

INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: RAY E. LEE
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

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G: Let's start with your coming to the NYA. Am I correct that you were with the University [of Texas] some and with the Austin paper?

L: I had a one-course teaching job at the University and also did some work with reference to athletics publicity.

G: Did you also work for the Austin paper?

L: I had worked for the Austin paper for about ten years when I dropped out of that group and came to the University for, I hoped, a full-time basis. It turned out to be part-time.

G: How did you come into contact with Lyndon Johnson?

L: He put out the word that he wanted an information officer. A friend pointed out the opportunity to me, and we just got acquainted.

G: Had he had anyone before in this line of work?

L: No. I think he had been here only about two months or three months at that time. This was in--what?--August of 1939?

G: No, it would have been August, 1935.

L: 1935, yes. That was 1935.

G: What was his attitude toward publicity? What did he look for there?

L: He looked for things that would popularize the work he was doing, anything to promote and increase the productivity of working groups.

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- G: Do you think he saw a necessity to get the word out to youths that this sort of program existed, that they could get work through the NYA?
- L: I would suppose that the problem of getting work, or getting youths to work, was not the key problem. The key problem was getting the county judge or the city manager or somebody who has got access to the purse strings to approve a project and to come in with the local contributions to the project.
- G: Did you have an office in the Littlefield Building?
- L: Yes, we were on the seventh floor of the Littlefield Building.
- G: Can you remember whose office was where, or what sort of arrangement [you had]?
- L: Yes. You got off the elevator and turned to the left and that brings you right up to where the hall turns again to the left. The corner office was Mr. Johnson's office. Next to him was Bill Deason. Next to him was J. C. Kellam. Then there was a workroom following that, over which I had some supervision. Then the last office was the one where I was staked out.
- G: How about L. E. Jones? Did he have an office there, too? He was working part-time, I think.
- L: I don't remember that he had an office particularly.
- G: I gather from going through the files that President Johnson had the attitude toward publicity that it was much better to publicize things that the NYA had already done, rather than to publicize things that they were planning to do.

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- L: I think you're correct in that, that he was not too vigorous a self-promoter. He would take credit for something accomplished and spread credit around to the working boys and staff for a job done. But as you suggest, his promotion was the problem of getting somebody to be sponsor on the project.
- G: I think somewhere the story has been recounted that initially, in the early-on NYA experience, he had announced a project in advance and had gotten the press there; it was maybe a roadside park project or something. All the media people showed up, but the youths didn't show up so the project fizzled out, at least on the first day. From then on he made it a practice to make sure that they got the people first, and the project going first, and then the press later. Is this accurate?
- L: I think it is a very good summary of the basic situation. He certainly wanted to avoid being left at the gate.
- G: But do you think the story itself is apocryphal, or was there an actual event?
- L: I think it was an explanation in there. For instance, the selection of the youth to work on a project was not a function of the NYA office. It was a function of the employment service, which registered unemployed people. There was certain law-making and rule-making that required that on this particular case where if they didn't show up, that it could have been a lapse in communication. The people who were supposed to make the selection failed to get the message on it.
- G: Do you recall such an episode though, where they didn't show up?

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L: No, no.

G: So it could well have [been apocryphal]. What techniques did he have for developing good publicity for the NYA, do you recall?

L: Well, we did the very simple little thing of preparing a sheet, usually once a week, that was sent mostly, with most emphasis, to the local weekly papers. It was also available to the press room locally, but he found that he could get more response from county judges who heard something about the NYA project in their local paper.

G: Did he know many of the publishers of the papers?

L: No, he knew a half dozen.

G: Who were his closest [friends among the publishers]?

L: Oh, Sam Fore, Jr. was number one.

G: He'd known him from the Kleberg days, I guess, Did you see much of him during those days?

L: Yes. I didn't see him much during the NYA program. When they got around to the political campaign, why, Mr. Sam was very much on the ball, very strong leadership.

G: How about Mr. [Charles] Marsh and Mr. [E. S.] Fentress. Did he know them this early?

L: I don't think he knew them this early. I wouldn't want to say he didn't, but I just am not aware that he did.

G: Any others that were close to him then that gave him good publicity?

