

INTERVIEW II

DATE: February 4, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: WRIGHT PATMAN

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Representative Patman's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

(Recording begins in mid-sentence)

P: A photograph taken of our committee, Banking and Currency. It's going to be in the book--it could well be called the annual--of the House. They'll have a picture of each committee.

G: I suppose that will be your last committee picture, won't it?

P: That may be so. I've had lots of them.

G: I remember the morning I saw you last time was the morning that William McChesney Martin had resigned and they were swearing in Arthur Burns as head of the Federal Reserve; it was a very happy day for you.

P: Down at the White House, yes.

G: Representative Patman, you went to Los Angeles to the 1960 convention to work for Lyndon Johnson.

P: Yes, at the Biltmore Hotel, as I had twice.

G: What happened when you got there?

P: We began to have little meetings around like you usually have at a convention where you are disorganized. You begin to meet the people you know and get together and discuss things.

G: Did you think that you were going to win?

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G: We knew that we had an uphill fight.

G: I was talking to Representative [Thomas P.] O'Neill the other day, and he described a meeting that took place I think at the Biltmore Hotel or some place the day before the balloting.

P: All the meetings were in the Biltmore.

G: You were there and Speaker Rayburn was there and Representative John McCormack was there. Mr. O'Neill and Mr. McCormack were working for President Kennedy at the time, and you and Mr. Rayburn, of course, with Senator Johnson.

P: But not for vice president. You know, Mr. Rayburn almost blocked Johnson getting the vice presidency because he felt like it was kind of a letdown from where we'd been. He objected to it at first, but he finally come over.

G: In this meeting described by Representative O'Neill he indicates that Speaker Rayburn said that any man whose name is placed in nomination has an obligation to take second spot on the ticket, and that if Kennedy would get the majority of the delegates, he would talk to Senator Johnson about taking second spot. Is that the way you remember it at all?

P: In a way. It wasn't any definite understanding or anything like that, and there is no rule on it. It was just the thinking of some of the members who were old in the party. I felt that way about it. I felt like our greatest hope was the fact that Lyndon would probably be second to Kennedy. That being true, that put him up there to where he would certainly have a chance.

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(Pause in recording)

G: Do you remember that meeting?

P: Yes, I remember several meetings like that. They were just general discussions at first.

G: But it sounds like, from what Representative O'Neill said, that Mr. Rayburn was sort of of the attitude that LBJ ought to take the vice presidency.

P: Well, he didn't have that attitude long. It was not a consensus. Now of course many of us, like myself [were] for Lyndon first, last and all the time, but it was not a consensus. They had differences of opinion.

G: And you later met with Speaker Rayburn to persuade him.

P: Oh sure, in his bathroom.

G: Will you recount what happened there?

P: Yes. I said, "Now, Mr. Speaker, Price Daniel, the governor of Texas, came to see me. He's disturbed about your opposition maybe to Lyndon." He said, "Oh, of course I'm not against Lyndon. If anything I'm for Lyndon, but I just don't like to see him low rated." We had such a strong pull for him for president, and we thought we had a good organization. Mr. Rayburn didn't want to weaken it by slacking up. So that was his objection. I don't think he actually objected to Lyndon, because one time when I was in line for the United States Senate he [Mr. Rayburn] recommended to me that I contend for it because, he said, "Your future's in the House. You stay with the House." And he convinced me. Of course he had talked

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to me about it over the years, and I wasn't hard to convince if I had a word from Mr. Rayburn. So I gladly yielded, although I wouldn't have been a formidable opponent for Lyndon, and I wouldn't have run against him and he wouldn't run against me. But Mr. Rayburn's interest was that we would not be opposing each other.

G: I believe Speaker Rayburn also received a call from Senator Kennedy urging him to persuade LBJ to accept the nomination.

P: That's right. It was right down near the end, yes.

G: And then he did?

P: And he did, yes.

G: Did he ever talk to you about that?

P: Oh, yes. Yes, we discussed it a lot. It was a topic of conversation. The main contenders were Lyndon Johnson and Jack Kennedy; we had nothing else to talk about as far as applicants were concerned.

G: Do you recall anything regarding his change of mind, why he changed his mind?

