

INTERVIEW X

DATE: October 6, 1983
INTERVIEWEE: WALTER JENKINS
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Mr. Jenkins' office, Austin, Texas

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G: What I thought we would start out by doing is there are one or two items on 1949. First of all, John Connally left the staff.

J: Yes, I believe in September or October. I think, I'm not sure.

G: Was this something that was planned? Did he plan to stay on?

J: No. He agreed to come only for that session, and I think that's all that Mr. Johnson really asked him to come for.

G: It wasn't difficult to leave once you got there? He didn't try to persuade him to [stay]?

J: I don't think so.

G: Did this change your duties, when John Connally left?

J: It didn't change them materially. I had a little bit more responsibility.

G: Did he continue to rely on John Connally after he left?

J: Oh, yes. He relied on John Connally nearly all the time on some things. And I think--did John go [to the LCRA]? He'd already been at the LCRA before that.

G: I think he went to Houston, didn't he?

J: Yes. He went to the law firm.

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I went on that trip January 31, [1950], [with Stuart] Symington, [Ed] Gossett and [W. R.] Poage. They gave me a watch; Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce really turned it on for me, January 31.

G: Well, this was to dedicate air force bases.

J: Sheppard Air Force Base.

G: Well, you were from Wichita Falls.

J: Yes, that's why they took me along. They even gave me a certificate that day. I don't know where it is.

G: What do you remember about the trip? Did you fly down?

J: I remember we stopped off in Maxwell Field on the way back and picked up--Symington said we got a hitchhiker, and the hitchhiker was Dwight Eisenhower.

G: Really? Is that right?

J: Yes. It was the first time I had ever met him. I was very much impressed with him. When we arrived in Washington on our way back, Mr. Symington and Mr. Johnson, they of course walked on off and I was staying at the plane taking care of the luggage and seeing that everything got taken care of. I'll never forget. Eisenhower started to walk away, and came back and said, "Mr. Jenkins, I want you to know what a great pleasure it was to meet you," and I thought what a personality he is even to think to do such a thing. They were already gone.

G: Was there any talk at this time that he might be presidential timber?

J: Yes, there had been talk, just wasn't sure what party it was going to

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be. In fact, I don't know quite when it was that--oh, the guy from Fort Worth, what is his name?

G: Amon Carter?

J: No. No. The oil man.

G: Oh, Sid Richardson?

J: Sid Richardson, if I'm not mistaken, flew over there while he was still in Europe to get him to run as a Democrat, try to get him to be the Democratic candidate.

G: Anything on that trip noteworthy between LBJ and Dwight Eisenhower?

J: Not really. Eisenhower really was just sort of a hitchhiker.

G: They knew each other by this time certainly.

J: Yes, but I don't think very well.

G: Really? But was he then a friend of Symington, is that how he [knew him]?

J: Well, he was chief of staff of the air force [army].

G: Okay. Anything else on the dedication of the bases themselves?

J: I didn't go to the one in Waco; I went to the one in Wichita Falls. The Chamber of Commerce had a big, big dinner and gave Mr. Johnson, Mr. Symington, and me--they included me in everything--credit for it. It was a nice night.

G: Had Mr. Johnson played a role in getting Sheppard Air Force Base?

J: Yes--in getting it originally?

G: Yes.

J: No.

G: It had been there before?

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J: Before the war, when he was not a senator.

G: But keeping it--?

J: Yes, he had played a role in keeping it.

G: How about enlarging it? Did he enlarge it any?

J: Well, it was enlarged. I wouldn't want to say he did it. He may have had some effect on it. It was there and others were closed.

G: Do you recall anything that you might have done to help preserve the base?

J: Well, I made a lot of calls about it.

G: I notice also that in late 1949 he went to Mineral Wells a couple of times, once with Allan Shivers and Bob Anderson.

J: Why?

G: That's what I wondered.

J: Was there a state convention or something?

G: I don't think so. He went again with Horace Busby later. Remember anything about that?

J: No. Probably [when he went] with Horace Busby was just to make a speech or make some sort of--

G: This was right before Jimmie Allred was sworn in as a federal judge.

J: Wouldn't have had any connection.

G: Okay.

(Interruption)

Okay. In early February Pat Neff came to Washington. Do you remember anything of that?

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J: No. I have no memory of it at all. I don't remember ever seeing Pat Neff in my life.

G: Now, the natural gas bill was passed that session.

J: Well, I remember that.

G: I have a note from Mary Rather at the time, saying that LBJ was pretty tired from the strain of working to get that gas bill passed and then he went on a little vacation after that.