L: I was trying to think of the fellow that was out at Kenedy, Texas. He had two local newspapers down there. What is his name? Curiously, it comes back to me, the Kenedy part does. But through Mr. Sam and

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and these two or three other fellows, he could show up at a meeting of a press group and be received and introduced around and have the opportunity to take life easy with a congenial group of people.

G: He had an NYA advisory board of business leaders and others from around the state. Senator [Alvin] Wirtz was the chairman of it.

L: Yes.

G: I have here a list of the people. Mr. [Lutcher] Stark was on it. Do you remember how that group would work?

L: No, I don't. I wasn't in that level.

G: I wonder if it met very often. Senator Wirtz was in the same building, wasn't he?

L: Yes. He was in the same building.

G: Did you get a chance to observe his relationship with President Johnson?

L: Very close relationship between him and Mr. Johnson.

G: What were they like together? How would you describe it to someone?

L: Well, I've already said they were congenial.

G: Was it kind of a father-son or was it a lawyer-client [relationship]?

L: I doubt it's a father-son relationship so much as it was a political partnership, Wirtz being basically and openly a political person. When you came into contact with Senator Wirtz, you knew that you were ringing the political bell.

G: As you've indicated, the NYA had to deal with a lot of the state agencies and I guess other federal agencies, particularly the WPA.

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- L: Yes. WPA, of course, was the papa outfit for this type of work. The NYA was a youth group spun off in two directions: one for projects, and another for providing part-time employment for people in school.
- G: Was there much friction between the NYA and the WPA with regard to approving projects?
- L: I think such friction as there was was a normal conflict of egos and also questions of interpretation. You must remember that the WPA had control of the NYA purse strings and had ultimate control over the employment of NYA personnel. I know that Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kellam frequently went to San Antonio. They'd go to San Antonio in the middle of the morning and get there for noontime and stay until they shut the office up at six o'clock. I'm sure they had their days when they wished they could do things more smoothly and more gracefully. But it was a case where Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kellam knew that their position, or their strength, lay in the hands of other people, and so they got along with them as best they could.
- G: I'm told that in other states, or at least in some of the states, the NYA was actually a subordinate to the WPA and completely under the thumb of the WPA. But in Texas, I gather, there was a considerable measure of independence.
- L: I think that was a consequence of the leadership on both the WPA and NYA sides. They agreed between themselves that the NYA would run itself within certain limits and regulations. WPA, on that side, agreed to let the NYA alone as long as it was not presenting serious problems.

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G: Was there initially an attempt to locate the NYA office in San Antonio by the WPA?

L: I don't know.

G: You know, their state office was down there.

L: That's before my time. They might have. I just don't know. When I came on board they were definitely settled in Austin. There didn't seem to be any question about the usefulness.

G: In going through the newspaper clippings I noticed an article published in October, 1935, that was critical of the NYA. It was written by J. Evetts Haley. (Laughter) He really made a career out of it, didn't he?

L: Yes.

G: I suppose that was not something you would have remembered at the time.

L: I did not. In fact, I did not begin work until sometime in 1936.

G: I see, with the NYA.

L: Yes.

G: Did you have much contact with the roadside parks project?

L: By the time I came in contact with it, the pattern was pretty well set. The results had been sufficiently satisfactory that there was no great friction about it. There were plenty of projects waiting for development. If the NYA had had the personnel and had the funds, why, they could stir up some work projects.

G: Who would normally think up the ideas for these projects?

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- L: Well, there you get into a question of the advisory committee. It's quite possible that the staff of the NYA would come in with some number of projects on a skeleton basis. The advisory committee could give a judgment--yes, no, one, two, three, four--as to how you want to go about it. There were various people who were appealing to NYA for projects to be conducted in their communities.
- G: Was there a shortage of NYA money from Washington, from the national office there?
- L: I think not; I wasn't aware of it.
- G: You don't recall LBJ going to Aubrey Williams and trying to get more money from him.
- L: Oh, I would think that was a continuing enterprise, not something that happens on Thursdays, but it's just every day of the month.
- G: Aubrey Williams came down to Texas in 1936.
- L: I remember when he was here.
- G: Can you recall the details of this trip?
- L: No. Mrs. Roosevelt was down here about the same time. I remember that they sat half a dozen of us in Johnson's office, and we had a two-hour, head-to-head talk.
- G: About what? Do you remember?
- L: She was inquiring about what we were doing, why we were doing it this way. Johnson was trying to get her to say it was very good, trying to win her approval.
- G: Did he get it?

