

INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE J. C. LOONEY OF EDINBURG, TEXAS

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

October 3, 1968

F: Judge, to start, let's have a little identification. How long have you been in the Valley? Where did you come from? In other words let's get you down to the present.

L: I'm a native of Mississippi. I lived in Tennessee, however, before I came to the Valley. I went to law school and received a B. A. degree at Vanderbilt University. Got my law degree in 1926. My bachelor's in 1924. Came to the Valley in the fall of 1926, which is 42 years ago this month. I have practiced law here continuously since that time.

F: Where did you get the title "Judge"?

L: I was County Judge here for six years -- three two-year terms in the 1940's.

F: Where did you first come to know President Johnson?

L: During his first campaign for the Senate in 1941.

F: What part did you take in that?

L: I believe they designated me as his district manager; that is, I looked after the 13 counties that were then in the 15th Congressional District and attempted to get campaign managers in each county. Of course, I worked with them. I was kind of the coordination for

that District, as he had them all over the State.

F: Did he divide his campaign by Congressional districts?

L: Yes.

F: Was he fairly well-known down in this area by that time, or did you have to give him his first exposure?

L: No. He was not known very well in this area, although he had taught school in LaSalle County, which is in the western end of this district, as a young man and had some relatives in that area. Had some contacts. And of course having been with the [National] Youth Administration, he had had contacts and also having been secretary to Congressman [Richard] Kleberg, he had had some contact. But no wide acquaintance. He wasn't known. Politically, he was a Congressman for a couple of terms, but that was in the Austin district and he was not well-known in this area.

F: Who contacted you to be his representative?

L: Well, originally he had talked with Senator [Rogers] Kelly, who was State Senator at that time and was in Austin about the situation down here and about what might be done in his behalf. And Senator Kelly talked to me about it because I was here on the ground.

F: The Senator is your law partner, right?

L: Right. This is correct. And he talked to me about it. Of course, Senator Kelly had at that time a little obligation maybe to Governor [W. Lee] O'Daniel, who was of course to be one of the candidates. And no obligation to support him particularly, but he was in the Senate, and Governor O'Daniel had appointed Judge Norvell, who had been our law partner, to the Court of Civil Appeals. I had nothing to do with that. But Senator Kelly felt some hesitancy about getting in the forefront too much in the thing, although he liked the Congressman very much and had a very high regard for him.

So I started in trying to see what could be lined up on the campaign and just kind of scouting the situation out. I can't remember exactly when--but before too long he called me and asked me---said he'd checked out over the district and he thought that I would be the best person to handle his affairs. Best person that would be available to handle his affairs in that campaign. After checking with a few of our political friends, I concluded that I would be glad to do it.

F: What did you do to give him exposure and make him known?

L: Well, the usual things you do in a political campaign. Of course, here, particularly at that time, you had a good deal of what you might call bloc-voting, what they do call bloc-voting, areas

where a comparatively few people were able to influence a substantial number of voters in a statewide race. More so than they could in a local race where the persons were individually known. Naturally I contacted as many of them as I could, and that was the first. In fact, I contacted a good many of them before I gave my answer on what I would do about trying to handle the campaign for him.

F: Who are these bloc leaders? What kind of people?

L: Well, they were --- some of them Latin, some of them of Latin extraction or Spanish extraction, and some of them were Anglos. And they were people like the Independent Club in Laredo, which was then headed largely by Judge Manuel Ramon and of course Judge Valls was living at that time. And Judge Bob Bibb in Eagle Pass and of course the Knaggs boys were in the Winter Garden area; Dutch, I believe, was County Clerk at Cotulla, and let's see---Arthur, I get them a little mixed up---I believe he was the sheriff over at Carrizo Springs in Dimmitt County. And then on down of course at that time the Guerras were in control pretty much of Starr County. And then Zapata County--I believe Sheriff Sanchez and Manuel Cuellar, who is still the County Clerk up there.

In this county there were quite a number of political organizations--people like Ed Vela, who is still the Mayor in Hidalgo. E. B. Reyna was pretty strong in the La Joya district. And then of course Harry Ridgway at Donna. He was manager of the irrigation district and there was a pretty strong political organization there, although Mr. Ridgway didn't go along with us in that first election. Various people like that and of course the same thing in Cameron County.

F: What did you base your approach on? Why would you come to my club and tell me to vote for Lyndon Johnson?

L: Well, one---Johnson had a reputation of being a comer. I had known this before I ever met him. I had known of his activities as Kleberg's secretary. I had known that he was aggressive and that he was a very capable man. And while I was not unfriendly with Gerry Mann, I wasn't really friendly with Gerry Mann, but I had no particular tie and he didn't ask me to do anything. And I had gotten into that situation. I wasn't against Governor O'Daniel, but I just never felt that he would be a potent power in the United States Senate. And I just felt like Johnson had the best possibilities--was the best man in the group. And that was more or less the basis. Anybody that's involved

in politics, that works at it, wants to know that their voice is going to be heard if they're successful. And he had that reputation.

