INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 19, 1975

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN HOLTON

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Holton's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Mr. Holton, let's start with your background briefly. You're from Abilene, I understand.

H: I went to school at Abilene, but I came to Washington from Sherman, Texas. I came up to Washington in 1939 after I had graduated from Abilene Christian College. I came up in June of 1939 and looked around town to try to find a job so I could go to school at night, maybe Foreign Service school or law. I went by Mr. Rayburn's office to see if he could give me some help. Alla Clary, his secretary, talked with me, and I got to know her pretty well. I had a recommendation in my pocket from Karl Noll [?], who was the postmaster at Sherman at that time. She liked that, so she put me to work around the office voluntarily to stamp the farmer's bulletins [and] infant care and that type of stuff, and to get the mail out. I did a little bit of that at spare times, other times walking the streets checking my applications, and this, that, and the other.

So one day while I was sitting there doing that, Mr. Rayburn came through, sort of put his arm on my shoulder and said, "It's getting close to September; have you found a job yet?" I said, "No, I haven't." He said, "Well, maybe you had better come on by,

and let's talk in the morning." The next morning I was in his office. He was majority leader at that time, and I remember walking into that great long office. This very imposing man was sitting back of the desk with his bald head, and he had little clinch glasses on his nose. He took those off, looked at me and said, "I understand you want to go to school and work on your graduate area." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "What are you interested in?" I said, "Well, I wanted to go to Georgetown [University] Foreign Service school or to law school. I think I've decided I'll try Foreign Service for a while at least." He said, "All right. Let's see." So he picked up the phone and called Millard Caldwell from Florida, who was chairman of the Patronage Committee in the House. He asked him if he had some sort of job running the elevator or something like that that I might be able to do. Mr. Rayburn tied down the job, so I got started to work the next morning on the elevator over in the House Office Building.

I stayed there about six months, and an opening came on the police force and an opportunity to get a little bit better pay, so I shifted over to the police force. I came into his office then after he had been elected speaker on Speaker [William] Bankhead's death. I started working in his office in 1942 as a clerk. Then later on through the years, he put me on a job as clerk to the private calendar objectors and the consent calendar objectors in the House. So I had to brief a lot of bills and things like that for the objectors and prepare analyses of them and this type of thing. So I did that for a while. I spent from 1943 to 1946 in the Navy. When I came back from that, the Reorganization Act of 1946 established a position in the speaker's office called administrative assistant, the first time that they had had that sort of a job. Bob Bartley, his nephew, was named administrative assistant the first time, and when Bob Bartley left and went down to the FCC [Federal

Communications Commission], Mr. Rayburn named me as administrative assistant.

G: When was that, do you know?

H: I'm not certain right now, I'd have to check and see. It seems to me like that was in the fifties, I believe around the middle fifties.

So I was the administrative assistant. Then he went back and was minority leader and all that. I stayed with Mr. Rayburn until he died in 1961.

One of the things that I do remember specifically in relationship to Mr. Johnson was in 1946 [1956], I believe, sitting in the office in Washington--Mr. Rayburn had gone to Bonham. The telephone rang, and he was on the line. He said he just wanted to let me know in case anybody up at the press gallery might be interested that he had just called the *Bonham Daily Favorite* and had announced that he was for Lyndon Johnson as favorite son and for Lyndon Johnson as chairman of the delegation to the Democratic convention. I don't know whether that was a surprise to anybody very much or not, but I have a suspicion that this is the way that Lyndon Johnson's career, as far as dominating politics in Texas is concerned, developed, when Mr. Rayburn sort of pushed him into that job as chairman of the delegation and as favorite son. It was through that vehicle that he got control of party machinery politics in Texas, because up until that time, it mostly had been dominated by the governor.

Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson had a tremendous respect for each other and mutual admiration. I was privileged to sit in the "Board of Education," which was a sort of gathering place that the Speaker had in the Capitol building where, after sessions of the day, Mr. Rayburn and some of his friends would gather and have a drink, discuss things that went on during the day, and make plans for tomorrow and the rest of the week. Vice

President Johnson would come over quite a bit. He was there practically all the time discussing matters. Even when he was majority leader, he would be there discussing mutual considerations. Arguments would develop on, "Why doesn't the House do this?" and "Why doesn't the Senate do that?" and "Who is going to do it first?" and this, that, and the other.

