear that if there was vote stealing, it was on both sides, and that when it really got down to being that close of a race and Coke realized he was about to lose, that in effect it was a case of waking up to it too late and not being able to get any late votes in to offset it or not enough late votes in for his gain. I don't know whether you've read the history, you probably have, of the campaign and the fact that there were late votes came in from--the one I

particularly remember for Coke was I believe from Brownwood, Brown County, and I think there were some other places. But clearly, like I say, I'm convinced there was vote stealing in the race. There's no point I suppose in saying who was responsible literally for votes being brought in late, but I'd say both sides did it.

G: I want to ask you about that phase of the campaign at length when we get there.

Do you think Johnson in his speeches would tend to speak too long or would he wind up his speeches at a good time?

B: Lyndon, even though it was a whirlwind campaign and he ought to be getting on to the next stop, he had then and I'd say throughout his political career, he had a tendency, a very definite tendency, to speak too long. He'd come up to a great climax and you'd say, man, this is the end of the speech where he's made a great climactic statement, and he'd get good applause maybe on this great finishing sentence. The only trouble was he didn't finish. (Laughter) That would just inspire him to further heights. So he'd go on and reach another great climax, that was so good. I saw him do that a good many times. They'd practically have to drag him away, his aides, try and get him by the shirt sleeves and say, "Look, you've got to go."

G: How often did this happen?

B: Pretty often. He was hard to keep on track as far as his schedule. It happened pretty regularly. Well one, he both loved to talk when he got wound up, and he loved, as he always said, to press the flesh.

He'd get out in that crowd and start wanting to shake every hand there, not let anybody leave without shaking their hand.

G: They had two helicopters. They had a larger Sikorsky at first and then they ended up with a Bell. Was there any difference in the use of the vehicles? I realize that one would hold more people than the other one or one was larger than the other one.

B: I honestly don't remember whether there was much difference in the use of them or what. Partly I suppose since we weren't getting to ride ourselves, we never paid much attention.

G: Do you think that the helicopter was effective?

B: I think it was a great, great publicity gimmick. It both got crowds out, and where they got a particular person to come, it stirred the imagination. Here was a guy doing something new, something different, kind of epitomized the difference between old, slow, pokey Coke Stevenson and this energetic young guy just going hellbent for leather all over the country, whether it's by helicopter or by car. Of course, when he was in a car, he was traveling at breakneck speed all the time. It was difficult on the highway, even when he was in a car, to keep up with him.

G: During that campaign tour did Johnson ever encounter hostile crowds or people who were noticeably Stevenson partisans?

B: I don't remember much heckling of Johnson. I suspect maybe one reason was that anybody that thought about heckling Johnson knew that he might be taking considerable risk with his physical health to really challenge Johnson by heckling him. Johnson had a fiery temper. You

know, I never saw it happen, but I wouldn't have been surprised because of the kind of guy he was, to see him come down off the podium after somebody that had really heckled him, you know, enough to make it irritating. I don't really recall his getting much heckling.

G: Any of the small town stops that have particular significance that you recall?

B: I don't know whether it's because it's too long ago or just campaigns get to be such a blur, going from one stop [to another]. I don't remember any particular stop that was a spectacular, significant stop.

G: The Taft-Hartley Act was an issue in that campaign, and Johnson came out in favor of Section 14-B. Stevenson rather vacillated on the issue, it seems to me, or did not come out. How would you explain the positions of the two candidates on this issue, do you remember?

B: I think that's one of the kind of surprising aspects of the campaign, that issue. I don't know what Johnson's reasoning was on it, but I think clearly that's probably why labor--in retrospect it might seem surprising to some people that labor came out for Coke, endorsed Coke. I think that was probably the main reason they did. Coke I suppose was smart enough to see that he could attract some support that ordinarily you wouldn't think he would have gotten. But I don't really know what Johnson's reasoning was, unless--this is really just speculation on my part--it was because of some of the alignments that he already had with some significant major business interests, like Brown and Root. I automatically think of Brown and Root. It may be because of that kind of association that Johnson, who may have analyzed it,

say, well, look, labor's not that much of a force in Texas anyway, and I'm not going to really lose votes and I can gain some significant support from business by coming out for the right-to-work provision. That's a guess on my part, but that would probably be my analysis of it.

