

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 14, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES A. ELKINS, JR.

INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB

PLACE: His offices in the First City National Bank Building,  
Houston, Texas.

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M: First of all, I'd like to know something about your background:  
where you were born, and when, and where you got your education.

E: Well, I'm a native Texan, actually, a native Houstonian. Even  
though I was born in Galveston some fifty years ago, I have always  
lived in Houston; educated in Houston in the public schools here;  
went away for the last couple years of high school.

M: Where did you go away to?

E: I went to Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Then, after  
that, [I] went to Princeton and graduated there in 1941.

M: You had a B.A. degree.

E: I have a B.A. degree.

M: What was your major?

E: Economics.

M: Came out during the war years.

E: Came out, right at the beginning of June of 1941. I got out, and  
have been working in the banks [since then]. I'd always been inter-  
ested in banking by virtue of family connections. So I came into the  
bank full time immediately thereafter and have been here ever since.

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M: You didn't get caught in the war then?

E: No, I was knocked out of the war because of my eyes. I was 4-F, tried to get that waived, and it was too much--

M: Too much 4-F!

E: Too much 4-F. (Laughter) Tried every ruse known to man, but I never could pass that eye chart any way in the world.

M: Now, according to my data, you were vice president of the bank in 1946. Is that right?

E. Right.

M: Up until 1950.

E: I'll have to rely on your data. I guess it was 1946.

M: This is in Who's Who information.

E: All right. I'll buy that.

M: You'll buy that? And the president from 1950 onward.

E: 1950 is correct. Right. And then I was made chairman about five years ago, I guess. Yes, it was 1964.

M: Where did you get interested in politics?

E: Well, I suppose in college. I guess when you start taking life a little more seriously and are beginning to see that. . . My family has always been interested in politics. I've always heard it discussed, ever since I was a child. I can remember going down and watching the election returns on the old Houston Chronicle building flash, written out on a blackboard. But I really started getting interested in politics during college years.

M: Your father was involved in Texas politics a great deal, wasn't he?

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- E: Yes, he was always very interested in Texas politics.
- M: So you must have gotten some acquaintance with that?
- E: Well, I guess if there is such a thing, I was brainwashed at an early age, unknowingly, because of his interest. I've always heard it all my life: politics and elections and races and so forth.
- M: When you came back to Houston then, did you get actively involved in politics?
- E: Yes, I suppose so. Of course, politics during the Second World War, the controversy wasn't quite as deep and as bitter, because there was a national effort going on.
- M: Yes.
- E: It was all for one and one for all, as much as you could ever be. So it wasn't too difficult, nor was it too controversial an issue, to get involved in politics. It wasn't as partisan then. In this state, of course, at that time, the two-party system was a nothing or nonexistent in 1940, or 1950. It was lip service more than anything, I suppose.
- M: Yes, yes. Can you recall when you first met Lyndon Johnson?
- E: No. It was sometime after the war, so I guess in 1946 or 1947. I remember the first time I ever actually met him was at a football game in Austin on a hot afternoon.
- M: Oh, really?
- E: That was the first time I'd ever met him. So this was sometime in 1946, 1947.

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M: Were you just introduced to him during the game?

E: Well, you know, a mob of people, a party going to a game.

And he was a member of the party.

M: I see.

E: Thirty, forty people, busload of people.

M: Did you get involved in any of his campaigns?

E: Well, I was always very interested in his campaigns. First of all, I was always very impressed with the man as a person and as a politician and a man of great ability.

M: What was it that impressed you about him exactly?

E: Well, I think his dedication to the job was what impressed me more than anything. This was a man who was thoroughly committed to politics, who was a professional politician. And it was obvious, or I thought it was obvious, that he was a man who was going to stick with it and be successful in it for the balance of his career.

M: Yes.

E: Which he eminently was. So when you're looking for a good candidate, a person that you think is a good candidate and you see, at that time, a fairly young one, this seems like a real attractive proposition.

M: Yes. He first ran for the Senate in 1948.