G: Was this "Board of Education" pretty much by invitation only?

H: Yes. You had to be sort of invited, but once invited and accepted, you could come in any time you felt like you wanted to.

G: How many people were generally there?

H: Oh, half a dozen. The Speaker, Lew Deschler, the parliamentarian of the House, would be there practically all the time.

G: Is he still living?

H: Yes. He's retired, however, as parliamentarian, but he's still in Washington. He was a close adviser to Speaker Rayburn. And then members of the Texas delegation who were particularly close [were] Frank Ikard, Homer Thornberry, Jack Brooks.

G: How about Lloyd Bentsen?

H: I don't remember too much. I mean, I wasn't down at the "Board of Education" much when he was in Congress, I don't think. I didn't participate in those things until later.

G: Did they each have a key? Did you need a key to get in?

H: I think the only key, as far as I know, [held by] an outsider was held by Mr. Patman. Wright Patman had a key. He could come in most any time, but no one else did. Maybe Lew Deschler did, I think, and that was about it. I had a key.

There would be some lively discussions. Majority Leader [John] McCormack,

later Speaker McCormack, would be there quite often.

G: Why did they go there instead of, say, P-38 or Speaker Rayburn's office, or something like that?

H: This was down on the first floor of the Capitol, away from the traffic, away from where the principal offices were, and it was sort of a hideaway. It was just a comfortable place where fellows could sit around--it had a refrigerator--have some drinks, and then go to their engagements later in the evening. It was in that room that Mr. Rayburn and Vice President [Harry] Truman were sitting with others when Mr. Truman was notified to come to the White House on Mr. [Franklin] Roosevelt's death.

G: Were you present then?

H: No, that was during my time in the navy. That was in 1945. But that tradition of having a "Board of Education" started in John Garner's time. Speaker Garner apparently would have that sort of a meeting place. Nick Longworth would be invited in [and] have a drink, "strike a blow for liberty," and that type of thing. So Mr. Rayburn carried that tradition on when he became speaker.

G: Did they go down there every day?

H: Practically every day that they were in session around town here they would be down there some time. Then if Mr. Rayburn couldn't go, then maybe one who had the key would go, and they would have a drink or something like that.

G: Were staff personnel there, too? For example, were there secretaries to take dictation?

H: No.

G: No work went on in there.

H: No work went on at all; it was just discussion. Occasionally, before I started coming very

regularly, I would be upstairs, and Mr. Rayburn would call for something particularly, and I would have to bring it down to him, a paper or a file or something like that. No one but members would be there.

G: Is it still the "Board of Education"?

H: I don't know. I just don't know whether Speaker [Carl] Albert carries that on or not.

G: I've gotten the impression that in this "Board of Education" you had a real emphasis on the difference between the House and the Senate. Speaker Rayburn represented the House; Lyndon Johnson represented the Senate, and there was a real competition between the two.

H: Oh, yes.

G: Do you recall any anecdotes or incidents here?

H: I remember--it seems like when the Landrum-Griffin labor bill came up, it was contested very hot and heavy in the House. Members were divided pretty much on it. The Texas delegation was split on it. Mr. Rayburn was trying to get a bill that would not overregulate and punish labor. We thought that Senator Johnson would use that suite over there to lobby the members of the House against Mr. Rayburn's position quite a bit. He would say, "Don't put Homer on the cross. Don't make him do this. It's against his district." He would argue, "I used to represent that district. I know those people. Don't make Homer do this." Or, "Don't make Frank do this," or don't something else. He would be pleading their case.

The vote finally came, and Mr. Rayburn lost as far as his issue was concerned and lost some members of the delegation that were part of the "Board of Education." They felt a little guilty, I guess, and felt bad that they had to do it, but they had to vote their

conscience they thought, and vote their best interests. The truth of the matter is I think Mr. Rayburn was a little peeved, a little hurt about it. I think he knew that Senator Johnson had not been helping him out very much as far as getting his delegation to stay with him. That caused some tension for a while, and maybe members didn't feel comfortable coming around like they did before. But that was over soon and forgotten, and they had gone on to something else.

