

INTERVIEW II

DATE: May 18, 1987
INTERVIEWEE: EMMA LONG
INTERVIEWER: Christie L. Bourgeois
PLACE: Mrs. Long's residence, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

B: I'd like to start today talking about the 1948 campaign Coke Stevenson and LBJ were in. LBJ won by a controversial eighty-seven votes. You were at the state convention, weren't you, when Johnson was certified as the party nominee?

L: Yes.

B: I wonder if you could talk in as much detail as you can about that convention.

L: It was quite an exciting convention. We had the conservative element there that was, of course, supporting Coke Stevenson, and the liberals, and Johnson's middle-of-the-roaders and minorities that were supporting Lyndon Johnson. And there were delegations that were contested, and one of the big delegations, I believe, was from Houston, and that delegation, if it had been seated, might have overturned the--well, no, it wouldn't have, either. When the votes were finally counted, it was shown that had they not--because they did have some people in the delegation that were voting for Lyndon Johnson, and one of the big conservatives, if I remember a story my husband told, said, "Well, let's vote us out," when the voting was whether or not to seat one of the delegations that was being contested--

B: Was that the Harris County delegation?

L: Yes, it was Harris County, and there were a lot of conservatives there supporting Coke Stevenson, and they didn't seat that delegation and seated the contesting one, and then that was the big fight, and it called for a roll-call vote, and it was quite exciting.

B: Do you remember what you won that by?

L: That--?

B: To unseat the Harris County delegation. Was it a real close vote?

L: No, there was--when that vote was finally taken, I think we had about, oh, maybe seventy-five or eighty votes to spare, but we didn't want to take any chances, and some of the rural votes we weren't sure of. My

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husband, Stuart Long, had certainly done a great deal to help organize the state that year, and he was on the Democratic Executive Committee, and he--they were, of course, getting their people there. Some of them would go out and, when they were going to take a crucial vote--in fact, the one to certify LBJ was the very crucial one. I think we had about one or two votes to spare on that one, and one guy had had a heart attack, and while he was lying there on the floor, Everett Looney came along and got his proxy, and then another man from Amarillo--I can't remember his name at the moment, a delegate--had gone out for coffee, and he just dashed in at the last minute and saved the day. So we had two or three of them that saved the day when they were certifying.

But I think, when it was all told, that they did have votes enough that they weren't worried about it.

B: How did the press handle this issue in general? Were there more newspapers supporting Johnson or Stevenson during this whole time that the election results were being contested by Stevenson?

L: Well, of course, Stevenson was governor, and he was quite powerful and he had lots of friends. He had lots of friends, and the big newspapers, most of them, were supporting him.

B: Is that right?

L: Stevenson, Coke Stevenson. There's no doubt that LBJ was the underdog going in.

B: Well, too, Stevenson must have had control of the party machinery pretty well. How did it come about that you all--?

L: Not exactly. Stevenson had not been a party man, exactly. He hadn't worked like Governor Shivers always did to control the conventions. He just didn't seem to think that was that important. And we did organize, but it was a fight then, I believe, of the Texas Regulars versus the liberals, and the Texas Regulars throughout the state were vying and working, but we managed to out-organize them.

B: Do you think that if Shivers had thrown more of his weight behind the Regulars that--?

L: Well, at that time, Governor Shivers was not that conservative.

B: I mean--I'm sorry. Stevenson; if Governor Stevenson had thrown more of his weight behind the Texas Regulars, do you think that they could have out-organized you and therefore--?

L: I don't think they could have, because it was just--we were well organized. The liberals had worked awfully hard, and they had through-out--we were real stirred up because we had been kicked in the teeth, so to speak, by the Texas Regulars in the last national convention.

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B: 1944?

L: Yes, in the 1944 convention. So we were pretty riled up, and we weren't going to allow them to steal the conventions or take them over.

B: So after that 1944 election, the liberals began to organize?

L: Well, they were organized then but not as staunchly as they were later.

B: Why do you think the Coke Stevenson forces took the issue all the way to the Senate? After the election, after the state executive committee had certified Johnson as the nominee and Johnson had been seated in the Senate, Stevenson forces took the issue all the way to the Senate.

