

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: May 13, 1982
INTERVIEWEE: WALTER JENKINS
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Jenkins's office, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let me explain first of all, Mr. Jenkins, what I'd like to do is go back and really systematically record your reminiscences in as great a detail as possible, beginning with 1939 when you first went to work for President Johnson. I'll try to not duplicate the things that you discussed in those earlier interviews, but in some areas I want to ask you to elaborate on things.

J: I don't remember what I discussed.

G: I have some notes on that, so I'll try to steer you around it. But please, let's have as much of you and as little of me as possible on this.

J: All right.

G: Let's start with that first day that you went out to Johnson City or that evening, and if you can recall that night in as great a detail as possible.

J: I recall it very vividly. Let me go back before that a little bit because the things leading up to it are slightly interesting unless I discussed them before.

G: You did.

Jenkins -- IV -- 2

J: Oh, all right. John Connally called me and said, "Would you like to go out and have dinner with Lyndon Johnson?" And I said, "Well, who is Lyndon Johnson?" He said, "Well, he's the congressman from this district." I said, "Oh, sure. What are we going to talk about?" He said, "We're going to talk about perhaps working for him." So John came, picked me up, and we drove to Johnson City and had dinner at the Casparis Cafe, Mrs. Johnson, Congressman Johnson, John Connally and I, the four of us. I don't think Bill Deason was present, was he?

G: He remembers being there.

J: Well, maybe so, but I don't remember his being there.

But at any rate, we ate and didn't talk about work or anything.

G: What did LBJ talk about?

J: Well, we just kind of listened to him talk about this and that during dinner while we ate. Soon as we got through eating he said, "You want to take a walk?" So he and John and I took a walk. They both walked very fast and I had to sort of run to keep up with them; I was in the middle. I still didn't have any idea in detail what I was being talked to about. Nobody told me. He said, "Do you drink?" I said, "Yes, a little." He said, "Okay." He said, "Would you like to go to Washington?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Would you like to work for me?" and I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "What would you have to be paid?" I said, "Oh, I don't know." He said, "What do you get now?" I said--I think I'm right about this--"A hundred dollars a month." He said, "Well, we'll start you at eighty," and

Jenkins -- IV -- 3

said, "Be out here Monday." This is Thursday night. I said, "Well, I work for the dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Texas. Don't you think I owe him some kind of"--no, he said, "Be out here tomorrow! Be out here tomorrow!" I said, "Don't you think I owe him some kind of notice?" He said, "Well, maybe so. Be out here Monday." That was the notice I was able to give, of two days.

G: Did he talk about his future that night or anything of that nature?

J: Not really. He never talked about ever being president, if that's what you're getting at.

G: Well, no. But did he talk to you about the job and what it would consist of, or how he ran his office or anything like that?

J: I think he was intrigued by the fact that I took dictation, I think that more than any other one thing, because he never had had a man that took shorthand. He said I would be taking dictation and be composing letters, and answering mail would be my primary job, although it turned out pretty quickly not to be. But that's what it was intended to be.

We worked the next month and a half I guess in Johnson City where our office was in the Pedernales Electric Co-op Building. Of course, I didn't really know Herbert Henderson. Did I talk about this before? This is kind of interesting.

G: Go ahead.

J: In the office was Herbert Henderson and Dorothy Jackson, now Dorothy [Nichols]. Nobody told me that Herbert was an occasional alcoholic,

Jenkins -- IV -- 4

and so Thanksgiving--I guess I had been working about a week--John went to College Station to the [Texas] A & M game leaving Dorothy and me and Herbert there. The night before Thanksgiving I guess it was, Herbert stayed at the office all night. I thought it was kind of strange. Dorothy and I went by there a time or two and he was calling all over the country, which as I later found out, that's what he did when he got drunk and had hallucinations about selling big stories and so on. But then we got worried about him. We went back down there, oh, two or three o'clock in the morning, and he was gone. We couldn't find him. Of course, Johnson City is not a very large town. His car was there. We started searching for him and found him. He was passed out in a ditch, not partly, dirty and mud all over him and so on.

I didn't know what to think about him. Dorothy was also rather new; she'd only been working a few days when I started. We didn't either one of us know what to do. We were both pretty young. We didn't know what to do about it. So we tried to reach John in College Station. And she didn't know anything about his history. We finally reached John. John said, "Don't worry about it." But even though we found him, he disappeared again and was gone some little while, which we found out later that was sort of the record. You just had to hunt him down. But we were awfully worried that day, because we couldn't imagine what people in Johnson City might think.

