

## INTERVIEW VI

DATE: September 16, 1982  
INTERVIEWEE: WALTER JENKINS  
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE  
PLACE: Mr. Jenkins' office, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Toward the end of 1946, Mrs. Johnson's aunt, Aunt Effie [Pattillo], who had raised her, was terminally ill and she died on New Year's. Do you recall that at all?

J: Yes. And I certainly recall Aunt Effie. They were very close. Mrs. Johnson used to go down to see her and she was very close to Aunt Effie. Aunt Effie left her I guess some of the Alabama property. She was very fond of her.

G: What was Aunt Effie like?

J: Well, it's hard for me to say. She really is not somebody that stands out in my memory. A sweet, old fashioned lady who you couldn't help but admire and like and respect, but doesn't stand out as a strong, vibrant personality.

G: In 1947 you have a lot of foreign policy issues coming up, the Iron Curtain, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, things like that. Do you recall what Mr. Johnson's philosophy was on the world situation in 1947?

J: He was certainly internationally-minded and supported President Truman and the policies that he was espousing and that Roosevelt had espoused before him. But he was not a real leader in foreign policy.

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- G: Is there anyone that he would normally turn to for advice on foreign policy, either a colleague in the Senate or an adviser or someone like that?
- J: Let's see, who was chairman of Foreign Relations at the time?
- G: Wasn't Tom Connally still [chairman]?
- J: Yes, but he never really leaned on Tom Connally for advice much.
- G: How about Walter George?
- J: Yes, very much.
- G: Really?
- J: Very much. You're right about it being Tom Connally, but it's Walter George that he looked to, who replaced Connally I guess as chairman.
- G: Both were quite senior, I suppose.
- J: He had tremendous respect for Walter George.
- G: George was a real orator, I understand.
- J: He really was when he got unwound. It was not a spellbinding type oratory but it was very convincing.
- G: Do you have any particular recollections of the Truman Doctrine, the proposal of aiding Greece and Turkey?
- J: Not really, although I remember President Johnson strongly supported the Truman Doctrine, while he was not one of the leaders in the field. Because he never was in foreign policy until he got in the position where he had to be. It was just never his cup.
- G: But he seemed to study these issues. He made speeches on them and at least from the newsletters and correspondence and things he seems to have at least explored them.

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J: That's true. But I don't believe anybody would contend that he was one of the leaders in the Congress in foreign policy. Perhaps in defense policy maybe.

G: Now, communists gained control in Hungary early that year. Do you recall that and his reaction to it?

J: Yes. He was alarmed by it. I don't recall just exactly what he said. I'm not sure that he didn't feel like we should have been a little tougher about it, a little stronger about it than we were.

G: Was there any particular event that alarmed him about the way the world was going or about the communist threat?

J: I think perhaps the Hungary takeover concerned him as much as nearly anything that happened.

G: Do you recall how he viewed that or what he said about it in particular?

J: Well, it seems to me that he reflected that we had said [things] to Hungary that encouraged them to sort of stand on their own feet and be independent and so on. Then when the Russians planes came over, why, we abandoned them, something to that effect.

G: Would he have favored a more aggressive defense of Eastern Europe, do you think?

J: I think he would have. I feel sure he would have. I don't know how far, but we had no defense at all.

G: The Democrats were really on the defensive on this issue, weren't they, because they were in power at the time so much of this was going on?

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J: That's true.

G: I guess he was feeling heat from the Republicans back then.

J: Yes, although I don't know that it became a real hot issue in the country itself. I'm not sure the people really understood how important it was and how critical--I don't remember that we got a lot of flak over it, as we did, say, like the firing of [Douglas] MacArthur, and the sort of things like that.

G: There was also the creation of Israel about this time and the whole question of Palestine--

J: All began.

G: Yes. Do you recall his view there?

J: Not at all. I don't recall that that. . . .

G: Did you have Jewish supporters at the time?

J: Oh, yes, and close friends, both financial supporters and personal friends and supporters, Ed Weisl and that type. Some of his strongest supporters were Jewish, a good many of them.

G: But you don't recall him taking a prominent stance?

J: I don't remember his taking a leading stand. I feel sure he always felt a little limited in the field of foreign policy, but I think that he supported free Israel and the effort to give them a home.