L: Well, you see, the State Democratic Executive Committee certified President Johnson as the nominee, and then in the November election, he was elected by a great number of--I mean, a great majority, almost two to one. That was against the Republican. But in the meantime, Coke Stevenson and his crowd tried--well, they sued, but they did not sue in the state court where it was proper for them to sue.

B: Why didn't they?

L: Well, this is the question that President Johnson asked at the time, and a lot of other people asked. I don't know why they didn't use the state court, because that was the vehicle. When they went into the federal court, it was thrown out because it wasn't the proper court to go to. They never did file in the state. They didn't ask for a statewide recount. In the suit, they wanted a recount on about half a dozen counties instead of statewide, and that was kind of [inaudible], but when it got to the U.S. Senate, it had just gone too far. The Senate was not going to turn down a man that had been elected in the November election by a great majority of votes.

B: Do you think that Johnson realized this? Do you think he was ever worried that he was going to be unseated?

L: No, I don't think so. He made a speech before the Senate [and] said that it was an embarrassment to the state of Texas to have this even brought before the state senate. Of course, there was quite a bit of bitterness at that time. The Stevenson people just didn't want to give up.

B: Do you think that the Stevenson people thought that they had a chance to unseat Johnson, or that they were just trying to embarrass him [by] taking it this far?

L: I can't speculate on that because I really don't remember, and I don't know. Because we did have a Democratic majority in the Senate at that time, I believe.

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You asked me if I thought of anything else. I would say that that was a time in the history of the state of Texas when there was a lot of skullduggery going on, swapping votes, switching votes, or boxes being brought in late. They'd be held out to see who's going to win, and I remember that my husband in one of his broadcasts made a statement about this kind of thing that was going on in Texas, fraud in the electorate, and that it just must be stopped. And I think that we do have some elections now that--most all of our elections are pretty honest now, I think.

B: How long do you think that went on? When do you think the state was finally rid of that sort of election--?

L: When they broke up those machines in South Texas. They had a group down there that--Archie Parr, the Duke of Duval, was one that was very good at bringing the elections in to the right person, and some others down there who seemed to know who the boss was, and they voted like the boss said. That's one area of Texas; now, I'm not too familiar with the other areas, but that's the most flagrant violations that we had.

B: I guess that was in the early 1960s that that was brought to an end?

L: Yes. I think about then. I think that some of those people were indicted and went to prison on--not fraud in the ballot box. I think it wound up in something like income tax violations, and people were gotten on charges of fraud in that way rather than at the ballot box.

B: If there's nothing else that you want to add about this 1948 election, then we'll go on to talk about some of the letters in the files, some of the issues brought up through some of the letters between LBJ and your husband, Stuart Long, in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

L: Okay. I would like to add this, that the election of Lyndon Johnson at that time changed history completely, completely changed what happened to the whole country and the world, because he became the majority leader and finally became president of the United States, and he was a great activist in the civil rights laws that were passed, and he helped do that, and Social Security, and rural electrification, and it's for sure that Coke Stevenson would not have supported any of those things. He was dead set against federal government helping the states in any way. He was a states' rightist, and he would have fought that kind of thing. And he would never have been president of the United States. So history was changed in that year in a great way.

B: I wonder if LBJ could have ever gotten to the Senate if he had lost that 1948 election. It's interesting to speculate--

L: If he'd have gone back?

B: If he'd have ever gotten to the Senate if he had lost in 1948.

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L: Well, it could be that he could have. It would have depended upon how that election came out and who won. If Stevenson won--O'Daniel was the U.S. senator at that time, and I just have a feeling that he might have run against one or the other, because he had gotten very popular and had a lot of votes. That's just a what-if.

B: Yes. Nobody can know that.

There's a letter in the files from your husband, Stuart Long, to LBJ describing what a tremendous reception Henry Wallace got when he spoke at Gregory Gym. I think it must have been in 1948.

L: Yes, when he was vice president, I believe, wasn't he?

B: When he was running, I think, on the Progressive Party ticket.