Jenkins -- IV -- 5

- G: Is there any substance to the story that he once hocked the typewriters in the office?
- J: I always heard that, but I believe that was before I came. But I don't doubt it at all. Because the first time that I was ready to get my pay--this was eighty dollars--he said, "You have a bank account?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, you don't want to start one; we're going to Washington. Just put it in my account and I'll give it to you when you want anything." Old naive me, I handed it over to him. It was six months later before Mr. Johnson just took it out of his salary, had to for me to get it back.
- G: Was there pressure on LBJ to fire Herbert Henderson, do you know?
- J: No. Well, I don't know who from. Mr. Johnson always did what he wanted to do. I know he would have fired anybody else. The two people that could get away with doing things that nobody else could were Herbert Henderson and Sam Houston [Johnson]. But I know of no pressure to fire him. But he would put up with from Herb, because Herbert Henderson gave a talent that he really needed at the time.
- G: Was he primarily a speech writer?
- J: He was primarily a speech writer when speeches were required, but he also answered letters. Any difficult letters, any hard letters, we gave to Herbert. He was an artist with words.
- G: Had he had political experience before? Had he worked for another congressman or--?

Jenkins -- IV -- 6

J: I don't think so. He had been editor of the Daily Oklahoman and I guess got fired for drinking too much or something. But he had had a lot of newspaper experience. But when he didn't have speeches to write, he'd just take a stack of mail. He never dictated, he always took that old typewriter and two fingers and batted out the letters himself. He could turn out a lot of work, really a talented guy, smart as he could be, but. . . .

G: Let's go back to that ride out to Johnson City when you and John Connally rode out there. Did John Connally then talk to you about LBJ and what he was like and what working for him would be like?

J: Yes.

G: What did he say?

J: Well, he told me he had just gone to work for him, which he had. He had only been with him--the whole office was new. The only carryover was Charlie Henderson, Herbert's brother, and he was in Washington. John was telling me how impressed he was with him, how he thought he was the coming young man of the country and how brilliant he was and how able he was.

G: Did he indicate that he would work you quite hard?

J: No, because as I remember it at least, I don't think John knew for sure I was going to be offered a job. That came only just direct from Mr. Johnson after we got out there and after we ate. Because Mr. Johnson must have just said, "Well, John, bring him out here and let me take a look at him." Because there was no discussion of my working for him really from John.

Jenkins -- IV -- 7

G: What were your first impressions of Lyndon Johnson that evening?

J: Very dynamic. Wasted no time in getting to the point that he wanted to make. Very impressive. I had no difficulty saying yes when he offered me a job at twenty dollars less than I was making, although let me say that he never paid me eighty dollars. I think my first check was a hundred and twenty-five.

G: So what did you do that night? Did you stay out in Johnson City or did you come back to Austin?

J: No. No. I was in John's old car. We came back here. I was living in a boarding house out at the University [of Texas].

Max Fichtenbaum I'm sure--well, I know he did--was the one who had recommended me.

G: You had gone through a whole array of preliminary interviews.

J: Yes. I had been interviewed by Ray Lee and Bill Deason and Jesse Kellam.

G: Was this customary when Lyndon Johnson would hire someone?

J: Well, later John told me it was, but it never happened again.

G: Why did he suddenly have three new people on his staff? Why was there such a large turnover at this particular point in his congressional career?

J: I don't know. L. E. Jones and Gene--what's Gene's name?

G: Latimer.

J: Gene Latimer--

G: Sherman Birdwell.

Jenkins -- IV -- 8

J: --and Sherman Birdwell had all left, and there just wasn't any staff at all.

G: It seems like there has been some suggestion that he really decided he wanted to get a more professional staff. Did he ever make this point?

J: I don't remember, and certainly he didn't get--I was anything but a professional, just a dumb kid just finished college. And John was not a professional. He waited for John. He hired John before he finished law school. He picked him out. Dorothy might qualify as a professional; she was a top secretary.

G: Let me ask you about his day in Johnson City. Typically how would the day be spent when he would be there?

J: Well, he and Mrs. Johnson were staying at the Great House--isn't that the name of it?--the Great House Hotel [?]. They were not early risers, which he never has been. One of us--usually John but occasionally if John was away or busy or something, it would be me--would go by there and take the mail that looked like he ought to see it and go over it with him while he was still at the hotel while he was having breakfast or something. Then he would come down and keep any appointments with anybody that wanted to see him and dictate his mail. Then he'd spend a lot of time on the phone; he was very busy in those days with the LCRA program. That was his [main project].

(Interruption)

Jenkins -- IV -- 9

He would make phone calls on the projects he was working on, which primarily was getting more money for the dams and getting the LCRA organized the way he wanted it, and REA. Those were his main things right at that time, trying to get every farm and home electrified. A lot of days he would come into Austin, visit around, politick a little bit, but not always, in the afternoon.

G: Make speeches or just visit with locals?