G: Did Johnson really stress this in his speeches, did he stress right-to-work?

B: My memory is he stressed it quite often, and I think he keyed it to what I suppose was typical, kind of a typical Texas feeling that Texas people like the idea--it sounded good, the right to work. I think he just felt that will sound good to most Texas voters, and I think he was right at that time. In fact, he might still be right today using that kind of psychology.

G: Did the oil industry tend to support Stevenson over Johnson?

B: You know, I really don't know. My feeling is that a good bit of oil may have gone with Johnson. Have you checked the record on that to indicate--? I really don't know.

G: George Peddy was the third candidate in the race.

B: Yes. He was not a particularly significant candidate though.

G: And of course Stevenson got, what, a 70,000 vote lead or something in the first primary. Did Johnson make any effort after that to pick up Peddy's votes, do you think?

B: It seems to me that I remember that Johnson either met with Peddy or met with some of Peddy's people--I'm trying to remember why I think I

have that memory, where it was even--and tried to get that support. Peddy I don't believe ever came out and endorsed anybody.

The reason I have a feeling that he [LBJ] may have had oil support, at least some of it, was the fact that he had been able to tap oil for contributions to help various Democratic candidates for Congress back in, what, 1940?

G: 1940.

B: 1940, I believe. He may have gotten himself into the good graces of some people like [Clint] Murchison and [Sid] Richardson, I don't know what others might have. It may have been only with the independents like that, Murchison and Richardson and I don't know who else might have been with them. I don't know if [William A.] Moncrief was there as a big oil man by that time or not. It might have been that the big oil boys might have felt like we've got to stick with Coke, maybe people like Humble, Magnolia, I'm not sure.

G: It seems like that Johnson attacked Stevenson for being supported by the PUP gang, petroleum, utilities and power.

B: Now that you mention it you've jogged my memory.

G: Does that sound like a familiar theme?

B: Yes, that sounds like a familiar theme. I believe that's right. But of course, typically he might have done that even if it weren't true.

G: Do you think there was any substance to that?

B: Probably some. Coke certainly had had that backing. I'm sure a lot of them stuck with him, thinking always play the favorite, always play the winner. I think most people thought that Coke would be the winner.

G: Did Mrs. Johnson take an active role in that campaign, do you recall?

B: My impression is that at that time Mrs. Johnson didn't do much besides be with him some on the stand and certainly not all the time even then. I don't have a memory of her doing what candidates' wives did, a lot of them, in later years, and that was to get out and campaign even separately on separate campaign trails. But I don't believe she did that.

I don't think there was near the emphasis in those days on a wife of a political candidate getting out and campaigning herself actively. I can recall I would say what were then kind of rare exceptions to it, for instance, Price Daniel's wife, Jean Daniel. As far as I know, I think she was probably one of the first wives of a politician to campaign actively in her own right for her husband.

G: LBJ had to leave after the first primary for a session of Congress, special session. Did that cut into the momentum of the campaign?

B: Well, I think obviously it did. I think that was one of the reasons he had to go so all out and why it became such a close race, you know, when he tried to capture the vote. But for the guy himself to have to be gone because of Congress, obviously it was a liability or a handicap.

G: Did the fact that he was 70,000 votes behind, or 72,000 votes, whatever it was, did that affect his morale in the second primary?

B: I don't think it did. Johnson I think was always the kind of guy that once he got in something, [he thought], by God, we're going to win this thing, we can do it. And as I say, I think he was a very shrewd analyst of situations. I think he probably knew that Coke was probably

lulled a little bit by leading by 70,000 votes and, by God, we're going to catch him and sandbag him. I think it just made him more intense. He was the kind of guy that in effect always said whatever the challenge, we're going to meet it.

G: Where do you think he had the best campaign organization, which city? Let's exclude Austin simply because he had been the congressman from this district.