P: No. He was reluctant to yield so quickly. Really, knowing Mr. Rayburn like I did, I could see what he meant. He just didn't want to take an about-face and run the other way. That was really what it was. He was for Lyndon Johnson strong for anything in the world. In fact, when he became speaker he called Lyndon and me over to the hideaway. You know where it is, don't you?

G: The "Board of Education?"

P: Yes. He said, "Of course, I have this room now. All speakers have had it before me. I have three keys here, and the three of us will

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have those keys." He gave me one, which I have in my pocket now, and he gave Lyndon one, and he kept one. Now, of course, their keys are not around. But it remained that way all the time, and we had the free use of the room. Of course, we would check with the Speaker's office to make sure one or the other of us was not using the room. We could have meetings there, and it was good for me because I had joint committees. You see, I was the author of the Full Employment Act, which created the Joint Economic Committee and the Council of Economic Advisers in the White House. That gave me an entre to the room over there, and I often had meetings in the room for that reason. Lyndon did, too. Of course, Lyndon was over on the Senate side, and I was on the House side. When we wanted to have joint meetings, we felt free to do it. It was very convenient. I have been in lots of meetings over there, and I never heard of a leak of any of the proceedings--never. Never.

There is a safe over there in that room--have you been in there lately--that's a regular combination safe where Mr. Rayburn would put the money when the campaign started. Then about two or three weeks before the campaign was over, some of us would meet over there who had something to do with getting money up. Mr. Rayburn would put it all out on the table and kind of halfway divide it by regions or states, or at least discuss it.

G: For the candidates?

P: Yes, for candidates and states. If they didn't have a candidate from a state in other words, just discuss it.

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G: Was that money that you and he had raised?

P: That different ones of us had raised. I was one of the large money raisers, and I didn't rate that. My district is a poor district in comparison to the average district. But I would call up these people. I did a lot of personal work. I would say, "Now listen, you are an important person in our district, and I think you ought to be on the right books up there in Washington. You ought to contribute a reasonable amount to get your name properly recorded and be known and identified as a Democrat." I had no trouble raising money, and I raised a lot of money. In fact, some people said I raised more than any other one member, and I suspect I was close to it. I would get up the dinners for the Speaker. I had several. I had two for Mr. Rayburn; I had one for John McCormack; I had one for different ones--and Carl Albert. Carl Albert's I well remember. I had raised \$35,000 and Carl's friends had raised \$30,000. I got hold of the committee and made them switch mine; I wouldn't think about being ahead of the Speaker, you know. I had them switch it so as to give him \$35,000 and me \$30,000.

G: It's been several years since we've talked to you about Lyndon Johnson. Do you have any reflections on him since then that you want to add?

P: He is one of the grandest men I ever knew. He was sincere and earnest; he was not facetious. I was with him a lot when he interrogated applicants for jobs. He would say, "You have been recommended to me for consideration. I was asked to talk to you and I'm glad to

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do it, so sit down here and tell me something about what you can do." The fellow would sit down and say, "Mr. President, I can do--" so-and-so and so-and-so, tell about his strong points. Then he would say, "Now I don't want to deceive you. I can't do everything. There are certain things I can't do, and I'll tell you something about them." [LBJ] would say, "Stop right there. I never hired a 'can't do' man in my life, and I'm not going to start now. I'll talk to you, and if you don't fit into my number one staff, possibly you might fit in some other way. You'll certainly get consideration." He made him feel good. But he stayed with that; he never hired a "can't do" man.

G: He was a very persuasive man.

P: Oh, very persuasive. You know, his people came from Oglethorpe County, Georgia, and my people came from Oglethorpe County, Georgia. One day he had been down there at Athens. He came back and said, "Say! I heard that our farms"--the Patman Farm and the Johnson Farm--"joined. I didn't go out there and look at it, but they promised me an ownership map of the whole county that would show it, and I'm going to have that pretty soon." He was a fellow that if he was ever challenged just mildly about a statement that he had made or anything would make darn sure that he didn't do anything until he got that proven. He brought that map to me. He said, "Well, here's the map; I told you." I've got it here in my files somewhere now.

[His family] left [Oglethorpe County] a few years before--it

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was along about the time of the War Between the States. Of course they were rather affluent compared to my family. They went down on a passenger train to New Orleans, and then they got on a boat and went up the coast of Texas and around. Finally they decided on settling at Johnson City. They settled there. Have you been there?

G: Sure.