J: Well, he did make speeches. He didn't like to drive and I used to-- I can remember there in just those first months driving for him to Brenham and. . . I guess he had no opposition, either that or it wasn't election year. But he made a round of the whole district making speeches and I drove for him. That's where I first really felt like I got to know him, those long drives with just the two of us in the car.

G: What would he talk about on these occasions?

J: Everything. I remember one conversation he talked about sex. It was kind of shocking to me. He said that he--I forgot just how he worded it, let me see now. I want to be careful it's stated correctly. And I think part of it was trying to shock me maybe, an innocent young kid. But it also is kind of generally the way he felt about things. [He said] he didn't see anything wrong with people having sex outside of marriage or something of that kind. It kind of shocked me. I said, "Well, wouldn't that bother you in your own family?" He said, "Well, not really," but I know that it would have. If it had ever happened, which I'm sure it didn't.

Jenkins -- IV -- 10

But I remember that conversation, because it just sticks in my mind.

G: What would a typical trip to Austin be like? Who would he see when he came to Austin?

J: Always saw Tom Miller, always saw Ray Lee. Was George Brown still here? I think so. It was probably about the time [inaudible], so he nearly always saw George Brown. [He] would nearly always have a meeting with Bill Deason and Jesse Kellam even though they were still at the NYA.

G: Did he maintain an active interest in NYA after he. . . .

J: Very muchly so. He kind of dictated the selection of the NYA personnel. I don't remember how long, but for a number of years you kind of felt like it was still his. I guess somewhere along there he got too busy for that, but all of the top people--and I don't remember who else it was besides Jesse and Bill, but you can go further down. The next four or five were also his appointees, his selections. He got reports on how it was going right along, and made suggestions. He was extremely interested in NYA.

G: I guess it was no accident that his office was in the PEC Building.

J: No. Because he had gotten the money to build that building; he was proud of it. It was brand new then, it had just been built. If you're going to have your office in Johnson City, it almost had to be there because there wasn't anything else. That was the only year it was ever there. Later we always had it in the Federal Building here.

Jenkins -- IV -- 11

G: I see. After 1939 you moved to [Austin]?

J: Yes.

G: Can you recall in particular what he did that fall on the whole question of public power and getting the dams completed and that sort of thing?

J: Well, it's difficult to remember it in detail. He was in the midst of a war with the private power interests, who were very much opposing the program to build up public power. I cannot remember, although I'm sure you have the files, his fight with CP & L was bitter and tough.

G: Did he rely on Senator [Alvin] Wirtz for advice during this period?

J: I think almost completely on that subject, more than anybody else.

G: Do you recall any of the details?

J: And when I said him coming to Austin, that also, that should have been first.

G: Any of his negotiations with the agencies of the executive [branch] to get funds for the dam, to get the appropriations, get approvals, things of that nature?

J: Yes, I can't remember. There was a man named--he was always meeting with PWA, WPA, Interior. I don't remember exactly what [Harold] Ickes had to do with it, but Ickes had something big to do with it because he was meeting with Ickes quite frequently.

G: PWA I guess was in Interior.

J: Was PWA then in [Interior]? I don't remember. But Ickes was really the key man and was very helpful to him.

Jenkins -- IV -- 12

- G: Was he at this point dissatisfied with the LCRA board? The files seem to indicate that the board didn't always. . . .
- J: Well, he began to be, but if my memory serves me correctly, I don't think he was at first, because I think they were his appointees. Governor [James V.] Allred and whoever the other governors were deferred to him on the appointments because it was sort of his baby and they said, "Who would you like?" I think he had a board to begin with that was his board. But then I think there were governors who were not quite so friendly, like Coke Stevenson came along, and appointed their people.
- G: [W. Lee] O'Daniel, I guess.
- J: Yes, and O'Daniel. I think he more and more became disenchanted with the LCRA board. Did John go on it?
- G: He did, and I was going to ask you about that.
- J: He got John appointed. That's when I took John's place. He got John appointed in 1941 and thought that was a major thing to keep it sort of under his control. John left Washington and came down here and went into Senator Wirtz's law firm, but the main reason for the move was he started to take over the LCRA.
- G: Now, that appointment I guess came through Bascom Giles. I guess he was, what, land commissioner?
- J: Land commissioner.
- G: Did Giles want anything in return for making that appointment, do you know?
- J: His son appointed to West Point.

Jenkins -- IV -- 13

G: That's what it was. I thought I saw. . . .

J: And he was appointed.

(Laughter)

G: Well, do you recall where the initiative came from? If Giles said, "Hey, if you'll appoint my son to West Point--?"

J: I don't think I can recall it, because I don't think I ever knew, but it happened almost simultaneously.

G: Well, his disagreement with the board after these new appointees came on, do you recall what it had to do with, what the issues were?

