

INTERVIEW XV

DATE: August 30, 1984  
INTERVIEWEE: WALTER JENKINS  
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette  
PLACE: Mr. Jenkins' office, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: --just discussing the general nature of your notes for 1955, and your observation was that your activities dealt much more with legislative matters than you'd remembered.

J: At least in the early part of 1955 that's true.

G: As you have looked over these, what do you generally recall about the legislative matters that you were involved in?

J: Well, the primary thing during this period is the [natural] gas bill, although there are things on the farm bill and other things where I was being reported to and reporting back and so on, on the status of how somebody stood, and arranging meetings with other senators. But I think primarily during this period the thing that surprised me is how many times I talked to people or they talked to me about the gas bill and reported on their conversations with [Albert] Gore or [Stuart] Symington or different senators they had gone to talk to.

G: Let me ask you to recall if you can how the forces that supported passage of the gas bill were organized. Was there a visible leader in the Senate and one in the House?

J: I don't know about the House, but it was [Russell] Long and Johnson in the Senate.

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G: How about [Robert] Kerr, was he--?

J: And Kerr.

G: Was there unanimity among these people with regard to what the bill should include, what provisions?

J: Pretty much. Pretty much to free the industry of government controls at the gas head, at the wellhead, anyway. There was never an attempt to free the industry of controls on anything that crossed state lines.

G: Right. Was the oil and gas industry united behind the bill or were there any elements that for one reason or another didn't support it?

J: I think the larger the company, the less they supported it.

G: Really? Why is that?

J: Because the people that really cared were the producers, and the big companies were not the producers. They were so-called little guys, although they weren't too little, who produced the well at the gas head and sold it in to commerce, to companies and so on. The big companies didn't care.

G: How about the utilities? Would they have a position in this?

J: No, it didn't involve them much. It didn't involve them as far as only on caring whether it passed or didn't pass.

G: Really?

J: But you asked about the forces. The people supporting the bill had largely Republican support and moderate Democrats. The opposition was from liberal Democrats, by and large.

G: Yes. To what extent was it an anticonsumer measure?

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J: People would still argue about that. That's the big point. The supporters of the bill said that in the long run the consumers would benefit by lack of controls. The opponents took the position that the bill was for the protection of consumers. Actually since the bill now has been repealed and gone and so on, perhaps the advocates were right.

G: Of course the critics charged at the time that this was a case of senators and congressmen bowing to a powerful interest in their state.

J: True.

G: What was LBJ's philosophy or attitude? Why did he support the gas bill?

J: Well, I think perhaps he felt that he represented Texas. Oil was Texas' primary product then, maybe still is, I don't know, but it certainly was then. And [he felt] that he was obligated to do so. Just as [Hubert] Humphrey supported the milk bill.

G: So he didn't see it as a question of supporting the big guys over the little guys, it was really supporting a state interest versus, say, an interest in Pennsylvania or some other state?

J: I think that's right. And actually a good many of the producers at the wellhead are the little guys. I'm a little guy and I have a little bit of interest in the gas at the wellhead. They're not big companies; they're usually independent producers.

G: Any critical stages of the gas bill that year that LBJ had something to do with?

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J: He worked more behind the scenes in organizing. He really, his position of leadership, as he often did, worked through other people, made suggestions of who they'd see and who they talked to and how.

G: Any trades or deals such as "if you'll support us on this bill, well, we'll help you with something else" that you recall that were instrumental?

J: I'm sure there were, but I don't recall them.

G: The notes don't reflect anything?

J: I would not have been in on that. I'd have been over my head.

G: Was that something that was normally one senator to another?

J: Yes.

G: How did he remember all of those trades?

J: He had a fabulous memory. He never kept any notes; he didn't have to.

G: Anything else on the gas bill this year? This was not the year it was vetoed.

J: No. No. It was the year that it was debated.

G: Okay. Drew Pearson right at the first of the year criticized LBJ for what he called a one-man rule and I think particularly for choosing Price Daniel over Herbert Lehman for the Judiciary Committee. Lehman had seniority but was not a lawyer. Do you remember that issue and Mr. Johnson's attitude toward that?

