

INTERVIEW VII

DATE: January 18, 1983
INTERVIEWEE: WALTER JENKINS
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Jenkins' office, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Now, early in the year Warren Woodward and Horace Busby joined the staff, in February.

J: That's correct.

G: Let me ask you to begin by--

J: They were hired the same day.

G: Yes. Tell me how they were hired and why they were hired.

J: Well, Mr. Johnson interviewed people himself for the Busby position and I guess selected Busby. He had told me he thought I needed some more help in the office and asked me to interview people. I interviewed a lot of people, I can't remember how many, but a number. I narrowed it down to Warren Woodward and the fellow who became chairman of the board of Braniff, just went broke.

G: Oh, Harding Lawrence?

J: Harding Lawrence. Harding Lawrence lived here in Austin and was manager here for a little airline that no longer exists. The Continental boys bought them out; it was one of Continental's acquisitions. Mr. Johnson left it up to me and I decided on Woody. One of them became vice president of American and the other one became chairman of the board of Braniff.

G: He was destined to have a future airline man.

J: They were supposed to report the same day, but Buzz was quite late. They finally got a wire from him saying, "Snowbound." The wire was sent from somewhere in Mississippi, where I don't think they'd had snow in a hundred years. (Laughter)

G: Did Busby replace someone or was this a new position? If so, did it have any significance?

J: Well, he sort of replaced--I don't know how long he had been [gone]-- he sort of took on the responsibilities that [Herbert] Henderson had had. I don't remember when Henderson died, but--

G: A number of years before that.

J: Well, we just didn't have anybody then, kind of passed it around.

G: Was it primarily to write speeches or deal with the press?

J: Both. Sort of learn the ropes and take that over eventually.

G: Was Woodward supposed to do something different?

J: He was sort of to be my assistant, administrative.

G: And was he to replace anyone?

J: No, I just hadn't had one. Mr. Johnson just felt like maybe I was overworked.

G: Now the Marshall Plan came up at this time and was a big issue in the Congress.

J: Yes, it was.

G: Do you recall LBJ's position here?

J: Well, he supported it. I don't think he was in a leadership position with regard to it, because he never took a leadership position on

foreign relations matters. He was not on that committee, and he just was not a real out-front man where foreign relations were concerned.

G: Why was this? Did he feel like it ought to be left to the committee or did he have a--?

J: Well, I just think maybe he felt that he had not--just presumption now--really perhaps [been] well enough informed and had enough background on it. He began to.

G: He did make a speech on the Marshall Plan.

J: Yes, I'm sure he did.

G: Did he ever talk to you about the Marshall Plan or his support of it?

J: I don't know whether he talked directly to me, but I was present when he talked to other people. There's no question of how he felt and where he stood.

G: That April he made a television debut I gather on one of the local TV stations there in Washington and wrote a letter leaving the impression that that was the first time he had appeared on television.

J: What year?

G: This would be early 1948.

J: Probably was, although I can't say for sure.

G: You don't remember the occasion though?

J: No, I don't. What station was it?

G: Oh, I gather it was just a Washington station.

J: I don't recall it. Do you know what the subject was?

G: No.

Then also in April he supported the concept of the 70-group air force. He and [Stuart] Symington worked on this.

J: He did that very strongly and did feel like he had a background in that from the Armed Services Committee.

G: Do you recall this issue and his position here?

J: Yes, I recall it. I recall the issue and I recall the fact that he and Symington conferred frequently and also that he took I guess not the leadership position but a leadership position in it.

G: What did the 70-group air force mean?

J: Well, in those days they had groups; I think now maybe they have wings or something else. It's like a regiment or a division. I don't remember who the chief of staff was. It was before [Hoyt] Vandenberg, wasn't it?

G: I guess.

J: I can't remember. But he very strongly wanted to have a 70-group air force, and we had nothing like one. I don't remember what we had, say 50, I don't know. He wanted to build up the air force to 70 groups. The peaceniks were opposed to it. There was a good deal of division on it.

G: Did this put him at odds with the administration, since it was coming out in favor of a lesser number of planes, I guess?