One of the big fights that I remember as far as the "Board of Education" was concerned was when Mr. Rayburn in 1961 had the Rules Committee fight, the contest between Rayburn and Howard Smith as to who was going to run the House. The vote on it was put off. Normally, you do those things right at the first of the session, and I think it was the end of January before they ever got that. In order to get out of the hassle on it, Judge [Howard] Smith made it appear that during the last Congress, he, using his power as chairman of the Rules Committee, did not permit certain legislation to come up or be voted on. They thought there had been agreements to do that. One way or the other, it never did take place. So they felt like in order for President Kennedy to have any chance of getting legislation that he knew that he was going to propose considered by the House, we had to get some way to get through the Rules Committee and get legislation reported out of the Rules Committee so you could debate it.

G: What was Rayburn's strategy in dealing with Smith on that?

H: I don't know that I could enlighten you very much on the strategy. I do know that Mr. Rayburn finally got it down to the point where the question was who was going to run the House; was it going to be Howard Smith or was it going to be Sam Rayburn? He finally got it down to that issue, and when it got down to that issue, Mr. Rayburn could beat him

any time, because Mr. Rayburn was very popular among the Democratic members, and all members of the House as far as that was concerned. It got to the point where it looked like some of the Democrats were getting so tied up on it that they were not going to be able to get out, but Mr. Rayburn finally did round up enough votes. I think it was five majority, or something like that, [in] that fight.

How much the White House was in that fight I don't know, but they were warned at least not to be visible. Mr. Rayburn was afraid that if it got to be that type of issue, then the White House could maybe rightly or wrongly be accused of getting into the internal affairs of the House and the organization of the House, and that would not be a good position to be in. I do know this, that without Mr. Rayburn's prestige and without the love and affection that members had for him personally, that fight would have been lost no matter what the President may have wanted. But with Mr. Rayburn's personality and the love that other members had for him and the confidence that they had in him, he was solid enough that they felt that he was not going to lead his fellow members into political thickets that would be embarrassing and so forth. They trusted his judgment about things, and that's the way it went.

G: I have had the impression that Sam Rayburn was more a creature of the Congress than he was of the district he represented in Texas, that he had a tremendous loyalty to the body as a whole.

H: Yes. And thank goodness it seemed to me like he could sense in his congressional district maybe a tide of opposition to something, or something like that. But he could go down and make a speech or two or three, and that would turn around. He had a way with his people. He loved his people. His greatest enjoyment was to get out of Washington

and get back home, because he never did want to travel anyplace else. He wouldn't take junkets to Europe or anything else. Whenever Congress would be out, he would be on the train or plane and get back to Texas as quick as he could, and stay there and be available to people. So they loved him, no doubt about it. Sure, they would be crosswise and all that sort of thing, but with his personality, they were able to let him sort of have his way.

You see, back in those days the seniority system counted for something when you were there and became chairman of a committee. He came from the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, and it was in that committee that he wrote most of the legislation that he is noted for in the Roosevelt era. He made a shot or two for a leadership position prior to the time he won. He got his reputation, I think, particularly in House Interstate, as being a legislator to have the patience and the time to do the hard work of putting it together, and getting the language tied down that expresses what you want to do and what's saleable, give something to the House that they would buy and still do the job that you are trying to do. Now that takes an awful lot of time.

G: How did his political philosophy differ from Lyndon Johnson's, his philosophy of government?

H: Oh, not too much, I don't think. They both had poverty in their lives, and that type of thing that made them feel very close to people and very much attuned to the needs of people. In that sense, I guess they had sort of a streak of populism in them. There was not too much difference in their philosophies, except that I think in the way they carried out their responsibilities as leaders, their different ways they went about it. Mr. Rayburn was rather quiet and would argue and persuade. He could use the powers of his office, all

right, but he went at it in a little bit quieter way, I think. Senator Johnson used to come over, there would be a lull in other conversations going on, and he would pull me by the lapel and say, "Now, John, if I were Sam, I would get those fellows up there, and I'd point my finger at them and say, 'Now you are going to do this?'" He would tell Rayburn how to run the House as well as anything else. That was a good exchange.

G: Can you recall any occasions when the two leaders worked together, combined strategies?

H: The greatest experience that I had on that was the first civil rights bill, the voting rights bill.

G: How did they work together on that?

H: There would be daily meetings.

G: That was 1947 [1957], wasn't it?

H: Yes. During the debate in the Senate, [the idea] was for the Senate to be able to pass some sort of a bill over there that the House would be able to accept. Gerry Siegel, who is now still around town, I think, was Mr. Johnson's administrative assistant, or the Majority Leader's assistant, something like that. I can remember going over language, going over exactly what they were trying to do in order, first, that there would not be a consuming filibuster in the Senate, and then when they did pass something, they would pass something that the House would accept.