E: This was right before his senatorial race. Right.

M: Did you support him in that race?

E: Yes. I supported him every way I could. Locally, [I] campaigned for

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him, worked for him.

M: Do you recall precisely what you did?

E: It was purely on the local level, on the Houston area level.

M: You would talk to your business associates then?

E: That's right. Contact people; send out cards, postcards, the old campaign technique, sign the postcard; well, do everything you could to help.

M: Do you remember if you gave him a campaign contribution?

E: I doubt that back in 1948 I did give him a campaign contribution, because I was kind of too concerned about my own contributions to think that this was all-important.

M: Well, raising money is always a problem.

E: That's right. It's always a problem. And, of course, even I was fairly young at that time. In 1948, I was not quite thirty years old, so a little young to be raising money. I really had no political purses. I hadn't gotten into that area of campaigning. [I] purely worked for the man on a personal, war-hero level sort of thing.

M: Yes. Do you remember him coming to Houston to campaign at all? In that 1948 period? Did you have any contact with him?

E: No, I honestly don't. No, I don't remember his coming to Houston at that time. I know he did, but as far as my having any personal association with him, no, I don't recall that I had.

M: Well, then he went in the Senate after a close race. Did you have much contact with him while he was a senator?

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- E: I had a fair amount of contact with him. Again, at that time, I certainly wasn't in any position to have much request, certainly early in those stages, of a senator's time. However, on matters which I thought were of interest to my industry, profession, in later years from time to time, I did. I would point out some bills that were maybe pending or proposed or what have you and I have always received a very good ear, not a partial one, neither pro or con, but one which seemed to me a fair ear and an understanding one, as far as I'm concerned.
- M: How would your contact with him take place? Would you call him, or would you write him a letter, or would you visit him in Washington, or all three of those things?
- E: Probably all three. Actually, I think, probably more by letter and by personal visit than anything else. I'm not very articulate, unfortunately, on the telephone and I don't really like to get too deep into telephone conversations. So it would probably have either been by written or personal visits.
- M: Going to Washington?
- E: Going to Washington for another reason, or went to the Comptroller's Office or something.
- M: Were you impressed about the quickness of response that you got?
- E: Oh, very. Yes. Always very well-handled, always direct, to a point, not brusquely so, but efficiently so.

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- M: Not always what you wanted, but at least you got a response?
- E: You got the ear, and you felt that you were being listened to, and you weren't talking to the wall.
- M: Yes.
- E: Which I can't say about all his successors. Yes, I was always very impressed. At least, you were getting a good attentive ear.
- M: Is there any particular legislation or issue during his senatorial period that you contacted him about that comes to mind?
- E: No, because there really wasn't anything, I don't believe, that significant that would be memorable, as far as I'm concerned.
- M: Yes.
- E: I don't really remember what the issues were or what the proposals may have been.
- M: Did you get involved at all in the push for Johnson to get the presidential nomination in 1960?
- E: Yes, I guess so. I was certainly all for it. And obviously, a lot of people in this area were strongly for it, from two viewpoints: first, the ability of the individual involved, and secondly, some representation from the area--the local pride situation which we at that time and still would, I think, feel is very important to all concerned. We had a good man that could represent a good state in the top job of the world.
- M: Yes. Did you happen to go to any of the conventions?
- E: No, I've never been to a national convention. Well, as a child, went to Chicago convention when Roosevelt was nominated. [It was]

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purely a look-see. No, I've never been to another national convention.

M: Were you surprised when Johnson took the vice presidential position?

E: Yes, I was very surprised, because, of course, I guess this is all candidates, but this has been an avowed intent that, "I'd never go for number two--always number one or bust." So when it was bust, this was theoretically the end of the story. So, yes, I was very surprised.

In retrospect, I think I can understand it a little better than I did then, purely by becoming more philosophical I suppose about the ways of the world. But it was a surprise and it was, frankly, at that time, a disappointment. But maybe I'm not as callow now as I was then. I hope not.

M: Did you go on to support the Democratic ticket of Kennedy and Johnson in 1960?