P: The most interesting place I think is that cemetery. You see that stone wall, that rock fence around it. Then the first person that's buried in there was the founder of Baylor University, [LBJ's] grandfather. It's a most interesting thing, and people just read those epitaphs on the monuments. They spend a lot of time doing that; I did myself. It was real interesting.

Lyndon was really a genuine person; there was nothing facetious or foolish about him at all. He could engage in levity, all right, just like anybody else, but that was not his stock in trade.

G: Do you think there was something in his leadership, or Speaker Rayburn's for that matter, that has not been duplicated in recent years?

P: Yes. Earnestness and sincerity of purpose, I suspect, are traits that are present in the case of Lyndon Johnson that are not so obvious in the case of others.

G: Do you think this is why they were so effective?

P: I think so, yes. He was very sincere. Lyndon could be facetious, like over there in the ["Board of Education"] room sometimes we would have a little levity, but he could get right back to cases awfully

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fast. And Lady Bird is just like him. You know, she was born twenty miles from Patman's Switch. That's where I was. It's on the little Short Line Railroad from Greenville, Texas, to Shreveport, Louisiana. It went through Patman's Switch. When my people came there in covered wagons they saw that area, the surrounding hills--not mountains--and the fine pure water with springs bubbling up, and it looked like Georgia, kind of red land. That's why my people stopped there. Then they built a big country store. They had a cotton gin to separate the seed from the cotton, and then they had the seed-crushing facilities for the cotton and a lumber mill. They had everything that they needed, a self-contained community. We didn't own it collectively. Each family bought their own land, but it was part of the premises. We got along fine, had our own church and cemetery and everything else.

I remember two of the boys, my uncle Jim Patman's sons Ed and Jack, would go to town about twice a week. They had a great long wagon and about six mules that pulled it. We had rough roads, you know, and sometimes they would get bogged down and have to go by where Uncle Jim and maybe one or two of the other Patmans were working out in the field. One of them would say, "We're going to town now. Throw us the purse." Grandpa would reach down and get an old long purse full of money and throw it to them in the wagon. They would take it and go on to town, buy what they wanted and come back. "All right, Pa, here's your purse," throw it back--never count the money, just throw it back. That's the way they

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transacted their business on things like that. But they had complete trust in one another, and it was a healthy thing to realize in a family. You know, they don't all get along so good.

Our people were anxious to get an education, I was myself, and most of them got an education and began to move off. Now we don't have a single Patman on that plantation, but the person who owns it was a favorite first cousin of mine, Gladys Patman. She married a fellow named Charles Windham, who is an insurance man in Dallas, and they have owned it for many, many years. We would always make sure that it stayed in the family.

G: Do you recall the last time you saw President Johnson?

P: Yes. We were visiting the President and Lady Bird. We usually visited them every year the last few years. We were told where to meet him. At the gates you had to ring a certain bell that would go to the house, and immediately they would open the gates so we could get in.

The next morning we were talking. [They] said, "Now, we are going to the [LBJ] Library in the morning and we're going in the helicopter." I didn't care too darn much about the helicopters at that time. Of course my wife spoke up, "That's wonderful. Wonderful!" I couldn't say a word against it.

When it came time to go the next morning the fog had come in, and we couldn't go in the helicopter. Lyndon had Lincoln cars, and each one of them had a television and a radio in it, and telephone. Most of the time that he was in those cars he was talking to somebody

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in New York or Washington or some other place. The rest of us were just sitting around in the car. He got hold of his daughter [Luci] that had the little boy about four years old. He was so cute and smart. [LBJ] got his daughter and said, "Now you have Sonny down there at the entrance to the Library. Congressman Patman is going to be with me, and I want to have it instilled in him that I am asking the Congressman to teach you [the child Lyn] how to be a congressman one of these days. I want you to be a congressman. He'll tell you and stay with you and give you points, but you be there." So when we got there, there was his mother and the little boy. He was a cute little kid and as smart as he could be. We spent some time together, and we went to the--you know, he's got a wonderful Library there. You've gone through it, haven't you?

G: Yes, I work there.

P: You do work there? Oh, that's great. Now, what happened to the man who was the postmaster general?

G: John Gronouski?

P: I was with him when Lyndon told him, "You talk about getting away; I don't want you to tie yourself up on anything without you talking to me about it first, because I have something in mind for you." He wouldn't tell him what it was, but it was this Library. He wanted him to have charge of it, and he did put him in charge.