G: Congress enacted the Military Unification Act that year, too, and [James] Forrestal was named the first secretary of defense. Surely LBJ must have played a role here, as active as he had been in the House.

J: Yes, that was his. That was more in his field.

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G: Yes. What do you remember about that whole issue and his work there?

J: I remember his support for unification and his feeling--I don't think it was handled by a subcommittee that he headed or was on, but it was certainly handled by the full committee which he was on and he attended the hearings and was very active in them. But he was an ardent supporter of the unification program, I know that.

G: Did he favor it for efficiency or for eliminating rivalries, or what was the basis for his [support]?

J: I think that was a lot of it. He had been chairman of the subcommittee which had found so many instances of where the one service was buying something at the same time another service was selling it, since there was no correlation between them and no centralized buying program and very large wastes of money. I'm sure you've gone over some of his subcommittee actions both in World War II and later.

G: Yes. Did he do any selling of that legislation on the Hill, do you know?

J: I don't remember that he did. Was he majority leader by that time?

G: No, let's see, this was 1947, so he was still in the House.

J: Oh, that's right. He had not been elected to the Senate until the next year. I don't think so. I may be wrong. But he was a lot closer to Carl Vinson than people realized.

G: Oh, really?

J: Who was chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, which is the committee he was on, and who called him in for conferences innumerable

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times. He was always running down to Vinson's office for some reason. I don't know all the reasons, but I know Vinson leaned on him for a great deal.

G: Vinson has the image of being a very stern committee chairman who was a strict follower of seniority and all of this.

J: Yes, he did, and while I really hardly knew him, I certainly had met him a number of times. But he'd look to--well, I don't know whether I can back this up, but I would say that he considered Mr. Johnson his strongest supporter and friend and helper on the committee.

G: Can you just come up with an example or an illustration of how LBJ helped the Chairman on the committee, the types of things?

J: No, but every time there was a critical issue up, Vinson called him in, so I'm just guessing that he looked to him to sort of organize the other members. See, Mr. Johnson had his own following.

G: Luci was born that year, too, in July. Do you remember that?

J: Yes.

G: Does that trigger any memories about it?

J: Yes, I remember it. I don't know whether it triggers any memories that would be startling.

G: They don't have to be startling.

J: But I remember when she was born.

G: I have another note that in 1947 he met with REA Administrator Claude Wickard, to get an extension of the power lines in the Tenth District. Do you recall that process?

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- J: I don't know whether I recall that meeting or not, but that happened so many times. The extension of REA lines in the Tenth District was one of the number-one things he worked on from the beginning, and whether it was Wickard or whether it was his predecessors, he was always going down there. I don't think there's any question but that the REA looked to Bob Poage and Lyndon Johnson as their advocates on the Hill. Perhaps Poage more because he was chairman of the Agriculture Committee, but Johnson more because they felt he could do something about it. And I don't mean to be taking anything away from Mr. Poage, I admired him very much. But they felt that Mr. Johnson was somebody who could do something.
- G: Well, that would help his acquiring REA installations and lines and things.
- J: I'm sure you know that at one time he had not one but the two largest co-ops in the country both in his district.
- G: Yes. Let's see, that would be the Pedernales and--
- J: LCREC, Lower Colorado River, at Giddings.
- G: I see. Yes.
- J: Bluebonnet was there, too, but I don't believe it was large enough to be in that class.
- G: Was that the one in Guadalupe County, would you say?
- J: Well, it extended into Guadalupe County.
- G: Seems like there was one in Hays County and Seguin and all in there that Ed Cape worked on.

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- J: Well, Ed Cape certainly was with him on that, and I guess that's right, that was not the Pedernales. It certainly was not the Lower Colorado River, it covered Lee and Washington and all the other end of the district entirely. So I'm sure you're right, I'm sure that was Ed Cape.
- G: Well, when he would go to see Wickard, let's say, what was the obstacle? Was it population still, as it had been in the early days? Or was it money or communicating with another congressman?
- J: I think it was kind of a combination. I know at one point, I don't know about this particular one, but [there was] a big argument about density. Mr. Johnson felt that if you're going to give electricity to farm homes, you've got to give it to all of them. But the REA had a rule, and I can't remember what the formula was, but seems like you had to have nine homes to the mile or something or it wasn't feasible to spend the money to build the line, because you wouldn't ever get it back. But Mr. Johnson felt that you had to take those losing lines along with the ones that had fifty to the mile, we'll say, and average it out. I don't know at what point this meeting that you're talking about here took place, but that was sort of a continuing. . . . And I don't know that REA disagreed with him, I think it's just a question of the funds that were available. But he appeared before the Appropriations Committee I don't know how many times to increase funds to try to make it possible for more and more farm women not only in the Tenth District but everywhere to get electricity.