J: I'm sure he did. He was on the floor every moment. He guided the gas bill, conducted the questioning--not the questioning, the answers from everybody. He handled it himself.

G: What was the key in getting that bill passed, do you recall what strategies he used?

J: I remember very well, but I think mainly it was his own--the confidence in him. But the belief that it was kind of a sham, and that having the gas free [of regulation] at the wellhead would actually keep gas prices down rather than increase them, which later I think proved right, after it was vetoed.

G: Do you think that some of the senators felt that it was a regional or a state issue, and if they didn't have any natural gas production in their state maybe they weren't concerned about it?

J: Well, I guess some of them did, although if the majority of them did, it would never have passed because there's [not enough] states that have gas. So they had to get backing in order to convince them it was not an anti-consumer bill, which the other side tried to make it.

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G: Do you think they ever balanced it with another issue that may have been appealing to senators from another region, for example, the dairy states or something like that?

J: I never heard it. Is there some indication that happened?

G: No, I just wondered if that was a parliamentary strategy to say, "Well, we'll support you on this if you'll support us."

J: Well, I'm sure that went on, off and on all the time, but I don't think any more than normal.

G: Okay. Do you recall his persuading any other particular senators to support the gas bill?

J: Don't remember particular senators, but I know that he was very persuasive and worked as hard on it as I ever remember him working on any one thing.

G: Was he disappointed when Truman vetoed it?

J: Oh, yes.

G: How did you find out about the veto?

J: I don't remember. I think I told you how disappointed Mr. Rayburn was because Mr. Rayburn felt that he had been given a commitment from Truman that he would sign it.

G: Did Mr. Johnson think that Truman would sign it also?

J: Only because Mr. Rayburn had assured him he would. He might have passed that assurance on to other people.

G: What was his mood after Truman vetoed it, do you recall?

J: Well, I think Mr. Rayburn felt that he had been double-crossed. I don't know that Mr. Johnson felt that way because I don't think he

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felt he had a commitment." He felt a real bad mistake had been made."

G: Did he blame any advisers at the White House, do you think? Did he attribute it to--?

J: Yes, but I can't remember who. I know there was a feeling that perhaps it was sort of a get-even thing on [Leland] Olds. Never knew whether it was correct or not, but there's a chance that maybe [it was].

G: That's a good point. Yes.

Now in May he went to Austin with Alben Barkley and Homer Thornberry for a Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner.

J: I remember that, but I don't remember anything specific about it.

G: Okay. In June you had the outbreak of the Korean War. North Korea invaded South Korea.

J: Yes. I remember it.

G: Do you remember the circumstances there, where you were, or how LBJ learned about it?

J: No. I don't.

G: They held the first meeting of the Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee shortly thereafter and focused on issues of supplies and preparedness and that sort of thing. Donald Cook.

J: He came down and became counsel. I remember that very well. He had worked for Mr. Johnson's subcommittee as a naval officer during World War II.

G: Was Cook reluctant to leave his post?

J: I don't think so.

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G: Why did he want to have someone like Donald Cook, who was vice chairman of the SEC?

J: Because he had a lot of confidence in Don Cook.

G: What were Cook's strengths? Why would he draft him in that situation?

J: Cook could make a statement and you would think it was a Supreme Court decree. It just couldn't be wrong. He spoke with such force--not exactly force, but if he said something, even if you thought the other way, you thought that man just can't be wrong, that's got to be right. Most convincing person I ever knew.

G: Really?

J: Yes.

G: And that's in a circle of some pretty convincing people.

J: Cook just had a way of being able to say, "This"--his hand down [slaps table]--like it came down from the Lord or something.

G: Was there anything in particular about his investigative skills or his knowledge of the sort of things you would be investigating, the supplies?

J: I think not really except that he knew some good people and brought them in to help him. He did not really do the day-to-day investigating himself.

G: Did he function as an advocate, or did he function as sort of a director of the staff?

J: As a director. Super-efficient guy and very loyal to Mr. Johnson.

G: When you say loyal, I could understand how--

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J: I don't know how they first knew each other if that's what you're going to ask me.

G: No.

J: It's before my day. They knew each other before I came into the picture, but I don't know from where.

G: Before 1939?

J: Well, either before 1939 or between 1939 [1942?] and 1945. When I came back from the war, Cook was on the staff in uniform, and I don't remember him before the war, but it was very close by that [time]. I don't know where the connection started. I don't think I've ever known.