J: Yes. I think he always felt that people with legal backgrounds should-- other things being equal--serve on the Judiciary Committee, and he felt that Price Daniel could contribute more to the Judiciary Committee than Lehman could. Lehman was, with all due respect to New York, not

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an effective senator. And he might have been trying to help Texas, I don't know. Price Daniel had not been real close to him but became real close to him after that period.

G: Do you think this action, putting a Texan, a southerner, on a committee that dealt with civil rights legislation gave him a little bit of cushion with the southern bloc that he might not have had if he had supported Lehman for the committee?

J: Probably, and I can't tell you offhand, I don't remember, what Lehman's other committee was. But it may be that this was a product of his announced policy of having everybody have one major committee. That had not existed before. It helped him with a lot of people because these senators all got a major committee, not just Daniel, but they had a chance to do something right off the bat. He got a lot of praise for that policy. It may be that Lehman already had a major committee; I don't know what Lehman's other committee was.

G: I take it that this was one of the times when Pearson and LBJ were at odds?

J: They were often at odds. They were friendly, but they were often at odds, even though we had Pearson's son in the office--stepson I guess would be more like it.

G: Did Tyler Abell work then during this period?

J: I don't know. He was around. I don't know when Tyler came. Certainly Bess was--well, I don't know when Bess came either.

G: Okay. The last time we did talk about a number of issues like the release of the Yalta Papers and things such as that. Do you remember

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the Salk [polio] vaccine and the question of how distribution should take place, who should get it?

J: Sure.

G: Was this at all a partisan issue or a philosophical issue between the moderates and the conservatives?

J: It was more a philosophical issue. I do not remember. I was not involved in the Salk dispute at all. But I do remember that George Reedy felt very strongly about it one way or the [other]; I don't remember which way. But he wrote Mr. Johnson several memorandums. I don't know whether this is in your document or not, but George tried to get Mr. Johnson to take a position. I don't recall exactly what it was.

G: I think his position was for universal distribution, as I recall.

J: Probably. That would tend to be like him. But it seems to me that there wasn't enough vaccine to have a universal distribution, at first anyway.

G: [Allan] Shivers came to Washington that spring and LBJ seemed to be very intent on promoting harmony within the Democratic Party--

J: He was.

G: --trying to restore some ties with Shivers. Why did that not succeed?

J: Because Shivers didn't let it succeed. Mr. Johnson I think did not want to be identified with Mrs. [Frankie] Randolph's wing of the party. He wanted to try to tie them together or at least keep them in some sort of semblance of [unity]. He kept saying that the Democratic Party is big enough for both sides and so on. And Shivers made some

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sashays at having some harmony. He met with [Paul] Butler I remember and I think met with Rayburn and praised Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn, maybe even Butler, I don't remember. But when he got right down to it, at the end, he didn't stay hitched at all.

G: Well, was Butler willing to have some sort of conciliation?

J: He didn't want to but Mr. Johnson beat him into it, told him he had to.

G: Any particular conversations you recall?

J: Not particularly conversations, but I remember that Mr. Johnson had several conversations with Butler telling him that he just had to, for the sake of harmony in Texas, accept Shivers and accept the fact that Shivers had bolted the party and forgive him for that. Butler I think was for anybody that ever bolted the party, they couldn't get back in. Well, Mr. Johnson said, "We'll never win if we take that position."

G: Okay, the interstate highway bill was a big issue that year. Do you recall that?

J: Vaguely. I wasn't involved in it, but I remember it.

G: Was LBJ's activity significant?

J: I don't think so. However, his activity was often significant in a quiet way.

G: I gather Senator Gore was one of the major exponents of that legislation, is that right?

J: Yes.

G: One of the questions of the highway bill that year was the issue of

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controlling advertising along the federally-funded highways. Do you recall LBJ's position here in 1955?

J: I don't. I know what Mrs. Johnson's position would have been, but I don't think she was active in it at that time. (Laughter)

G: Senator [Walter] George seems to have been strongly against regulating advertising on the federal regulation of the billboards and things like that.