J: Well, I think primarily it was [that] the board was beginning more and more to try to get away from the agreement they had made with the co-ops. I think Mr. Johnson's primary interest was the co-ops. I think the LCRA was beginning to feel like they had made a contract with the co-ops that they didn't get rich off of or do as well off of and wanted to break the [contract]. Maybe not break it but to end it as soon as they can. What did they call it? It had a name, the management contract that they had for Bluebonnet, LCREC and Pedernales. I believe that really--there may have been other things. I'm sure there were.

G: A lot of it had to do with the price that they were charging for the electricity I guess.

J: Was charging the co-ops, yes. Also I think Mr. Johnson was very interested in building extensions anywhere anybody wanted them, even if it was a loss proposition. And I think the LCRA had gotten to the point where they were looking at the bottom line more than

Jenkins -- IV -- 14

Mr. Johnson wanted them to. They would build an extension if they could see the money coming back in a reasonable amount of time, and Mr. Johnson felt that they ought to build them all and lump them together. Some of them would be losers, some of them would make it back off the ones that had a lot of houses.

G: Did he ever convey to you where he had gotten the idea of rural electrification?

J: I don't know that he ever conveyed it to me. I've heard him discuss it in speeches, in which he talks about his own home not having it, his mother lighting Coleman lamps and so on. And I'm sure that had some effect on him, how much easier his own family's life might have been if they had had it when he was a child.

G: He also worked on the Austin fish hatchery I believe, getting that for the city.

J: He sure did.

G: Can you recall that, how he did that?

J: I remember we had a lot of time spent on the Austin fish hatchery, and he was very interested in it. But I never did work on it myself and I don't remember just. . . .

G: Why do you think he was interested in it?

J: I think only because he was interested in Austin. That interest continued through the rest of his life.

G: He never drew the parallel with San Marcos and the fish hatchery there.

Jenkins -- IV -- 15

J: No, he worked on that, too. The departments that he had some friends in--and I don't remember what the fish hatchery was under, I guess Agriculture, wasn't it? I don't remember. But whatever, he worked those friendships for all they were worth.

G: Did they resent it? Did these people in the cabinet departments resent it after a while, do you think?

J: I don't think so. As a matter of fact, when he ran for the Senate in 1941 I remember that they all had instructions to give him whatever he wanted, and didn't seem to resent it.

G: The files also show that he would meet periodically with the postmasters from the Tenth District out at Buchanan Dam.

J: That's right. I have attended two or three of those meetings.

G: What was the purpose of these, can you recall?

J: Well, in the early days before the Hatch Act became so strong, that was really his political machine. He'd appointed them all, they were his buddies. He encouraged them to have their people write him, so we could answer them the day we got them, and find out what they needed and then write us and tell us what we might could do for people. It was just his contact with the people, was the postmaster. Of course we appointed the postmasters in those days, and the people who had been in his original, early campaigns all became postmasters.

G: So would this be just a weekend session to get feedback on what was going on in their communities?

J: Right, and to keep them fired up.

Jenkins -- IV -- 16

G: What would happen if you had somebody who you had appointed that didn't measure up, or a postmaster who was, say, lackadaisical about getting the information if you needed it?

J: I don't remember that anybody was. He had a way of sort of stimulating them.

G: Do you remember the Maury Maverick corrupt practices indictment that winter?

J: Was it in 1941?

G: No, I believe it was 1939, late 1939.

J: I was going to say, I believe it was--I guess that was the year I came. I remember it, but as far as knowing anything about it, I don't.

G: That was when Wirtz went down and defended Maverick.

J: I remember it, but. . . .

G: How about Wirtz's appointment as under secretary of the interior?

J: Well, that was certainly Mr. Johnson's--Roosevelt did that for Mr. Johnson, completely and wholly.

G: Do you recall specifically what LBJ did on that to get that appointment?

J: I'm sure he went to Roosevelt and talked him into making it.

G: Because Ickes's diary mentions that Maury Maverick had made some recommendations.

J: Well, Maury Maverick would have, too. Mr. Johnson and Maury Maverick worked together closely, they were close friends. And I don't doubt

Jenkins -- IV -- 17

that, but Wirtz was a whole lot closer to Mr. Johnson than he was to Maury Maverick.

G: Was there any other reason for doing that? Did he want Wirtz in Washington, do you think, during this period?

J: Well, I think he wanted Wirtz in Washington because of what he might do to help him with the dams and the rural electrification and the public power program. But he sure wanted him out of Washington as soon as he announced for the Senate. Of course he didn't know Morris Sheppard was going to die.

G: Then you went to Washington in January of 1940?

J: Yes.

G: And you talked some about staying at the Dodge Hotel.

J: Yes. John Connally and I roomed together at the Dodge Hotel right at first, but the fact that--

G: Typically, how would he spend his day in Washington?