G: I see. I didn't realize that Rayburn had that much input into the final product.

H: Yes, and the negotiations a lot of times would take place in the "Board of Education."

G: Was [Richard] Russell in on any of that?

H: No, I don't remember Russell being directly in on that, but Johnson was in close touch

with him, of course. He knew that he had to satisfy Russell some way.

G: What were Speaker Rayburn's imperatives on that bill? What did he feel had to be included or excluded in order for the House to get it passed?

H: Well, I would have to think about that some right now. It's been such a long time that I haven't thought about it in that way.

G: The jury trial, for one thing?

H: Yes. It seems to me like that was one of the issues.

G: Did Speaker Rayburn feel that that civil rights bill was necessary for the Democratic Party?

H: First thing, I think he felt like it was necessary in order. . . . I think he just couldn't understand how you could keep people from voting who were citizens of the United States. There had to be some sort of federal protection for that right. And he felt that process and structures and built-in discriminations around all over the country could best be solved if people had the right to vote, because in representative government, that's how a citizen expresses himself.

G: Did he ever voice this to you?

H: Oh, yes. Yes.

G: Can you remember his language?

H: No, I couldn't quote his language, but it was that in essence, he said, "I just think people that are citizens have the right to vote. Sure, there have to be some qualifications and all that, but they should not be arbitrary."

G: I'm sure there were a lot of opponents to this idea in his district. Did he feel much heat?

H: He never did have too much heat about it.

G: Really?

H: I don't remember it. He didn't have too much heat about it. As far as I know, no one ever tried to [pressure him].

G: Was Sam Rayburn a populist?

H: In a way, sort of one. He was a populist in the way that he was for people, but he also felt in a conservative way that if you're going to have a lot of spending in these areas for people, that you are going to have to pay for it.

G: Did he have any of the hostility to big business that some of the rural Texas politicians of this era had?

H: Back in his career, he had to struggle a little bit with opposition from some of the large [businesses]. In developing the REA [Rural Electrification Administration] program, he had a big struggle with the Texas Power and Light Company and with public utilities, holding companies and all that sort of thing. They thought the "death sentence" clause in the securities legislation was the worst thing in the world, and he had to overcome that. But it wasn't as bad as they thought, and it wasn't as hurtful as they thought. He never did want to punish any particular people. He felt that businesses had the people around them, the lawyers and advisers, and they could pretty well take care of themselves, whereas the ordinary person didn't have that sort of ability.

G: Did he ever talk to you about his fight with Jesse Jones and his efforts to have Jones removed as head of RFC [Reconstruction Finance Corporation]?

H: No, I don't remember any of that. [It was] before my time. I do remember one situation he told me about, that he had had a commitment from President Roosevelt for a certain person to be named to the Interstate Commerce Commission. The President had

promised him that [whenever] the first vacancy came up, Mr. Rayburn would be able to name [the appointment]. The vacancy came up, and some other man's name was submitted to the Senate. So Mr. Rayburn had to go to the White House personally and confront the President with it. The man that Mr. Rayburn was interested in was finally named, but from that time on, he had sort of lost faith a little bit in Roosevelt. He felt like he had to watch Roosevelt then pretty carefully about commitments after that.

G: Who was the [ICC appointment]?

H: Dr. [Walter] Splawn. Dr. Splawn had been his chief-of-staff in the Interstate Commerce Committee on the investigations that he had with reference to the public utilities holding company and other things.

G: Did he ever talk to you about the Eugene Cox case, or were you working there for him [then]?

H: I remember Gene Cox.

G: They had that row with the FCC.

H: Yes. That's sort of vague, but I remember that fight all right.

G: LBJ and Speaker Rayburn worked together on that, I understand.

H: Yes. I don't remember the details of that. I was a youngster that didn't get in. . . . I don't remember too much about that. But I do remember that situation. Judge Cox was always very close to Mr. Rayburn, a very personal friend of his. Again, Judge Cox was one of these fellows that would fight everything in the world, but if Mr. Rayburn ever came to him and said, "Gene, I've got to have your vote to get this bill out," Cox said he would do it; he would give in to him. And he did many times. "I'll do it." But until he got that word, he would fight many things that Mr. Rayburn thought ought to be [passed]. But

Mr. Rayburn would try to go around some other way to get the votes on it.