J: Senator George was pretty much against regulation, an antiregulation man.

G: Okay. Let's talk about Quemoy and Matsu. This was a much-debated issue in 1955, the defense of those islands. What do you recall of Mr. Johnson's position here?

J: He was pretty much a supporter of Formosa China--not pretty much, fully--and took the position that they ought to be allowed to continue as they had been and was opposed to allowing any erosion of the Taiwan situation. He liked Madame Chiang and Chiang [Kai-shek].

G: How well organized was the China lobby or the people who supported Nationalist China?

J: Very well organized.

G: Really?

J: And certainly one close friend of ours was very active in it, Tom Corcoran. I don't know how much he was being paid or any of that kind of thing, but he was a leader and he was very close to Mrs. Chiang.

G: How about Styles Bridges? Was he active in it as well?



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J: Yes. And Mr. Johnson and Styles Bridges were together on a lot of issues; it's surprising the number of issues they were friendly on. And even when they differed, they differed friendly. They were good friends.

G: What did they have in common?

J: Armed Services Committee, and Bridges was the ranking Republican on the Preparedness Subcommittee and he was perfect to work with, had to work with him every day. Mr. Johnson just couldn't have asked for a better fellow to--you know, so many times the Republican leader of a committee and the Democratic leader clash all the time, but they never did.

G: Why do you think that they were compatible, that they got along well?

J: I don't know, they just had the kind of personalities that hit it off.

G: Bridges was considerably older, I gather.

J: Considerably older. He liked Mr. Johnson, Mr. Johnson liked him. They realized that they belonged to different parties and had different basic beliefs and respected each other's right to differ, but they were still good friends.

(Interruption)

G: I want you to talk about the [Homer] Capehart Amendment and LBJ's role there in defeating the Capehart Amendment.

J: Well, the Capehart Amendment would have drastically reduced the housing program. He opposed it and lobbied a very close Senate--he only had a margin of two--into defeating it and then supported a substitute which would have increased the housing starts double or triple, I

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don't remember, which was surprising, as I remember, when it passed the Senate. He got a lot of plaudits for it.

G: Did he think he had the votes?

J: He usually knew exactly whether he--between he and Bobby Baker, they could count pretty well. A lot of times they had the votes and nobody knew it but the two of them.

G: Yes. This was a case where Humphrey's plane had not been able to land for [the vote].

J: I remember that.

G: Let me ask you, were you there when Johnson supposedly made some calls that enabled them to bring Humphrey's plane down or whatever they did to get him back there?

J: Well, there were two things they did. I don't know exactly where I was, but I remember it. He had a few people talk on the floor to delay the vote as long as he could, and then he I think talked to the airlines to let his be the first plane to come in rather than somebody else's. They had a bunch of them I think flying around up there waiting to come in. Between delaying the vote and getting Humphrey's plane down, why, Humphrey got to vote.

G: Getting the right senators there for a vote I guess was one problem.

J: Very muchly so. There were always three or four who were out speaking or something, and while that was not primarily my responsibility, I sometimes was involved in getting them back.

G: In addition to logistics for, say, making sure that a plane can land

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or making sure that a senator had a ride, what other devices did you employ to make sure that you had all of your votes there on the floor?

J: Well, that primarily was it, but we used the air force pretty generally.

G: Is that right?

J: I don't know whether they still do that or not, but we could call the air force and ask that "Kerr's in Oklahoma City, let's bring him up here," the plane wasn't going to leave for four or five hours.

G: If the administration was opposed to a particular piece of legislation, then could you still use the air force?

J: Yes.

G: You could? You didn't--?

J: They never knew we used the air force. (Laughter)

G: Oh, really? (Laughter) Who would you call?

J: Oh, Jack [John M.] Torbet or somebody like that who was assigned to our office.

G: How often was it a situation where the senators didn't want to come back because either they didn't want to have to vote for the measure or because they had an important speaking engagement or something of this nature?

J: Not too often, but Mr. Johnson respected their--if they didn't want to vote for the measure, he'd let them stay away. He'd try to get them paired; he tried to get somebody on the other side to go away, too. And very often did, because there was nearly always somebody that would like to go away on the other side, somebody who didn't care about having the record show that they voted.