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- L: Oh, there was no disapproval of any important scale.
- G: What was she interested in? What in particular, what kind of projects?
- L: I hadn't thought about that question. Probably she was interested a good deal in the girls and trying to develop projects in which girls could be employed. At that time you couldn't take a couple of girls out and start them digging up a flower bed and making a park. It was sort of not girl's work.
- G: So you had sewing rooms?
- L: Yes, they had sewing rooms.
- G: Did you have an impression of Mrs. Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, how they got along together?
- L: Very comfortably. I certainly had an impression the next day that he thought the afternoon with Mrs. Roosevelt had been well handled.
- G: Really? What did he say, do you remember?
- L: I don't remember. He was emphatically on the side of, "We hit one yesterday."
- G: I guess in June of that year they tried to arrange for President Roosevelt to dedicate a park while he was going to Dallas, I think, or en route there. It was one of these roadside parks. I guess he drove by, but I'm not sure that he stopped.
- L: I'm not sure. I never heard that discussed, so it must have been unsatisfactory or disappointing.
- G: Anything more on Aubrey Williams and his visit to Texas, do you recall?

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- L: Well, as I recall, I think that Williams came here and stayed twenty-four hours and then moved on to San Antonio and possibly got pulled out of San Antonio to some districts where we could get him to look and listen.
- G: I understand that Mary McLeod Bethune came down, too, a black woman with the NYA.
- L: Yes, she was here--when was it?--on a Saturday afternoon. I have reason to remember it was Saturday, because there was some little problem in getting an audience.
- G: Where did she speak?
- L: Over at a Negro church, Bethel something, in the early afternoon.
- G: Was it a good speech?
- L: Yes, she was a very effective [speaker].
- G: Was she impressed with the work that he had done for blacks in the NYA, or do you recall what her attitude was?
- L: I don't recall that any commendation was made. There was certainly no serious complaint.
- G: In August of that year they had Richard Brown, Aubrey William's assistant, visit. They had a big banquet for him here in Austin. Governor [James V.] Allred was there. Do you remember that occasion?
- L: No, I don't remember that.
- G: In a more general sense, one NYA man described the NYA in Texas as more of a crusade than an organization. Can you elaborate on the spirit that [prevailed]?

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L: Well, certainly from the level of his staff, the professional staff, it was a crusade. Each and every guy on the team felt that he had to hit it. They really thought nothing of working extra hours or doing additional duties or tackling difficult projects.

G: What motivated you to work like this?

L: LBJ. (Laughter) He and Bill Deason and Jesse Kellam had the cornerstone.

G: What was it about him that was able to get you to do this?

L: It was just a pride. We had leadership that we were proud of and willing to follow and had people who were making it quite clear what their objective was.

G: Did he seem to emphasize the fact that there was so much poverty? Did he see this as a mission of eliminating poverty and getting rid of some of the poverty in Texas?

L: I had never heard him describe it in eliminating poverty terms. But there was always the problem of providing employment, putting some money into the family hands. You see, there was no distribution of food or even clothing connected with this.

G: Did you have meetings on the weekends and in the evenings?

L: No, most of the staff would get out about five or six o'clock. But there were times when we stayed on till ten or eleven, depending on what needed to be done.

G: He's had a reputation for answering each letter that came in the same day. Was this something that was practiced in the NYA period, also?