E: Yes. Went on and supported the Kennedy-Johnson ticket; not blindly, but simply because I thought it was the best ticket that was on the ballot.

M: Again, did you perform the functions of raising money and contacting people?

E: I wasn't as active in that one as I had been in his, say, last senatorial or in his presidential candidacy campaign. I wasn't as active in this because, I guess, again, of perhaps somewhat my disappointment, feeling that this wasn't at all the way we had started out. So you have a little personal reaction. My interest didn't run as high.

M: You mentioned again that you were more active in campaigning in the last



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senatorial race that he was in. Was that the same kind of work that you had done before?

E: Well, I think, like anything else, it picks up steam. And anybody that sees somebody working at one level in the first campaign, the second campaign, if they did a fair job in the first one, they're naturally going to go up. They were always looking for good workers anyway. And so I suppose it was a little more active at that time. I am obviously no speaker, so this was out, but you certainly tried to be as influential in gaining votes for your candidate as you can on a personal level or a professional one.

M: Yes.

E: It was probably more along the general banking lines and the personal lines of communication in the area.

M: And what did you do then? Would you help raise money? \*

E: Contributions. Help raise money.

M: Arrange dinners?

E: Gain support. That's right. Try to interest other men who had groups of people whom they could contact. You always tried to spread your influence as far and as deep as you could, be it by dinners or what have you.

M: And, of course, your own personal endorsement of the candidate.

E: Ultimately, we ended up, I guess, with a big appreciation dinner. I guess this was more in line with the presidential aspiration. We had a dinner here that several of us got together and gave. I emceed and did drumbeating. Highly successful thing.

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M: Was Johnson there?

E: Yes, they came down. This I guess . . .

M: Must have been early 1960 or late 1959.

E: I'm going to guess 1958-59. It was really prior-- It was sort of trying to get everybody very interested and in getting behind the man as a presidential candidate. So it was probably late '58. It was the fall of the year.

M: Did you consult with him about this at all before you gave this kind of thing?

E: No, no. Well, we might have said, "Would you let us give you [a dinner]?" It was a testimonial dinner for a man who had been a successful leader in the Senate. "Would you let a bunch of us give you a large testimonial dinner?" It was one at which we had speakers from all walks of life and so forth and so on. Yes.

M: Did Johnson seem appreciative of your effort?

E: Very much so. He was very appreciative and most cooperative.

And Mr. Rayburn came and talked. It was very cute when he got here. This thing was televised, and all this, that and the other. And when he got here, the Speaker says, "I'm not going to say anything. I don't have any remarks." So this just threw the whole thing into a cocked hat, because we were televised, and we had three minutes and eight minutes, and all that sort of thing. We had him for about twenty minutes, and I was the emcee, and I said, "You're not going to speak! What are we going to do with twenty minutes of dead television on this thing!" "Oh, well, I'll get up and just nod." He got up,

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and he talked twenty-eight minutes. We couldn't get [him to stop]. We had to yank on his coattails to get him back off of there. It was a real good affair.

But back to what you originally started to ask. I think you become progressively active, and then maybe the interest did fall off a little with the 1960 race.

M: Yes. When you go about raising money, what do you do? Is this all done by personal contact?

E: Yes, as far as I'm concerned, it is. It's the only way.

M: It's not done through writing a letter or anything like that?

E: Well, I've tried that, but I never could get any answers.

M: Yes.

E: You get pretty skimpy response.

M: And I'm talking here about large contributions or relatively large.

E: Yes. Thousand or so dollar contributions.

M: Yes. And the way to get this is to go out and have lunch with the man and go see him, or what? I mean, how do you do this?

E: Well, this depends on the man, of course.

M: Yes.

E: Sometimes you have to have lots of lunches with the man, and sometimes you have a three-minute conversation with him. I think it does have to be face-to-face conversation and an approach that shows that you are personally interested and willing to give your time and legwork to get out and see him, rather than sit down and

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write him a "Dear John." I know I don't answer much of that kind of letter, and I have to assume that none of the others do.