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- G: Could you offer them enticements not to be there, say, a good investigative trip or some speaking engagement or something that would make--?
- J: Help in the campaign.
- G: Help in their campaign?
- J: Yes. The next one.
- G: Now, the opposite side of this was trying to minimize the opposition when a bill was up for the floor. Could you also schedule something or time it so that the opposition was least likely to be there in force?
- J: Mr. Johnson was very careful about that. He always tried to be open and aboveboard. [William] Knowland tried once or twice to do that and found out that--Johnson taught him a lesson once or twice where Knowland had indicated that he was not going to bring anything important up and Mr. Johnson let the Democrats know they could be gone, and then Knowland brought these things up. Mr. Johnson trounced him badly about twice, just to teach him a lesson. But he didn't do that himself. Not that he didn't try to maximize the support and minimize the opposition, but he did it not underhandedly. He'd more likely offer them a chance to speak somewhere, or if it was somebody he had a relationship with, he'd talk them into going ahead and staying away, openly, not ever try to sneak something through.
- G: Well, what could a Democratic majority leader offer to say a freshman Republican senator? What inducements did he have?

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J: Support for some little project he was interested in. They all had little--even though they were freshmen, they didn't have any big legislative [projects], but they all had some little home projects they were interested in.

G: Now, when the minimum wage was raised to a dollar--it came up right after the Capehart Amendment, do you remember that?

J: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to recount what happened there.

J: Well, as I remember, they were just trying to raise it to--

G: Ninety.

J: --ninety cents. But I think the Democrats wanted to get the better of the issue instead of letting the Republicans get the credit for raising it to ninety cents, so they just took over and raised it another dime. It became a Democratic issue rather than a Republican issue.

G: This was a case where Senator Spessard Holland came charging out of the Senate Dining Room I guess after the vote, that LBJ had really called a very short quorum call and then passed the bill before the opposition had a chance to really organize. Holland came out of the Senate Dining Room and really criticized the procedure.

J: I don't remember that.

G: You don't remember that? Okay.

J: I don't know about it, or if I knew about it, I forgot it.

I wish I had done this twenty years ago.

G: I do, too.

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I want you to talk about this [Jospeh] McCarthy resolution regarding the Geneva talks.

J: Well, Senator McCarthy introduced a resolution prior to the conference, the big four meeting in Geneva, for the purpose of really tying up the State Department and Eisenhower, and Mr. Johnson, instead of letting the Senate consider it, asked that it be referred to the Foreign Relations Committee for study, which is a device he used fairly often. It wasn't always successful, but in this case it was.

G: The Republicans I understand wanted to kill it quietly in committee rather than to have a regular, identifiable floor vote or something of that nature.

J: Yes.

G: Anything else on that issue?

J: I don't think Mr. Johnson was opposed to killing it quietly, I think he was just for killing it, and the best way to do it was to get it in a committee where it could be done by six people or eight, ten people, instead of a hundred. I noticed that--I had forgotten this, but it was voted unfavorably fourteen to nothing.

G: Which was that?

J: This resolution, I think.

G: Okay.

J: The committee, after considering it, reported it unfavorably by a unanimous vote.

G: Another issue--here's one where he was in opposition to the administration--had to do with the level of appropriation for the Marine

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Corps. Stuart Symington proposed to add I think it was forty-six million dollars to the defense appropriation to maintain the Marine Corps strength at a projected level. This was something that the administration opposed and it passed by one vote. Do you recall that?

J: No, I don't. Where are you?

G: It's June 20, at the bottom of page 28.

J: I do remember it now that I read about it. I remember when Secretary [Charles] Wilson impounded the extra funds.

G: When he did what?

J: Impounded the extra funds, that triggered a memory.

G: Okay. That's an awfully close vote, a one-vote margin. Do you recall how he was able to hold that majority together?

J: No, but it probably--probably, you'd have to look it up--was a straight party-line vote. It sounds like 40 to 39 was about the divisions of the Senate, with a few absentees.

