

INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 11, 1971
INTERVIEWEE: WM. HUNTER McLEAN
INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB
PLACE: Continental Life Building, Fort Worth, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

DM: This is an interview with W. Hunter McLean. M-C-L-E-A-N. I'm in his office at 2204 Continental Life Building, in Fort Worth, Texas. The date is May 11, 1971. It is about 9:30 in the morning, and my name is David McComb.

First of all, to get some background on you, Mr. McLean: Where were you born and when, and where did you get your education?

HM: I have to first be sure the name's down right. That's William Hunter McLean. Because there were about five William McLeans, my family called me Hunter. So I've used the abbreviated Wm. Hunter McLean to distinguish myself from the other William McLeans.

As to my background, I was born in Fort Worth, October 1, 1909.

DM: Did you go to school here?

HM: I went to the public schools here and also the private school here in the elementary and high school years. And I went to VMI, Virginia Military Institute, for one year and transferred to TCU for a year and, of course, no degrees either place.

I entered the business world just before the stock market crash of 1929, a very inappropriate time to start something, but [it was] a very educational experience, of course.

McLEAN -- I -- 2

DM: What kind of business did you go into?

HM: I entered the insurance business and have been in it all of my life, to one extent or another.

DM: This is life insurance?

HM: This was at that time a fire and casualty agency and I stayed in that work until about February of 1933 when I went with the State Board of Insurance of Texas as an insurance company examiner. Work similar to that done by bank examiners. And I stayed there until December of '43 when I resigned and prepared to enter the military service.

DM: Then you went into the Army for awhile?

HM: I went into the Marine Corps in May of '44 and stayed there until the conclusion of the war in the Pacific.

DM: Did you go into the Pacific--?

HM: Yes sir, I was at Okinawa in radar fighter direction work for the Marine Corps, attached to an aviation division. I was a civilian commercial pilot among other things, and held an instructor's rating in flight for light planes and taught for a period in early '44 as a civilian instructor in some Air Force primary schools. But the Marine Corps assigned me to night fighter work, radar night fighter work.

DM: Then after the war was over you got out, I assume.

HM: I came back in November of '45 and did the thing that I had intended to do since 1935 and that was start my own insurance company. Threatened with an army or military tour of duty from 1938 on, I

McLEAN -- I -- 3

just didn't undertake a business venture prior to World War II.

But as soon as I got home, I was able to borrow and beg enough money and to buy a small insurance company and subsequently organize the company to merge with it. And those companies I operated until November 1961 when they were sold.

DM: And then since then what have you done?

HM: Well, I didn't get much rest. John Connally was secretary of the Navy and in the early part of December of '61, about a month after I'd sold out, he called and said that he had made up his mind to run for governor and he would have his primary headquarters here in Fort Worth and asked that I make myself available to assist in the operation of his state primary headquarters here in Fort Worth, which I did. Then later that year, in '62, when he moved his headquarters to Austin for the general election, I went down there. So I wound up being engaged for about a year in Connally's campaign for governor.

DM: Well, of course this raises questions about your political activity. Before we get into that, let me ask you one other thing: did you remain in insurance work all through the sixties, even though you sold your companies?

HM: No, Connally appointed me again back to the State Board of Insurance. I wound up where I'd been in '33, except this time as chairman of the board. It came as quite a surprise. Connally and I had never discussed it, except that I had urged him to keep his eyes open as he campaigned for a man of technical insurance experience to serve

McLEAN -- I -- 4

on the board. It's very seldom that a person of that training can be found available. There are plenty of them, but they are all drawing retirement from an insurance company or employed by an insurance company, and the law doesn't permit a person to serve who has any ties whatsoever with an insurance company.

DM: And yet you've got to have a man of experience.

HM: This leads to a number of unfortunate things in that the board generally turns to lawyers and some of them, well, most of them, have no technical experience in this very complex business and it takes them a good while to feel at ease with it. Anyhow, he couldn't find anybody and, to my astonishment and rather real astonishment, called me late in January of '63 and wanted me to take the position. I was really in no personal position to do it. I had sold my company; I hadn't had any time to look after my personal affairs during the year I campaigned for him, but nonetheless I didn't feel I could refuse and so I accepted the appointment.

DM: This came in 1963; how long has this continued, or how long were you chairman of the board?

HM: I served for five years. It's a six year appointment; I served for five of those years, through January of 1968. When I resigned, there was a year left and I was succeeded by George Cowden, a young legislator from Waco, in the year that remained.

DM: And since then what have you done?

HM: Since then I have been connected with Continental Life Insurance Company of Fort Worth as a director and chairman of their executive

committee. Through the merger of that company with Transport Life Insurance Company and other companies with which they've merged, the surviving company now is Transport Life Insurance Company.

DM: Well, now to pick up your political activity. Can you recall when you first met Lyndon Johnson?

HM: Yes. I and my family, who were prominent in politics locally, knew of Lyndon Johnson as head of the [National] Youth Administration here during the late thirties, early thirties [1935/37], and also as a congressman from the Travis County district, I don't recall the number of it. We had no personal or close contact with him, but he ran for the Senate in 1941 in a race in which W. Lee O'Daniel was a candidate and Gerald Mann and one or two others. It was at this time that I cast my lot with him as an able and competent young man and one that should be encouraged in national politics. So all of the McLeans here supported Johnson in 1941 although we hadn't known him prior to that time and we met him in that year just as he would meet any supporters in any county. Nothing exceptional.

DM: Did you do any campaigning for him?

HM: I was with the state at the time and had a very limited opportunity to campaign. Some legal restrictions on it, not much but some. But my father who was a doctor here and my uncle, W. P. McLean, supported him openly and in the county conventions and with the precinct chairman and the other Democratic organizations here in Tarrant County and in the Twelfth Congressional District.