M: Well, do you use any kind of format, or is it just informal? You say something about--

E: Purely informal approach. Purely saying, "Look--

M: "I'm interested in this candidate," and so forth?

E: "Everybody's got to be interested in politics. I know you, Mr. X, are, and here's what I think. You might agree with me that this is the best candidate, or the best program, or the best slate"--or whatever the situation may be--"because if we don't get behind this sort of thing, somebody else is going to."

M: Yes.

E: "And I think our interest, as far as government philosophy, is a mutual one, and here's why I think it's a mutual one."

M: Have Houston leaders been fairly receptive to Lyndon Johnson?

E: Oh, yes. I think they have. Of course, the man is such a big man, I mean literally a big man. And any big man is very controversial. But generally, yes, they've been very receptive to him.

M: I mean when you went to ask a man for money, he didn't throw you out.

E: No, no. No, we never got any--at least, I never got any real adverse reaction. Maybe I picked my prospects. Maybe I wouldn't take on those controversial ones. I might get a little bad mouthing if something had just happened the week before that was adverse to this man's thinking. But, by and large, most of the reception was very good.

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M: Is there any what you might say category of businessman that would be more ready to support Johnson than another kind? Say the oil and gas people versus the--

E: I don't really think you could categorize it that way. The only way you could say it was really the oil and gas people is that there are just more oil and gas people here. So, yes, there, but that's sheerly by weight of numbers in the profession.

M: I'm just curious about where his support came from in Houston.

E: Well, I think it came from really a pretty broad section. Now, as far as I personally am concerned with, people in high executive level of industries such as banking or commerce, not industry so much, I would say it was about fifty-fifty for Johnson. In oil and gas business, I would say, well, probably sixty-forty. I would say more oil people were for him--a good many were against him. In heavy industry and construction, I think they pretty well supported him, as far as I know.

M: Like Brown and Root?

E: Or the general constructors, the Bellows people, and the builders Ruby and Tellepsen. They pretty well supported the man.

And certainly all loyal Democrats supported him. There was never any more loyal Democrat than he.

M: Yes, indeed. Did you have much contact with him when he was vice president? Did you ever see him?

E: Well, I saw him once. He occasionally would give, you know, affairs, and I went to one of them but that was really all--

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some sort of entertainment to-do when Ayub Khan was here.

M: Yes, up at his Ranch.

E: Yes. When was that? 1961?

M: Yes. And you went up to the Ranch?

E: Used to go there for dinner on occasion with probably a hundred or two hundred, and I've really forgotten the size, the approximate size, but large things.

So I saw him once during that period.

M: And then Kennedy was assassinated, and he became president. Did you see him when he became President then? Did you get involved in the 1964 presidential race?

E: Yes, very much so. I say, very much so, I'm sure in a lot of people's eyes not very much so, but in my eyes very much so.

M: You spent some time on it.

E: That's right. It seemed like an awful lot of time to me. Maybe some people didn't think it was enough. But, yes, very interested in it. To me, this was no choice. So it was a must as far as I was concerned.

M: All right, in 1964 what do you do?

E: Well, I guess the same old story, only more so. You try to raise some money; you try to engender interest; you try to convince the on-the-fencers.

M: Did you operate--maybe operate's not a good word--but did you work for Johnson just in the Houston area?

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E: Primarily. This is really as far as my influence . . . Well, I'd work for him anywhere I could.

M: But this is where your influence was.

E: But I'd certainly think as far as being effective, I would have to evaluate my effectiveness as being in the Houston area. Oh, I'd work for him and beat the drum every time I'd go out, go to New York or anywhere else. But, as I say, I have a feeling that my effectiveness was a lot more so here than other places.

M: Did you have any particular difficulty in 1964?

E: No, I don't think so. I think, yes, you ran into the lines at that time that were very severely drawn.

M: Yes.

E: It was a minority, but a very vocal minority, to which you addressed yourself.

M: Were you worried that Johnson might lose that election?