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- L: Yes. I was up to my ears in that particular thing, with reference to the school program. In his name I was answering each and every letter that came with a rational relationship to the school program.
- G: I guess Jesse Kellam would have worked on this end of the program.
- L: Yes. You asked about the extraordinary situations. Bill Deason was the extraordinary guy to me. He was unmarried, so he was showing up at work at six o'clock in the morning and had all the mail opened and sorted before eight, ready for Jesse Kellam or different division units.
- G: Mr. [Llewellyn B.] Griffith, whom you pointed out in the photograph, was working [with the NYA]. He was an engineer, is that right?
- L: Yes, he was working--to my knowledge--with the parks program; [that] was his main activity.
- G: Did all of you work as a unit? Let's say, would you sit down and see something through mentally in terms of publicity and engineering feasibility and everything else, or would he work individually with you?
- L: There was possibly a need for more connection, more group connection, more group response. On the other hand, so much of the work was not in Austin. What was it? Sixteen districts they had, or some such number.
- G: Twelve, I think.
- L: Only one focused in Austin; the rest of them were in other places.
- G: Yes. How did you overcome the fact that the projects were so spread out and far afield?

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L: Either by going to the project or having the division manager come in for conferences. I suppose they had one or two big meetings, but I don't recollect extensive use of large meetings.

G: Did you do any traveling around to these projects yourself?

L: Not a great deal, I think mostly a matter of showing up at meetings where the press was going to be there heavy. I remember going to one such meeting, at Taylor it was, forty miles away from here. Yes. They had a press meeting there. Jesse Kellam and I both showed up for it.

G: There is some indication from the files that there was a fellow connected with the NYA who took a number of motion picture films, with the idea of maybe making a documentary film to demonstrate their activities. Do you remember this at all?

L: I don't remember that.

G: Did you have any indication at the time that the NYA would be the basis for a future political organization?

L: I think that could be inferred. After the fact you could say, well, that's what he started out to do. I expect he did start out to improve his own political connection. He had been secretary to a congressman before he came to work here at the NYA. Of course, when he came to work with the NYA here, he had no reason to anticipate that there was going to be a death in office, or there was going to be an opportunity for a campaign.

G: Did you yourself, though, receive any indications from him or any insight that he contemplated a future in politics or that he planned to run for elective office?

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L: I had no knowledge of that until the occupant congressman had died. They were drawing the lines there.

G: In other words, as far as you know, he wouldn't talk to his NYA associates about a future in politics or anything?

L: No.

G: What were some of the problems and crises that the NYA had to deal with in Texas?

L: I don't know how to answer that.

G: You mentioned earlier the problem of getting projects approved by other agencies and getting the supervisors. Can you think of any others?

L: No, I don't. I guess I wasn't in the problem room.

G: Did they manage to streamline the application process so that they could get youths certified and on jobs more easily and more quickly?

L: Well, I think it was just a question of measure there, since there was ten times as many people being put on the WPA job than were being put on the NYA job. So the NYA people came onto the job frequently as a by-product.

G: I noticed from the files that there was a good deal of work on the highways in addition to the roadside park, planting shrubs and even using the term beautification. Do you remember this aspect of the NYA?

L: I don't remember it particularly. It's quite possible that it was described as roadside park work, even though you were planting more shrubbery somewhere.

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G: Do you remember the inception of the La Villita project in San Antonio that Maury Maverick took such an interest in?

L: Yes.

G: Can you narrate how this idea developed?

L: Well, we had this energetic congressman over there who was quite ready and willing to go the last mile. So when the La Villita project was put on, pressure was applied to the local politicians to cover the thing, to finance it, to make the local participation in it. It has ultimately turned out to be a most successful thing. It's still used today.

G: It sure is. What were some of the other real showcase projects that you had back then?

L: One I think of is a chapel up in Denton.

G: That's still used.

L: At the North Texas [State] University. I suppose it's still in use. It was a permanent building when it was built.

G: Any other projects that stand out? I've heard that there was a good project up at Prairie View [A & M], the college.

L: Prairie View. Yes, there was a project down there. What in the world was that? It was of considerable volume, or considerable employment [was] connected with it. Was it a gymnasium? I'm uncertain about it, but I do remember, now that you remind me, that the Prairie View people had lots of people who were able to work if they could just get a project organized where they could work with it.

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G: In cases like this, would LBJ meet with the college officials, say the president, and work something out if it was work-related?

L: I think the North Texas State project was one that simplified it. I don't know whose idea it was initially, but all of a sudden, Lyndon, the congressman [?], had hold of it and was going with the ball; the president of the school was going with the ball, so they could get it and work out an understanding and cooperation.