DM: What was your next connection with Lyndon Johnson?

McLEAN -- I -- 6

HM: My next connection was in 1948 when he once again ran for the Senate, this time with Coke Stevenson as the major opposition. There was a third candidate whose name I can't recall from Houston who polled a real good vote in the primary, first primary. Fred Korth and Raymond Buck and I handled his campaign here. Fred had some time to devote to it; Raymond was busy in his legal affairs and devoted a small amount of time but a great devotion, I might add, and served to help raise money. Fred and I actually ran the office. Fred was designated as the chairman of the Twelfth Congressional District for Johnson, while I was designated as the Tarrant County chairman. But our jobs were just interchangeable. We'd do whatever had to be done and we had the time to do.

DM: Why were you selected?

HM: Well, I had, as I mentioned, been identified with Lyndon in 1941--

DM: This was remembered?

HM: --and so had the others I mentioned. I had helped in Democratic county political matters from time to time. I had some time to give to it. My business wasn't that demanding and so I was available and had some experience. Mr. Buck actually was the dominant leader here at that time for Johnson.

DM: Is he the one that asked you to help?

HM: He's the one that asked Fred and me to give as much time as we could to it.

DM: How did you go about setting up the campaign here? Do you recall anything about that?

McLean -- I -- 7

HM: Yes. Fred and I came from the old school of campaigning where you try to get people that are oriented toward politics--this means your Democratic precinct chairmen and the election clerks--interested in your candidate. They're people with a political bent and they are seeking good candidates; they are part of the Democratic machinery and they're helpful in county conventions. So if you can get a major support from that group, you not only are in good shape in the primary and general elections but you're in good shape in county conventions and state conventions and so on. So we concentrated on this group of people.

DM: And what would you do? Would you call them on the phone, go out to see them or what?

M: Because of rather limited time, we had to work harder really in the run-off election than we did in the first primary. We should have worked harder in the first primary because Johnson trailed here by some nine thousand votes in the first primary. And we worked then intensely in this area of rallying personal support from the people I've just mentioned as well as others in this four or five weeks that intervened before the second run-off. This necessitated not only telephone canvassing but also mail, a good deal of mail canvassing. And we had banks of telephones at work and would follow-up with mail campaign material for these workers to do: people to call in precincts, people to send postcards to in precincts, people to help with absentee voting, and so on.

DM: Do you recall where Johnson in this area got his financial support? What industry did this come from?

McLEAN -- I -- 8

HM: Johnson's financial support in this community has shifted from time to time. One of the things I noticed in the years following 1948 was that [from] this substantial list of precinct workers that I maintained from that time on, I would find twenty percent or thirty percent not enthusiastic about him in a succeeding race. But another twenty or thirty percent or replacement number of people would show up anxious to help. And in the race that would follow that, the twenty or thirty percent that had been cool toward him would be back in harness and some other twenty or thirty percent would have cooled off. Now these, mind you, were not just casual voters, these were people that at one time previously had a rather dedicated and outspoken interest in Johnson.

DM: These people would not only campaign for him, but they'd also contribute financially.

HM: Yes, and this was true of the financial community here. Most of your money, of course, does not come from your dedicated precinct workers. You can raise money through their efforts and through them by having dinners and the candidate in and big rallies and things of this type, and we did that regularly. But financial support's got to be obtained early in a campaign so you'll know how to plan the thing and what to spend and how much.

So that's a long way around to saying that in 1948, for example, labor opposed Johnson and your so-called Texas regulars opposed him--this was your right wing on one side and conservative to ultra-conservative people opposing him, for reasons that are not

McLean -- I -- 9

very clear to me even yet, because he had voted for the Taft-Harley Law, and by that vote had alienated labor, and yet he had failed to please the conservatives. So he was opposed by both of them and we had a difficult time raising money in 1948. It was easier subsequently, but basically Johnson's financial support in this area, and for the local campaign has come to a limited extent from oil people, and I emphasize limited. I could identify some of them but they, I'm sure, will be making these same tapes, so I'll let them speak for themselves, but not all oil people by any manner or means. They always, as did labor--those that didn't volunteer their support--were suspicious of Johnson. Labor always carried suspicions and never were real dedicated supporters of him. And I shouldn't denounce all labor, because this was true--what I just spoke of--more with your building trades and communication workers, sometimes the machinists. But it was not true of the United Automobile Workers. They were dedicated supporters of Johnson and much help to all of us here in the campaigns. But there was always this undercurrent of reluctance on the part of of all organized labor to support him. This same reluctance was always present around your more conservative people.

DM: So then who did support him?

HM: Well, it was your middle-ground, as I call them, brass-collar Democrats. And, as I mentioned, this twenty or thirty percent that would drift off and come back--sometimes the conservatives, rarely, would be in support of him, sometimes labor would be in

support of him. But the great body of his support, some fifty percent of the people, were your moderate, middle-income, brass-collar Democrats.

DM: This shifting pattern over the years of people drifting in and out of support for Johnson--was this due to the political legislation and so forth he was involved in, or the particular contest at the moment?

HM: It's very hard to identify. If you speak back again to the two groups I have mentioned, some elements in labor and some elements in the conservative group, you become perplexed.