G: I've heard detractors of both Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn indicate the belief that they were more or less tools of the oil and gas industry in Texas. On the other hand, I have heard supporters say that Sam Rayburn was constantly opposed by oil and gas interests in his state, particularly at re-election time. What do you know about this?

H: That has sort of been my impression. Really his closest, really respected friends were oil people in Texas, were people he trusted and who trusted him. But there was a certain element of the oil people that hated his guts, not particularly because of what his position on oil was, or depletion allowance, or the gas bill, or something like that, but on other matters, I suspected.

G: What?

H: Well, being a Democrat and a supporter of Roosevelt, interested in people. New Deal legislation that was going through and all that sort of thing, I suppose. But I don't see how in the name of God they could be opposed to him as far as their own industry is concerned, because he did more for them than any one man that I know of. Without him, they would have been down the drain many times.

G: Did this opposition distress him?

H: It hurt him, because he felt that he had been fair to them and had done the best he could, and they didn't understand it. There is a certain element, an arrogant element, in the oil [people] that feel like they can press a button and they are going to have anything they want. No one had that on Rayburn. He just would not bend to that sort of thing at all. The former chairman of the Railroad Commission in Texas, Ernest Thompson--

G: He was a good friend.

H: Close personal friend of Mr. Rayburn's; Mr. Jim Abercrombie, close personal friend; J. R. Parten, people of that stature, very close friend; Bob Anderson.

G: Well now, weren't a lot of these independents, though, as opposed to representatives of the major oil companies?

H: Oh well, that may be true.

G: Was there a conflict between the independents and the majors here?

H: I don't know, except that the independents are the ones that got Mr. Rayburn's interest more than the needs of Standard or Gulf or something like that. I don't know if they ever had any particular [conflict]. They never did come around him very much.

G: Do you remember anything about the 1944 convention, or were you gone at that time?

H: I was in the Navy at that time. I went in the Navy in 1943, so I don't know much about that convention. I just remember talking to the staff going out there. Mr. Rayburn didn't make it because he had a fight in his district. The 1948 convention was the first convention I went to, and [then] in 1952, 1956, and 1960.

G: Were you involved in that state convention in Fort Worth when LBJ was running for the Senate?

H: No, Mr. Rayburn never would let me come down there and get into the political matters, because I was on the payroll, and he just felt it wasn't right for me to be engaging in a lot of political efforts.

G: Do you know how he did aid Lyndon Johnson in that 1948 race?

H: Oh, I don't think I could. . . .

G: I know he gave Ray Roberts a leave of absence to go down and [work in the campaign],

H: Yes, right. That's exactly right, and he gave me leave of absence in 1960 and 1964 to

campaign. I did some advance work [in] Florida and other places around. I can remember in Chicago advancing; I guess it was in the campaign of 1964. NBC wanted to interview him, and he was saying, "No, no, no, I don't want to do that. I don't have time," and all that sort of stuff. I kept knowing all the time that he was going to do it. I felt that he would do it, and he kept saying, "No, I'm not prepared. I just don't want to do it." And sure enough, like he always did, he was running late. I went up to his hotel room, and he was having to get back out to the airport to go on to another spot. He did though, right at the very last minute, jump in his car, and we went over and made the recording, had the interview, and came back. He thought it was the greatest thing in the world, but up until that time he thought it would kill him. He thought it would just ruin him. He was dreading it and didn't want to do it.

G: This was LBJ?

H: Yes.

G: Let me go back a little, back to 1956. You talked about the favorite son candidacy of LBJ. The indication I've got is that Speaker Rayburn more or less promoted that. He was the one that pushed Lyndon Johnson into this favorite son candidacy. Evidently Rayburn and [Allan] Shivers had had a falling out, and I've heard that Speaker Rayburn felt that Shivers had misrepresented some things to him. Is that right? Do you know anything [about that]?

H: I don't know about that. No, I don't know about that.

G: How did he feel about Shivers? Did he regard Shivers as a threat to the party?

H; I don't know. Let me see. It seems to me that it was being loyal to the party. The big split, I think, was when--didn't Governor Shivers support [Dwight] Eisenhower?

G: Yes.