G: I'm wondering if there was much contact between LBJ and other NYA directors of other states. Would they get together at conferences?

L: I suppose once a year or occasionally a few of them would gather in some place to meet Mr. Williams, or they'd be called into Williams' office. But my impression was that the NYA program in Texas was so much more successful that a good many of the directors in other states weren't very happy with the comparison.

G: Did Mrs. Johnson play a role in the NYA at all, do you recall?

L: I don't remember anything she particularly did.

G: You know, in later years she seems to have really been an active partner in so many endeavors of his, but you don't recall any involvement with the NYA.

L: No.

(Interruption)

G: Well now, you were going to relate the story of getting into the campaign?

L: Yes. Congressman [James P.] Buchanan had died early in the week, say, Tuesday or something like that. They had the funeral. His widow

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was down in Brenham, which was their home, and her son was there with her. There was an argument about which one of them should stand for election. Well, they called in all the known and established candidates for a conference down there, to try to arrange things so that she could run for Congress without opposition. On Sunday afternoon this was the tenor of things. Mr. Johnson was not invited to this group and didn't go. Apparently we didn't know anything about it. Apparently our intelligence was bad. But along about five o'clock in the afternoon, it was my lot to say, "Look, men, if we're going to make this announcement, we've got to do it within the next hour or so or the papers go to press and you get things all gummed up if you keep on putting it off."

So by six o'clock I was down in the newspaper office with an approved announcement in hand. It got on the front page of the next issue of the paper. I said it was Sunday, they were holding a meeting on Sunday afternoon. In the Monday morning paper it was announced. At the Saturday afternoon and Sunday gathering, it had been agreed that Mrs. Buchanan should run for office without opposition and that everybody would come in and support her. Anybody who wanted to fight about it could fight in the next Democratic primary. So the Buchanan people were considerably surprised and shocked at Johnson's announcement without reference to their schedule.

G: Do you think that this strategy of organizing her campaign or her succession to that seat was done mainly by [C. N.] Avery's people? Wouldn't they be the major beneficiaries of having her succeed?

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- L: Well, Avery wanted to believe that and he would want you to believe it. There was a fellow named [Houghton] Brownlee up in Burnet County who would want you to believe the same story, that if you vote for Brownlee, put her in now and put Brownlee in [later].
- G: Did President Johnson ever try to talk Mrs. Buchanan out of running?
- L: I think not. I think that he was just not acceptable.
- G: Was there a debate in your camp about whether or not to wait and see if she did announce, or to go ahead and announce before she did?
- L: That was the argument Sunday afternoon. Senator Wirtz and Sam Fore and two or three others were there. I was sitting on the doorsill. That was the argument, "Shall we wait and see what she's going to do, or shall we be first?" It was finally decided that the courageous thing to do was to be first.
- G: Who took that position, do you know? Do you know how it stacked up, one or the other?
- L: No, I don't. It was a fluid situation. However they voted, they had talked very frankly and freely with each other. There weren't many people there, so they could talk about the problem without any trouble.
- G: Did this decision incur opposition from other people who might have supported him, the fact that he announced early on? Say, for example, [Richard] Kleberg or someone like that?
- L: I just don't know. Of course, you immediately distinguish some opposition in terms of people saying, "Well, the Fourteenth District is trying to take us over." But by and large Mr. Johnson just started

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off pretty nearly at scratch. I'm sure he didn't have more than a double handful of active supporters when he started.

G: What do you think led him to believe he could win?

L: Just his own [confidence], more guts than judgment. He felt strongly about it that if he was going to win he had to make the effort.

G: Was it a question that was thrown out to his friends, like you, "Should I run?" Or was it merely a statement, "I'm running. Are you going to help me?"

L: Well, that Sunday afternoon talk-a-thon where four or five of them talked, there was nothing dogmatic about it. Each one would come up with his point or his point of view on any question. They were just running out of time there. It was a repetitive situation. The same things were heard more than once.

G: Were there people that counseled him against running, fearing that he couldn't win?

L: Yes, I'm sure there were.

G: Do you recall who they were?

L: Not particularly, no. You could just say Avery, Brownlee and the fellow down here in Caldwell County, whatever his name was, all of their immediate families and friends would have counseled him not to run.