Johnson and Rayburn for example, from 1948 on, almost singlehandedly protected Texas in its oil resources and natural gas resources from any erosion in the tax structure that would lend itself toward a restriction on drilling. Your depletion allowance and your intangible drilling expense and other things were under attack in the Truman Administration and I think by Truman, as a matter of fact, as early as 1948. Yet, as I mentioned, it was only some oil people that had a keen interest in supporting Johnson. Once again in the mid-fifties when the Harris Gas Act was laboriously passed through both houses of Congress under the Eisenhower Administration, it was due in the main to the work of Johnson and Rayburn. Eisenhower vetoed it, yet Eisenhower got the support of the Republican oil men and of the conservative Democrats. Goldwater came through here speaking in 1960 on a fund-raising tour for the Senate Republican campaign committee and attracted quite an audience at the Texas Hotel. Many

McLean -- I -- 11

so-called conservative Democrats were there and their campaign contributions were used in turn to defeat Allen Frear of Delaware who was a friend of the oil people and understood the depletion allowance, substituting a Republican senator that's been opposed to it ever since.

Now labor's got the same paradoxes: they're eternally asking Johnson for something; if they got in trouble with the Republican floor leader or the Republican committee chairman in the Senate, labor would come to Johnson to solve the problems. Yet they were just not volunteers, except for those particular unions I mentioned, when it came to helping. I can't tell you why this suspicion existed or put my finger on it; it had perplexed me since 1948 with the voting record and record of accomplishment Johnson had, I would've thought he would have had far more understanding in those groups than he did have.

DM: In 1948 did Johnson come through here to speak?

HM: Yes, several times. You may remember he was campaigning in a helicopter at that time.

DM: Do you remember him flying in in his helicopter?

HM: Oh yes, we met him out in the sticks one time, had a place, and then I think he landed in the downtown area on one occasion. Yes, he was here several times.

DM: Do you remember any of the things he talked about in that campaign, the campaign speeches, any of the meetings you had with him, or anything of that nature?

McLean -- I -- 12

HM: The issue, as I recall it at this late date, was mainly who could do the best job. Johnson was an experienced congressman. He had occupied positions of power in the House of Representatives during World War II, except for the time he was in the service. He had demonstrated on a committee of the House, that he was either chairman or vice-chairman of, having to do with strikes of longshoremen along the eastern seaboard, that the principal interest of the U.S. came first and these other matters of limited interest to the public at large, came second in his make-up. He was younger than Coke by a good deal. Coke, being governor, suffered the same scars that any governor of Texas or governor of any state suffers, and that is that any position he takes makes somebody disappointed or angry, and so Coke in his governorship had lost support. These were the things that we attempted to emphasize here: that Johnson would be more effective, that he wouldn't make the mistakes Coke Stevenson had made, and I use that in pure political sense; I don't know that the things that Coke did were wrong, but certainly the electorate thought they were wrong and we took advantage of it.

DM: Now, that was a very close race between Johnson and Coke Stevenson. Did you have anything to do with the Democratic convention which finally decided on a candidate?

HM: I don't believe I was even a delegate to it. I'm pretty sure I wasn't. The county political convention, Democratic convention, was controlled by the Coke Stevenson group here in Tarrant County, following the Johnson thing, and I'm almost certain I was not even

McLean -- I -- 13

a delegate. What we did do was that we knew that our race here would be relatively close and we knew that Tarrant County was kind of a weather vane community in these elections. The state organization of Johnson's was aware that it would be close and Mr. Korth and I and others working in the headquarters canvassed every election return from every precinct in this county and all of the election returns from about fifteen surrounding counties in three or four days following the election. And we found mistakes that added up to fifteen votes for Johnson at the expenditure of an enormous amount to time and effort. These were just transposition of figures and errors in accumulation of figures made by clerks, but they happened to turn in our favor in this area. Tarrant County, incidentally, did better for Johnson, although he didn't carry it in the second primary, than it had in the first. I've forgotten what he lost the county by, but somewhere in the neighborhood of 4500 votes, instead of 9000 votes as he had in the first primary.

DM: I would assume that in a normal election fifteen votes wouldn't make much difference, but this was a very tight contest.

HM: Right, and this was only one congressional district or about that and there were twenty some-odd, so fifteen votes per district maybe could make a big difference.

DM: Well, Johnson won that one and went off to the Senate. When was your next connection with him--did you meet with him as senator or anything like that?

McLean -- I -- 14

HM: Oh, yes, Fred Korth soon after that went with the Continental National Bank, and although he remained a friend and supporter of Johnson, he didn't have the time, and Mr. Buck continued his busy career as a lawyer and insurance company executive. So the two of them and Senator Johnson asked me to take, from that time on, charge of his affairs in the Twelfth Congressional District and I did so. The next race, of course, was his race in '54 for re-election which didn't amount to very much. A young man named [Dudley] Dougherty from Victoria or somewhere in that area ran.

'56 I believe is when we had the struggle for control of the Democratic state machinery and we geared up a campaign here to control the Tarrant County Democratic convention for Johnson rather than for Shivers.. These were the men identified in the opposing factions. And we were able to carry the county for Johnson in '56.

DM: Why was it that Johnson was trying to control the party at that point in time. Why was it important?

HM: Well, as I mentioned earlier, his support was pretty much middle-ground, brass-collar Democrat support, and the so-called Texas regulars or their successors had attempted to use, and had succeeded in using the Democratic Party machinery, state and local, in support of Republican candidates. There were some elements of this in 1948 in the Truman election. It was extremely pronounced in '52 when Eisenhower ran for office and once again in '56 it was becoming the same thing: that the Governor, Democratic Governor of Texas and the State Democratic Executive Committee membership were

McLean -- I -- 15

by and large supporting Republican candidates instead of Democratic candidates. This led to unrest among this middle-ground, brass-collar Democratic group, and this is the group that rose up in '56 and took charge of the Democratic machinery in Texas.

DM: Was there a coalition formed of various elements in order to do this?