J: I don't remember that there was any bitterness as far as the administration was concerned. As a matter of fact, I think the air force

itself was strongly behind him, perhaps not the administration as a whole.

G: I have a note here that the Pentagon favored a 60-group air force, which LBJ referred to as trying to hoodwink the public. The planes would be obsolete or it wouldn't be sufficient.

J: I'm sure the Pentagon had the problem of requests from the navy and requests from the army in trying to cut the ball back a bit.

G: Did LBJ have people within the military who you feel were helpful in airing his side of the issue?

J: I don't know what you mean by airing. He did have people in the services who helped him prepare material and document the positions that we were in.

G: Is there anyone in particular on the 70-group air force that would be [the one]?

J: I'm trying to think. I have a feeling it was Hoyt Vandenberg, but I'm not sure. I rather think it was. I know it was in some air force issues, and I think maybe it was this one. He was around a good deal and became friendly.

G: Okay.

Now the Senate race heated up early. [Coke] Stevenson announced I guess very early that year and [George] Peddy made it known that he was going to be running.

J: Johnson waited late. We all just sat on the point for weeks it seems like.

G: What was he waiting for?

J: I don't know. I think he'd sort of made up his mind in his own mind. I don't know why he waited so long to announce, but he did. Everybody was urging him to. I guess some people were trying to get him not to.

G: What did you want him to do?

J: I wanted him to run.

G: Do you think he felt he could win?

J: Yes. Although I think he knew from the beginning he was running against a respected, conservative, established name who had somewhat of an organization statewide, where he didn't.

G: Do you think that his candidacy kept other people from running who might have run? Did you have to talk people out of the race who were thinking about running?

J: I don't remember anybody being talked out of the race.

G: Well, did [James] Allred want to run, for example?

J: I don't remember that he did. I don't think he did. When was Allred appointed to the judgeship? Not till later, was it?

G: Well, he was on the bench at this time I think.

J: Then I don't think he wanted to run. He was happy on the bench.

G: There was also the question of whether Pappy [W. Lee] O'Daniel would seek re-election. Did this enter into LBJ's thinking at all?

J: I don't know that, but I would think, just knowing his general feelings, that that would have strengthened his desire to run. Because Pappy O'Daniel had not performed well, had not been much of a senator. Mr. Johnson had lost to him once, at least in counting,

and I think he would liked to have taken him on again rather than Stevenson. I think he would have been easier to beat than Stevenson.

G: Did he consider the possibility with both men in the race, with Stevenson and O'Daniel in the race?

J: I don't know, although I think that he felt that they would not both be in the race, because they appealed to the same general electorate in many ways. And I doubt if Stevenson would have run if O'Daniel had run. I'll bet Stevenson had some assurance that O'Daniel wasn't going to run when he announced.

G: Is that right?

In 1941 he could run for the Senate and not lose his seat in the House, and here it was really a much larger gamble.

J: That's right, very much bigger gamble. He was out and gone if he lost.

G: Do you think that he considered the possibility of losing and what he would do if he lost?

J: I'm sure he considered it. Of course, by this time they were in business. I guess he thought he could go into business.

G: Do you ever think he considered this as a possible way of forcing a career change if he didn't win?

J: I think it's possible, because I think there are many times he kind of liked the idea of being in business. He liked to look over the radio station reports on Sunday afternoon, read what everybody did, have Mrs. Johnson make notes on what they should have done. She would then write letters and reports as to what they should have done.

Actually, I think if he had been a businessman, even though the business was very successful, it would have been fabulously successful.

G: Is that right?

J: Yes.

G: Why is that?

J: He just was able to see in a moment things they should have done.

Like, one of the things that he made them all do is everybody that advertised, he had her tell everybody that worked there to go by and at least price something and say, "I heard about this on KTBC."

(Laughter) They'd always get a renewal. Because when somebody takes a group of spots out and then nobody comes in and says anything about it, then they're off.

G: Yes. Sure.

Did some of his supporters urge him not to run because he would be out?

J: Yes, but I can't think who. There was somebody who was very strong for him not to run. Who was it?