E: No, I never was really worried. But you worry until something's done anyway. I don't think I lay awake many nights thinking he was going to lose it or feeling that he was going to lose it. I never felt that he was going to lose it. But, as I say, you just don't count those chickens until they come home.

M: Yes.

E: Finally, they're all right. But, no, I wasn't particularly worried; but I was concerned, because, as I say, this was a very vocal minority. And it was such a hard line. Once you got on one side of it, it was hard to ever get anybody back over on the other side.

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- M: Did you have much contact with Johnson after he was president?
- E: Not any great deal. I saw him several times.
- M: Did you consult with him about any banking legislation or Treasury legislation?
- E: No. I didn't consult with him. I thought he had a lot more important things to do than worrying about banking areas.
- M: Did you talk to [someone else]?
- E: Any consultation I'd have, I'd go to the Treasury Department.
- M: I see. Who would you talk to over there, incidentally?
- E: Over at Treasury? Oh, you'd talk to the Secretary or one of his unders. That's right, whose obvious aegis this really was.
- M: You had some contact with [C. Douglas] Dillon?
- E: Right.
- M: Dillon and Joe Fowler?
- E: And Fowler more, even, than Dillon, I guess, over there.
- M: Were these men responsive to your comments?
- E: Yes, always very attentive to them.
- M: I mean, they would listen to you.
- E: And I think very understanding. Of course, they're both wonderfully capable men. And again, banking was only a small part of their responsibility--I don't know how small, but a part of their responsibility--and so I knew they had other things on their mind. But if something was really important, I felt that you could pretty well get the ear of the federal government by going to the proper area.



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M: Was there any piece of legislation that bothered you that took you to Washington for consultation?

E: No, I don't think that . . . I'm trying to think back now and putting times and legislation together. It's a little difficult.

M: There was a credit crunch.

E: The credit crunch was . . .

M: Did this affect you much, incidentally?

E: No, that one wasn't felt as much down here as--well, the '66 credit crunch, of course, was felt. I guess that's the one to which you are referring.

M: Yes, yes.

E: It was very definitely felt.

M: Did that worry you, incidentally, that credit crunch?

E: You bet your boots.

M: Did you have any fear that the financial structure might crack?

E: Well, I didn't really think--

M: Was there any fear that . . .?

E: Maybe I'm a Pollyanna, and I say it can't happen here, but it was a fear that you could really get this thing going so far that it would be the dickens to turn it around. So you're always . . . spectres or . . .

M: Well, I've had some comment from people, who've been inside and outside on that, that there's a great deal of fear, especially after it's over with, that it was much more serious than people thought.

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- E: Oh, I think people in retrospect said, "Boy, we didn't know how really close we were to getting into a tailspin."
- M: And also, that private bankers were very worried about it and were contacting Treasury officials. So I was wondering, from your side of it, if this were true.
- E: Well, as I say, I don't think we've gotten over the faith that it can't happen here, that some way, through some ingenuity, you're going to walk this tightrope. But I think, like you say, it was kind of exactly like walking a tightrope, and you turned back around and look at the chasm over which you'd walked, and that's when your stomach started doing flip-flops. Maybe we were dumb enough it didn't do it.
- M: But it was a very serious, critical sort of thing.
- E: Very serious. Very critical. I don't think it was as nearly critical as the one we're in now, quite honestly. But it was serious, no laughing matter.
- M: Do you remember having any contact with the Treasury on that issue at the time? In 1966?
- E: During that time?
- M: Did you call, say?
- E: Well, I think they had some meetings. I know they did, as a matter of fact, discussed where are we going with credit and are banks really living up to what they profess. And each banker saying, "Well, this is what we're doing. We're allocating credit," and we're doing this, that, and the other. Other than that, I don't think . . . I didn't have any personal axe or individual axe that I was grinding on it.

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I spent some time in Washington. At that time, we were working on a bank merger which was not very large. So I spent some time over at the Treasury, actually at the Comptroller's Office and Justice Department during that period--with no success, I might add. (Laughter) So that was why I had to be in Washington to deal with it at that time.