HM: Yes, here we leaned heavily again on labor for that help and got their help. Then, once again, labor split up on us; as soon as the convention was called, the unions that had a genuine interest in Johnson stayed firm, but the unions that did not caused trouble at the state and county conventions. But in any event, we hung together until the State Democratic Executive Committee had been so constituted as to remain loyal to the Democratic Party.

DM: What was your position in that 1956 fight? Were you head of the Tarrant County delegation?

HM: Yes. I wasn't chairman of the delegation to the convention, but I was one of the officials of it and was a floor leader. In the '56 campaign, we had to conduct just about the same sort of an effort as you would have made in a primary campaign race because we had to get control of each of the precincts and their delegations. So we were conducting a very heavy mail campaign to get the Johnson supporters to their precinct conventions in '56.

DM: As I recall, there was some controversy over who would be the national Democratic committeeman and committeewoman. Do you have any insight into that difficulty?

McLean -- I -- 16

HM: Yes, I'm confused whether that was in '56 or '58--I believe it was in '56 though, it was at the Dallas convention. Mrs. Randolph of Houston was a candidate for committeewoman and Mrs. Lloyd Bentsen also of Houston was mentioned. It looked like it would develop into a rather ugly fight, so Mrs. Bentsen withdrew her name and Mrs. Randolph was elected.

DM: The books written about Johnson sometimes indicate that Johnson made more or less of a deal with the liberals over this and that there was some falling out over the selection of Mrs. Randolph. Do you know anything about that?

HM: I have never discussed this with the President or the then-Senator in detail, but I sensed that he felt that a healing of the wounds of the party would not be as readily accomplished with a person of Mrs. Randolph's intense views as well as it would have been by a person of the more broader view of Mrs. Bentsen. I also sensed that this caused some ruptures, but they were never openly discussed with me, so I have no personal knowledge of them.

DM: Well, after going through this fight to gain control of the Democratic Party which apparently was accomplished by Johnson-Rayburn, did it have any repercussions, lasting effect in other words, on Tarrant County?

HM: No, the effect here on the local Democratic Party machinery to this day has been a very healing thing. We that ran the race and headed up the effort in '56 were quick to hold open our arms to people of good judgment, people of sound views, people who were

McLean -- I -- 17

willing to compromise, people who were willing to join a hand, of any of the groups, right or left, black or white, or whatever. We began seeing to it, making a special effort that they got representation in all of our delegations to the state conventions and to the national conventions. And we have had labor on them, we have had blacks on them, we have had conservatives on them. And we have not had since that time a single county Democratic convention with the exception of the one--well, that was in '56 too, the second convention held here in the fall of '56. But following '56, we have not had a tumultous Tarrant County Democratic convention. They've been fairly well agreed upon.

DM: Well, then, was the 1956 fight to control the party worthwhile, do you think?

HM: Well, I think for the Democratic Party it was; if we're going to have a party that is going to speak and stand up for Democrats, it certainly was worthwhile. I don't know how you have party politics with the leadership of it supporting the opposing party.

DM: Right. So it was perhaps then a necessary fight and one that helped the party.

HM: Yes. I might add this satisfactory outcome that happened in Tarrant County is not one that's been shared all over Texas. There are some bitter fights still in Dallas and Houston and the other larger communities, so we've been the exception in this.

DM: Then what is your next connection with Lyndon Johnson? Did it come in 1960?

McLean -- I -- 18

HM: Well, in '58 we had a Democratic convention. This one, this state Democratic convention, was held in San Antonio. Johnson was pushing the state officials forward as leaders of the party by this time, Price Daniel and others, and the convention there came off reasonably well. There wasn't the bitterness there had been in '56 and I played a role in that with the Tarrant County delegation again.

But the next real effort, of course, was in '60 when Johnson had some aspirations to be President, and John Kennedy was nominated for President and Johnson for Vice President. I might point out that once again that this campaign started in the early part of the year and lasted through November and I was identified in the leadership of it all the way in. When Johnson was nominated, or agreed to accept rather, the vice presidency in Los Angeles, there was a good deal of discontent in the newspaper here about it, which wasn't peculiar to Tarrant County. But I was quick to publicly defend what he had done and we had once again sort of a successful campaign here.

DM: Let me ask you--did you go to the Los Angeles convention?

HM: No, I wanted to emphasize that. I stepped aside from the delegation in order to see to it that some of these groups that we were trying to be sure played a role in Tarrant County politics got to go.

DM: This is part of the comprehensive attitude of the Tarrant County Democratic party.

HM: That's right. I took myself off of the delegation at the state

McLean -- I -- 19

convention in '60. I had taken it off of the recommended delegation done by a caucus, but they put me back on the delegate-at-large group at the state convention in Austin. I demurred and told them that I couldn't do this, that I was sending people to cement our relationship here locally and if they had an opening they ought to send somebody of that type and not me.

DM: Were you surprised when you heard that Johnson had accepted the vice presidential position?

HM: I was surprised, of course, but I wasn't dismayed like some of the others were. (laughter)

DM: Why not?

HM: Well, I just [felt] you win them and lose them and, once again, if you're going to pick up your marbles and go home, why, you just don't have a party organization and then we'd be in much the same role as the people we criticized in the early fifties. It just wasn't a role I cared to further.

DM: This reminds me, did you happen to go to the national convention in 1956?

HM: Yes.

DM: Johnson was a favorite son then too.

HM: He was nominated there and by John Connally, incidentally. John made the nominating speech in '56.

DM: Was there any serious thought that he might become a presidential candidate then?