G: Right away LBJ and Cook met with President Truman about the Preparedness Committee. Do you remember that?

J: Yes. I don't know any details of the meeting, although I remember Mr. Johnson feeling that Truman, having headed a similar committee during World War II, would be a person he ought to meet with.

G: Do you think Mr. Johnson considered the political implications of this, too, since it had catapulted Truman to influence?

J: I'm sure he did.

G: Did he ever talk about that? Did he say this is a good forum to have, or this is a good thing for exposure?

J: I don't remember. I'm sure it must have been in the back of his mind, although what he talked about was digging up some things that would really make the services look as ridiculous as some of them did make them look.

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G: How would he go about digging up this--?

J: He had a good staff. He found instances where they were selling as surplus certain things, say for--I don't remember the figures, but we'll say for fifty thousand dollars apiece, and buying them back on the other hand, at the same time for two hundred thousand dollars apiece, practically giving them away on the one hand. I don't know how they [learned this]. These staff people we had just combed through the stuff that was being sold at surplus and through the purchases to see--

G: Did he have allies in some of the services who would tend to tip him off if they saw something wasteful?

J: Well, I don't know that he had any planned allies, although he certainly--they came.

G: Is that right?

J: I remember them giving us tips all the time, both with names, and saying "don't use my name."

G: Well, what was the reliability of these?

J: Some of them turned out to be flukes, but every once in a while you'd hit pay dirt.

G: In addition to exposing waste, what else did the subcommittee do?

J: I'd have to see some of their reports. I helped write them; I ought to remember them, but I don't. I guess they wrote thirty or forty, and they weren't all on waste. I'm sure you've got them.

G: Yes. Well, the idea of preparedness and being able to meet a military

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threat or a challenge seems to also include an emphasis on technology and having the necessary up-to-date hardware.

J: Yes, I think there was some of that, but that didn't get the headlines.

(Interruption)

G: He did succeed in stopping or getting a freeze on the sale of surplus property, didn't he?

J: Yes.

G: Anything else on the Preparedness Committee?

J: I don't remember. I don't think so.

G: Where did it office? Did it have its own staff and office and everything?

J: Yes. It was in the Senate Office Building. It was in the Old Senate Office Building around the corner from our office, between us and the Senate Armed Services Committee. I don't remember the room number.

G: Did this allow him to generate more staff, to put more people on the payroll?

J: Yes. The Armed Services Committee gave him an allotment; I don't remember how much it was, but it came out of the Armed Services Committee authority.

G: So he could then go out and hire new people?

J: And did.

G: Anybody in particular who's worth [mentioning]?

J: I think Don was probably the only one who is noteworthy. The others were investigators.

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G: Now also that summer the Senate approved his bill to get the government to continue the tin smelting operation in Texas City. I wanted to ask you about this, how he saw the significance of that?
(Interruption)

--just discussed the issue of the tin smelting in Texas City. I realize it was a local industry, local employer and that sort of thing, but let me ask you to discuss the significance of it or the implications of it as far as Mr. Johnson saw it.

J: When was that on here?

G: Let's see. June 30.

J: Okay.

G: What was the significance of that tin smelting as far as he was concerned?

J: Well, I think in addition to the fact that it was an industry in which he, as Texas senator, had constituents who were pushing him to keep from having to close down, I think he really felt it was important that we maintain some lack of dependence on Asian tin.

G: Were there any other industries which he felt should be fostered in order to eliminate a dependence?

J: Not at this time, but certainly earlier he had fostered very strongly the synthetic rubber industry, several years earlier.

G: Okay. Truman's seizure of the railroads, anything on Mr. Johnson's reaction to that?

J: I don't remember. I don't think he was involved in it particularly.

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- G: George Marshall became secretary of defense and of course his appointment was challenged by some of the Republicans. Mr. Johnson did speak for Marshall and may have even changed some votes. What do you remember about that, his support of George Marshall?
- J: Well, I remember he had a good deal of confidence in Marshall and felt that he had done a good job as a general and would make a real contribution in his new appointment. He supported him and probably did change some votes, although I can't make that statement positively.
- G: In September Truman vetoed the Internal Security Act, which required registration of communist-front organizations. Do you remember anything of that and Mr. Johnson's position there?
- J: No. I don't even remember it.
- G: Okay. Now we get into 1951 and one of the things I wanted to ask you there is about his election as Democratic whip.
- J: All right.
- G: How did he get to be whip?
- J: Mainly because there was nobody else that was satisfactory to both sides.
- G: Really? When you say both sides, you mean the North and the South?
- J: I really mean the liberals and the conservatives. Both groups liked him, the [Richard] Russells liked him and the. . . .
- G: There's a suggestion that Senator [Robert] Kerr was also interested in being whip.
- J: I think he was, and was somewhat in the same general category.