G: Of the School of Public Affairs.

P: Yes, that's right. It was the School really that he had charge of.

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G: He was pretty pleased with the Library, wasn't he?

P: Oh, he was happy with it, yes.

G: Do you recall anything that he particularly liked when he went through it?

P: He liked it all, and he liked the way they fixed his papers. They had the real experts in doing that and the tapes and everything else. He said, "We're going to fix yours the same way." I said, "Oh, Mr. President, that's too much to give me. You couldn't afford to do that. I'm not in the class of Lyndon B. Johnson. You forget about me." He was going to give me a wing, and he did. It's a huge long room, and Lady Bird made him put my name on it. That's the only room that had anybody else's name on it except his name. She said, "Every room shouldn't have Lyndon's name on it." They put my name on that room; it'll be mine. I'm shipping my papers down there now.

G: They are a welcome addition.

P: I've got some things that nobody else has. When I came here in 1928 I was very lonesome. I had been used to activity. In fact, when I was going to high school I organized debating clubs and societies around in the area [at] different schools because I liked it. For kids to debate one another I knew was the most telling thing in an education. When Daniel E. Garrett came there in 1912 running for congressman-at-large, somehow or other somebody told him about me taking an active part with young people, and how the young people had sprung up and [were] so active and doing so

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much in the public interest. Daniel Garrett got interested and got me to take him to see some of the leaders in different communities around. He was very much sold on what I had done, and after he was elected he sent me the Congressional Record. Of course, I couldn't read the Record; it was much larger than anything I could read. I thought I had one here. But you've seen many of them.

M: Oh sure.

P: I want to tell you how I fixed it. I would get each Record, I would open it up, and I would look through it. Subjects that I was interested in I would make a note of on the front page. (Patman speaks to an assistant) Let me have the morning Record, please ma'am, the Congressional Record. That way it wasn't three months until I could make a speech on most any subject just by looking to the references I had there. So I have done that ever since. I've gotten the Record, and I always put things on there that I am particularly interested in. That has helped me more than anything. If I were trying to teach a young man how to get to be a congressman, I would start right there. I would say, "You have your congressman. He'll be glad to send you a daily Congressional Record. It will stack up like cordwood if you don't use it right. But you can use it right, and you'll get an education out of it. You'll get news all over the world and the United States, and things that you should know that help you in current events and things like that."

I was taking the Pathfinder then. That was about the best

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little paper I ever. . . . I don't suppose you remember it, but it was a very meaningful little paper that students liked. That way I got interested. As long as Daniel Garrett was congressman he would send me things that would help me. He knew what my ambition was. That helped me to get to be a congressman. I probably wouldn't have been if I hadn't had just a little encouragement like that.

G: So you knew about Washington affairs before you got up here.

P: Oh listen, the fellow I defeated had been there fourteen years. I'm not bragging about this, but I knew more about the Congress than he did. Of course, I had studied it. A fellow asked me, "Why is it the little university you came from in Tennessee, Cumberland University, the law school, has more graduates here in the House of Representatives than any other school in the country?" I said, "Well, that's understandable. Most of the boys were like I was: they just had to work hard and work their way through school, things like that." It's kind of like the dog going along on the farm. All at once a rabbit jumps up in front of the dog, and the dog takes after the rabbit. All his interest was to catch the rabbit and maybe get a bite of rabbit meat, or at least win the race. But that rabbit was running for his life, and he always won because he had his life at stake. That's the way the boys were from Lebanon; they had their lives at stake and they were trying to win the race. We have meetings of the Lebanon law school. I was at one last Friday night here nearby out to the club at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. They have a huge officers' club

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out there, it's a wonderful place. They had a meeting out there and invited me. I was out there and saw a lot of my old friends. They are kind of clannish and stick together because they all have something in common.

G: I certainly do thank you for your time, Representative Patman.

P: Oh, it's a pleasure.

G: I look forward to having you come down to Austin.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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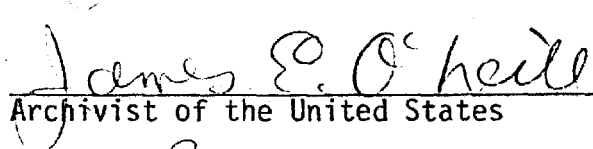
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