F: Did he campaign actively down here?

L: Yes, of course, he was ill during part of that campaign. Everett Looney made the most vigorous campaign for him--a campaign trip. Of course, this thing ran just a very short time, and Everett Looney came down here--- You see, that was a bad rainy year. I'd just gone in as County Judge, and I knew the effect of it because people were harassing me to death about getting the water off their land. But Everett came down here and he went from town to town and talked to whomever he could get. I think they still have pictures of him in maybe not hip boots, but just rubber boots, but with a raincoat trying to make speeches in the water that was in a lot of the towns up at times several inches deep, if not a foot or so deep.

F: Was much said about flood control in the campaign?

L: Undoubtedly something of it, but probably not a whole lot. I don't remember a whole lot of it at that time. Of course, now Congressman Johnson came down, I think, and made two talks that I recall. One in Harlingen and one in McAllen, I believe. But I don't recall his being here. I know he wasn't here for any town-to-town speaking at that time. But of course there was a lot said about flood control.

We were not only conscious of it, but I'm sure that we explained to the people there that we would have a voice there in Congress that could speak for us in connection with it, because we did. The County did solicit federal aid in doing something about the drainage problem.

F: Was it as close an election here as it was over the State?

L: The first election?

F: Yes.

L: Yes, sir, it was. The way I remember it in this county, I believe O'Daniel probably led the ticket. Gerry Mann was second, and Johnson was third. I don't think there was a hundred votes between the top and the bottom man in the race. Which was really very gratifying to us, because both Mann and O'Daniel were well-known and didn't have a big vote.

Now over the district it was better. Of course, in Cameron County it was close. But over the district in particular some of these counties where there was more solid voting, it was better.

F: Incidentally, are you kin to Everett Looney?

L: Everett always called me his country cousin.

F: Well, people have said "yes, he's his cousin," and others have said, "no, there's ---"

L: That's it. He always kidded me, called me his country cousin.

But I'm sure the families, as far as we know and there has been some work done on it--- All the Looneys in this country come from one source, and are related to that extent. In that sense, but no.

F: Well, now, did you have any further relationship with Congressman Johnson after the election was over? When he ran again in 1948?

L: Not a great deal. Of course, you know, soon thereafter we got into war, and he was in the service for I don't know how long--a couple of years--until the President called them all back. We had some contact but no great contact during that period of time from then until 1948.

F: And then in 1948 did you fulfill the same role?

L: Yes, sir, I did. Continuously every time he ever ran.

F: How did that campaign differ from the one in 1941?

L: Well, of course the 1948 campaign was ----Well, it was a short campaign too. You know he announced, what was it, the 28th of May or something like that. I didn't have any inkling he was going to run, and it was a short campaign. And of course the first primary was the last of July. It differed down here a whole lot. He was of course known then from the previous campaign, and the sentiment was much better for him. Although Stevenson was well-supported and liked, and particularly by the more conservative element, the

Note from Judge Looney: "Right now I can't place Dan. Was there a fourth party in the race? I can't remember right now."

Republican element, which of course voted in that election and by a lot of the state political people who had been connected with the State Administration. And Stevenson was, of course, a real strong candidate.

Peddy got a good deal of votes, but he wasn't a factor.* Dan wasn't any substantial factor down here. But Johnson was the favorite of the Latin people all over South Texas, particularly in this Congressional District, and in that election we were the second highest District in the State. Next to his home district.

F: Why did the Latins like him?

L: Well, he had a certain rapport with them. Maybe he liked them. You know, people kind of sense that and he had a feeling for them and lived among them and worked with them to some extent. And they like a person that is warm, and he is warm. And of course Governor Stevenson was rather cold and aloof. And I think that partly contributed to it. And the leaders throughout the area were in the main--they were Johnson people. And, of course, work had been done with them. And he had had a chance to meet them and visit with them, and he tended to understand their problems and they felt they understood his.

F: Did you ever hear him speaking Spanish to any of them?

L: Not appreciably. I don't believe he at that time, at least, was fluent in Spanish. Oh, he would use some phrases, but I don't recall that he ever tried conversations with them or make speeches in Spanish.

F: Was he more active personally down here in this campaign than in the previous one?

L: Yes. He was. Now, of course, that was the time he had the gallstone operation.

F: Kidney stones.

L: Kidney stones. He was out some, but he was more active in this campaign than he was in the ---

F: This was the one in which he used the helicopter, wasn't it? Did he use it here?

L: Yes, he used the helicopter. He hit everyone of these little towns, particularly in the Valley area here, about 15 or 20 of them, he hit every one of them.

F: In the runoff, did you change your tactics any from what they had been in the primary?

L: Not appreciably. Except we just tried to do more of it. I just noticed that I have some figures here that I ran off. That first

primary, you see, he carried this district about two for one. Almost two for one. And of course he did about the same in the second primary. No, I don't think we did, except we just really worked hard. Of course, we had a good result from the first primary, and people were not inclined to look back.