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- G: Why do you think LBJ got it rather than Kerr?
- J: I don't know. The oil industry might have [been a factor], and Kerr's unwillingness to disassociate himself from the oil industry.
- G: Was the decision one that was essentially [Ernest] McFarland's to make?
- J: No, it was the party caucus.
- G: Really?
- J: McFarland's recommendation carried some weight, but it wouldn't necessarily have made the decision, although McFarland wanted him.
- G: He did?
- J: Yes.
- G: Did McFarland, do you know, consider Kerr?
- J: I don't know.
- G: You don't know anything about LBJ and Kerr competing for the position and having a conference with McFarland?
- J: No I don't. LBJ and Kerr were very close, always were. I doubt that if they competed it would have been in any way bitter, because they were extremely close friends. McFarland was a very good man, but not a strong leader.
- G: Is that right? Well, why did LBJ want to be whip?
- J: Well, he always liked power and liked to organize. It was just sort of his forte.
- G: Were there any suggestions that he was too junior to be whip because he had just been in since 1948?

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J: Yes, I heard that, but only among the staff. I never heard it from any senator.

G: Did you feel like this was another rung up on the ladder for him?

J: Yes. Oh, yes. So did everybody else.

G: Now, how did being whip change his role in the Senate or his activities? Did it require him to spend more time on the floor, say, than he would have?

J: Yes.

G: What else? How did it change his day-to-day functions?

J: He spent more time--I don't want to use the word courting, but it's sort of what--other senators, getting to know them better, getting to know what their requirements were, what their needs were and what their interests were, what appealed to them. Really getting ready for the time when he would be leader himself, I think. He came close to being leader when he was whip, because McFarland never tried to exercise a strong leadership.

G: Did the position bring any additional staff positions or did it confer anything other than--?

J: Yes, I believe one additional staff person, and in a way others, because he had access to the staff of the Leader, and that's Bobby Baker and his staff and so on.

G: I'm going to look forward a couple of years and just ask if you think that his selection as whip and his function in that capacity had an influence on his election as, first, Democratic minority leader, and then majority leader?

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J: There isn't any question about it; it just almost led right to it.

G: The fact that he was effective in that role, then other senators--?

J: It was almost automatic.

G: Do you think that his experience as whip influenced what types of people he himself would look to as assistant majority leaders later on? Say would he choose Earle Clements for one reason, or so and so, not choose another senator?

J: Not really I don't think. Because he didn't choose people like himself. It was a different situation. McFarland was not an active, effective--I don't want to say he wasn't effective, he was effective, but he was not a strong leader. Mr. Johnson was. It would not have done to have a strong leader and a strong assistant leader. Clements was a "hail fellow well met." Everybody loved him, and he was able to get some people because they all liked him so well. But he was never a strong, forceful individual at all. He was more like McFarland had been.

G: How did [Mike] Mansfield fit into this slot?

J: Mansfield was entirely different, too. Mansfield was an educated--he was not a strong leader either. He appealed to people's intellect.

G: Okay.

J: Never a personality as Mr. Johnson did. I mean, Johnson appealed to their interests. Whatever it was they were interested in, he knew about and saw to it that he knew about it. He had a part in it and had an interest in it, and he thought of ways that they could help get re-elected.

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G: He was very interested in the draft bill that spring, Universal Manpower Training, putting people who were physically qualified for combat, getting them into the war theaters and out of desk jobs and things of that nature. I suppose this incorporated a lot of the attitudes that he had developed during the Second World War when he was doing work on absenteeism.

J: And Preparedness Committee.

G: Anything here that you recall?

J: I remember the studies that he had made to show how many combat-ready people were sitting doing jobs that even handicapped people could have done just as well, or women. I don't want to sound like Secretary [James] Watt now, but [doing] work that could have been done by women or cripples.

G: Wayne Morse called for an investigation of Lackland Air Force Base, said it was poor training conditions, et cetera, et cetera. Eugene Zuckert and John Connally and Horace Busby and others went down there and spent some time investigating the San Antonio air base. Do you remember anything of that?

J: I remember it's happening. I don't remember the details of it. Zuckert was a good friend of mine, personal friend.
(Interruption)

G: Another thing that happened in early 1951, the FCC planned to release its allocation of television channels.