L: That's right. He had been dropped off the ticket [in 1944], and he was very unhappy with the Democratic Party, and he was running on the Progressive Party [ticket], and he came to Austin, and it was very exciting. I frankly did not support him, because I've always been a very staunch Democrat, but I was interested in what he was going to have to say and the impact that he would have in Austin. I remember that the very conservative Walter Long, who was not related to me, was executive secretary for the chamber of commerce, and I was helping with arrangements up on the stage for some reason, and old Walter Long said, "See who's there. See who's helping out here. They're all communists! They're all communists!" And so we were kind of drawing ourselves in so we wouldn't be spotted, but I remember he was there: "Take these names!" But he did have a--

B: Guilt by association. If you were dealing with Henry Wallace, then you were obviously a communist.

L: Yes. Henry Wallace was a very interesting man, and I think he wasted his talents by going and getting soured on the Democratic Party because they didn't bring him in for a second term as vice president. He had some great ideas, but when he pulled loose from the party, he just ruined himself. But he was a good speaker, and he drew a huge crowd that was very responsive. And he--I think we had--is that the year that Homer Rainey had been fired?

B: I think Homer Rainey had been fired in 1946, or a couple of years before. I think that's right.

L: Yes. But the young people at the university had become real active in 1946 when Homer Rainey was fired, and they became very unhappy about his being fired, and they became all very political, and in two years, they were really political. So they were very much interested in Henry Wallace. Now how many of them followed him off into the Progressive Party I don't know, but the newspapers did not give Henry Wallace a fair representation, of the crowd or [of] what he had to say when he was

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here. They tried to ignore him, and I think in the letter that my husband wrote to President Johnson, when he was state senator, he told him that Wallace did get a lot of--well, he had a lot of people there, and they were all excited by his pronouncements.

B: I think your husband mentioned the *Austin American-Statesman* in particular, as deliberately--

L: Distorting?

B: --distorting the Wallace speech and the reception. Do you recall that? Do you recall why the *Statesman*--?

L: Well, they were just very much against anything progressive at that time. We had a very conservative paper. They were always lambasting me, and Homer Rainey, when he was running for governor. They were always against Ralph Yarborough, and they put us in a very bad light any time that they got a chance.

B: But they were pro-Johnson, weren't they?

L: Yes. They supported President Johnson. He had a lot of conservatives that believed in him and supported him, and the newspaper was one of them. The owner of the newspaper was one of his best friends and supported him, and of course Herman Brown was one of his great supporters, and of course all of the establishment here was for the President when he was running for the U.S. Senate.

B: Was he perceived at that time by most people, do you think, in Texas as a conservative, a moderate, or a liberal?

L: He was a moderate, and he was trying to stay as far away from the liberals as he could in order to get elected, but he had good support. The liberals didn't have any place else to go. They certainly didn't want Coke Stevenson.

B: Yes. In this same letter, Mr. Stuart Long indicates to LBJ that he's disappointed that LBJ saw fit to make a disparaging remark about Henry Wallace and his patriotism, and Long says that this has lost him about ten thousand votes in Travis County, and he doesn't know how many it's gained him, maybe two: Dan Moody's and O. P. Lockhart's. Do you recall all that?

L: I recall that. I think Stuart was exaggerating, trying to get LBJ's attention so that he would pay more attention to the liberals.

B: Did that sort of thing ever do him any good with LBJ, do you think? Do you think that that got LBJ's attention [inaudible]?

L: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Stuart worked him very nicely, and he wrote him very amusing letters at some times. The one that I really chuckle over every

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time I look at it is the letter where he wrote to him and he said, "Lyndon Johnson, S.O.B.," and then he put in parentheses, "Senate Office Building," and when Lyndon wrote back, he wrote, "Lyndon Johnson, S.O.B."

(Laughter)

But he was always [approaching him] in a very clever way, I think, and I think President Johnson really enjoyed Stuart's way of getting to him. And he did, and he advised him a lot. In many of Stuart's letters he would say, "You ought to do this," "You ought to do that," or "I want to point this out." It was just amazing how sometimes he almost just told him what to do.

B: Yes, I've noticed that he criticized him particularly on his voting against labor and civil rights.

L: Yes. Early. Early on. Yes. Yes. And he would always answer. You notice he always answered those letters. They had an ongoing conversation.

B: One of my favorite remarks Mr. Long made in one of his letters to LBJ was--he was talking about LBJ and labor, and he said, "Frankly, I can't get my friends to get excited about making you a senator when even Fulton Lewis brags about what a good man you are since you sobered up from that FDR binge."