HM: Not in that particular year. Those of us that had supported him had

McLean -- I -- 20

great hopes for him. The timing of it was something over which we had no control. Stevenson had made an attractive, intriguing candidate and he had lost in '52; he wanted another shot at it and was entitled to it. So the die was cast and the favorite son nominations up there were just to honor the favorite sons and put them in position of power and influence in the party and power and influence in that convention. But there was no serious hope of anybody in our delegation, the state's delegation, in '56 that Johnson would be a nominee either for president or vice president.

DM: Well, the Texas delegation then supported Stevenson?

HM: Yes, in reality.

DM: How about in the vice presidential fight?

HM: Well, to say it supported Stevenson is not so; they rode with Johnson as favorite son until he released them, yes.

DM: Well, then in the vice presidential fight in '56?

HM: Well, I felt some dismay with the nomination of Kefauver and if I had to evaluate the Texas delegation, I would say that they would have much preferred some other vice presidential nominee.

DM: Did Texas support support John Kennedy?

HM: Yes. We were asked to by Johnson and Rayburn and we were in some sort of an agreement with Oklahoma, and I've forgotten how it fouled up, but at any rate as they called the roll, why somebody jumped the fence and instead of the votes going as we had anticipated they would for Kennedy, they went some other way. And by the time they got to Texas in the roll call the voting was about

McLEAN -- I -- 21

over, but we caucused and Rayburn and Johnson both espoused the cause of John Kennedy as the vice presidential nominee.

DM: That's an interesting connection there. Did you have any indication at that time that Johnson thought Kennedy might be of presidential timber?

HM: No, none. They spoke of him mainly in other terms; that he was a young, aggressive, attractive comer in politics. I don't know that they dwelt on presidential timber possibility, but . . .

DM: Yes, you've also mentioned Sam Rayburn and apparently Rayburn and Johnson worked closely together. Have you ever had occasion to see them working together on political matters?

HM: Well, in election matters here in the state, not on matters of politics within the Congress.

DM: But on election matters.

HM: Yes, sir.

DM: Can you give me any examples of this?

HM: Well, Mr. Rayburn came into Fort Worth several times. I remember particularly in the '56 effort to control the party machinery, Mr. Rayburn was here and spoke to a rather large audience in behalf of the effort we were making.

DM: But Rayburn and Johnson seemed to work hand-in-hand in Texas.

HM: Yes, yes, very closely.

DM: Well, to return then to 1960; Johnson was selected as vice presidential candidate, then did you campaign in Texas for him?

HM: Yes, I handled the campaign for Kennedy and Johnson here in Tarrant County.

McLEAN -- I -- 22

DM: Yes.

HM: By this time, we had redistricted and Tarrant County was down to constituting the Twelfth Congressional District so then my obligations to the other counties were just to be helpful rather than to be in charge.

DM: Did you have any problems in this area with that ticket?

HM: Yes, there was a good deal of religious backlash, oddly a lot of this came in ranks of labor. Members of the Church of Christ were the most outspoken and some of our better friends in labor were in that church. It caused a great deal of indecision on their part about what to do. We have had a local issue all along here and that is these two aircrafts that we manufacture here: the B-58 and the F-111. The B-58 had been cancelled by the Republican administration. It was the only supersonic bomber that we had and, a matter of fact, it's the only one we have now except the FD-111--a few of those we've got. And it didn't seem logical to people here, and certainly it didn't seem logical to the employees of that plant, so we capitalized on this local issue in that race. They did it again locally in '64; to some extent it was done again in the '68 election here--about the F-111. So, we couldn't do anything about John Kennedy's being a Catholic, or about these church groups, Church of Christ and the Baptists mainly, but we just picked up another issue and ran with it. That was the economics and the B-58; this was in 1960.

DM: Right. Did Johnson come through here and campaign?

McLEAN -- I -- 23

HM: Yes, we had an enormous political rally for him, a dinner at the Centennial grounds. It was just a few days before the election. The election was on Tuesday, and I guess this was either Thursday or Friday night preceeding. We had a fine turnout. A bunch of congressmen were here from surrounding districts and several thousand people out to the dinner.

DM: Did you organize this dinner?

HM: I organized it. Kennedy was through here earlier; he was through in September.

DM: And you organized his [visit]?

HM: Organized his tour. He landed at Meacham Field up north of here and had a procession route down to Burnet Park here in the center of town, spoke, and then left and went by motorcade through Arlington where he stopped briefly, and then to Dallas for a big appearance. That was in September. Johnson came, as I mentioned, just three or four days before the election.

DM: Well, that turned out to be a successful campaign.

HM: We didn't carry the county; we lost it by 7500 votes, but by comparison Dallas was 45 to 50,000 votes Republican majority, Houston had a large one. So you can say that Tarrant County is sort of a weather vane if you aren't too precise in things, if Tarrant County is going Democratic the state generally does, and if it's even going Republican by a small vote, the state will generally follow.

DM: Did Johnson ever say anything to you about this--the fact that

McLEAN -- I -- 24

Tarrant County could go one way or the other?

DM: No, I've never discussed it with him, but it's a fact of life, and it came to my attention first, of course, in the narrow race with Coke Stevenson where the county voted for Coke by, and I forget the votes, whether he had a 2500 majority or 4500 majority here, but the state, as you know, went narrowly for Johnson. I've watched it since and this has pretty well held true even if the Democratic candidate loses in Tarrant County by a small amount, the state will go Democratic.

This occurred in Kennedy's race. It occurred in Humphrey's race in '68 here; Nixon carried the county by 2000 votes, and the state went for Humphrey. And we lost the county in '60 by 7500 and the state went for Kennedy. So it's gone pretty steadily.

DM: Is this explained in terms that the county is Republican-oriented?