J: Its freeze.

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G: Do you think Mr. Johnson thought that this would be a good activity to expand into, going from radio into television?

J: You're talking about KTBC now?

G: Yes.

J: As a matter of fact, he had grave doubts about it. So did Mrs. Johnson.

G: What do you think sold them on the idea?

J: That lawyer. What's his name?

G: Leonard Marks?

J: Leonard Marks just talked them into filing the application. They didn't much want to do it, and he said, "Well, file it. It won't cost you anything. You can always withdraw it." The records of that time showed Texas had four stations, all of them were losing money. I'm not sure that the Johnsons thought television was here to stay. It's hard to see in light of present situations, but that's the way it was.

G: Well, was it thought of as kind of gimmickry rather than a--?

J: Somewhat.

G: How about the decision of what kind of television application to file, whether UHF or VHF?

J: Well, at that time I don't think people really knew that one or the other was better. It turned out that VHF was a lot easier and a little more powerful and a lot more--the sets, when they began making them, only received VHF. I think there was feeling that VHF was slightly preferable, and they filed for the VHF channel.

G: Did you have any role in the application stage?

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J: Not in the application stage. Oh, I sat in on a few meetings with Marks at the house and so on, but not any--I got active in it later, left the government actually, went to New York, lived there.

G: When was this? In 1952?

J: In 1952, before we went on the air. Went off the payroll and sold advertising in New York. Thought I was the hottest salesman in the world. As it turned out, all these big advertising agencies were just buying everything they could get. It wouldn't make any difference who the agent was, they would have bought it. But I'd go into BBD & O [Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn] and say, "We've got a new station coming on the air Thanksgiving Day in Austin." "We'll take it!" And I thought, God, I'm a hot salesman. As a matter of fact, I wasn't any kind of a salesman at all, they just were ready.

G: Okay. The [Douglas] MacArthur firing comes up next. Let me ask you to--

J: When was that?

G: He removed him on April 11.

J: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to recall in as much detail as you can Mr. Johnson's involvement in that whole episode.

J: I don't think he had any involvement directly in the firing. I know he felt that Truman had no choice but to do it, and yet we had I think probably the largest single mail that we ever had on one issue. It just came in by the tub full.

G: Was there any pattern?

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J: All on the same side. Yes, there was definitely a pattern, nobody supporting it.

G: Nobody supported--?

J: Truman. Everybody unhappy because we were firing a hero.

G: Well now, the hearings were held under the joint auspices of the Foreign Relations Committee, I believe, and Armed Services, is that right? What was Mr. Johnson's role here, do you remember?

J: He was just a member of the Joint Committee and went every day.

G: Did he attempt to moderate the tone of the hearings by bringing out--?

J: I don't think he took an active role in any of that. I think he was interested. I don't remember that he took a leading role in it. I believe he did not.

G: Russell was I guess the de facto chairman or subchairman of those joint hearings. Do you know what Russell's attitude toward MacArthur was?

J: Well, I know Russell liked MacArthur, but I don't remember what his position was. I never went to the committee hearings. I think they felt that there could only be one president.

G: Someone has suggested that they saw as a way to defuse this thing to simply let the hearings drag on and on until people finally just got bored with it.

J: Maybe.

G: Anything on LBJ's own attitude toward MacArthur?

J: Well, I think he had a healthy respect for MacArthur, somewhat because MacArthur had been his own personal commanding officer when he was a

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[naval officer]. He had quite some respect for MacArthur as a military man. I don't think he had a lot of respect for the fact that he was taking positions contrary to his commander-in-chief. I mean I think people of the time felt that MacArthur was actually almost demanding what he got, asking for it, knew it was coming, knew it had to come.

G: Okay. Now, the Saturday Evening Post published an article mentioning LBJ as a potential vice presidential nominee in 1952. Do you remember anything about that?

J: Well, I remember going to the convention. Yes, I remember it.

G: Do you think that LBJ thought in terms of a possible vice presidency?

J: No, he was for Russell. Connally and I both went to Chicago to work for Russell.

G: Okay. I want to ask you about that in some detail in 1952. I just wondered if you remembered the Saturday Evening Post article and if that had any significance.

J: Well, there was a good deal of--maybe not a good deal, some discussion of Mr. Johnson in 1952. But I don't think he ever took it at all seriously.

G: Now, in June you resigned from the staff and ran for Congress.

J: Right.

G: Let me ask you to give the background of that.

J: That was in 1951.

G: Yes.