G: Well, I heard that the Browns didn't want him to run at first.

J: That may have been it. They certainly supported him, but that may be true. I can't remember. There was somebody prominent, and I guess that's probably it, whom he had to overrule. My memory is not as good as it used to be.

G: Now, were you in Texas when he actually made the decision to run? Or were you in Washington?

J: I was in Washington.

G: Have you heard how he actually decided?

J: As far as I know he made the decision in Texas, as you know. But I'm not sure but what he actually had made it before he came to Texas. I always thought he had, but that he wanted to make the announcement down here.

G: How did you learn about the decision?

J: Well, I can't remember who called, whether he did or John Connally or who. But somebody called us and told us that the announcement was going to be made. I believe it was John.

G: And almost immediately Miriam Ferguson came out in support of him. Do you remember that? Do you have any idea how that was arranged?

J: Well, she had become very friendly. He had shown her a good deal of attention, and not many people did anymore. I think and I understand, I heard him say that she expressed to him her regrets that any part that her husband might have had in the 1941 campaign. She probably was trying to make up for that. She very much liked Mr. Johnson.

G: The headquarters were set up in the Hancock Building in Austin.

J: What's the Hancock Building?

G: I think it was down on 8th and Colorado or 3rd and Colorado.

J: 8th and Colorado, but it wasn't a building, it was an old house. It's been torn down now. It's right about where the Federal Building is now, a great big old white house.

G: Do you know why that space was selected?

J: I'm guessing because it was available and it was down close to town. I don't think there was any special significance to it, but it was close to places in the campaign where you could go eat, and close to the post office.

G: Who actually headed the campaign?

J: Well, again, it was the same one we had in 1941, what's his name?

G: Claude Wild?

J: Claude Wild in name, John Connally headed it in actuality.

G: Why was Wild there?

J: Well, he had gone back to the first campaign and his name would have been associated with Mr. Johnson as a campaign manager and as chairman. He was actually sort of ineffective, but. . . .

G: Was there a problem with really having two different managers?

J: Well, I don't think [so] really. Mr. Wild would do whatever he was sort of told to do.

G: Do you think it might have been to an extent to keep him from managing somebody else's campaign?

J: Oh, no. No, no. I don't think that at all. He would have been for Mr. Johnson in any event. He'd been closely associated with Mr. Johnson back to the 1937 campaign.

(Interruption)

G: Now there's another letter in which you indicated that Tom Connally was quietly for LBJ, Senator Connally. Also that you had gone around to various Texas congressional offices and gotten poll tax lists of each district.

J: I remember that.

G: Yes. Do you recall anything regarding Tom Connally and his position in the campaign other than what I just said?

J: Only that he did not want to make a public statement, but quietly.

G: Did he do anything tangible to help you in that race?

J: I don't know. I think he may have with his close friends.

G: Did you try to get him to take a public stance in the race?

J: Yes. But not real hard, because Mr. Johnson never was willing to take a public stance in anybody else's race but his own. It was kind of hard to ask somebody else to do something Mr. Johnson wouldn't do. Except in the general election. I'm talking about in the primary he wouldn't.

G: How about the other Texas congressmen?

J: Most of them were for him and some of them openly and possibly to their own detriment.

G: Were there any surprises either one way or another?

J: I don't remember any. They weren't all for him. I think they probably were all for him; some were more open than others.

G: Now, I have the impression that you were in Washington part of the time and in Texas part of the time.

J: That's true.

G: Let me ask you about your role in the campaign and when you were where.

J: Well, I can't remember the date, but at some point Mr. Johnson or John--I don't remember which--called me and said that the campaign

headquarters needed organization very badly. Everybody was running every direction and said the big decisions were being made and handled all right, but that they needed somebody to coordinate the mail and the volunteer workers and so on, and said come on down. So I came on down and worked in this old house.

G: Was that before the first primary?

J: Yes.

G: It was.