L: (Laughter) That's the way he wrote to him.

B: So apparently LBJ was perceived as much more conservative than he had been when he was a staunch New Dealer in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

L: Yes, he had to do this in order to carry some of his--a great number--he had to get some votes from both sides in order to beat Coke Stevenson.

B: Do you think LBJ was getting more pressure from the right, from conservatives, to move, to be more conservative, or more pressure from the liberals?

L: Oh, I'm sure that he was getting pressure from the right, so to speak. That's where his money came from, to run on. You can't run without money, and even though it didn't take nearly as much to run in that day and time, it still took a lot of money, [it was] considered a lot then. The liberals didn't have a lot of money, and they gave their little twenty-fives and fifties and thousands, but some of these big law firms and big oil men, and Brown & Root, big contractors, they--and a great number of them were antilabor and fought labor. In fact, Brown & Root was the biggest labor baiter in the whole state, and had some bitter fights. So he had to do this to balance out his campaign, and we understood it. Some of our ultraliberal friends did not, and they hated

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him for it. I don't know what they did. I know one time they went off and voted--in a liberal-conservative thing--they went off and voted for John Tower, some of the liberal wing, and made him U.S. senator, and he stayed there for years. If they'd have voted for--I believe it was Waggonner Carr at the time--but they split the vote, and we lost to a Republican senator. But the majority of the liberals used common sense.

B: Understood why he was doing that?

L: Yes.

B: We'll get back to some more of those letters, but I'd like to change the subject just a little bit. In October 1948, you wrote LBJ explaining that there was concern that "weeds and grass were taking over Lake Austin," and you asked him if there was not a federal agency that could do something about it since the federal government did have an investment in the Colorado River dams. Was he able to help you with this, and, in general, was he able to help you with matters that came up in your work on the City Council that you often asked him--?

L: Well, no. At that time we made application for federal funds, and usually things went through the mayor, but this was just a little pet project of mine that I wanted to do something about and wasn't getting any help from the mayor or council, so I just decided that I'd see if we could get some help from him. I don't recall that we got any help there because--it's an unusual problem. Because we have a lot of sunlight and clear water, the weeds grow, and the algae, and we've had this problem always. We still have it. You know, they lower the lake in the late winter while there's still a chance that it might freeze, so it will freeze some of that growth back, but we still have the problem. It isn't gone.

B: Can you think of any other local problems that you took to LBJ?

L: Not personally. We always did it through Mayor Tom Miller, or the mayor, if we had a problem that we felt--like getting money for Bergstrom or--I remember when Stuart was president of the AVC, American Veteran's Committee. He went to LBJ to get him to help us get public housing through the university for students. And the university wouldn't come through with it, [but] we did get some public housing. The city sponsored it. And that was just the whole council, working through the mayor, to get LBJ to help us there, and he did. We got that housing, and it was down there on the lake front, now where the gazebo is, about in that area. And married students lived there, and it put a lot of kids through school, helped them.

And then, the same thing when they were trying to get this housing, they found that there was some barracks at--parked someplace. I've forgotten where they were, but anyway, they got the university finally to come in.

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B: Was LBJ quite instrumental in that?

L: Oh, yes. Yes. He worked very hard on that.

B: Tell me about that first campaign in 1948, your first campaign for city council. Do you remember any special problems you ran into, being the first woman to run for this position in Austin?

L: No. Of course, there were a lot of jokes about the little woman that ought to be home taking care of my children, and I had a six-weeks-old baby when I announced. That was Jeff. He was just hardly out of the hospital.

But we were well organized. That was the year we organized the county and the state for President Truman, the liberals. We were well organized, and our machinery was really clicking, so this county--we had every precinct chairman and people working in the precincts, so I was working with the League of Women Voters in the precincts for different political things--aside from the League of Women Voters, because they are nonpartisan. But when President Johnson resigned from the Congress to go to the Senate, and Homer Thornberry resigned from the city council to run for Congress, that left his seat vacant, and there was quite a discussion and some controversy. The conservative element, or the old crowd here, the establishment, wanted Mayor Miller to appoint Jim Nash to the vacancy, and Tom Miller, who was mayor, said "No, we have to have an election because it's more than six months before an election, and the charter says we have to have an election." So that left a vacancy, and I had been very active, and some of my friends said, "Emma, why don't you run?" And I said, "Well, great!" We had a lot of women working in the field then, in politics. So when I announced, well, everybody was just thrilled to death. [Inaudible] just says, "Wheel!", like that.