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G: Now also that year the government sold the Big Inch and Little Inch [pipelines] to Texas Eastern. Do you recall if he had a role in that?

J: Not that I know of. I remember it, but I don't remember it ever being an active matter in our office.

G: Do you know if there were other people that wanted to buy it besides Texas Eastern, the pipelines?

J: No. I assume they took bids. I don't know that, but I'm confident that they didn't go to Brown and Root and say, "Here, we'll sell this to you," without making the investigation as to who else might buy it for a similar high price.

G: Anything else on the legislative issues of that year, 1947?

J: What else was there?

G: Well, there were a lot of strikes, a telephone strike, I think 80 per cent of the phones were out.

J: I guess this was after Taft-Hartley, wasn't it?

G: Well, let's see. I guess so.

J: That was one of the largest mails we ever received, both critical and favorable, particularly because a lot of people were surprised at the position Mr. Johnson took.

G: Let's see, the Taft-Hartley was passed over Truman's veto that year.

J: That's what I was thinking, it had to be about that time. I didn't know whether it was 1946 or 1947. But Mr. Johnson supported it and supported it strongly, despite tremendous pressure to go the other way.

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- G: Let me ask you to go into this in some detail, because this does emerge as an issue the following year, vis-a-vis Coke Stevenson--
- J: I think it emerges as the issue that got him elected actually.
- G: You think so?
- J: It had more than anything else to do with it, because of the fact that Stevenson sort of refused to take a position on it, a good many of the labor unions came out for him. And of course as you know from the speeches and so on, Mr. Johnson kept pressing it and kept pressing and kept pressing, making him say what he would have done, because he sort of knew what he would have done. And Stevenson evaded it just as long as he possibly could, and finally I think he was beginning to lose all his conservative support, which he had a multitude of, and he decided he had to get off the fence and he made a sort of halfway statement supporting Taft-Hartley. It wasn't enough to please the labor unions and was too much for the conservatives. So he sort of lost both ways with his statement.
- G: I wish you would explain LBJ's position on the issue and the background of it. Not just how he felt, but why he felt this way and how he perceived Taft-Hartley in terms of legislation.
- J: I think he felt it went too far in restricting people's liberty to do what they wanted to do and gave the unions--although he had been normally a supporter of union matters--too much hold over people. He felt, I think, that every man on the street did not want to go quite that far. He labored over it and studied it and thought about it. But when he reached his conclusion that he was against it, he

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was against it strong and all the way and didn't equivocate. It caused him some very harsh, strong enemies.

G: Who, for example?

J: Well, at that particular point in time nearly every labor union in the state of Texas. Now I think they came back, because they never had a chance to support anybody against him that they felt was going to be any better to them than he was, but at first they nearly all came out for Stevenson. But Stevenson was trying desperately to hold all the labor unions with this hand and the anti-labor people with this hand, and he found he couldn't do that and make a speech every night and answer questions. Mr. Johnson was just pressing him on the issue every day, every day, calling on him to tell us where he stood. He said, "You know where I stand, now where does he stand?" I think it was the prime issue of the 1948 campaign.

G: Now, Congress recessed in late July I guess, almost August of that year. Let me ask you about some of your office procedures here. Did you keep part of the staff in Washington and the other part moved down with him when he came to Texas at the end of the session or when you had a long break?

J: Yes, we did that, because we had so many things that required sort of errands in government departments. Some years I would come to Texas and some years I would stay in Washington, but that year I stayed in Washington until right at the end of the campaign. I think I told you about that the other night.

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G: Oh, about 1946, that's right, yes.

Well, who would he usually take and who would he leave there?  
Was there any formula normally?