J: I was here all during the second primary. The biggest job I think, and I helped with it although it was Charlie Herring that did it, and it was a tremendous organizational job, was having gas for that helicopter. Because in those days there wasn't 90 octane--I believe was what they had to have--available many places and so we had to have trucks scurrying around on the ground being where he was going to run out of gas. Two or three times it didn't work.

G: What would you do in a case like that? Would you just leave the helicopter there till you could get gas?

J: Well, yes, he'd go on by car until you'd get gas and the helicopter would pick him up again.

G: Gee, that must have been a nightmare.

J: But the helicopter served its purpose. He did not use it in the second primary because he thought he needed to work in the cities, and the helicopter was no good in the cities. But it was great in the country.

G: Was his assessment of campaigning in the cities based on the returns from the first primary?

J: Based on an analysis of what he'd have to do to win, and I think he decided his best chance of picking up the votes would be in Dallas, Harris, Bexar, Tarrant, Travis, six or eight counties. He spent practically all of his time in the second primary in the cities.

G: Now, in your first interview with Joe Frantz years ago you talked a bit about the helicopter. Let me ask you this. There were actually two helicopters?

J: That's right. The first one was much larger.

G: It was a Sikorsky, I gather.

J: Right.

G: Do you recall why that was discontinued?

J: It was just too expensive.

G: Really?

J: He just got one that was just a little bubble with him and the pilot and that was it. I've forgotten what brand it was.

G: Bell, I think.

J: Bell. It was Bell, I remember, because this guy from Bell was his pilot, Joe Mashman. Sure, it was Bell.

G: But the first one was expensive in terms of the use of gasoline or in terms of the rental of the helicopter?

J: Both.

G: Both. Okay.

J: And we were having some financial problems.

G: How did he like the helicopter?

J: I think he enjoyed the helicopter, but I don't think he ever wanted to do it again.

G: Had he ever flown in one before, do you know, say in Australia perhaps?

J: I feel sure he had, but I can't tell you where. As much as he had flown around, I feel sure he'd been in a helicopter.

G: You know, you were asked in the first interview if you recall who thought of the idea of campaigning with the helicopter?

J: What'd I say?

G: I think you said it may have been John Connally.

J: Which it may have been. I'm not sure. I don't think it was Mr. Johnson. But it was a great idea, because the crowds would just come out. Helicopters were not so common then. He'd even talk-- he'd see thirty people working on the railroad, he'd talk to them from the sky, you know. He had this loudspeaker. He wouldn't land. He'd just hover over them.

G: Well, that in itself was an innovation, making a sound truck out of it.

J: I don't suppose it's been done maybe even since, I don't know. I guess it has since.

G: There were a number of other races I understand around the country that employed the helicopter after this. Did anybody ever come up to you and say, "We used this as a result of your using it"?

J: I don't think so.

G: Now, let me ask you about the opposition. If you had to characterize the people who supported Coke Stevenson, how would you do it? Who were his main backers?

J: Mostly people who are now Republicans.

G: Is that right?

J: There weren't any Republicans in those days.

G: But were the corporations or representatives of large corporations more inclined to support him than LBJ?

J: Yes. And then eventually he got and then lost labor. He got a group of labor endorsements because he didn't come out on Taft-Hartley, he kept dodging it. Mr. Johnson kept needling him every speech. I guess you know this. Finally he got so much pressure he made kind of a left-handed statement, letter, to somebody that was released by the person that got it saying he would have voted against the Taft-Hartley law if he had been a member. And Mr. Johnson used that to the fullest with the labor people, and a lot of them withdrew their support. I don't know how many actual run-of-the-mill labor would have ever supported him anyway. I don't think they would. But the organizations were because they just couldn't bring themselves to endorse Mr. Johnson not too long after he had cast a vote for the Taft-Hartley law, which was a vital issue with them.

G: What was LBJ's position on organized labor?

J: Well, he was always very friendly to organized labor. He always had labor support. It got down to the Taft-Hartley law itself, and there may be another occasion or two when he voted against them, I can't

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recall, but that was one he knew and I guess outside of [Douglas] MacArthur's firing that's probably our second biggest mail. Gosh, the mail on Taft-Hartley was so tremendous on both sides.