J: Well, they were living I guess out on Connecticut Avenue. He never was one to come down real early, but he'd know it if we didn't come down pretty early because he was always calling the office to tell us what he expected of us that day, going over what we had. He always had a lot of projects he was working on. He would spend a good part of it talking to people at PWA and Interior and other government departments. He always had some appointments. There were always a few delegations up there, particularly the REA delegations. In the early days he signed his own mail. He didn't continue that forever, but he liked to see what people were saying.

Jenkins -- IV -- 18

Then nearly every day he'd check to see how much we might have left, if we had any, because we had that standing rule that every letter was answered every day. We didn't really do it because the last mail didn't come until like four o'clock in the afternoon. But we came pretty close. He'd come around and check, "How many you got left?" We had to do a letter count and put it on his desk every morning, how many we'd done that day and how many we had left that night. If we didn't do forty or fifty [he'd say], "Well, why didn't you?"

G: Let me ask you about his relationship with Rayburn when you first went up there. How would you characterize it?

J: Well, I think he looked up to Rayburn very much. And Rayburn liked him very much and had him over to the Board of Education room I don't know how many afternoons, but three or four a week. At five o'clock Mr. Rayburn would call and say, "Come over." Occasionally if something came up he'd call and have John or me bring something to him over there. Mr. Rayburn didn't much like anybody coming there. It was a secret place.

G: Staff were not normally included?

J: Ever. But occasionally. In the early days, I think it was a father-son type relationship, but that didn't last too long. I think it became more just friendship-equality sort of thing. In fact, maybe at some point there maybe got to be a little jealousy.

G: Do you think when he had something that he wanted through fellow

Jenkins -- IV -- 19

members of Congress, would he go through Rayburn to get assistance or did he have other avenues?

J: Oh, he had other avenues, especially after that deal he did the year that he worked for the campaign committee--

G: 1940.

J: He had a group of congressmen who really felt like he had elected them, and he sort of had his own little machine. And did have. Before that he had certain congressmen who were close to him, and sort of a group that Mr. Rayburn did not have that much influence with, the ones that were kind of close to Roosevelt and that he sometimes saw at the White House and so on. Mr. Rayburn was never as close to Mr. Roosevelt as Mr. Johnson was.

G: Do you recall any of his meetings with President Roosevelt? Did he talk about them after he came back?

J: Yes, but I don't recall. Jim Rowe could probably tell you more about that than I could, because he was there, Tom Corcoran--Tom is gone now, but. . . . Bear in mind I was the lowest rung on the ladder. But he was down there a lot, I know that.

G: How much of his day was spent with the Naval Affairs Committee?

J: Well, it changed. After he got the subcommittee, the investigating subcommittee, and I can't remember just when that was, but sometime in 1940 I guess, he spent a lot of time, held a lot of hearings and issued reports. He became very interested in that. I don't think before that he spent a lot of time. Not that he didn't go to

Jenkins -- IV -- 20

the meetings, he did. But after he got that investigating subcommittee he spent a lot of time on it.

G: Did you have an impression of Chairman [Carl] Vinson in those early years?

J: Well, as being very austere, cold, which he may not have been. It's an impression that came from afar, because I didn't know Congressman Vinson. I'd met him, when I'd go over there to take Mr. Johnson notes or something, but he never seemed very warm, human. But Mr. Johnson was crazy about him, so. . . . I was more a messenger boy than anything else in those days, so whatever impressions I had may well have been wrong.

G: Okay. Going further along in 1940 on the outline, I notice that in early March he flew to Houston to be with his Uncle George, who was dying. I don't even know if he got there in time. Do you have any recollection of that?

J: Well, I remember when his Uncle George got sick and I remember how sick he was, but I don't remember whether he got there before he died or not. Mrs. Johnson probably would know. I just don't remember.

G: Let me ask you to describe in as much detail as you can the fight between the Roosevelt supporters and the Garnerites in Texas. This was the issue of the third term.

J: Let me get myself--that was the Texas state convention in 1940, wasn't it?

G: Right.

Jenkins -- IV -- 21

J: And one Mr. Johnson took control of, which he was not in control of. Isn't that correct?

G: Right.

J: Well, Mr. Johnson was never very close to [John Nance] Garner. I don't know that anybody was. He wasn't close to him like he was close to Roosevelt. I guess when Roosevelt decided to make a change, I'm sure Mr. Johnson went along with him even though the Vice President was from his own state, and did what he could to soften the blow in Texas. I was with him--not with him, I was with the group at the state convention that year, and it was a knock-down-drag-out fight. I've forgotten what the key vote--the key vote was over a side issue. It often is, you know, once you have one vote on one issue and then the other side capitulates. I can't think what it was.

G: Did it have to do with a Stop Roosevelt strategy, in essence that they wouldn't. . . ?