G: I'm going to ask you to talk about this Newsweek piece. First of all, the substance of course is that Mr. Johnson had to come to Sam Rayburn's rescue because Rayburn was aging and evidently not able to stay on top of things, according to the article. Do you recall instances here in 1955 where LBJ did have to come to Rayburn's defense or help him out on occasion?

J: Well, I think they both tried to help each other out all the time. Mr. Johnson certainly was embarrassed by that article; he did not feel that it was fair or right. While it was meant to be good for him and to help him, he certainly did not think that it should be at Mr.

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Rayburn's expense. Mr. Rayburn may have had some trouble in the House, but he had four hundred and thirty-five people to contend with and we had ninety-six, or maybe ninety-eight, maybe a hundred, I don't remember. When did statehood [for Alaska and Hawaii] come about? I don't think statehood had come about yet. But Mr. Rayburn had a much harder job than Mr. Johnson did.

G: What was Rayburn's reaction to the article?

J: If anybody knows, Mr. Johnson knew. I don't think--maybe H. G. Dulaney can tell you, I don't know.

G: Okay. Did LBJ do anything as a result of the article?

J: I'm sure he told Mr. Rayburn that he had nothing to do with it and that he didn't agree with it. He also made a public statement of some kind that Mr. Rayburn had always guided him and he still guided him and he still looked to him for wisdom.

G: Did you notice any failing on the part of Sam Rayburn during this period?

J: I didn't, and I saw him frequently.  
(Interruption)

G: We're talking about the [John] Chadwick press conference.

J: I didn't realize it was Chadwick, but I knew that he had had a press conference because he had told us that afternoon that he had blown his cool a little bit in his press conference and he was sorry he did, but the fellow kept pushing him and pushing him and pushing him. He perhaps was not feeling too well, although I don't think he realized that at the time.



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G: Did he feel that he had made a political mistake?

J: He always felt he had made a mistake when he lost his temper. He didn't lose his temper often, but when he did he was the first one to realize it and the first one to be sorry about it, the first one to try to make amends.

G: Harold Talbott resigned as secretary of the air force.

J: Is that after the heart attack?

G: Yes, that was July 21.

J: Yes, I remember that.

G: And here was a case where a lot of people suggested conflict of interest because he was writing letters on [air force] stationery to this defense-related company that he was a stockholder in, that had military contracts. Was this a topic of discussion with Mr. Johnson, do you know? Did he get involved in this?

J: No, I don't think he got involved in very much in the weeks immediately following his heart attack. But I just don't believe he did. I remember the papers were full of it. Although Mr. Johnson rather liked Harold Talbott. He had been before his committee a number of times and he was, as an individual--I didn't know anything about this, I don't think--but he liked him personally. I don't think he was involved in it at all.

(Interruption)

G: Let me ask you to talk about the purchase of KANG in Waco. Tell the whole story of that, if you will.

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J: That summer he had a little time on his hands, of course, and we decided that we wanted to go and buy another station or perhaps two stations. He told Jesse Kellam and me and I don't know who all else to look at the possibilities. I remember we looked at Wichita Falls, KFDX; we looked at Lufkin; I don't know what else, we looked at three or four possibilities. I was for him buying the Wichita Falls [station] because I had perhaps had a little personal interest, having grown up in Wichita Falls. It was a VHF station and, I've forgotten, I think it was six hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars. But they finally decided to buy Waco, he and Mr. Kellam, maybe because they didn't want to invest that much money. They bought Waco for a lot less, but it didn't have anything to do with any office at all, not a thing. They wanted to sell it and they did sell it.

G: Was Waco a problem with regard to the signal from Austin? Since it was so close to Austin, did you have a--?

J: No, because Waco, in those days UHF didn't go out but about twenty-nine or thirty miles, and VHF goes out about sixty miles, so there wasn't any overlap between them. They have beefed up UHF stations now where there probably might be a problem now.

G: Now, there were two stations in Waco, is that right?