G: What about Dr. Bob Montgomery? Do you recall his [role]?

L: Bob was a professor at Southwest Texas [State Teachers] College when they were there. I saw a note there that Lyndon spent the night at Bob Montgomery's.

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G: Did he advise one way or the other during this period?

L: I don't know.

G: You don't recall?

L: If he advised I would think that it would be more likely that he would advise on a particular problem rather than on a general question of do or don't. In fact, when they got through with making the first announcement, the answer to that question was irrevocable.

G: Did Dick Kleberg resent the fact that LBJ filed against Mrs. Buchanan or before she could announce?

L: I don't know.

G: Kleberg didn't support him in that election to any sizable extent.

L: I'm not aware of any support that Mr. Kleberg gave.

G: Do you know why?

L: Maybe that's just the way the Klebergs do.

G: Really? Was this a disappointment?

L: No, I think it's an analysis of the fact that what has Kleberg got to gain by getting his feet in this. If Johnson wins, why, Kleberg and Johnson are still neighbors and long-time friends. If Johnson loses, well, he's hunting a job and Kleberg may have to help him get a job somewhere.

G: What was Governor Allred's position in this election, do you recall?

L: Well, he was apparently pleased and proud of Johnson. There were a number of conversations with the Governor, Johnson directly, or Wirtz with the Governor, or somebody else with the Governor. He did not make a public announcement. Again [it was] a case where he wouldn't

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have helped himself by making an announcement. But as soon as the election was over and Lyndon got on his feet and the President came along in his train, why, Governor Allred was right there.

G: What was the substance of these conversations between Allred and, say, Wirtz, or Allred and President Johnson? Do you remember?

L: I don't know.

G: Did Allred help set the date of the election to favor President Johnson, do you recall?

L: No, I think it was held at the earliest possible statutory date. There was a statutory provision there as to how you fill a vacancy. This was the first--what?--first Tuesday or first Saturday that fell within that area.

G: In this special election you had an open field of candidates. It was just a question of the top man winning overall, no run-off. I suppose the general rules of politics wouldn't apply to that. How was this type of election different from a normal primary and run-off?

L: You've stated it. It was a case of winner takes all. The leader doesn't have to have a majority.

G: What I'm saying is, how did this affect your campaign strategy?

L: The campaign strategy was to try to get in contact with as many people as we could, try to touch hands where you can.

G: I noticed that Senator Fleetwood Richards--was that his name?--dropped out.

L: Senator Richards. Yes. I think he got hot about it but never did commit himself in any particular way.

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G: He was from Lockhart. I wonder why he dropped out.

Also, you notice that some of these candidates seem to cancel out each other, either because they were also opposed to the Court-packing bill, or because one of them had strength in a particular county, and yet the other one had also good ties with the other end of that county. Did this work to your advantage, do you think?

L: Yes, definitely. It gave a payoff to the Johnson campaign many times, in many places, where he might not have got very much. But of course, the famous operation counted for a good deal, appendicitis two days before the election.

G: Were any of these candidates asked to run so that they could cancel out the strength of another candidate or bring out a certain issue, or were they all independently motivated?

L: Of the nine candidates, there were certainly seven of them were in there on their own ego, trying to simply get elected. There was one fellow named Smith who was making a showing for the Republicans, carrying the flag, and there could be somebody else who had some motivations. But mostly [with] the [Polk] Sheltons and the Averys and the Brownlees, it was a yen to win, an expectation to win.

G: But did your organization encourage the candidacy of one in order to offset the other, for example?

L: No, I'm not aware of that.

G: This was not a strategy that you used?

L: The campaign was short enough that you wouldn't have had a whole lot to show.