H: I think that's what Mr. Rayburn was [thinking about]. If you are going to be in the Democratic party, hold office as a Democrat; it's not [good], as far as his liking was concerned, to go and support an opposition candidate. It hurt him like everything for Bob Anderson to do that, and yet they were close personal friends, dearly loved each other.

G: In 1960, when LBJ was running for president, I've had the impression that Sam Rayburn was the one that really talked him into accepting the vice presidential nomination.

H: That's the way I understood it. From my viewpoint, after the fight was over the night before and Senator Kennedy had gotten the nomination, I can remember coming back in the car with Mr. Rayburn, and the talk indicated that he and Johnson would talk the next day to see what was happening and what was going on. We came on back home, and everybody sort of left. It was late and [he was] tired out, and so Mr. Rayburn went to bed pretty quick.

The next morning Mr. Rayburn had a breakfast planned for the members of the convention from his congressional district. He had done that before at other conventions, and so he did it this time. We came out of his suite early that morning, and as we came to the cross in the hotel corridors we looked down toward Lyndon Johnson's suite. Cameras were there and a crowd was standing around outside. He looked at me, and he said, "He told me he wouldn't say anything until we had talked this morning." Mr. Rayburn didn't know what was going on. As far as I know, he had had no calls or anything. But he knew; you know, the cameras were there. So we went on down and had breakfast and stayed there a long, long time, talked with people and tried to commiserate with them about the loss and this, that, and the other.

We came back on upstairs then. I don't know what time it was, really, but the crowd was still there. We got in the room, and he wanted to find out what was going on. He called then. I don't know who he talked to, Mr. Johnson or who it was, but he talked to somebody over there and found out, apparently, that Kennedy had made overtures of offering the vice presidency to him. So Mr. Rayburn hung up and talked and talked. I think Tommy Corcoran came in, and Hale Boggs was there. They were pleading the case, I believe it was, to accept the vice presidency. But Johnson apparently didn't want to; he was making all sorts of arguments about everything in the world. Mr. Rayburn thought the vice presidency was nothing; it was just nothing but presiding over the Senate. His power as majority leader was [gone], all that sort of thing. But then he told me that he came to the conclusion that if Mr. Kennedy would give him something to do that would be busy and would be meaningful, and if he would get on the television and say to the convention that he had chosen Senator Johnson, and he wanted Senator Johnson as his running mate and ask the convention to do that, that he would advise him that that's what he ought to do.

Well, word got back to Senator Kennedy, so Senator Kennedy called up and wanted to come see Mr. Rayburn. Mr. Rayburn said, "No, I'll come up to you." He said, "No, no. I'll be right down." So we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and nothing ever happened; Kennedy didn't come down. Mr. Rayburn got sort of feisty and mad; "What the hell's going on?" I remember that finally then he sent Hale Boggs up to Kennedy's office, and he said, "What's going on? What's the matter? Mr. Rayburn's still waiting." He said, "Oh, we've just been tied up so that we couldn't get down, and we're on our way right now." Sure enough, in about five minutes Kennedy did

come down with Kenny O'Donnell. I put Mr. Rayburn and Kennedy in my bedroom, closed the door, and they had their talk. Mr. Rayburn told me afterwards what he had said, just like he had said before. He said, "If you want Johnson, if you want somebody that can get you some votes, if you will make him a working vice president and give him some things to do and you will announce it to the [convention], I'll advise him that he ought to take it." That was done. We hadn't heard anything more.

In a few minutes we turned on the television tube, and sure enough, there was Kennedy going to the press conference. He made his announcement, and then, about that time, Governor [David?] Lawrence came charging in saying, "What about Johnson? Give me something to say. I've got to nominate him tonight. Give me some biography or something." So we sat down with D. B. Hardeman, I think, and helped give him some facts. And that's the way it was. Now I do know that Kennedy came to him to talk about it.

G: There was another meeting.

H: During that time, though, Mr. Rayburn went up to Johnson's office. Let me see, who was there? Bob Kerr from Oklahoma; [Mike?] Monroney was there; Bobby Baker was around, I think.

G: Were you up there then?

H: Yes. Mrs. Johnson was crying.

G: She didn't want him to take it, did she?

H: No.

G: Do you know what her arguments were?

H: No, I don't.

G: I understand that Robert Kennedy came in and that four of them went back to the bedroom, and this was Sam Rayburn, John Connally, Lyndon Johnson, and Robert Kennedy.