So then the establishment, the people that usually ran the council and decided who was going to run and who would do what, they decided that they would run their candidate, but they couldn't get together. So three--at least three or four--businessmen ran for office that time, and I just outworked them and out-campaigned them, and I had a real good platform. Austin was really not doing anything, just kind of sitting there, squatting down after World War II. The buses were bad. The streets were bad. People were unhappy with the performance of the council and what it was not doing for them. So it gave me a good chance to bring out all the things that needed to be done and that I would hope to do if I got elected. And all the men ran, and that day we just had--what is it? A plurality? They had five people to run, and so some of them just knocked each other off, and my vote brought me in. I came in with the high vote, which was remarkable. And of course then that created lots of stir down at the city hall. They finally built me a little rest room back there in the city hall so I could--we had long council meetings, you know, and the nearest rest room was up on the second or third floor; I've forgotten which. And so Taylor Glass [?],

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and Bill Drake, and Will Wilson, and Mayor Miller were all there, and they laughed about, "They have this small child," and they said, "Well, we'll have to get a potty for the baby," and they made silly remarks like that and said, "Now, are we going to have to clean up our jokes or our language?" I guess they did, because--that was the kind of thing. It was all very, very chauvinist. They just didn't know what to think. They couldn't believe that a woman had won.

And of course there was a lawsuit to try to say that this election was null and void, but they--

B: How did they try to say that it was null and void? What was the--?

L: That they should have had appointed somebody instead of having an election. That was thrown out of court, and I was elected. And they said it was already decided when I was elected, so--

B: Who tried to bring that suit?

L: A man by the name of Stevenson, and I don't know his initial. But he was part of the established group, and they felt that--and it was after I had been elected. I think the suit was filed after I was elected, and then it was thrown out of court.

B: You were city councilwoman for quite a long time. Over the years, did the men on the council get more used to having you serve and more comfortable with having a woman as their peer?

L: Yes, they did, but they were scared of me (Laughter) because I didn't make any bones about speaking out. If they were wrong, I'd just tell them so right there at the city council, and maybe even embarrass them at times. The heads of the departments were all very respectful. They got respectful, let's say. At first, I had kind of a time breaking them in. But the first six months, it played into my hands, because we had a telephone rate case coming up, and then the bus company wanted a new franchise, and they wanted to raise the rates. The way that they had always done this--you are required by law to have to have a public hearing, but Mayor Miller would--the man from the telephone company, and I can't think of his name; maybe I will--he was head of this district. He'd come over, and he'd meet with Mayor Miller in his office, and he'd say, "We're going to file this case for a rate increase, in so-and-so and so-much," and Mayor Miller would say, "Oh, that's too much!" And then they'd talk, and they'd finally settle on something, and so--

B: Real back-room--?

L: Yes. And then they'd just bring it out, and the council would vote for it. So this time I just raised all kinds of objections, and I said, "That's far too much. We can't have this. We need a rate expert." Well, they stalled it off by putting it off, you know, and kind of keeping the council off balance. But finally, they did pass an in-

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crease, and I objected. I voted against it. It [was] too much. But they weren't exactly chomping on the bit to do it, because they realized that I was making a lot of friends. The public were all against this increase, and they were very vocal about it. So the council voted once, and then, because I wouldn't go along--they wanted me to go along with them so it would be unanimous, and I wouldn't--so they waited another term. Well, I saved about a thousand dollars a day every time we postponed it, for the citizens of Austin.

B: Hanging on there for a while.

L: But anyway they finally passed it, and as a result, in 1949, Mayor Miller was so unpopular that he decided not to run. A lot of his friends were angry with him because he had voted for Truman and had gone with the liberals in that election, and the conservatives that had gone for the Republicans, that had always supported him, offered him the presidency of the chamber of commerce if he wouldn't run. And oh, he was furious about it! That was a step down, and he wasn't going to do that. So he quit; he didn't run. He was badly hurt. His feelings were hurt because this group decided that they thought maybe somebody else would be better. So that, and with the bus situation which was rocking along, and we had big meetings on that. Large delegations met.