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- G: Okay. How about the Court-packing bill? Where did the idea to make this the critical issue come from? Do you know?
- L: Yes, it came from Alvin Wirtz, who was not as far liberal as his conduct might make you think. He was handy at racking up the votes and pretty quick in the campaign, between Wirtz and Claude Wild and two or three other people, they evolved this tactic of supporting the President.
- G: Was this something that was settled on early on?
- L: Well, I'd say the second week it was settled on. That's just second week as a guess, meaning early.
- G: Was this tied to any concrete issues in the Tenth District? For example, getting those dams finished? Did it have a practical application other than just pro-Roosevelt or con-Roosevelt or anything here?
- L: No, I think it was just purely a matter of "Hooray for the President. He's our man. We're going to vote for him."
- G: You know, there is some indication that the Court was balking on the use of PWA funds to complete these types of hydroelectric dams, and I'm just wondering if Wirtz saw this as a way to aid that development of the Lower Colorado that he was so interested in.
- L: Well, that's an analysis that can be made.
- G: But you didn't have that perspective at the time?
- L: My perspective at the time was that this was a way to put the ballots in the ballot box.

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G: What about Lyndon Johnson? Was he all for the Court-packing bill, too?

L: He made a big noise about it.

G: Did he?

L: Yes. I don't know that he would have originated the idea. But somebody sold it to the two or three key leaders.

G: In retrospect it seems like something that Maury Maverick would have advocated more than Lyndon Johnson, just because politically it would have seemed more. . . .

L: It's quite possible he had his foot in it and had something to do with it.

G: Do you think that Wirtz had a reason for getting behind Lyndon Johnson here in this campaign?

L: Oh, yes. They'd been very close for two or three years.

G: Through the NYA?

L: Yes. See, Wirtz comes from Seguin, down south of San Antonio, and they just naturally teamed up. I think that Wirtz was personally proud of Johnson and expected him to make a good show.

G: Now, during the campaign--we are again continuing on the Court bill--there was a Belden Poll which showed that almost nine to one the voters in Austin, or the Tenth District, supported the Court reform bill, the Court-packing bill. Do you remember that poll?

L: No, I don't.

G: Do you remember the Belden Polls in general?

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- L: Yes. I know them generally and I know their business.
- G: Were these polls general valid polls?
- L: Yes, to the extent that they had the knowledge and the skill, they were valid. Joe [Belden] would start out to do a valid job. If he got hung on some point, why, it would be just tough. I think that a survey of this case that you're citing was done forthrightly.
- G: Do you think that the majority of the people in that district supported the Court-packing bill?
- L: I doubt it.
- G: Then perhaps they supported LBJ in spite of it rather than because of it?
- L: Well, it gave him a point of aggression, a point to begin with on an issue that would give him a hearing, get the people to listen. To say that the majority of people supported the Court-packing bill seems most unlikely. Because [in the] first place, on questions of that sort, majorities don't; you just don't get majority response. So it was quite possible that he could get the leadership response, the number-one position, which is I think what he did. He lined them up, the voters, and he took the number-one batch and somebody else took the number-two. Polk Shelton took the number-three batch. Avery took the number-four batch.
- G: What role did Lyndon Johnson's father, Sam Ealy Johnson, play in this campaign? Do you remember?
- L: He had died.
- G: I think he died in October, after the [special election].

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L: Did he? I had forgotten. No, I don't remember anything that he did.

G: Did you ever get to meet him or visit with him?

L: I don't remember him.

G: How about his mother? Did she campaign any?

L: I knew his mother well and loved her. She got on the telephone and talked to a lot of people from Hays County and Blanco County who had moved into Austin.

G: Blanco had only recently been moved into the Tenth District, is that right?

L: Yes, that's right.

G: You, I think, know the circumstances of that, how it was redistricted. Is that right?

L: I don't think I'm being pretentious about this, but there was a guy named [John William] Hornsby, who was a state senator. The redistricting bill, senatorial redistricting bill, was going to come up. I was at a newspaper and took the commercial view that we wanted the counties in this district that did business in Austin. Let's get away from the far-away places and get into a little compact district here. I tried that balloon out on Hornsby and didn't get much response. A day or two later I went to see him personally up at his office in the Capitol up there. We talked about it. I held out to him a prospect that there's going to be this senate place that might be vacant, and if he was the author of the bill governing the election he might have some advantage. He took my flattery and

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pushed the bill through the senate down there. Nobody else cared, so there was no problem to get it through once we got him going with the thing. If you think that's pretentious, well, I'm sorry. That's a long time ago, remembering way back.