G: Was it in favor of, let's see, overriding the veto of Taft-Hartley, was that right?

J: Some were. But it was very split down the middle. That's why. . . .

G: Why do you think he took the position that he did on that vote?

J: I think because he felt that the time had come to sort of put some curbs on. I don't think he had politics so much in mind as he did conscience. Because I think he knew it would hurt him rather than help him.

G: You know, here one of the issues that's raised is that he was close to George and Herman Brown and they were very anti-union, and that he might have voted with them on that because they were close allies and financial backers. How would you answer this sort of accusation?

J: I'd say if you wanted to research it, you could find fifty places where he voted against whatever position they'd probably be taking. I guess it's conceivable [that was] one real gut issue, but I don't think so. I think he did it because that's the way he felt it should be done. Maybe I'm naive.

G: I understand there were some real differences of opinion within your organization, campaign organization, about how that Taft-Hartley vote should be stressed. Say perhaps Roy Hofheinz on the one hand wanted to play down the labor issue, and John Connally on the other wanted to play it up. Do you recall this?

J: Yes, I recall it, but I recall Mr. Johnson, who made the decision himself and who felt strongly that it should be played up only because he wanted to make Stevenson come out. Because he knew that when you got right down to it he was a better friend of labor than Stevenson ever would be and he had to make Stevenson--I don't know that he necessarily wanted to play up his own position, although he had to do that in order to press Stevenson every time. I'm sure you've read the speeches; I'm sure you know more about it than I do. It was the issue, almost.

G: Do you think that LBJ at this point had actually better ties with organized labor nationally than he did with labor in Texas?

J: Probably.

G: Why is this the case? Do you think they were more familiar with his record or their philosophies were different?

J: Well, they were there. He was a person they could see whenever they wanted to. He met with them and worked with them. They knew him and outside of perhaps this one issue considered him a friend and called on him. Outside of certain individuals--I saw one of them the other night, Bill--he didn't have really close ties with the Texas organized labor people. Bill. Bill. Bill. He was a little while later on the board of the LCRA. I ran into him the other night at some party. But he was an organized labor leader. He was very close to Mr. Johnson.

G: Did you have any way of knowing what the Stevenson campaign was doing other than through the media? Did you have any sources within

the Stevenson organization that were helping you or giving your intelligence?

J: No, although I think some people in the campaign did. I didn't. Because we seemed to always know. However, it seems--we had the person that traveled with him who reported. I don't know who that was, but I remember that we did. That he'd go into a town, go to the hotel and sit in the lobby and invite anybody that wanted to come in to see him. A few people would come in and he'd shake hands around. He never went out. That's why Mr. Johnson called him "Coffee-cooling, Calculating [Coke]," because he'd sit and drink coffee in the hotels in these little towns where we were meeting. He'd meet fifty maybe where we'd meet five hundred on the helicopter.

G: It was a very different campaign style.

J: Very different.

G: Anything else on the people that supported Stevenson?

J: I'm sure there is, but I can't think, can't remember.

G: I assume Dan Moody did.

J: No question about that. With everything he had. Although his son has become a friend of mine. I see Dan, Jr. pretty often. He's a bridge player.

G: Someone related the friction between the two--the enmity--to Dan Moody on the one hand representing Magnolia Oil and LBJ on the other casting some votes that the Magnolia Oil Company thought were against their interests, maybe on the Disney bill or something like that. Do you recall any of this?

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J: No. But I know big oil supported Stevenson. I think a good many independents like Sid Richardson and so on supported Mr. Johnson, supported him very heavily and very actively. But I don't remember that we had any support other than individual independent oil producers.

G: Was this a matter of economics or economic politics? I mean, was there a reason why the independents lined up behind one candidate and the majors behind another?

J: Well, I think probably because the depletion allowance was very important to the independents, not so important to the majors. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn had almost--I started to say single-handedly, I guess I better say double-handedly--kept any legislation that would change the depletion allowance from ever coming up year after year after year.

G: Yes. Well, this may be a good stopping point.

J: It's good for me.

G: Okay. I appreciate the time.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VII]

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