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J: Well, Ed Gossett, who was the congressman from the Wichita Falls district, was appointed general counsel of Southwestern Bell Telephone Company and resigned from Congress. There was a vacancy in the district that I lived in, and I fancied that I had a chance to win. I was wrong.

G: Had you thought about running before?

J: No, not really, because I didn't have any idea that there would be a vacancy.

G: It is rather unusual for a congressman to resign like that.

J: I had thought about it a little earlier because Bob Anderson--you know who he is--who's from that district, came to see me several months before this happened. He was a powerful man; he told me this was going to happen long before it happened. It was in January that he told me this, and he said, "You ought to have all your kinfolds pay their poll tax." We had a poll tax in those days. So I told my mother to have all her brothers and sisters--she had ten--and all of her friends to pay the poll tax--they probably would have anyway--just on the chance that it would happen. I mean, I didn't know for sure it was going to, but Bob Anderson had told me it was going to.

G: Do you think that Gossett would have had any opposition if he had sought re-election?

J: Nothing serious.

G: Really?

J: And I resigned not intending to come back, incidentally.

G: Were there other reasons for your wanting to leave the staff then?

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J: No. No. As a matter of fact, Mr. Johnson wrote me a letter that I used all during the campaign, not supporting me, and I didn't want him to. He wouldn't anyway; he didn't take part in primaries. He wouldn't have taken part in primaries for his child. It was a nice letter, and he called me nearly every day.

G: Did he?

J: Yes. A lot of his friends came up and helped me, like Wesley West. A lot of them came from outside the district, so that didn't--I was kind of quiet about their taking part.

G: Well, it was pretty conservative district, wasn't it?

J: Yes. Jimmie Allred was on the federal bench, flew up there to see me. He said, "Don't tell anybody what I'm doing, because I'm not supposed to be with politicians." But he said, "You're making a big mistake. You're not talking about religion. You ought to make that the issue. That's all you ought to talk about. You've just got to say, 'If you don't like Catholics, you'd better vote for somebody else. If you think I've got a right to practice religion any way I want to, you be for me.'" But see, I never would talk about it; I never said a thing about it all during the campaign. But he kept trying to get me to really bear down, make that the issue.

G: Yes. Before you made your decision to resign and run, did you talk to Mr. Johnson about it?

J: Yes.

G: Did you have him help you weigh the decision?

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J: Yes. And I think he thought I had some chance. I don't know that he knew Frank Ikard was going to run or not, because Ikard certainly--I didn't--would have been a formidable candidate. He was active in the Boy Scouts, active in the Chamber of Commerce, he was right there, head of everything at home. I had been away from home for twelve years.

G: Yes. Do you think LBJ was reluctant to have you leave his staff and run? I mean, by this time he depended pretty heavily on you.

J: I think he was, but he never tried to get me not to.

G: He never tried to dissuade you from running?

J: No. If anything it was the other way around.

G: How else did he help you in the campaign?

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J: His was my first campaign contribution, and people that were close friends of his made contributions all during the campaign. I don't think they would if he hadn't at least known that they were doing so.

G: Really? Was there any effort to talk Ikard out of the race?

J: Not that I know of.

G: Well, you had two opponents I guess, didn't you?

J: Seven. There were eight in the race, and it was a special election. Now it doesn't make any difference, but in those days the top man won. Actually Ikard only had about 20 per cent of the votes; I had about 18. You didn't have a run-off, you just had a one-shot deal.

G: And there was another guy named [Wayne] Wagonseller, is that right?

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- J: Yes. He's dead now. He was a state senator and very conservative. Then there was a Republican, he ran fourth. Wagonseller was third. There was a member of the state legislature from Denton, he ran fifth. And then Congressman [William] McFarlane, who had preceded Gossett, in Congress, ran sixth. There was a woman, she ran seventh. And there was somebody nobody ever heard of ran eighth.
- G: That's a crowded field, isn't it?
- J: We spoke together every night, because the only way to ever get a crowd was to travel around, in the middle of a hot summer. There were no other races, just us.
- G: The candidates went together?
- J: Yes.
- G: Did you?
- J: No way we could get a crowd without it. I heard Wagonseller's wild speech so many times I thought I couldn't stand to listen to it again. I tried to vary mine. He made the same speech every night.
- G: His dealt with religion, is that right?
- J: Oh, that wasn't what I meant though. He was very conservative, he would take off his coat and roll up his sleeves. You could hear him three blocks [away]. You'd take a microphone and put it way over to the side, because he didn't need microphone--he was a picturesque guy, he was a state senator--then [he'd] start screaming. He said, "I won't have to check with the Pope on how to vote."
- (Interruption)

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A lot of people thought he would be the person I was running against, because he made more noise than anybody else. I said all along it was Ikard. Ikard called me one day--he was a friend of mine--asked me to meet him at the main hotel. I thought it was kind of strange. I'm sure everybody [saw] us sitting in the Kemp Hotel coffee shop. But he said, "I want you to know that I'm taking no part in this religious business." I said, "Well, I didn't think you had to tell me. I'd know it anyway."