B: Well, I don't know how the vote turned out, but I'm going to say probably San Antonio.

G: They did pick up an awful lot of votes there after the first primary.

B: Yes. I'm going to say San Antonio, probably he had the best organization and probably it was because of people like Bellinger and Maury Maverick. I think I'm right that John Peace was heavily into politics with LBJ.

G: Had Adrian Spears.

B: Adrian Spears. He really had some horses there that really knew the town and were popular, and probably of all the major cities, well, I'd say San Antonio even more than Austin probably had more of the liberal or populist or whatever you want to call it element in the levels of leadership. Liberal is the wrong term to use, of course. I don't think you could say that any city was ever liberal. But maybe populist or they would follow a personality like Johnson as against Coke Stevenson.

G: He had Roy Hofheinz working for him in Houston.

B: Yes.

G: Was that effective--?

B: That's bound to have been a big plus, too. I was thinking about it, wondering whether Houston or maybe San Antonio. But my memory is that, as far as outcome, reflecting the ability of organization to do it, my memory is that he came out better out of San Antonio than he did out of Houston.

G: Did he have smooth relations with his people during the campaign or did you hear about his eruptions of temper?

B: I would say that Johnson never had smooth relations with his staff at any time, whether it was in the campaign or in his office, mainly because of his personality. He was very volatile. He would chew people up and down. He did a lot of this more or less in public--maybe not in front of crowds, but he would do it away from a crowd maybe or before they got to a crowd. He'd certainly do it in front of reporters and not think anything about it. He would chew his staff out. And then of course on the other hand he was [inaudible]. I suppose people who worked for him long enough kind of accustomed themselves that way, you know, chew my tail out, going to rake me over the coals for something today. But then later he's going to come up and butter them up, flatter them and put his arm around them. I saw that throughout his career, and I covered him on a lot of this. I saw it all the time. One minute just really chewing out his staff, it didn't make any difference whether it was Mary Rather, his personal secretary, who was so devoted to him, or Willie Day Taylor or Horace Busby, whoever it was.

G: Did he normally have a valid reason for criticism or was it--?

B: Well, I suppose it depended on your attitude about what justified that sort of thing, and just by nature, I've never believed in that sort of thing and I always resented seeing him do it. I would say that that was just his nature and that when he was irritated or something rubbed him the wrong way, he just exploded, whereas another candidate wouldn't have. Wouldn't have found it necessary or thought it necessary to get the job done.

G: How much of an endurance task was this campaign, do you think, for him?

B: Well, it was difficult, as all his campaigns were for reporters who covered him, just because he was such a high-speed candidate. You just had to go fast and furious, from early in the day where his first stop was until late at night. And he was always that way.

G: Did he lose his voice at all during the campaign or did he have trouble with it?

B: I'm trying to remember whether he actually lost it or whether he was just very raspy. I can remember it being very raspy and hardly being able to talk. You know, his voice would break. I can't remember for sure whether he ever lost it at all. But he seemed to be on the verge of it at times and may in fact have lost it and maybe I just don't remember it, but there may have been a time when he couldn't have actually talked on some stops.

G: My impression is that the state was becoming more and more urban at this point.

B: It was just starting to become urban, really urban, moving towards becoming urban. You know, today, it's what, 75-25 [per cent], or whatever it is, 80-20, and despite that, the concentration of population is--in one sense Texas is still a very rural state. You have these tremendous concentrations, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Austin, and yet look how big the state is and there are all these little, little towns. Because of that, maybe it's just me, even with those big cities and their tremendous population, I still have trouble thinking of Texas as an urban state when so many people are still out in the rural areas, maybe not numerically but because you know there are so many small towns. And you know, what do you call urban?

G: Did Johnson perceive this trend, do you think, during the 1948 campaign?

B: I think he probably had a good bit of vision in that respect, that he could see that with oil and gas production and the natural resources in Texas that it was going to become an industrial state and become a boom state. I think he saw that coming.

G: Do you think he stressed the campaigning in the urban areas as much as he should have in that campaign?