Yes, I went to a couple of meetings, actually along the lines that I talked to you a minute ago wherein it was more sort of a basic philosophy, rather than an individual situation, that was under consideration.

M: You've had some connection, official connection, have you not, with the Federal Reserve System? You've been a director of a branch bank?

E: Yes. I was a director of the local bank and so forth.

M: That's just in the Houston branch.

E: Branch office. Branch bank.

M: Rather than the district bank in Dallas.

E: Right. In Dallas.

M: In your capacity as a local director, did you ever run into any conflict, reflected from Washington, between the FRS and the Treasury? Or did they always seem to work well together?

E: Well, in your capacity as a director, you didn't run into any. In your capacity as a banker, you ran into it all the time. In other words, as a local director of the Federal Reserve System, it's more informative than it is administrative. You don't really [make policy]. You get the

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word back, and properly so. You can't have all these branch banks, obviously, running their own show. You'd never get the system together. But what we got was pretty much a reflection of the Washington Fed. So, as a director, we had their side of the story.

M: Then as a private banker?

E: As a private banker, you see it--

M: You see it in another way.

E: That's right. You see the rebound from various angles.

M: Well, as a private banker, are you sometimes caught between FRS policy and Treasury policy?

E: Oh, very definitely, I think. Vis-a-vis, right now we don't happen to have a one bank holding company; but those who have one bank holding companies have been caught right in the middle of this thing, with the Fed saying, "No, you can't, et cetera, et cetera," and the Comptroller's Office saying, "Pax vobiscum and go right ahead."

M: Does this give rise to any thoughts that maybe the Federal Reserve should be under executive control?

E: No, I think it would be very damaging if the Fed was under executive control. Even though I may not always like what they're telling us, and they may not always tell us exactly what's right, at least they have their independence, which is very important to the basic economy--that they're not as subject to political pressures and strains.

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M: Then from your point of view this is favorable.

E: I think it's a plus. I think it's a very definite plus. This presumes that there are good men, and there are good men running the Federal Reserve System. If you get a bunch of gangsters in there, I'll tell you that's something else. I think it's important that they do remain as an independent organization.

M: Again, while we're on these federal agencies, you may have some reflection on the FDIC during the Johnson years. Was this run in a satisfactory manner, as far as you were concerned?

E: FDIC, well, yes, I think it's always been run in a satisfactory manner. They've fairly well confined, and again, properly so, their activities to the insurance feature. And so unless you've got a bank where they have to pay off on the insurance, you don't really have much cross swords with them. They do their job; they do it well. And as long as a bank is properly administered, there's no problem. Because they're not trying to regulate you other than to make you run a prudent operation.

M: There was also, during the Johnson years, some controversy over the spread of national banks, the proliferation of them. Do you have any comment about that?

E: Well, I think it got to a snowball operation.

M: There's a man named James Saxton.

E: As you say, there was a comptroller here, Saxon, who was a highly controversial man. Jimmy Saxon is a very highly intelligent man,

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a highly energetic man, and a highly innovative man. He sometimes acted a little too quickly. But I must say that if you have to make a choice between the two ends of the poles, I'd rather had a man act too quickly than not to have him act at all, which in some previous comptrollers had been the case.

M: Yes.

E: And of course, a lot of his thesis was that this is a free enterprise system and "Let her rip!". As many banks as could stand it, let them go. Basically, he really stirred up the banking industry. But while he created some havoc in some of this "shoot from the hip" philosophy, at the same time he did wake the bankers from their lethargy into looking into new ways of doing it and how you've got to get there from here, besides just sitting back and thanking the man for his deposit. As I say, it had a lot of headaches in it, but to be very trite, you just don't make an omelet without breaking eggs. He had to break a few eggs.

He did a real good job basically as a comptroller. He wasn't ever afraid of the new, of the untried, and was firmly convinced of what he thought was correct. He wasn't going to be buffeted around, and was not.