J: Well, it was so interpreted. Whether it really was or not. . . . I don't know whether it really wanted to stop Roosevelt, it might have been, I guess. I guess there was a group in Texas that was opposed to a third term.

G: Were there any other members of the Texas congressional delegation that were on your side in this?

J: Yes. If I remember correctly Gene Worley was. Let's see. Wright Patman I think was.

Jenkins -- IV -- 22

- G: Well, how did you all blunt the opposition of the anti-Roosevelt, the anti-third term people?
- J: Well, not "you all," I didn't have anything to do with it, I was just there. Certainly by just appealing about Roosevelt himself. Roosevelt's popularity had not dimmed at that point. And all these people that had been broke and were not any longer broke, they sort of banded up together. I wish I could remember what that vote was on, but I can't. I remember that Mr. Johnson and Senator Wirtz and various ones who were very active in the. . . . I get it mixed up with the fight with Coke Stevenson, which is sort of the same sort of thing five years later, or several years later.
- G: Another wild Texas convention.
- J: That's right.
- G: Well, in 1944 I gather there was a fracas there.
- J: I was overseas in 1944.
- G: Now the Democratic National Convention was in Chicago that summer and there was also serious infighting within the Texas delegation then. I have a note here that LBJ and Bascom Timmons almost got into a fight representing opposite sides in that. Do you recall that?
- J: I wasn't there. The first national convention I went to was the first time [Richard] Russell ran. I guess that was--what, 1952? We went there to work for Russell, 1952 and 1956 both.
- G: Or was it 1948 and 1952?
- J: I guess it was 1948 and 1952, because I'm getting too late now.

Jenkins -- IV -- 23

- G: Anything else on the fight in the Texas delegation?
- J: Not that occurs to me.
- G: Let me ask you some more about his heading the committee or whatever to raise funds for Democratic congressmen for re-election. How did he get that assignment, do you recall?
- J: Well, I just remember that he was called down to the White House and came back and said Roosevelt had asked him to do it. I imagine it came somewhat through Corcoran and Rowe, but I'm also pretty sure he was asked directly by the President to do it.
- G: Was there a particular strategy here in terms of who got how much money or how the money was divvied out?
- J: Well, Mr. Johnson made the decisions himself, and I think he studied the ones that were close where he thought the money could be used effectively, and gave minimum amounts to those that didn't have any chance, and maximum amounts to those that had some chance. Then he asked every one of them to tell him what they thought would win for them and those that wanted Roosevelt to come and speak, why, he got Roosevelt to go and speak. He was given a lot of power to do what they--if they had certain projects they wanted approved, they got approved. In those days, politics was played a little bit stronger that way than they are now.
- G: The Roosevelt files from this episode seem to indicate also that there was some jockeying for position within the Democratic National Committee, maybe with [Congressman] Pat Drewry or somebody like that. Do you recall whether as a result of this--

Jenkins -- IV -- 24

J: Wasn't [James A.] Farley still chairman?

G: Well, I think he went with the people that opposed the third term.

J: I guess that's right. Who took his place?

G: Well, did [Edward Joseph] Flynn come in later, is that [it]?

J: I guess so, I don't--

G: In any event, my impression was that LBJ and perhaps Pat Drewry of Virginia were rivals for the same position.

J: Maybe, I don't know. I don't recall. I know that we did not go through the National Committee. We were kind of given carte blanche to go direct to the cabinet officer or to the White House for the things that we wanted.

G: Were there other members of Congress who worked with LBJ on this?

J: I don't remember if they did. I think it was just him.

G: Did he take part of his staff? For example, did you work on this?

J: I didn't. I was down there some. He took everybody but me. I was the congressional office. I answered all the mail.

G: Was this the Munsey Building where he did all this?

J: Right. John went down there.

G: Where did they get the money?

J: Mr. Johnson himself raised a lot of it, just called everybody he knew that had any and told them how important it was to keep a Democratic Congress. I guess he got some from the Democratic National Committee, I don't remember. But I know, by and large, it was his own operation. He raised a lot.

G: Was it mostly Texas money, do you think, since that was his base?

Jenkins -- IV -- 25

J: Yes. Yes.

G: Was there anything that the people who gave the money would be interested in? For example, were there oil issues or issues that would affect them that would persuade oilmen that it was important to vote for these congressmen or get these congressmen in?

J: I don't think anything like that was stated at the time. It may be that later on people that helped would say, come on, help me now.

G: Was it a question, do you think, of independents, independent oilmen rather than representatives of the major oil companies?

J: I'm sure it was. Because we never had any support from the major oil companies, ever. I don't think that any major oil company ever helped Mr. Johnson. They always opposed him.

G: Was there a rivalry between the independents and the majors?

J: Very muchly so. A lot of the big independents were strong, close personal friends and political friends, like Sid Richardson, Clint Murchison, some of the largest independents were very close to Mr. Johnson.