G: Sure. Well, of course that enabled him to run, I suppose. I wonder if he would have run if Blanco County had not been in that district, his home county.

L: Might, sure might.

G: Of course, I guess that was really his base, though, wasn't it? That was where his strength was.

L: Yes. Another angle of the thing was that they put Blanco County into the district and Lyndon was a resident of Blanco County. I understand that the law was such that that wouldn't disqualify him in the present-day law. I don't know about the law twenty-five years ago. But it was no disadvantage to be a resident of the district.

G: What was your strategy in visiting other counties in the district? Who would you contact? How would you set up these visits?

L: This was done largely by Claude Wild, who got on a long distance phone and would pick out a target town and call two or three people there, and get somebody to accept the chairmanship and to call the roll.

G: Would you normally work through lawyers or postmasters, certain types of people who were politically active?

L: Yes, I think so. We tended to work with people who knew how to mark a ballot and who had some sense of getting the vote out.

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- G: Who were these [people] generally, in terms of trades?
- L: The problem always, of course, was the question of obligation, who is obligated to whom. Sometimes I guess Claude was disappointed by a prospect that just didn't want to give up his horse.
- G: The newspaper stories at the time seemed to indicate that President Johnson really campaigned with more energy than his opponents did, and that this was really a novelty in terms of fanning out over the district and visiting as many of the towns as often as he did. Was this your perspective at the time? Was he indeed more active than the other candidates?
- L: I think we took the view that he should go to as many places as he could and shake hands with as many people as he could. If he could make a ten-minute speech, that was all right. Don't get off on any thirty-minute or hour-long things. Instead, get to a town, go up and down the streets and stop in every store.
- G: What do you think was the most important factor in his winning that election?
- L: I was going to say his appendicitis operation. (Laughter)
- G: That was pretty late, though, wasn't it?
- L: It was Thursday, Thursday night, and the election was Saturday.
- G: Why was that so important?
- L: It gave us an unexpected top-page headline. I can illustrate it this way: we had in three doctors for the operation here. This doctor at Lockhart called up one of our doctors locally and wanted to know if this was really on the level about this operation and

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the need for it and so on. I think that conduct shows that it really shook some votes. I think it's quite possible that [there were] enough uncommitted people, and what they needed was just some reason to go to the polls the next day, some reason to participate and take part.

G: I suppose he himself didn't get to vote, did he?

L: No. I don't know. I was going to suggest unless he had voted absentee, but I have no idea. I expect he wouldn't, as a matter of strategy, vote absentee, because he would want to appear at the polling places.

G: Claude Wild came in after you did. Weren't you in before he was in the campaign?

L: He came in the first week.

G: Oh, did he really?

L: Yes.

G: Did they hire him?

L: Yes. I heard him explain it once. Here was a young lawyer on the make in need of a fee, in need of a client. When he approached him on the thing, why, he was just ready to pitch. I don't know who approached him, but I suppose Wirtz or Wirtz' firm or somebody in that family made the approach.

G: He had managed some successful campaigns in the past, hadn't he?

L: A Jimmie Allred man.

G: Okay.

L: It's quite possible that Wirtz got Allred to talk to Wild.

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- G: Do you think he may have?
- L: I'm saying this is possible; I don't know.
- G: Well now, how about you? Did they reimburse you?
- L: Yes. I got--what?--two hundred dollars or something like that, enough to live on for a couple of weeks.
- G: Did you think of it as a gamble, a risk at the time, or did you feel that he was going to win when you took the job?
- L: I think we suddenly found ourselves campaigning and there was no time to second-guess it. You just had to go.
- G: Is there anything else you want to add about the campaign that we've left out?
- L: I don't know anything worth telling. In fact, a good deal of what I've said maybe ought to be expunged.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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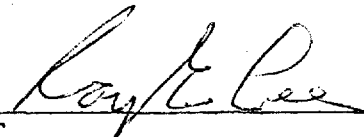
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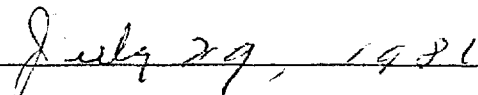
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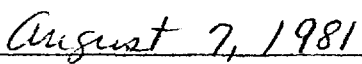
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