HM: No, it's more Democratically-oriented than Dallas. Dallas went for Nixon by 60,000 votes in 1960 and Tarrant had gone for Eisenhower in '56 by some 35 or 40,000 votes, but it went for Nixon by only 7500 in 1960. Dallas still went for the Republican Nixon by 60,000 votes.

But it's true of this central area of Texas, if you watch Wichita Falls, Denton and Fort Worth, Waco, Temple, Belton, and Austin on down even to San Antonio and on down to Nueces County, Corpus Christi, almost the central area of Texas. What I've just said of Fort Worth has been normally true of that whole area. It's sort of a Democratic heartland.

DM: Did you have anything to do with the trip of Kennedy and Johnson in

McLEAN -- I -- 25

1963 to come down into the state?

HM: Just in a very secondary, tertiary capacity. I was chairman of the State Board of Insurance and couldn't neglect my duties there, but they needed help in organizing the dinner which was to be held in Austin the night he was assassinated. So I was called in early in the conferences with Governor Connally about the trip to start with, where he ought to go and what counties he ought to go to, what he ought to see and what local people ought to be in charge of it, and the general planning. But, specifically, I was working more on helping on the dinner in Austin than I was on the itinerary and arrangements for these people because I simply didn't have the time.

DM: Was that trip necessary?

HM: Well, John Kennedy thought so.

DM: Did you think so?

HM: I thought Kennedy was in trouble in Texas. The polls showed this. I don't think he deserved to be in trouble, but he was in trouble.

DM: Is the cause of the trouble the usual explanation of the difficulty between Yarborough and Connally?

HM: No. This had nothing to do with it. Goldwater had captured the fancy of the national press and from 1960 until the fall of '63 he got a very favorable national press. They would label him an unreconstructed rebel and an arch conservative, but the man had some personal fascination to him, and he got an intensely favorable press all of this time. In the meantime, John Kennedy was having to face up to some of the problems of accomplishing something rather

McLEAN -- I -- 26

than simply talking about it. And, as you know, he had some difficulty with Congress--his program didn't move the way it was anticipated it would. Kennedy's problem in Texas was with of course this more conservative element again that is a successor to what I would call the Texas regulars. Those people had really not supported Kennedy and Johnson--a few had in '60--and they were doubtful of Kennedy's liberalism, as they put it. And although they wanted a Texan to be Vice President and would love to see a Texan President, they had begun to defect. Kennedy was criticized by the more conservative papers, editorial policies and so on. So his vote popularity in Texas had suffered, there was no question about it. His margin here in '60 had only been about 45,000 votes. So he didn't have a lot to give away.

DM: So the trip then was to shore up his support.

HM: Right. My understanding is that Kennedy early in '63, just when, I don't know, but certainly in the spring, had suggested and resuggested this type of a thing down here. And had insisted from the beginning that Connally head it up. Connally had been his appointee, secretary of the Navy; he was governor of the state.

I don't think any of us counselled against Kennedy coming. Many of us counselled against his going to Dallas.

DM: Did you?

HM: Yes, sir.

DM: Why?

HM: Because of the incident involved in, who was it, Adlai Stevenson,

McLEAN -- I -- 27

who they spit on or something like that?

DM: Johnson too, earlier.

HM: Well, Johnson was in '60, but shortly before Kennedy was over there, Stevenson had been sort of roughed up in the crowd, and we just thought prudence--at least I thought prudence would dictate an appearance in Dallas that didn't entail close community with some of the people.

DM: Then you got the dinner arranged in Austin.

HM: Well, I didn't have the leadership in that; I was simply helping, but the dinner was arranged--the seating arrangements and everything else. Tickets had been sold, and the dinner would have been a huge success. I think there were over four thousand people coming.

DM: And then the assassination took place and Johnson became president. Did you have any contact with Johnson immediately after the assassination?

HM: No, that occurred in Dallas and I was in Austin and, while most of the staff members of his that were in Austin looking after the dinner and other things left instantly by chartered plane or however and went to Dallas, I was still chairman of the State Board of Insurance then. He of course had plenty of devoted people with him and no real need for me to go.

DM: Then is your next contact with Johnson in 1964?

HM: Yes. I saw him in the interim a time or two in Washington or other places, but in '64 following the Democratic national convention and with very little notice to me, Governor Connally phoned one

McLEAN -- I -- 28

day and said, "The President and I want you to take charge of his '64 campaign here in Texas." I really didn't see how, with the time limitations imposed and being chairman of the State Board of Insurance and other things, I could quite put it altogether, but they insisted on it. So I took a leave of absence and with ample help, I might add, and devoted help, I was able to put his campaign together in the state.

DM: How long of a leave of absence did you have to take?

HM: Oh, from about the middle of September till the middle of August, or middle of November.

DM: So about a month?

HM: No, two months.

DM: Two months. Were there any great problems in this?

HM: No, we had no great upsets in the thing. The President planned a tour of Texas that had to be cancelled at the last minute because of the Chinese atom bomb explosion. That caused some disappointment, is about the best way to put it, but we substituted people-- Mrs. Johnson came here to a breakfast that had been planned. I've forgotten how we substituted in Dallas and Houston and the other places he was to touch down; we made the best of it we could and it came off all right.

DM: So there were no great problems then in the '64 campaign?

HM: I had none.

DM: No financial problems?

HM: Well, of course, they were severe. (Laughter) The President was putting his arm on the people down here that were the heavy donors and when I reached them, they were stripped.

DM: Then he reached them for the national?