B: That's kind of hard to say, because even if he saw that coming I think there was still a lot of the tradition that even he would have had a hard time shaking off and saying, "Look, we ought not to be spending so much time out here in the boondocks or the smaller cities, we ought to be spending more time in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio." I think he knew the importance of the big cities, because that's where a lot of

those were, and he had sense enough to get a good organization and to go there enough to fire up his workers. But as his schedule I think would reflect, he really jumped around the state to an awful lot of cities, and a lot of really small, small, small, even then, places that I think probably Coke Stevenson never went to, wouldn't have tried to get to.

G: He had Marietta Brooks as head of a woman's division. Did he have more women in his campaign than Coke Stevenson did, do you think?

B: I think he must have had. I think he must have had. I think Lyndon recognized early the importance of having women in his campaign, whether he thought that women ought to get much attention, per se. But he knew that women in his campaign could help him. Marietta Brooks, certainly at that time, [was] full of vim and vigor. Marietta, I know there would be other women whose names I could call, but she was certainly one of the prime workers for him. Who was it? Maybe it was years later. Up in Hillsboro. Can't recall her name now. I went to the university with her.

G: A lady from Hillsboro?

B: Yes. She and her husband became big workers for LBJ [Dr. Silas and Bettye Grant]. Now I can't remember her name. But he certainly pulled a lot of high-powered women into his campaign in later years, and I think he probably had the start of it right there in that campaign.

G: Yes. Now let me ask you to recall as much as you can about the election itself and the aftermath.

B: Well, my main impression of the election and the aftermath, particularly election night and then the next, what--I suppose two days probably. That impression is kind of epitomized by his house out on--what was it? Was it Bowman Road?

G: Dillman.

B: Dillman. Dillman Road. I still have a very distinct memory of that house being ablaze with lights as if every room--and probably every room was--like every room in the house, the lights were on in the house it seemed like all night. And I was inside the house on election night, because I was covering him. I became aware then and continuously for the next two days of the fact that there was tremendous activity that went beyond waiting for the returns to come in. It was just--there are some things I think that reporters kind of realize instinctively, and I knew in effect that something was going on, that there was tremendous activity. Now, I couldn't know what it was, because just like when he had strategy meetings, he was not letting reporters come in the room where he was meeting with people that he was working with, Connally, who was there. Who else?

G: Well, Claude Wild I guess.

B: Claude Wild.

G: How about Charlie Herring?

B: Charlie Herring.

G: Alvin Wirtz? Was he one?

B: Now I don't know whether--I suppose Wirtz may have been there, although it seemed to me like Wirtz maybe stayed at his own house. Wirtz may

have been there. But as I told Dave Cheavens, we were getting statements from Johnson, he was confident he was going to win this race. I told Dave, "You know, something's going on." The main thing was that I was aware that they were burning up the telephone lines.

G: How could you tell that, for example?

B: Oh, you could hear them, and you were aware that--well, you'd see them going into a room or you'd hold the door and they'd be on the phone. Couldn't hear what they were saying, but I was just aware that there were people on the phone it seemed like all the time. So I spent the night there at his house. As John Connally says, I think he's the one who said, "I still remember Byers sleeping on the couch here in the front room instead of going home."

G: Did you sleep on the couch in the front room?

B: Yes. One interesting story. I don't know whether I told you this on the phone when you called me up the first time or not, but I've told people this story a lot of times. It dramatizes, to me at least, the way Johnson was, how intense he was. I think it was Sunday night. Was the election on Saturday, right?

G: Yes.

B: I think it was on Sunday night. I know it was not the election night. I think it was Sunday night. He had been in one of the inner rooms there in his house while I was outside, just basically waiting for him to come out and make statements or tell us whatever he thought was new. This was about midnight, and he came rushing out of his room, putting on his coat, and went to the front door and rushed out the

front door. I'm going, what the hell, here's midnight and he's leaving the house. So of course I went out the door after him. He ran and jumped in his car and I jumped in my car. He took off like a bat out of hell, so I tore out after him, followed him. He went down to Washington Square. Is it Washington Square? Down near the university? It's the street that Frank Erwin's house is on, his mother's house.