F: Am I correct in my understanding that you had a significant part in the local election contests here that had some bearing on the contest for the Senatorial race? It seems to me there was a Judgeship, County Judgeship down there. That there was some kind of a contest that set a precedent.

L: I don't place it. I don't know what it is. Of course, the Jim Wells County thing was ---I wasn't in that as a lawyer or in any other capacity. It wasn't in our Congressional district. I knew about it, of course.

Well, now, you know there was a suit that Ed Johnson held up in Brownwood that---

F: My informant may have been confused with Brownwood and Brownsville.

L: There was a suit up there, and I've forgotten exactly what the facts were, but----I'd have to refresh my memory.

F: You were not involved?

L: But that had a good deal of bearing. I mean, it didn't have any bearing, but it was a reverse of the situation that they had in this Jim Wells County thing. I can't remember any election contest at that time that had any pertinence as far as ---

F: There wasn't any threat of a contest in this district over the results?

L: No. It was overwhelming in the district.

F: Had your bloc-voting habits changed any between 1941 and 1948, or were they pretty much the same?

L: I would say they weren't too different. But we were able to get better support, although the support was good in 1941 over the district. We got much better results in Hidalgo County, which was probably the largest county --largest voting county-- in the Congressional district. But our results were appreciably better in 1948 than in 1941. And particularly the runoff results. By a little better than ten to seven. Which when you are dealing with 20,000 votes makes a good bit of difference.

F: Were there any particular issues that were peculiar to this area, that Mr. Johnson worked as against what Mr. Stevenson's stand would be?

L: Yes. Of course we were in the midst of a drought, and being an irrigated area--that is, this immediate part, not the whole district. But this particular lower Valley country was short of water, and one thing that Johnson hammered on was doing something about the water problem. And he did try to, as a matter of fact. I am sure he was conscious because of his work with the Guadalupe Valley and Colorado and all that area. And he was conscious of all this

water problem in Texas, but he was particularly conscious of it down here. And as a result of it, you know, the proposal to bring the water from the Sabine down to the river [Rio Grande], the Bureau of Reclamation came up with that project originally at his request, as I understand it, following his election to the Senate.

F: What has ever happened to that proposal?

L: Well, it's still in existence. Now they're coming out with another one now on the Mississippi. It has never been put into effect, of course, but they're going to divulge a new project, as I understand it within the next [year].

F: Is there still some pressure along this line?

L: Yes, sir, there's a lot of pressure. Of course, there's a lot of pressure for it. For projects of this nature. Never been able to get it over.

F: Did Mr. Johnson, once Senator, play a significant role in the location of the Falcon Dam?

L: Yes. Of course, the agreement had already been made before he became Senator. The International Agreement. Yes, he sponsored the legislation and fostered it. But, of course, Senator [Tom] Connally was there, too, and worked on this.

- F: To stay on politics a little longer--now in 1954 you played the same role again but with no particular contest?
- L: Wasn't that the year that what's his name from up at Beeville----
- F: [Dudley] Dougherty.
- L: Yes, Dougherty ran. That wasn't any significant campaign. But that's correct. Once he got in the Senate why he was pretty good about keeping up his fences, and he came down not just on election year, but he came down on all the years when he could get off. When Congress wasn't in session. And toured the area. Of course, he toured all of Texas. He toured it town by town, and we'd set up coffees or small meetings--group meetings--in every town. And he did that.
- F: When you had these coffees, did he make a brief speech or did he just listen to problems? How did that work?
- L: He made speeches generally. Oh, of course, he would listen to other people, too. There were always a lot of people wanting to talk to him and it was hard to move on and meet your appointments.
- F: He never has been one to stay on schedule.
- L: No, and it's hard to keep him going.
- F: Were you involved in that State Democratic fight up in Dallas in 1956?
- L: Yes

F: Would you give me your impressions of that?

L: It was a pretty bitter fight, and it was a bitter fight down here. You see, Governor Shivers, you know, is a kind of semi-resident here--his wife has lived here all her life--and there was strong feeling for Shivers, particularly in this county. And we had a pro-Shivers woman on the State Committee and so we had a lot of problems here. We won the Convention and were eventually seated, but I'm sure through her efforts, there was a considerable fight against us.

F: Did you send contesting delegations from here?

L: Yes.

F: On what basis?

L: Oh, it was fairly close. I should say we won by a comparatively small number of votes, maybe 5 percent or something like that. And there was one precinct that contended that they were in the majority and that they didn't get the delegation.

F: Who was your Committeewoman, incidentally?

L: Mrs. Hendricks.

F: Do you know her full name? [J. C. L. nods head negatively] It doesn't matter--I can find it out. In the actual Convention, was the fight in Dallas before the Credentials Committee to seat you close?

L: Let me see. I'm probably a little mixed up.

F: Well you've been up in a lot of things.