B: Were you the only one on the council on that issue, too, that was against the increase?

L: Yes, I was. I was the one that was making the objections and trying to--because the bus service was not good. The telephone service wasn't that good either, because it was overloaded, and it hadn't been revitalized after World War II, and there was no reason--they weren't spending a lot of money. Anyway, [because of] those two issues, when I ran again in 1949, six months after I ran the first time, I had garnered a lot of support, and I didn't have any problem winning hands down, and the people that were opposed to me really worked hard.

B: I was going to say, was there a lot of money put in a campaign against you?

L: Yes.

B: But you'd gained so much grassroots support because of your positions that you just won handily?

L: Yes, I did. But then the next year they had a charter amendment to change the way the council would be elected. We started with the place system, and we had a charter amendment--which I did not approve of--to make each person on the city council choose a place. It didn't mean anything but a number. And the idea was that they would choose a woman and a black, maybe, and a Hispanic and a liberal, maybe, and then one conservative, and split my vote and get rid of me. But it didn't work. But that was the reason--

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B: Pretty elaborate scheme.

L: Yes, it was. It changed the charter, and I believe that was in 1950 or 1951, I believe, the first year we had the--the place system is what it is called.

B: Was that 1949 campaign where there were charges that you were a communist?

L: No, I believe that was in 1951.

B: That would make more sense. That would be the time period when that would come up.

L: And they tried to connect me with the CIO, which was a dirty word in Texas in that day and time, and they were so vicious in their campaign against me that it just kind of backfired, and I came in--and I think after that they almost decided not to support me. But I did have some support. All along the Johnson people supported me, and Mayor Miller always supported me, and Mayor Miller brought along some of his friends. I could have some--not a lot of the old establishment but some, and particularly a lot of the women liked me very much. They said, "If you want anything done at City Hall, just call Emma Long," and my phone rang just constantly, constantly! It was just always--but at that time, we had so many streets that were not paved in the City of Austin, and these caliche streets--the dust would just choke people to death, and they couldn't keep their houses--and it made them sneeze and cough. We watered the streets, which I thought was ridiculous because it doesn't last over thirty minutes. So we started putting an asphalt water on the streets, which was better.

And dogs would bother people. And the street lights--they didn't have street lights, and the streets were not well kept. Those that were paved had big holes in them, and those that were unpaved needed to be graded. We just had all kinds of growth problems, because it was soon after World War II, and everything had been frozen, and there was not much that you could do, even the city, for catching up.

So it was in the period of rapid growth, and we had lots of problems, and anybody would call me, anything they'd call me for--boy, I'd tackle it! And I became very popular with the women and the elderly, and I worked awfully hard at it. I was like Jake Pickle. You know, I think he's a terrific man for--there's no problem that he doesn't--if you write him a letter, well, he gets it, and he does what he can, and he'll write you and tell you what he can do and what he can't do. This is what I always did. I've run into people even now that say, "Oh, I remember you. I called you about a zoning thing. "I called you about a street light, about my neighbor's garbage cans." Oh, just all kinds of problems. So, it was fun.

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B: Do you remember who, specifically, put their money up against you? Any specific names?

L: Names? Well, I would say that--E. W. Jackson. He was one of the leaders. And Walter Long, who was at the chamber of commerce, and who else in the chamber of commerce? There's Ed St. John [?], who was one time a--and Everett Swann [?], who was with the Retail Grocers Association, was--I don't know why they were against me, but they were. Oh, Will Johnson represented them on the council at one time. A lot of the developers at that time were against me, and I can't name any of those. I guess--I can't remember Nash-Phillips, what position they took, but they never did put any money in my campaign, so I guess they were putting it on the other side. The banks were all against me. They were part of the established group that always had somebody representing them on the bank [council?]. You see, Mayor Miller was [with] the American National Bank, and one time I served on the council with--I guess Bartholomew [?] was on the council when I went on--

End of Side 1 of Tape 1 and Interview II

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