HM: National. But we were able to raise an adequate amount. It isn't the type of money that you hear about nowadays being used in a campaign. I think the sum total of it maybe was \$300,000, and I just had to cut back on commitments on billboards, on TV use, on other usual campaign things. It disappointed a lot of my staff, disappointed some of the local people, but we wound up with a little surplus instead of a deficit, and I was able to send the Democratic national committee about \$35,000 at the end. And I don't think if we had spent \$200,000 or \$300,000 more, assuming we'd been able to raise it, that it would have changed the results materially. He got about 63 or 64 percent of the votes here in Texas; he might have gotten 67 percent if we'd strained it every night, but I'd rather had the surplus.

DM: Was Johnson appreciative of your efforts?

HM: Yes, he couldn't have been nicer and more gracious about it. And was gracious to all of the volunteers and others that worked in the headquarters.

DM: After 1964 did you have much contact with Johnson, in a political realm?

HM: No, he had no races to run unless it would be in '68. We visited the White House during that period of time at the invitation of the

McLEAN -- I -- 30

President. I believe on two occasions went to dinner--was on two occasions, but so far as politics is concerned, I don't recall of a single instance where I had any communication to him or from him.

DM: Were you surprised when he chose not to run in '68?

HM: I was surprised, I'll have to admit, but I really hadn't been able to see how he would work out of the unfortunate and untenable position he was in to where he could run. But I just hoped against hope that something would clear the atmosphere where he could run for re-election, but I really couldn't see how. But I was surprised that he withdrew. I think he made a wise decision, I might add, but I was surprised by it.

DM: Did he ever try to get you to come to Washington, to appoint you to a position?

HM: Yes, I can't say that he was trying to get me up there, but I got two messages wanting to know if I was available and whether I would have been seriously considered is something else, but when they organized the OEO, some word reached me that I was being considered for I guess, state chairman of the OEO, I don't know the title of the position. But the State Board of Insurance had its hands full; we had a legislative program and I had committed myself to the Governor and I just didn't feel that I could switch jobs and do any better somewhere else. So I demurred to his staff, he didn't contact me about that. Funny thing was, my first intimation of any interest in me came from friends all over the country who were being contacted by the FBI doing an investigatory work on my background

McLEAN -- I -- 31

and I couldn't figure out what in the hell was going on. (Laughter)
Atlanta, Georgia, and--but the second time was in the spring of '68
after I had resigned from the State Board of Insurance. I was not
feeling too good, had a little high white blood cell count, it's
since been remedied, but at that time it was high and made me feel
badly every afternoon, and he called me and asked if I would have
any interest in serving on the Civil Aeronautics Board, and as I
recall, as chairman of it. And I told him that --

DM: Did he call you personally?

HM: Yes, and I think I'd earlier heard from some of his staff, but in
any event he did call personally. And I told him that my dobber
was down, I didn't feel good, and I'd just gotten through with five
years of intense controversy, and in and out of courts six, seven
times; the legislature to deal with and Congress as well, and that
I just hesitated very much to take on another extremely controversial
job, not feeling up to it.

DM: Right.

HM: And I thought about it a day or two and then phoned him back and
told him that while I felt terrible by not helping him when I knew
he needed help so badly, that I just was fearful of the type of
job I'd do if I didn't feel well.

(--Not on Tape--Insert including more details on federal appointments
furnished by Mr. McLean by letter 5/14/71)

As a consequence of civil disobedience and riots which had caused
large amounts of property loss in riot-prone areas and resulted

McLEAN -- I -- 32

in restrictions of the availability of insurance in those areas, Congress enacted the Urban Property Protection and Reinsurance Act of 1968 with an effective date of August 1, 1968. The Act provided for a National Insurance Development Program having an Advisory Board of 19 members appointed by the secretary of Housing and Urban Development. The act also authorized the appointment by the secretary of a Federal Insurance Administrator.

In July or August of 1968 I was contacted by White House staff as to my availability to fill the role of Federal Insurance Administrator. While I was greatly tempted to make myself available for consideration to that post and believed I had some of the qualifications it would require, I felt compelled to take my name from consideration because of the six year period of partial neglect of my personal affairs and those of my family.

Inquiry was then made of me as to my availability to serve on the Advisory Board, National Insurance Development Program, and I responded that I would be pleased for my name to be considered. In October 1968, Secretary Robert C. Weaver, Department of Housing and Urban Development, announced my appointment to that Board along with the other members. The term of office was for two years and I served on that Board until August 1970, attending several meetings in Washington, for the purpose of developing and initiating a federal riot reinsurance program.

(Return to taped interview)

McLEAN -- I -- 33

DM: Did you ever have occasion to ask him for any kind of help in Washington, it's a bad word, but, say, for a favor of any kind?

HM: No, I don't think a single time on anything that involved me or my business.

DM: I was just wondering about --

HM: But anybody that's elected to public office or prominent in the campaign of somebody that's elected will get literally hundreds of entreaties from people for help that are having difficulty on social security, difficulty with the veterans disability, or these types of things, and I did call on him several times, twenty or thirty, where I thought there was justification in these things to ask somebody on his staff to take a look at the file and see if these didn't warrant some sort of help. I might add that where it did, it came through very promptly.

DM: So that his response was quick in those matters. Well, you had some social connections with the Johnsons, too, then.

HM: Yes, we of course have been more political friends than personal friends. We certainly are not, my family and I, personally intimates of the Johnson family. We've been in their home several times, we have entertained him and Lady Bird, incidentally, more frequently than Lyndon, here in Fort Worth, at teas and things of this sort. And I've been to his Ranch a number of times and all of them incidentally either small or large crowds, whichever they were, but all of them had a distinct political flavor to them rather than just a personal relationship.

McLEAN -- I -- 34

DM: Do you have any impressions about Mrs. Johnson as First Lady?