J: That's a VHF station. See, we had the--it was never a station--there was one station in Waco and one station in Temple, and Mr. Johnson had helped to get the station in Temple, Channel 6. And Channel 6 was Odessa or somewhere, I've forgotten, and he felt that the coverage in Waco--this is several years before, before he ever thought of being

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involved in Waco at all--that Waco had insufficient coverage. Somebody came to him and showed that Channel 6 would work, not in Waco because they had to be two hundred miles apart and a hundred and fifty miles on adjacent channels and so on. I don't know all the rules; I knew them then. But while it wouldn't work right in Waco, it would work in Temple, thirty miles to the south. It was unused and nobody had applied for it, and he helped get Channel 6 moved from--I believe it was Odessa, I'm not sure--to Temple. Frank Mayborn, who owned the Temple Daily Telegram applied for it and got it, and it was the only station in Waco or the area for quite a while.

(Interruption)

Only UHF, Channel 10, was available [?]. Well, it wasn't Channel 10. Waco had one VHF channel, and people had later applied for it and got it. They had one UHF channel, Channel 29, and that was the station that we bought. We had the advantage of having CBS and ABC, because the Temple station had NBC. Channel 10 hadn't come on the air yet, that's right. But we had the disadvantage of being UHF. But we had a substation at Bryan. Bryan carried the same programs. So we tried to fight with a short stick against Channel 6, and Channel 10 came on the air and it was VHF, of course. In those days UHF could not really compete with VHF. We were having serious trouble. We kept CBS, they got ABC. Later we combined with them; we ended up with 29 per cent, I believe it was, of the combined operation, took the UHF station off the air. We just took their books and our books of what we had in it. Ours came to 29 per cent, theirs came to 71.

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G: Who did you buy the initial facility from?

J: Buddy Bostick [?] was sort of the head guy. There was a group of people, but Buddy Bostick was the fellow that ran the stations.

G: Was this station profitable at the time?

J: No. It never was very profitable, but we just hoped it would be someday.

G: Now, another one was one in Weslaco. Didn't you buy that one at the same time or about the same period?

J: Yes. Well, I can't remember. Waco was first, I know that.

G: This was KRGV--?

J: KRGV. But we bought that from Ted [O. L.] Taylor, who was an old friend.

But to finish up with Waco, Channel 10 was owned by a group of prominent Waco citizens and we became partners with them.

G: Did they resent Mr. Johnson moving in?

J: Well, probably, but they were glad to get us off the air to get CBS. There was a mixed bag for them because they wanted CBS and we had it, being first on the air; we had both CBS and NBC. When they came on the air they got ABC; CBS stayed with us. And when they merged, they got both.

G: Was there anything in these transactions that could lead the opposition to say LBJ used influence with the FCC to retard his opposition?

J: No.

G: Or the station's opposition?

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J: No. I've heard that said about Austin, but I never had even heard that said about Waco.

G: Tell me about Weslaco.

J: Well, there are two stations in the Valley, Weslaco and Harlingen.

They were expensive stations to operate because in those days you had to have microwaves--I mean, you didn't have to have--

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G: --[inaudible].

J: Or you had to use these tall towers and bounce the signals one to the other. In any event, it was a long hop and it was expensive to operate. But it was VHF and it did all right. It I guess made money.

G: Why did Taylor want to sell?

J: Ted Taylor was running out of money, had gotten spread too thin and needed some cash. But I never heard it charged that Mr. Johnson used influence in connection with either Waco or Weslaco, and he didn't. Didn't need to, if he bought them. If he would have, which he wouldn't have, but if he would have, why, he didn't need to. I won't say that he didn't use his friendship or let somebody else, for instance me, use his friendship with people like Frank Stanton and General [David] Sarnoff and so on to help get the better programs that maybe some advertiser hadn't bought. I'd call up and talk to them about buying Weslaco, but that didn't hurt anybody but maybe the advertiser. Sometimes it did, sometimes it didn't.

(Interruption)

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I don't want to leave the impression that we muscled people to come on in Weslaco or Waco or Austin, that concern, but we did try to call it to their attention that we had the space available or the time available and could use the programming. Occasionally we would get the order.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XV

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*Beth Jenkins*

2-5-87

Date

*Francis S. Burns*  
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