H: That's right. That's where the famous phrase came from, "We have already talked to your brother."

G: What did Speaker Rayburn say about that meeting? This was when Robert Kennedy was talking about the chairmanship of the DNC [Democratic National Committee].

H: Yes, or something. All I know is that Mr. Rayburn looked at Robert and said, "We have already talked to your brother." That's the only thing I remember out of it.

G: Did Speaker Rayburn feel that Robert Kennedy was trying to withdraw the offer of the vice presidency?

H: No, no, I don't think so. It was just one of those things. I don't believe that occurred to Mr. Rayburn at all. He just knew that this fellow didn't know what the hell was going on.

G: Oh, I see. Well, they were worried about--

H: A lot of people were suspicious about it. I'm sure that they thought it was a way of trying to get out, and throwing roadblocks up and doubts and fears and all that, about whether or not he could get the nomination without a big fight and all this sort of stuff.

G: I have heard two versions of it. There was obviously some opposition from some of the labor people in the Michigan delegation, and one thing and another.

H: Yes.

G: And I have heard that Bobby Kennedy's mission was to warn LBJ that this opposition was there and to be ready for it. On the other hand, I've heard that he was trying to get him not to accept it and to take, instead, the chairmanship of the Democratic National

Committee, and that Mr. Rayburn said, "No, we're not going to do that. It's been offered to him, and we've already accepted. We don't want the DNC."

H: That was, in effect, what it was when he said, "We have already talked to your brother." This guy, as far as Mr. Rayburn knew, had no commission to offer anything or argue about anything. He just told him, "We have already talked to your brother," and that ended it. They just felt like this guy [Robert Kennedy] didn't know what he was talking about. It was all over, and he didn't know it.

G: Did you work in that campaign at all?

H: Yes.

G: What did you do?

H: Advance work in several places around. I was down in Florida, the awfulest state in the world to work in, because they'll promise you everything in the world and won't do a damn thing. At least the leadership at that time was pretty split up. I think [Millard] Tydings was doing the coordinating work for Kennedy for the state. I had responsibility for the advance work after the train trip, the whistle-stop tour. They decided not to go across Florida by train. They'd do part of it, but then they had to fly down to Miami and Tampa and back, then get on the train, go on, and end up in New Orleans.

G: Did you work on that whistle-stop tour?

H: I worked Florida--I didn't work on the train--and Oklahoma, Casper, Wyoming, maybe Boise, Idaho, some far-off places like that.

G; Did you have an opportunity in that campaign to observe Lyndon Johnson as a campaigner?

H: Oh, yes.

G: What was he like as a campaigner?

H; When you would turn him loose from his text and let him get to waving his arms and talking, he would be all right, but if you had to tie him down to reading something, he never did come across. He came across best when he would just be talking, and he would be his best when he would be talking, I think, to people who had rural connections. In Oklahoma he made a splendid [showing], in Casper, Wyoming, he made a good [impression], because you could tell right off he knew how to communicate with them.

G: I have heard that he was very good at sizing up an audience while he was talking, telling who was there.

H: Yes.

G: Do you have any recollections about this?

H: No, I don't remember about that particularly.

G: I have also heard that he was very particular about the speaking arrangements and very difficult to please.

H: Oh yes, you had to have the rostrum so high, and all this sort of stuff.

G: Did you ever get burned by him?

H: Oh, you'd get chewed, but it was fast and quick.

G: You must have some memorable stories on the campaign.

H: Well, I don't know. I don't know that there is anything in particular that I can think of, right now at least.

G: Did you have problems with the communications setup there, the telephones and everything?

H: Oh yes, some of these. And then it seems like there were an awful lot of problems

coordinating with what Kennedy was doing, but I was just mostly on the outskirts of that. That was handled by somebody else.

G: I have heard that he felt like his people would overschedule him, that they would just give him too many speeches in one day to do. Did he feel that way generally?

H: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. He would come in just cussing like it was going to kill him, driving him down the drain. It's really frightening to see a person that has been driven that way. Your eyes don't focus; you have a stare in your eyes; you get tired; you're flushed; you know that you're just limp. It's amazing what the human body can endure in that type of thing and yet, get up and make sense and appear in public and get people to applaud you and to have empathy with you, and still at the same time be so tired out you don't know whether you're doing right or not. He was great at it. Sometimes when you'd think he was going to fall over he was so tired, that's when he would make his best speech.