L: That's right. This is not the Convention--that 1956 Convention was the Dallas Convention.

F: This was the one where Rayburn and Johnson came down and ----

L: They were down in 1958, too. No, we didn't have too much trouble on that Convention. No, there wasn't much trouble on seating, and of course, you know, the Johnson forces had control of that Convention pretty well until they let Doss Hardin get hold of the loud speaker. I'm just not sure which Convention that was. No, this Convention I'm thinking about didn't go for Eisenhower. The Amarillo Convention went for Eisenhower.

F: That would be 1952.

L: No, in this Dallas Convention, the Johnson forces were in pretty good control. And where they slipped out is when they let Doss Hardin get hold of that microphone, and then they seated the Dallas-- well, liberal delegation, on the agreement that they'd support them, and then they backed out of that. Because that's the Convention where Mrs. Lloyd Bentsen, Jr. was named for National Committeewoman. I know, I was on the Committee on Nominations. But she finally withdrew because the Convention had just gotten out of hand.

F: That's the one where they chose Mrs. Randolph, right?

L: That's right. The Convention I'm thinking about is a different [one].

F: What did you do in the 1960 campaign?

L: I was active for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, and I maintained that same capacity.

F: Did you go to Los Angeles?

L: Yes. And I was in the same capacity in this Congressional district.

F: Did you have any inkling that Mr. Johnson would accept the Vice-Presidential nomination?

L: No, sir. Not the slightest.

F: What was the reaction of you and your cohorts when you learned this?

L: Well, most of them were considerably upset. You remember Governor Daniel made some statements on national radio.

F: Some of the Kennedys were upset too.

L: But a great lot of the Texas delegation were certainly upset. And my immediate family were there, and they were considerably upset. They just couldn't see, you know, how he would go along with a thing like that. I realized that --- I thought I realized that it was a pretty smart political move.

F: Did you have much trouble then getting support when you came home?

L: It took time. And also of course the Republicans [and] the ultra-conservatives--they tried to pick at you all the time. And pick at

your people. You know, it was a pretty mean campaign. It tried to be waged on little things, rather than on what's best for the country. And it was really probably one of the meanest campaigns, as far as that is concerned.

F: How did you counteract this reaction that set in against Johnson right after he accepted the nomination?

L: Locally, we didn't have so much of it. You see one thing that we had was that a lot of those people were Johnson friends and a lot of our people were. And the ones that had been for him, why, whatever he did, they thought that was all right. Then of course, we have a strong Catholic group here. And of course the Catholic issue was a big issue. I mean, it was the first time they [Catholics] had had a chance--first real chance--to elect a President. And they were strong for him. And that helped a tremendous amount in this particular area.

F: Did you form Viva Kennedy-Johnson Clubs here?

L: Yes

F: Were they more or less a duplication of the old bloc groups?

L: No, not too much. They helped, because they were largely a group of people that had really not had too much part and I guess were the beginning of the new politics. They were people that were not too

much politically in line. They were Democrats, but they hadn't had too much connection. And it helped cement a group and make them active that had not been active before. Most of what we called the Old Line--Democratic Latins or Mexican-Americans, or whatever you want to call them, they were Johnson people and they didn't participate much in this "Viva Kennedy," but they were glad to see it. Because they were glad they had this support.

F: Did Mr. Johnson over the years, between campaigns or during campaigns, do much to broaden the participation of your Latin-American voter in this area? This has been one of the revolutions during our time.

L: Yes, that's right. Of course, there has probably been more done since he was President than at any other time. Probably wasn't too much done [previously]. He probably didn't have too much opportunity to do it. But the Latins, generally speaking, have always supported him and have, in that sense, supported him enthusiastically. And in that sense, it did broaden the participation while he was in the Senate.

F: They were more likely to vote.

L: That's right. If they are enthusiastically for somebody, why, they get more people out.

F: What has he done as President to increase the Latin-American vote?

L: All of these programs that they have beginning even with Kennedy---
You see, the "Viva Kennedy" people, as I said were largely
a group that had been interested but had never had too much to
tie to. They had never any place that gave them any prestige.
And of course, you know PASO grew out of that, and while it
wasn't so prestigious, still it gave them----

F: Another handle.

L: Yes, that's right. It gave people a position that didn't have it before.

F: Has this broader participation to a great extent been helped by the
abolition of the poll tax, or did that really make any difference?

L: Undoubtedly it has helped some. Yes, that's right. The registra-
tion has increased appreciably. Actually, there are a lot of people
that register that don't vote, though. You haven't gotten a big vote.
You may see it in the general election this year, but we do have a
lot more people registering. And at times we have more people
voting. But not as appreciably as you might [think].

F: Has Mr. Johnson made a fairly conscious effort to build up leaders
of Mexican background down here?

L: Yes, he has. No, I won't say necessarily as much leaders, but he
has been responsible for appointing a great many of them to public
office--high public office--that have never held it before. And in

that way, he has inspired a lot of them to take part. And then of course, the poverty programs and the programs that grow out of it have caused more participation and given them better jobs.