But it worked both ways. I never appealed to people on a religious basis or tried to keep from appealing to them on that basis. But the two Catholic towns that we had, the little Catholic community where they have 102 votes, I got a 100 of them. (Laughter)

G: Isn't that something.

J: I didn't really want to, but the other people made so much noise about it that they almost ran them to me.

G: What did you plan to do if you lost?

J: I didn't know. I'd gotten sort of a real estate license and was perhaps going into the real estate business. Some people I had worked for already were in that business. I had worked in that business the summers I was in college. I didn't know what I was going to do.

G: Did you plan to go back to Washington or maybe Austin, stay in Wichita Falls?

J: Stay in Wichita Falls.

G: Yes.

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J: Mr. Johnson called me the day after the election, asked me to come back, and I said no. He said, "Well, I'm going to put somebody on the phone." He put Ikard on the phone. Ikard said, "I want to ask you to come back. I want you to help me." (Laughter) He said, "I don't know my way around up here. I need you to help me."

G: So did you then decide to go back?

J: I went back, yes. Not specifically on that, but it had something to do with it. Because I had told around that I wasn't going back, that I didn't think it would be good for the district for me to be there with him.

G: Yes. Yes. Well, what did that experience teach you about your work in politics and Lyndon Johnson? Here for the first time you did get out in grass-roots politics on your own--

J: Oh, I'd been out with him in the grass-roots long before that. I'd been all over this district here. I was his chauffeur before he was in the Senate, every little town around here. I learned it was not as easy as it might be cracked up to be, making a bunch of speeches every day.

G: Did you have any reluctance to return to the job in Washington where the demands were just incredible, the hours were so hard?

J: Well, they were not as bad then as they were later when we were at the White House. It got worse. Oh, perhaps some. I don't know. I don't think so.

G: Of course I guess campaigning for Congress is not really a form of relaxation. Any other impact of your--?

Jenkins -- X -- 28

J: Well, the issue that I felt was my strongest issue, that I had been an administrative assistant to a congressman and a senator for quite a number of years and knew my way around, was used very much against me. I mean, I was the carpetbagger candidate, that's what they called me. Either Ikard or some of his associates dug up the fact that one year-- just one year--I had paid my poll tax in Travis County, here. All the other years I had paid in Wichita County. He had, I don't know, five hundred photostats made of my poll tax receipt, came down here and got them. I didn't know this, but the printer in Wichita [Falls] called me one day during the campaign, said, "Where can I send this bill for five hundred copies of your poll tax receipt in Travis County?" and I said, "I'm not sure." (Laughter) "I didn't order it." So I knew it was coming. I remember [the reason I made] the decision to do it was because it was the year Mr. Johnson was running--I guess 1941 or 1948, one of the two--and I wanted to vote for him. No, it must have been in 1946 because I could have voted for him in Wichita County in 1941 and 1948. I guess it was when he was running against [Hardy] Hollers, and I couldn't vote for him in Wichita County, so I paid my poll tax here.

G: Five hundred copies!

J: But that doesn't have anything to do with all this stuff we're doing.

G: Well, it is interesting certainly.

Senator [Alvin] Wirtz died that fall.

J: At a football game.

G: The Rice-Texas game. Were you in Texas at the time?

Jenkins -- X -- 29

J: Yes.

G: Tell me what you remember about that?

J: Well, I was at the game, but I don't think anybody knew it until the next morning. I didn't know it until I read it in the paper or something. I'm sure Mr. Johnson did.

G: What was his reaction to it, do you know? Did it have a visible effect?

J: Yes. He was, of course, terribly upset. He depended on Senator Wirtz I think more than anybody in his life for real sage advice, counsel.

G: I wonder if Senator Wirtz, by 1950 or 1951, was less significant as an adviser to him than he had been earlier when he first went to Washington.

J: He probably was less significant as a power in Texas, but I don't think he was ever less significant as an adviser.

G: Really?

J: No, I don't think so. Mr. Johnson leaned on him till the end.