G: Did he enjoy campaigning?

H: Oh, yes. Nobody ever enjoyed pressing the flesh like he did. I think he really enjoyed that. And he'd hate it. He loved those homemade signs, because he felt like that was not something that was just sort of manufactured. It had some personal time and energy and thought to it.

G: Do you recall anything about his relationship with Sam Rayburn during those last years? Speaker Rayburn died in 1961, I believe.

H: Yes, that's right, November of 1961. I went down to Bonham with Mr. Rayburn, and they put him in the Baylor Hospital in the latter part of September. He stayed there for about a month, and then he came back to Bonham and stayed there three or four weeks before he died. Mr. Johnson always kept very close touch with Walter Jenkins to find

out how things were going.

G: Did Rayburn feel that it had been a mistake to take the vice presidency?

H: No, I don't think so. It seems like I remember one time that Johnson was complaining, and everybody was feeling sort of sorry for him because he was not being used. Then all of a sudden we get a call from Johnson's office that he wanted to meet the Speaker and Carl Vinson and two or three other fellows--I don't know who--in the "Board of Education" as soon as we could get together. He came charging up there. He had just come from the White House, where the President had told him he wanted him to go to Germany. He was just beaming, and he was making his plans and wanting advice about how to do this, that, and the other. "I want to make a good impression to the Germans," and do the job that the President had asked him to do. I remember being there at that time, and that was the first time, I think, or at least it sort of got him over that [feeling of not being used].

G: Did Sam Rayburn treat him like a son?

H: In many ways he would do that. It was not patronizing, though. When Johnson would give you the treatment sometimes, he realized what he was doing. I don't know that I can say it was like a son--to some extent, I guess, but not after he became majority leader. I think he told him the bases he ought to touch, perhaps, when he was made majority leader, in order to get that. And I'm sure that working with Dick Russell [helped]. Johnson knew how to do it as well as anybody, but I'm sure they worked together on it. There were so many members of the Senate at that time, Democrats, that had come out of the House, and Mr. Rayburn still had a lot of influence with them because he had known them in the House.

G: Do you recall Speaker Rayburn ever talking about LBJ's father?

H: Not very much. Not very much. He mentioned that they served, I think, in the [Texas] legislature. I don't remember it too well.

G: Were you with Speaker Rayburn when he died?

H: Oh, yes.

G: He died at his home or in the hospital?

H: He died in Bonham in a little clinic-hospital there. He went to Baylor first, and they finally diagnosed it as cancer, malignancy. They finally decided that they couldn't do any more for him there, so the family then felt that he would be more peaceful without the hurly-burly going on all the time [if he would] just go back to Bonham. So the doctor took him back there. I remember the doctor had told us that the end was fairly close. I remember going in about four o'clock in the afternoon. H. G. Dulaney and I were staff people that were sort of close by, and H. G. had just gone off. I went in about four o'clock, and Mr. Rayburn recognized me, said hello to me and talked to me. His foot felt like it was going to sleep or something like that, and he wanted to know if I could rub his foot a little bit. So I did. I thought he had drifted off to sleep. He looked like he had sort of gone off to sleep, but apparently it was a coma. He never did wake up after that, and he died about six o'clock the next morning. We were there all night, and the family was there most of that night. It was the first time I had ever seen someone die, and he literally died from his extremities on up. His feet got cold, his hands [got] cold, and he just finally [died].

G: Do you remember the last thing he said to you?

H: "Thank you," when I was rubbing his toes, rubbing his feet.

G: Do you recall how Lyndon Johnson learned about Speaker Rayburn's death?

H: Yes. Let me see if I can remember now. I made two or three calls right together. I called the White House first, then I called Johnson's office, then I called the Speaker's office--McCormack.

G: Did you ever talk to Lyndon Johnson about what Sam Rayburn had meant to him?

H: No, but I have heard him. He wasn't talking to me; he was talking to other people.

G: What did he say?

H: "He was as close as a father could be." He used that expression. Let me see. I don't know that I can get any words that I can remember him saying particularly.

Well, I think this is about all I can say.

G: Is there anything else on the 1964 campaign that you would like to add?

H: I did advance work on that one, too. No, I don't know any much more.

G: Okay. Well, I certainly do thank you.

H: Fine.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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of John Holton

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Interviewee (or Interviewee's agent) — Date

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