F: Will the Mexicans tend to go for the person that they believe in regardless of whether they're conservative, liberal, or anything else?

L: That's correct. Their political philosophy doesn't control them like it does a lot of Anglos. It has some bearing on them.

F: Have you had the making of a fairly strong Latin-American Republican group here?

L: It hasn't shown itself yet.

F: But you do have a kind of conservative-liberal split among the Latins?

L: That's right.

F: Is it old family versus newer family? Is it based on social and economic position? What's the basis?

L: Originally, it's on jockeying for position. Some of it is based on actual philosophy. Really most of ours are really pretty liberal when it comes to programs that they think will favor their people-- their race.

F: Have you had a significant change in the use of Latin-Americans in various public offices such as your customs officials, border patrol, and so on? Has that changed any, or does it stay about the same?

L: I don't know about the customs and border patrol. I don't know of too many of them that are in those services. Although there are some in those services. But many other services have had a big change in them. For instance, Internal Revenue agents. You have lots of Internal Revenue agents of Mexican extraction.

F: They tend to be picked from this area?

L: Yes, some of them. And, of course, many other fields. You have a tremendous increase in teachers, in municipal officials, also in the professions. There are a great many Mexican doctors. Some of the best in this area are of Mexican extraction. Of course, lots more lawyers---Always were some lawyers, but [now] a greater percentage. A greater percentage of accountants. Appreciably, you know.

F: In the 1964 campaign, did you have much of a Goldwater group in this area? Or was this pretty much Johnson country straight through?

L: Johnson country. There was a good deal of Goldwater talk. But it went to Johnson pretty strong.

F: What happened to the Goldwater talk?

L: Well, of course one thing, they [pro-Goldwater people] were more volatile, I mean more explosive as a group. They talk louder. But when

they got to looking around and they (Mexican people) found that the talk wasn't supported by very much, it kind of wilted. Then a lot of the leaders of the community that maybe never had been too strong for Johnson backed off Goldwater, and that had a lot of influence.

F: This is a question of feeling more than fact. As far as you can tell, have the Mexicans in this area cooled on Johnson the way they have in some other parts of the country?

L: I don't think so. The people that have always been for Johnson haven't. Probably some of the young people who never had any tie to him. They probably would go almost anyway, although we had very little [Eugene] McCarthy, for instance, sentiment in the campaign. Everybody down here felt that Johnson preferred Humphrey, and naturally they resented the McCarthy-McGovern people's war attitude. And maybe not as much because they thought we ought to continue the War but they thought Johnson, Kennedy and Eisenhower had established this policy and it should be pursued.

F: You've had an outsized number of participants from here, haven't you?

L: Yes, that's right. I think this town's had--I don't know--eight or ten killed. Maybe more than that. Killed in Vietnam out of a little town of 18 or 20,000--that's a good many losses.

F: But that doesn't make them bitterly anti-War?

L: No. Oh, it may affect the families to some extent. The immediate family. But the people as a whole, it doesn't affect.

F: What have been Mr. Johnson's most effective programs down here?

L: Well, it depends on what you mean by effective.

F: Well, you can look at that two ways. What has worked best or what has been politically best? In tying the area to him?

L: Well, actually, I'm not sure that they associate the programs with him. In other words, I don't think the OEO or Poverty Program have politically helped him very much. I think that maybe the overall programs--I mean by that the general things, that are not entirely characteristic of the Johnson Administration, things like the farm program and the Public Works programs and things of that kind have probably helped him more, maybe politically, than something like the Poverty Program. Of course, you can't exactly tell about a thing like the Poverty Program if you got into a heated political campaign where he was involved. And where you began to separate the sheep from the goats. But they're by nature an uninhibited kind of a people and are inclined to complain and not feel real obligation.

F: Judge, you were the honorary chairman of the Texas delegation in Chicago in the 1968 Convention, were you not?

L: Yes, sir, that's correct.

F: Just what does that entail?

L: Well, it's simply an honor. It doesn't really entail any duties other than just normal duties of a delegate.

F: Well, as you know, the Chicago Convention, I think, may turn out to be a truly historical one. For a number of reasons, I would be very interested in your impressions of it. One thing I would like to know is, when they voted down the unit rule, I was rather surprised in some ways how tightly the Texas delegation stayed together on its several votes, because I know some people in there that I did not think were necessarily Connally people.

L: That's correct, but most of those people felt that they were morally bound, even though they were not legally bound, they felt that since they were there under the unit rule, believing it to be in full force, believing that it would be enforced, that it wouldn't be proper for them to take advantage of the fact that the rule had been abrogated by the Convention.

And, of course, another thing. In the main, they felt that we were probably pretty much right in it. They might have voted otherwise under other circumstances, but they just didn't care to do it under those circumstances. This had been discussed by the group as a whole. Of course, they particularly felt obligated to

support Governor Connally as long as he should be in the race or be considered, and there were quite a number that were not Connally people. That probably had some feelings with the dissenters, but in the main they were supposed to go along with him.