G: I wanted to ask about LBJ's relationship with Charles Marsh during this period. Marsh must have been a peculiar individual.

J: Very. Extremely. They had a very close relationship and Mr. Johnson was careful to try to protect it because he needed the [Austin] American-Statesman and the American-Statesman was important to him, but sometimes he would get sort of teed off with some of the things that Mr. Marsh would say and do. Mr. Marsh was extremely erratic.

Jenkins -- IV -- 26

G: He must have really been in his heyday then, because wasn't he a supporter of Henry Wallace?

J: Yes.

G: Wallace went on as vice president.

J: Mr. Marsh was quite a guy. He had that place down in Virginia. Mr. Johnson used to go down there a lot.

G: What was that--Longlea? Was that the name of it?

J: I don't remember the name of it, but it was at--what's the name of that little town in Virginia where they have all the hunt country places?

G: Oh, near Middleburg.

J: Middleburg, yes.

G: Did you ever go?

J: Never to his place. I've been down there to Mr. Johnson's place when he finally got one of his own, you know, quite often. I guess he never got one of his own.

G: Probably Huntlands. Is that the one Mr. Brown owned?

J: Yes, that was Mr. Brown's. I've been to Huntlands many times. He sort of treated it like it was his own; he used it like it was his own.

G: Did Marsh try to influence him, do you think? Others have said that Marsh saw himself as a kingmaker.

J: He did.

G: Was his advice usually sound?

Jenkins -- IV -- 27

J: I don't know the true answer to that question. My inclination is to say it really wasn't, because I think he was--I don't like to use the word crackpot, that wouldn't be accurate either, but not really always well thought through.

Did I tell you about the time Marsh took the money off me? I believe it's the maddest Mr. Johnson ever was at me. In the 1941 campaign we were just broke in the race against O'Daniel, and Mr. Johnson called me and said, "We're just off the radio completely. We don't have any money. Go around and see all the Austin [and] Texas lobbyists and raise whatever you can. Just tell them I've just got to have it." I got Dale Miller to help me and we raised fifteen thousand dollars. He said, "Well, fly down here"--I stayed in Washington during most of that campaign--"Fly down here with it." So I flew to Texas, money stuck out of every pocket, the midnight flight. They don't have it anymore, but they did then. And I got in about eight o'clock one morning and went to the headquarters to deliver it and the first person I saw was Charles Marsh. He knew what was coming, and he said, "I've been instructed to take that and I know what I'm supposed to do with it." You know, innocent me, I just turned it over to him. (Laughter) His idea of what to do with it was entirely different from Mr. Johnson's. Mr. Johnson was going to spend it on radio and Mr. Marsh spent it all on newspaper. Mr. Johnson later in the day said, "Well, did you give that money to Senator Wirtz?" I said, "Well, I've already given it to

Jenkins -- IV -- 28

Charlie Marsh." "YOU WHAT!" He was so mad he couldn't stand it. He said, "That's the campaign, we've lost. Just because you didn't pay attention to what you're doing." I said, "Well, he told me that it was your instructions for me to give it to him." He said, "You can't believe Charlie Marsh! He'll tell you anything!" (Laughter) Oh, he was mad.

G: That's a great story.

J: Somehow they got through the rest of the campaign. But we did lose it so bad, and maybe that was the reason, I don't know.

G: Let me ask you about LBJ's relations with Jesse Jones during this period. There is another story that I've heard that I think it was LBJ and Rayburn went to FDR to try to get Jones removed from one position, perhaps secretary of commerce.

J: Head of the RFC, I imagine.

G: And to do that they suggested that FDR appoint him to something else, and Roosevelt, according to the story, appointed him to the other post but left him with his previous one as well.

J: Oh, really?

G: Giving him even more power. Did you ever hear of that?

J: Never heard it. Don't doubt it though.

G: What was his relationship with Jesse Jones?

J: Never close. Knew him and had to work with him because RFC controlled the money for--some of the dam money, I've forgotten which channel it was. But he always had problems with Mr. Jesse Jones.

G: Do you think Jones was an enemy? Did he try to thwart LBJ's projects?

Jenkins -- IV -- 29

J: No, I don't think that. I just think he was--I don't think he was ever really in sympathy with a lot of the things Roosevelt himself was doing. If I remember correctly, the problems they had with him were as head of the RFC.

G: I see. Also during this period LBJ spent some time in Corpus Christi [as] I guess part of his Naval Affairs Committee activities with the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station. Do you recall what he did there?

J: Well, I recall that President Roosevelt asked him when he was first elected what recommendation he had as the newest member of the Naval Affairs Committee, and he said Texas with its long coastline needs a naval base, and I think that's what resulted in the Corpus Christi Naval Base. And I think that's also what caused--Brown and Root got the contract. That was their first big contract. He got blamed by some people for Brown and Root getting the contract. I don't think he had anything to do with it. I think they were here and bidded cheaper than others did. And they were friends, they were friends, too. But I think he was sort of helping in the selection of the site and the whole operation of the Corpus Christi Naval Station.