HM: Yes, I think she's great. And that opinion of her, I might add, is not only shared by a great number of people in Fort Worth, but all over Texas. At teas and other things that my wife and other women here Mrs. Buck, Mrs. Perry Bass, and others have held for her receptions and things, she just couldn't be a more gracious person, more interested in people and just charming. She's just tops in my judgment.

DM: Do you have any comment to make about Lyndon Johnson's personality as a politician? Is he the master politician that he has the reputation of being?

DM: Well, I think it's been fairly well summarized in the press, with some degree of inaccuracy. But Lyndon's success as a senator and as a majority leader and prior to that as a congressman was in having a sensitivity to issues and colleagues, so that he found out what was proper or improper, what was good or bad, what was without fault and what was faulty, in any of the issues that came up, whatever they might be, and similarly, he addressed himself to the inclinations of his colleagues in the House and Senate. He would know off the top of his head whether Clint Anderson or John Stennis would be for or against something, Aiken from Vermont, the same way. So, as he took up as majority leader, those things that the Senate had to dispose of one way or another, he was always conscious and attentive to these things that I've just mentioned. As a result of this, he earned the respect and deep appreciation of his

McLEAN -- I -- 35

colleagues. He knew also where the centers of power were among the trade associations and the governors and if some advocate of a position became too prominent and the position was wrong, he knew where to turn to counter that effort, and as you know he shunned publicity. By God, Fulbright's been on TV a hundred times more than Johnson ever was. And Fulbright alone to say nothing of some of the others up there. But this was his way of working, sensitive to other people and to the issues.

DM: Did he adequately pay enough attention to state politics?

HM: Yes, Johnson did here in Texas. It's difficult for our Washington representatives to pay attention to state politics any longer--they stay in session all year. And there are long distances involved and I think in the last ten or fifteen years our situation with reference to congressmen and senators staying in touch with their constituency has worsened very materially. It's not just peculiar to Texas, it's anywhere that's remote from Washington--they don't get home enough. But Johnson was here campaigning in '48, he was here again campaigning in '54--he was in and out all the intervening times. He lent his support and name and effort to restoring the control of the Democratic Party to the Democrats in '56. I would say that he's been as sensitive to internal Texas workings as anybody could have been under the circumstances. And as president, he didn't necessarily lean over backwards for Texas; I'm reminded of the Trinity River Canal--they're still trying to work on that blamed thing, and they've been working on it for forty-five years.

McLEAN -- I -- 36

Kerr got his through to Tulsa--he didn't live to see it completed, but he had it on the road. But, on the other hand, NASA's in Houston and there have been other things that I think he had his finger in, to help out on. The Trinity River Canal is just one that's got to wait, but to say that he was unduly considerate of Texas is certainly untrue after he was resident, and it would certainly be untrue to say he was neglectful of it. Simply because the Trinity River Canal is not being done does not mean that there were not other things that he helped Texas get.

DM: Did he ever give an opinion on the Trinity River Canal project?

HM: I think he has spoken out for it over the years. Some criticism came up about it soon after he went in to the presidency from Midwestern senators saying it was a boondoggle and he was going to put it through, so he asked that it be revalued under an entirely new and much harsher set of standards than the Army Engineer Corps used before, and it came out showing itself to be even more economical and feasible--not because of the change in standards because they worked the other way, but because of the change in the economy of Texas. The tonage forecast went way up. And it's been stalled in Congress ever since the new evaluation, but it's making some slow, but very slow progress.

DM: Well, this has pretty well used up the questions I have for you about Lyndon Johnson. Is there anything I should have asked you about and didn't, or anything you care to add?

HM: Well, I can think of one little thing that has puzzled

McLEAN -- I -- 37

me for many years. And that was that in the election of 1948, the 87 votes, the press never gave any publicity to the fact that there was an election contest in Brown County out here at Brownwood. Paid a lot of attention to Box 13 in Jim Wells County, you know, involving 200 votes.

DM: Well, what happened to Brownwood?

HM: In Brownwood, the contest was not by people interested in the Senate race, but was by some local candidates in the sheriff's race, and some 1300 ballots were thrown out down there as fraudulent or improper somehow. And in those 1300 ballots, Johnson had gotten a 500 vote majority. So Johnson didn't win by 87, he won by 500 and something, but this was reported on in the press later on, but back on page ten and I thought that Johnson's election by that narrow margin had always been under some, and probably properly so, some suspicious pall that probably wasn't deserved, as a result of that one election contest. Now there may have been others in the state, but I know about that one.

DM: Did you happen to investigate it?

HM: No, but I knew some people in Brownwood that were interested in the sheriff's race and talked with them, and it was reported in the newspapers. But all of the attention was given to the attempted contest of Stevenson of Johnson's election by appealing directly to the Supreme Court that he was being denied his civil rights by this thing.

DM: Well, let me thank you for your time, and for the interview.

McLEAN -- I -- 38

HM: I hope we've covered everything you want. I regret very much that the President didn't get a chance to run for re-election. I think he made us a fine president, I know darn well he made us a fine Democratic leader in the Senate. And he's a far more sensitive man than the news media's given him credit for being. They regard him as an insensitive buffoon, but this couldn't be further from the truth. I think it's a tragedy that he got caught up in a series of events that caused him to decline to run for re-election. But I think his decision was wise. I don't think he could have been elected.

DM: Well thank you very much.

HM: Yes, sir.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

NOTE: McLean recorded a tape with the oral history group at North Texas State University. It concerns mainly his business career in insurance.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Wm. Hunter McLean

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Wm. Hunter McLean of Fort Worth, Texas do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on May 11, 1971 in Fort Worth, Texas and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Wm. Hunter McLean
Donor

3-2-78
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

March 17, 1978
Date