G: Woodlawn?

B: Woodlawn, yes. He drove up there, stopped his car, jumped out. So I drove up right behind his car and stopped and jumped out. I still remember there was a big full moon overhead, and he turned around. He was just furious that I had followed him. He let me get up fairly close to him, and he said--and he was mad, just bellowed at me, "Goddamn it, Byers. Can't I even go take a piss without your being right there beside me?" (Laughter) Then he turned around and stormed in the house, in Erwin's house.

G: Then Alvin Wirtz'.

B: Yes, then Alvin Wirtz' house. Obviously there was a lot of discussion going on about what they were doing. You can assume that, otherwise why would he have gone over there. That's something I'll never know, of course, what they said, what they decided to do, or what they felt could be done to win the election.

G: Plus the Johnson people have indicated that they were calling all of their--

B: County leaders.

G: Yes, to get their own returns, rather than relying on those of the Texas Election Bureau. Do you think that was true?

B: Well, I think that was true, but I think it went further than that.

G: Do you? Do you have any evidence that they were--?

B: I honestly don't have any evidence. As far as my personal knowledge, I say what I just said on the basis of the known late votes from Box 13 and Jim Wells County and that whole history of late returns. To me it just defies logic or common sense or credibility not to believe that there were late votes that never should have been counted.

G: Was Johnson ever absent for a period long enough that would have allowed him to go down there?

B: I am absolutely certain that there was not enough time that I wasn't there that I didn't know that he was there, for him to have ever done that. As a matter of fact, I wrote a story, a column, knocking down that story when it came out--when?--several years ago, the Mexican-American--

G: Luis Salas, yes.

B: Yes, down there making that claim. I wrote a column flatly saying that on the basis of my own memory of the aftermath of the election that there was never a time when Johnson could have left the house and been gone long enough, even if he had flown down there, which I don't believe, to have gone down there and done that and been back without my being aware of it. I simply do not believe that.

G: What about John Connally? Could he have gone down there without your knowledge?

B: Well, that's why I said I don't think Johnson could have done it. I would say that anybody else could have done it for him, John Connally, anybody that he trusted well enough to have sent down there to do something like that could have done it, and I would not be able to dispute that having happened, if it did.

G: How long did you stay at Johnson's house basically after the election?

B: I was there election night, all day Sunday, Sunday night, and my memory is until late Monday, I don't know how late but late Monday.

G: And then what did you do?

B: Well, I went home, and then went back to work the next morning.

G: Back to his house or back to--?

B: No, I think back to the office.

G: What was Johnson's mood after the election, when you were there, aside from the single incident you've described?

B: You mean during the time before they finally got a final count that had him winning?

G: Yes.

B: I'd say his mood was one of very intense, fierce, aggressive determination that, by God, this election wasn't over and that he was going to be the winner, that he was typically Johnson. He was frenetic and demanding, in effect saying to Connally and the rest of them, "By God, keep those telephone lines burning. Get some results in. Find out what the latest count is." I think he was just very intense, just consumed with a passion to win.

G: Who was in charge there during that period? Was Johnson himself in charge?

B: Connally was pretty much the ramrod, was kind of his first lieutenant or whatever you want to call him, the guy who was really the ramrod.

G: Did you have much contact with him during this?

B: Not a whole lot. Not a whole lot. Connally was working with people. I will say this, I've said how much I think LBJ was very astute. I really think that Connally, I am going to say perhaps rather than probably, had as much to do with whatever happened to get it done as LBJ himself. Connally is always I think a supreme strategist and was even then.

G: You've indicated that part of your role was tracking Johnson's movements and going where he went. What else did you do while you were there? Were you trying to get returns from them? Were you trying to get votes?

B: Yes. Only in the sense that I was kind of there as the reporter on guard to get whatever was going to come out of there. As long as they were working at it, as long as they hadn't turned off the lights and said, "Well, let's go home, it's all over; we won't do anymore," I was there, really at the instruction of the bureau chief, Dave Cheavens, who said, "Just don't leave." So I was there just to wait for whatever might come out, whether it was a statement or a new count or some more votes or a change in votes, you know. So it was really just a continuous watch to get whatever might come out of Johnson and his

headquarters, which had really become his home, until there was nothing more to stay there for.