G: As long as you're going into this subject of helping friendly contractors, how much could a congressman's office do to help a contractor without stepping over the line?

J: Well, in those days--

G: And I realize that the standards have changed dramatically.

Jenkins -- IV -- 30

J: In those days, other things being equal he could probably help a little bit. If the other things weren't equal, you probably couldn't. In other words, if they had bids from LTV and some other contractor that were similar, why, he might be able to say that LTV would be better and so on. But I don't think he ever could get a contract from somebody if it wasn't in the government's interests.

G: Was there an informational role that a congressman could play that would be helpful, such as alerting a contractor that bids on a project were going to be let, or suggesting an approach that might appeal to the--?

J: I don't know. I think the contractors all knew when they were going to be let. I doubt it. I don't know.

G: To what extent do you think it was competition with, say, contractors in another part of the country or another part of the state on the one hand, or was it competition with friendly contractors and unfriendly contractors within the same congressional district, say, or the same area?

J: I don't remember that ever happening. There just weren't that many contractors around. But I think contractors that were fairly close by could always underbid those that were far away because of transportation costs and so on. I always thought that's what happened as far as Corpus Christi was concerned. That's where Brown and Root got big.

G: I guess between that and the dam, Mansfield Dam.

Jenkins -- IV -- 31

- J: Yes. They were about the only contractors here that amounted to anything. And they were here. They weren't in Houston then.
- G: Let me ask you about LBJ's friendship with George Brown. The impression I have is that he was much closer to George Brown than he was to Herman.
- J: No question about it. Although he was close to Mr. Herman, but the personalities were quite different. I don't know whether he ever had the social relationship with Herman Brown that he had with George.
- G: What do you think the basis of that friendship was with George Brown?
- J: I don't know. It existed before I went to work for him. They were close. I don't know. It may be that the dams might have been involved. It may be that--well, George Brown I think was a supporter of public power and there weren't many wealthy ones that were, and that might be the basis for it. But it came before my time.
- G: George Brown seems to have been somewhat of an enigma to me in this period, because on the one hand he seems to have been in support of a lot of progressive ideas, a lot of New Deal ideas. On the other hand, he had a reputation for being very anti-labor. How would you--
- J: Well, I don't know about anti-labor, he was anti-union. In fact, as far as I know, they're still not unionized now. They certainly

Jenkins -- IV -- 32

weren't a very few years ago, never were unionized. What was your question?

G: How did you square this contrast? Is this a correct reading? Did he have on the one hand some progressive instincts and on the other some conservative instincts?

J: Well, I think by and large he was progressive, certainly more progressive than most contractors were. He was a supporter of Roosevelt, a lot of his activities and his programs. This was not a strong union state in those days, and I guess he didn't want to be. I don't know whether. . . .

G: To what extent do you think that the ideas of populism entered into LBJ's thinking in 1939 and 1940, you know, the Walter Webb concept of the South as a colony of the North and the East?

J: I always thought it entered into it a lot, because--I think he got some of that from his father.

G: Can you give any examples of how this influenced his voting or his actions in particular occasions?

J: No, but I think if you'd just take his voting record down the line it would almost show it.

G: He did, you think, seem to think in those terms and to talk in those terms?

J: Yes, sir.

G: Well, I think we've gotten through 1940.

J: All right.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

G: Let's see how we're doing.

Jenkins -- IV -- 33

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

WALTER JENKINS

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Beth Jenkins, of ^{Dallas} ~~Austin~~, Texas, Executrix of the Estate of Walter Jenkins, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted with my father, Walter Jenkins, on August 14, 1970, August 24, 1971, September 23, 1976, May 13, August 12 and September 16, 1982, January 18, July 22, September 22 and October 6, 1983, and on April 18, April 25, July 12, July 19, and August 30, 1984, in Austin, Texas, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recordings may be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Beth Jenkins Bromberg
Donor

Date

9/4/07

Ann Sawcotte
Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries

Date

10-30-2007

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Walter Jenkins

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Beth Jenkins of Austin, Texas, Executrix of the Estate of Walter Jenkins, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on August 14, 1970, August 24, 1971, September 23, 1976, May 13, August 12 and September 16, 1982, January 18, July 22, September 22 and October 6, 1983 and on April 18, April 25, July 12, July 19 and August 30, 1984 in Austin, Texas, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter, the copyright in the transcripts and the tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations of the transcripts and tape recordings without my express consent in each case.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Donor Beth Jenkins

Date 2-5-87

James A. Burns
Archivist of the United States

Date 2-19-87