G: Anything else on Wirtz and his death? Did it create a vacuum?

J: I'm sure it did. I'm sure Mrs. Johnson can tell you more about that than I could.

G: Yes. Did LBJ ever talk about how he met Wirtz to begin with, where he became acquainted with him?

J: I don't remember. He was close to him when I first met him. I don't know.

G: Okay. Now I guess sometime that summer they bought the Ranch.

J: Traded for it.

Jenkins -- X -- 30

G: Traded the house or something?

J: The house in Johnson City for the Ranch. The house in Johnson City was in pretty good shape, but the Ranch was in terrible shape. It was a wreck.

G: Well now, he traded [with] his Aunt Frank [Martin]. Is that--

J: Yes.

G: --who owned it at the time?

J: What's the other aunt?

G: Aunt Lucy [Price], was that the one?

J: No. [Ava Johnson Bright?]

G: Well, there have been some suggestions that Tom Martin, who would have been Aunt Frank's son, I guess, wanted the Ranch for himself, and later his wife evidently had hoped--

J: Lela.

G: Yes. Was this a sore spot at the time?

J: Right at the time, later it was not. Whatever problems they had were made up. He used to go see Lela all the time. They got to be very friendly in later years, but there was a sore spot for a while.

(Interruption)

G: --to the Ranch when they first bought it?

J: Yes.

G: Did you see what kind of shape it was in?

J: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to describe it in detail and what Mr. Johnson's plans for the Ranch were. First of all, why did he buy it?

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J: I think he saw what could be done with it. It had been run-down. The building looked like it was falling down. It was practically uninhabitable. Combined with the fact that his aunt was living out there by herself, had reached an age where she couldn't very well take care of herself, and I think he felt that she'd be better taken care of if she was in town. I think it was partly to help her and partly to help himself. And she agreed; I mean, she was very enthusiastic about it. She felt like she came out ahead in the deal.

G: Had he wanted to buy a ranch for some years, do you think?

J: I don't know. I doubt that he just wanted to buy a ranch; the Birthplace and all sort of held a significance of this particular place for him. He went to school there and rode the donkey and all that business.

G: Did you go out there and look at it?

J: Yes. As far as going into great detail, I can't, but it was just a ramshackley place.

G: I'm told that some people had advised him to just bulldoze the house and start over.

J: That's I think what I would have advised him. That's what it looked like. It took really some imagination to see what could be done with it, because it was [so run-down]. You can't remember how--what's his cousin's name that lived down the road?

G: Oh, Cousin Oriole [Bailey].

J: Cousin Oriole. If you think Mr. Johnson's house was a wreck, you

Jenkins -- X -- 32

should have seen hers. Hers was rebuilt, too. Hers was worse. Hers was falling down around her.

G: At the time he bought it, his ranch?

J: Yes, at the time he bought his ranch. Then he started helping her fix hers up, too.

G: Did he expect to live out there, do you think, away from Austin?

J: I think he did from the beginning, because he began immediately to start fixing it up.

G: Did this create a problem logistically since it was so far from the airport and the city?

J: Well, he used the Johnson City airport first, for quite a while. There was a little airport in Johnson City which was about twelve miles away. It created somewhat of a logistic problem. We were always having to meet people at the Johnson City airport. And if it was a bigger plane, we had to meet them at the West Ranch. Mr. West had a modern, up-to-date airport on his ranch further over a piece. I remember meeting Mr. Rayburn and, I believe, Mr. Truman at the West Ranch one time. I can't remember when it was, but they flew down together and landed at the West Ranch.

G: Did you have any role at all in the fixing up of the Ranch? Did you work with the architects at all?

J: No. Kept the books on it.

G: Anything else on the purchase or renovation of the Ranch?

J: No, because he knew really what he wanted to do. The graveyard, all

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of it. He had very fixed ideas of what he wanted to do. I believe he used [inaudible] Brooks and Barr, helped him.

G: Yes. They dammed up the river, too, didn't they?

J: Oh, yes. Not right away, but pretty soon, so you could drive across. They don't do that anymore, but for years in order to get in you had to drive across the river, across the dam. If it was raining heavy, you just couldn't get in.

G: Well, how did you get in before that?

J: I don't know. There wasn't a bridge as there is now. There was a dam--and it's still there--a bridge, further on up a mile or two--you may remember that--that you could drive on past it and cross the river. But even then it became impassable.

G: Well, I think you covered everything that I had on my list.

J: All right.

G: I really appreciate it.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview X

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