J: Well, as long as he had John [Connally] he usually took John with him. He usually left me there, although not always, because the Washington job was more of a routine job, just carrying out messages and things to do. Sometimes he would take both John and me to Texas and would leave Dorothy Nichols. She didn't ever want to go to Texas anyway because she had a husband and a family. Whoever. We didn't have a very large staff until the Senate days.

G: It really increased then, didn't it?

J: Substantially. The allowance for a staff was--I don't know about now but was much larger. On the other hand, he had to cut back a bunch when he became vice president, because the staff for a vice president is much less than the staff for a senator.

G: What did he do? Did he put people in agencies?

J: Yes. I don't think he fired anybody, but we had to struggle to get them placed. Of course, we had some help. He had been made vice presidential nominee of the party and vice president-elect. I've forgotten how many we had to reduce, but it was substantial. It was several, a good many. There just wasn't a damn thing to pay for them with, except his own salary, which he did various [times]. People would be surprised at how much of his own money he paid people when he didn't have enough allowance to pay for.

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- G: Well, let me ask you, do you know anyone in particular who was on his own payroll rather than the government's?
- J: Me.
- G: Is that right?
- J: Dorothy Nichols. We've talked about it, because it was nice and so on. But in a way it does us a disservice because we don't get credit for that time in retirement.
- G: Well, one of the questions that has arisen I guess here and there is that whether or not staff was doing personal work for him, and of course if they were on his own payroll, well, that certainly makes a difference.
- J: They were not doing personal work other than the kind of personal work that everybody's staff does for them. I mean, I may have written his checks for him and paid his bills for him and stuff like that, but that sort of wasn't considered personal work in those days. That was just kind of one of the things you did.
- G: But how many years were you on his salary, would you think?
- J: Oh, not that long. I think Dorothy was for three or four.
- G: Really? Well, was this during the period let's say after you came back from the service before he went to the Senate?
- J: Yes.
- G: Is that right? He always seems to have been looking out for people to hire, to add to his staff, collecting able staff people. He seems much more conscious of the value of staff members than maybe some of his colleagues. Was this the case?

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- J: Yes. I think it was looking for loyalty almost more than ability. I don't mean to say that he was not interested in ability, you understand, but he wanted people that were completely, entirely, wholly loyal.
- G: How could he gauge this loyalty in advance?
- J: Well, he couldn't very well gauge it in advance, and he never fired anybody, but he'd just try to give them a job somewhere else. I don't remember his ever firing anybody. Now, I have fired people for him, not many though. Gene Latimer a time or two but you always could get him back.
- G: Anything else on this year that we haven't talked about?
- J: 1947. What else have you got there to refresh my memory with. Anything. . . ?
- G: Well, of course, he is being asked about whether or not he is going to run for the Senate. He's saying, "No comment."
- J: He certainly indicated he was not going to run for the Senate until right near the time to decide. I don't know that he made a positive statement, but it certainly was not a statement that would have encouraged you to believe that he was going to run. I always thought he really didn't much want to.
- G: Really? Well, there is an indication that a lot of his supporters didn't want him to run because they thought he would lose and be out entirely, whereas having run in 1941, in a special election, if he lost he still had his House seat. In this case it was all or nothing.

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J: It was close.

G: Did people pursue that argument with him?

J: Some did, yes. I don't remember who. The point was made. There isn't any question about that.

G: If you had to attribute one factor to his decision to run, and say this was probably it, what would it be? Why do you think he did win?

J: I think he decided that he could win, that he had a statewide organization that was sort of active, vocal, younger-type people that Stevenson didn't have. And he didn't think Stevenson would work, which he proved right. Of course it was very close. But Stevenson had a great personal popularity. He never had done anything to make anybody mad. But I think he felt like he could win. I don't know what Senator [Alvin] Wirtz told him, but I would guess that that might have had something to do with it because he paid more attention to Senator Wirtz than anybody else.

G: Do you think that he also considered the prospect of leaving the Congress and this forcing him to make a career change, either go to the Senate or go into private life?

J: Yes. That's actually the position he put himself in, that he was going to have to do one or the other. I think he always felt that he would be a reasonably good businessman if he decided to go into business.

G: Did he ask you advice on whether or not to run?

J: No.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VI]

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