F: Would you agree with some of the critics that it was a rigged or closed Convention?

L: No, any convention is rigged if you've got the votes. I mean by that, it depends on what you called rigged. But if you call having the most votes being rigged, why, it was. And, of course, a great many of those votes were largely committed before the Convention. But everybody was free to vote their own choice. It wasn't set up this way by any group, for instance, by the National Committee or any group other than the candidates--the efforts of the candidates. And Mr. Humphrey simply had the most votes. He had the most people that were for him. Not only that, I think it was general sentiment----Of course, it wouldn't have been that way if he hadn't worked, and if his people hadn't worked. But by the same token I think it was maybe pretty much national sentiment. There's a minority that felt like the dissenters did, but probably the majority of the country----

F: What did you think of the debate on the Vietnam plank?

L: I thought it was real good. I thought that debate was excellent. I

thought both sides conducted themselves well, and both sides made good arguments.

F: I'll agree with you that it was an open Convention if for no other reason than the debate. It's reassuring that you can have one like that.

L: That's right. Well, you've got a situation where the dissenters actually were heard--they would be heard any time that they were considerate, that is if they were decorous, and of course, there were places that things could appear to make it seem closed [but these] were things that were actually more or less irrelevant. People that just wanted to be heard, or that wanted to impose the will of the minority on the will of the majority.

F: Did you find the security measures oppressive?

L: No, sir. I thought that the police were most considerate, and I say this, Chicago people generally--the service people--were very nice and very courteous. Of course, I wasn't out with the dissenters, but I was out around Chicago some and I did bump into police. And whenever I asked them for courtesies, they never showed the slightest indication that they were not trying to be helpful. And I couldn't see any reason why they wouldn't be helpful to anybody if they would to me, because I had no way of identifying what political faith or view I might have. But I thought they were

very considerate. Of course, I realize that there are two sides to these things, and probably police officers should not permit themselves to be stirred up by threats and things of that kind. But a human being is just made that way. If you're attacked or threatened or abused, it's just natural that you're going to resent it, and I think it's pretty hard to train people where they won't.

F: To get back to the Valley, are you conscious of any particular measures regarding Rio Grande Water control, flood control, relief in disaster, that the President may have been involved in this area?

L: You know he came down here after [Hurricane] Beulah, and he did offer all facilities of the government, and the federal government was very cooperative with the people in charge of disaster work. I wasn't involved in it particularly, but they're all very grateful for the assistance that was given. And he ordered all the assistance that could be given.

F: At the time of a major disaster like that, do political lines tend to fade, or do you still have the opposition that feels that the President is just taking advantage of someone's misery by political advancements?

L: They pretty much fade. They pretty much faded in that. The truth is that the disaster chairman or Civil Defense officers-- volunteer officers--their political faith wasn't apparent. Actually, they're not drawn from any particular political segment. They were people that had been selected locally and they all said that they got excellent cooperation. There's no feeling of any political--- And actually I say this. In most of the President's actions, I mean, as Senator, the conduct of most of his actions had never been political. Sometimes I thought not political enough, being embroiled in a fight.

F: For instance?

L: Well, he would help his friends. I mean by that, people that had politically helped him. But he wasn't bashful about calling on somebody else if he thought they were competent to do what he wanted done. Or if he thought they needed it. And to the extent of people that might have vilified him.

F: Can you give an instance of that?

L: Well, it's a little hard to put your finger on exact cases, but I'm sure if I had thought about it a little bit, I could come up with some where he did. Well, I can point out one. I remember when he dedicated the fly factory out here. That's what we call it. The fly factory. You know, this screwworm fly factory. When he

dedicated that, I guess it was in 1961 or 1962, along there, we had a little reception for him over here. And at that time, some people that had always, some Latin people--people of Mexican extraction who had always been opposed to him-- some of them were on hand and he instructed his people to help them with their problems. That is, employment problems, seeing that they got a fair break on jobs, which were even more of a premium than they are now.

F: Critics say that the President never forgets someone who opposes him and nurses it and consequently never forgives. Do you agree with that?

L: Well, I say he has a pretty good memory, but also, he's intelligent. And he recognizes the fact that those people--the people who opposed him have got their place, too, and that they can be helpful to him as a practical matter. And I think he's humane enough to realize that everybody has got some rights whether they supported you or not. So, I think he has a pretty good memory, all right, politically. But you've got to be practical if there wasn't any other consideration. And he's pretty practical.

F: I think the results show that.