M: Did you have much personal contact with Johnson as president? Did you ever go to the White House to see him or to the Ranch?

E: Yes. Only invitation, obviously.

M: Social events.

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E: Social events and something like that. No, I wouldn't say that this was, you say much, I don't know what much is, but enough to maintain contact and to feel that you still knew him as a person as well as a president of the United States.

M: Did he ever consult with you about policy or about politics?

E: Yes. Of course, this is his life. And I'm sure that he consulted with everybody that he ever could get the view of about policy or politics.

M: Was there anything in particular that he asked you about?

E: Any conversations we had along those lines were just about always directed towards banking: what's good for the banking industry of the country; who is a good man for this job; or what do you think of that man for this job? It was a matter of a Johnson poll, I think, as much as anything.

M: Did he then consult with you about appointments? Did he call you up and ask--

E: Yes, he would ask.

M: --"What do you know about this man? Can you recommend him?

E: "Is such and such adequate?" "Is he more than adequate?" "What do you know?"

M: Would he call you personally or would this be through John Macy or somebody?

E: No, no. Some staff man or somebody, usually a staff man.

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M: In your conversations with Johnson, did he seem to understand the problems of the banks? Did he understand banking?

E: Yes. I think he understands banking pretty well. Whether he understood the problems of the banks, I don't know, but he understood banking pretty well. Well, I think he understood banking. I sometimes don't know that basically, as far as economics are concerned, that he would be. . . Oh, I wouldn't say he's the best economist in the country. But he, as far as practical banking, I think would have made a hell of a banker, because he's a very practical man. After all, there's nothing more to it than that. It's just practicality.

M: Were you again surprised when he chose not to run?

E: I was dumbfounded. Yes. I was very surprised. I think he was in a terribly difficult situation. When it was all over that evening, in thinking about it, I just said, "Well, he made the only choice he could have made." And I think that is true: that he made the wise choice, because he didn't want to split the country any further than it was split over something that he obviously wasn't going to be able to handle by the time the issue was going to be voiced. By this, I'm referring primarily to the war and so forth, which had been the paramount issue at that time. Well, he certainly wasn't going to be able to bring it to an end by November 7 or whatever the election date may have been. It was simply going to tear the nation further apart. Isn't good for anybody.

M: Through these years, did you have any contact with Mrs. Johnson?



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E: Well, purely on a social basis.

M: From your viewpoint, then, on a social basis, did she seem to handle her role as a hostess and first lady with a--

E: Top notch. With lots of charm, lots of warmth, and yet with lots of know-how. Nothing hard or brittle about the lady obviously, but she was sophisticated in the ways of the world, also quite interested in public affairs. She wasn't just sort of a, "Oh, I don't know anything about that. You'll have to ask my husband." Well, she was no smart-aleck, I don't mean that on the other side of the coin, but she kept herself abreast of problems and policies and so forth enough to where she could be conversant with them in an intelligent manner.

M: Well, now, have you had any other contacts with Johnson that haven't come up in this conversation?

E: No, mine have been purely on political foundations.

M: Is there anything else that you would like to say then? Or any comments you wish to make?

E: Well, I don't believe, Dr. McComb, I have much else to say. You pretty well plumbed the depths. I just think that he's one of the most interesting people that you could conduct a survey such as this on, because he's certainly not a simple person. He's a person who, in my way of thinking, has always, at every turn of the road, put the country ahead of anything else that happened. I'm firmly convinced of this. I violently disagreed with some of the

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things that I read about that have happened, but I think that in his judgment this is the way it was. He's a strong person, sometimes overly strong. But I think when a person has a position of power for a good many years, which he certainly had, why, you get overly strong sometimes, and sometimes the muscle overrules the mind. But it may have happened in some instances, but not really primarily. He was able to keep his balance as far as letting what was right rule his decision. [He was] impetuous, but not overly so. I don't know much else to [add].

M: Then let me call the interview to an end, and I thank you very much for your time.

E: Thank you, sir. It's been a real pleasure.

[End of Tape 1 and 1 and Interview I]

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