G: Did they spend time out in the back yard, too? It must have been hot at that point. It was August.

B: Very little. They were in the house I'll say almost all the time. And you're right, it was hot as hell.

G: Were there other reporters there for long periods of time also?

B: The reporters for the major papers pretty much stayed out there, but they were in a little different situation from wires. In fact, the newspapers always kind of take advantage of the fact that they knew that if AP at least was going to cover something, then they could go home because they didn't have a deadline until, whatever they were, the morning paper or the evening paper, whatever their deadlines were. So they'd be there close to the deadlines maybe and get whatever they could get to write the story and meet the deadline, but then from their viewpoint there wasn't much reason for staying. So my memory is that I was almost the only reporter that was kind of around the clock there at Johnson's house.

G: Anything else that you observed during that time that's noteworthy?

B: Not really. Not really. It's just that clear impression, as I say, this impression or feeling of knowing that there is frenzied activity going on, that they are not stopping, that this election is not over.

G: Did you have any contact with Mrs. Johnson?

B: If I did it was just very momentary, like maybe--of course she was always a perfect hostess. I think that I recall her bringing out some

sandwiches or a sandwich tray and probably ice tea or Cokes or whatever, coffee.

G: Now, of course you had the convention after that, the state convention in which--

B: Yes, but oddly enough I wasn't involved in the coverage of the convention. Dave Cheavens, who was our bureau chief, went up and covered the convention at, what, Amarillo, was it?

G: No, it was in Fort Worth I think.

B: Fort Worth. That's right. I'm mixing up conventions. But it was Fort Worth, and Dave Cheavens went up and covered that. Because of course he was the AP's key man on politics. In effect, Mac Roy Rasor and I were kind of the leg men who went out and covered campaigns. Dave did the conventions and wrote the main political analysis pieces and that sort of thing.

G: Did you cover any of the hearings?

B: No. When it got beyond the campaign, then it really went to Dave Cheavens and people in Dallas. I was kind of low man on the totem pole, as a matter of fact. It was a three-man bureau: Dave Cheavens bureau chief; Mac Roy Rasor, who had seniority over me by six months; and then myself. So when it got to that kind of general coverage, the aftermath and all the developments, the Coke Stevenson people trying to get the boxes locked up and impounded and all that sort of thing and going to court to try and throw it out, their appeal to, what, the Fifth Circuit I reckon and then to the Supreme Court. All of that, of course, was beyond my realm of coverage.

G: How about the Truman train through Texas?

B: I covered Truman. I was sent to Uvalde, where I covered Truman in Uvalde, when he went down there to visit Cactus Jack [Garner]. That was the only segment of the trip that I covered myself. Kind of shows you the difference in times. Even though they had Secret Service then with the candidates, there was not the intense security that there is today. Today it would have been foolish for me to have done what I did there. I was still young and fairly impressionable. Well, let's see, that was 1948. Well, I was twenty-eight, which sounds by today's standards fairly old, but I'd only been a political reporter for a couple of years and here was the presidential campaign. I was standing somewhere along the parade route, and here came the car with Truman in it. So I ran out to the car and stuck out my hand and said something like, "Hello, Mr. President," or something, shook hands with the President. I probably would have been shot, blown away by the Secret Service, grabbed, if I tried to do that again, if a reporter tried to do that today, which shows you how relaxed it was then.

G: Yes. We're a little more edgy.

Have you learned anything about the 1948 campaign since then that gives you any insight as to what happened and how?

B: I literally have not. All I know is what happened then, the facts that came out then. As far as I know, there's been no real disclosure outside of the so-called story a few years ago about Johnson going down there in the dark of the night, which I do not believe. There's been no story really, as far as I know, that's really shed any light

on it as far as any new development that would say, well, this proves that this happened or adds credence.

G: Yes. Well, this is a good place to break I think.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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