- L: Well back to this fruit-fly, I mean this screwworm deal I was talking to you about. There are some of our old time political friends---- They didn't like that at all. They didn't like his helping those people out. But it was a thing that made sense, and of course, they're American citizens--- they had their rights. The fact that they hadn't always supported him wasn't too compelling.
- F: Has the President entered himself in bracero problems or in the problems of the migrant worker or the imported worker from the other side of the River?
- L: Well, I'll say this, he has never to my knowledge intervened to perpetuate the bracero deal--that is, obtaining workers from Mexico. And he has, and this is contrary to the wishes of a lot of people of this country, of this area, he has pushed to increase the wages, the salaries, the income of the lower-classed people. That is, stooped labor people. And of course the bracero program or rather the integration program--bringing in workers from Mexico whether wetbacks or braceros in later years was on the way out before he became too prominent on the national level. But I don't believe he has ever lent himself very much to try the discontinuance of the Bracero Program.
- F: Did he show his hand at all in the La Casita-Helga situation?

L: Not that I know of. I'm sure that he did not.

F: This was strictly run from state to state.

L: Yes.

F: Has he noticeably in this area done anything either to strengthen or loosen U.S. - Mexican relations?

L: Well, principally I think it's exhibited in the meetings he has had with the Mexican heads of state. And, of course, he has always been--or generally been--friendly with the Mexican heads of state regardless of whether they supported us or not. He had something to do when they were attempting to decrease the amount of imports, you know, in connection with the gold situation a year or two ago. I'm sure that he probably, at least, didn't express any displeasure at their eliminating Mexico from that program. Which was done, you know. The amount was not reduced. People along the border--on this side of the border--were very much opposed to decreasing the amount of goods they could return.

And, of course, the Telles appointment and border improvement program, he has cooperated.

F: What did he appoint Telles to?

L: I forget what title, but he's the man that works on these projects

on the border. Similar to the job that Bermudez had in Mexico. Except that Mexico's more of a showcase program for border cities. I believe the main job is to get any kind of improvements along the border area. Not necessarily improvements in the cities. But projects that could be approved under existing programs to help improve the area. And, of course, that would inure to the benefit of a great many people of Mexican origin that lived here.

F: Would you say that there is any significant border tension along the Rio Grande?

L: Certainly not along this part of the border. There's no tension. I mean that the officials on the Mexican side are friendly with the officials on the American side. Their relationships are good and oh, there are continuing arguments about things like, for instance, trucks can only come across from Mexico to the nearest town without being licensed in Texas. And you can't haul stuff in Mexico without being licensed there. Continual problems about crossings and things like that, but those are not major problems. They're things that ought to be eliminated, but they're not problems of national importance.

F: Anything else that we ought to discuss?

L: I think reverting to political and practical politics in a practical situation--in handling from the standpoint of a person that's working for a man, his idea was excellent and it worked real well. Certainly it did with us in that he delegated the authority to one man or a few people in an area, and then he held them accountable. But he was tremendously cooperative in that he never came in your district without letting you know. He never made an appointment or took any action--when I say never made an appointment, that might be an overstatement but generally speaking--he kept you apprised of what he was doing and what he was going to do and sought your advice if he could. Of course, in many matters, well, he'd seek your advice then, but there were many matters that he didn't have the final say on. And he abided by what you told him pretty much.

F: You didn't read in the paper that someone from your district had gotten a job and that was the first you had heard of it?

L: That's right. And even if it were something that you knew that he had a part in but that he didn't control and it came up, you knew it had been going on. It came up and it was something that had been arrived at and it had been acted on, he'd have them call you even though it was going to be announced in just a very short time and you'd get the message before it happened. From a standpoint

of a person that's working day to day for an official, that is ---
When I say working, I mean just volunteer-working, it's a
tremendous amount of help to you. And, of course, he was that
way himself. I've heard him say that when he came to the
district, for instance, he liked to see the Congressmen there.
He liked to have the Congressmen greet him. He said when he
was Congressman no Senator ever reached the border of his
district that he didn't meet him and stay with him while he was
in that district. And he was that kind of organization man.

The only other person that I know of that I had ever had any
contact with that was that kind of a man was John Connally.

Whether he learned it from him or whether they learned it from
each other, I don't know, but he does pretty much the same way.

F: In the 1948 runoff you delivered in the district 33,000 votes to
Johnson against about 18,800 for Stevenson. Did Johnson do any
sort of a follow-up on that to let you know how pleased he was
with the results?

L: Oh, yes. Not only me, but of course he followed up with all the
county people and all the people that had been active in the campaign.
Not only by letters but also by telephone to as many as he could
reach.

I think there might be one other thing that you might be

interested in. This is of course record, but this congressional district in the 1960 campaign--the majority in this district--was greater than the Kennedy-Johnson margin in Texas. Of course, this wasn't the only district that that was the case. I believe probably two others. Probably the Austin district, maybe I'm right on that, and maybe the 14th in Nueces County. That Congressional district.

F: He ran way ahead of the Texas ticket--that is the national ticket in Texas?

L: Actually we ran about 2 to 1 in those three districts. I think each of them could probably rightfully claim that they were responsible for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket carrying Texas, because each one of them had enough votes. I'm speaking from memory. Because I know we did. I compiled it and sent it in.

F: You could have eliminated this district then and eliminated Kennedy?

L: That's right. I compiled those figures and sent them up to him at the [LBJ] Ranch while Kennedy was there. Shortly after the election and before Christmas.

F: Did Kennedy ever come down here in this area?

L: No, he did come to Laredo in 1956 for the Stevenson-Kefauver ticket. He stopped off there on the way from California and made a talk. But he never came south of San Antonio during the 1960 campaign.

F: Who did the campaigning for the Party in this area? Did Mr. Johnson come down?

L: He came down. He was here on Sunday before election. He was down at Harlingen--came in from New York that day-- and we had a real good crowd. We had parades going from every ---well, we had one parade down U.S. 83, that is, from Mission, McAllen and Harlingen; then we had one parade that went from near Edinburg down 107 east to Harlingen, and we had one come up from Brownsville to Harlingen. We converged down there, and we had a real good show.

F: Did you have one big rally somewhere?

L: That's right. At Harlingen.

F: Where?

L: At the park--that football park field out there by the municipal auditorium. And then he appeared on television that evening, and I believe that was the only trip he made down here. But we had lots of people there. You know, he was in the Senate and he was the man in the Senate, and we had Senators pouring out our ears here. And we got good use of them. We had any number of Senators.

F: You mean U. S. Senators?

L: Yes. Moss from Utah, and oh, the fellow from Nevada---

F: Bible?

L: No, the other one. Well, I believe he's still in the Senate. I can't think of the name now. And we had Dodd.

F: A pretty good show of brass, wasn't it?

L: Yes, sir, actually we really had more than we wanted. But we didn't dare turn them down. [I'm not sure] that I have any answer for it, but you asked about why the Johnson appeal to the Mexican-American. Of course, he did some things that were calculated to endear him like, you know, bury this boy up here at George West [Texas].

F: What was that story?

L: Was this the Korean War?

F: Yes.

L: Where this boy, I believe, was killed in the Korean War and they sent him back--I don't think it was World War II--I think it was the Korean War, and they sent him back and were supposed to have the funeral. They wouldn't bury him in the public cemetery there at George West, and he arranged to have him buried in the National Cemetery in Arlington. Well, of course, that's nothing but a humane thing, but it endeared him to a lot of people, and of course, there's something else thought that you can't put in words, or I can't--not any particular explanation for it except that he has always had a tremendous personality and a tremendous way of when you are in his presence, and I

suppose all great men more or less are that way, but he has a feeling that makes you feel like that you're really somebody and also that he has a kindred spirit with you. And of course, naturally, as much as we could we got him down here, or we got people to other places where he was. Where they could have an opportunity to visit with him, and he always recognized them and had established a real good friendship with a lot of people of Mexican origin in particular; of course, that applied to the Anglo, too.

But it's hard to exactly tell what did cause that relationship. Of course, part of it is probably due to the fact that he had been exposed to the people of Mexican origin and knew something about their traditions and their background and what they liked and what they disliked, and so that gave him an advantage. And when he had an opportunity to meet them or know them under favorable circumstances, that impressed them a lot more.

But he had a real good following with the Mexican-American people. Still has--I don't say he doesn't. Obviously, when you reach the Presidency and are not in constant political contact with them for a period of eight years, why, you lose touch in the first place, and in the second place your old friends pass out of the picture one way or another--they either become inactive

or die or various other things. Young people come on and crowd them out and haven't known you. So you'd naturally have that problem. You see one of his great friends whom I'm sure you know is Dr. Hector Garcia, who is not among the rather established Mexican order--he's kind of a rebel. They consider him just not--well, he's just not conventional and while they don't dislike him or anything--I wouldn't lead you to believe anything like that--but they just don't consider him exactly one of them. But then they've always been close friends. Garcia has always been a strong supporter. One of the ways he has done that, and I have heard Garcia say it, is that he could call him up any time and get him to do anything that was reasonable. And of course the same way he had with Henry Gonzalez. And up until a time with Pena, but I don't think he is now. The thing just kind of came unbridled, I think.

F: I think [Congressman] de la Garza gets along with him rather well.

L: Oh, yes. De la Garza just thinks he's the greatest man in the world. And de la Garza, you know, is a conservative. More conservative than the President. Of course, that illustrates what I mentioned about the conservative Latin. Of course, de la Garza, you look at his voting record, and it's pretty liberal.

But he is elected by ultraconservative people. Of course, he's a pretty capable politician, too. He can get along with those ultraconservative people and, actually, the people he votes with dislike him more than the people he votes against. Well, that's a real tribute. And, of course, a lot of those liberal measures are measures that he thinks will benefit the people of Mexican extraction. And they're his people. I mean, he's entirely conscientious about it and that's the way of a whole lot of these older leaders. They're not against anything. They're not the type that want to downgrade their own people or hurt them or anything like that, but they're just not revolutionaries. They don't care about overthrowing the established order of things to accomplish things that they're not sure will be entirely to their liking.

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By J. C. Looney

to the

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