INTERVIEW II

DATE: June 17, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: J. J. (JAKE) PICKLE

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Congressman Pickle's office in Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Mr. Congressman, we were talking last time about the election of 1946, and we'd just finished winning the Clay box. I thought we'd pick it up from there.

P: Well, that was just one of the experiences in the campaign of 1946. It was the first time that the President [Lyndon Johnson] had ever really been challenged since he had been elected as congressman, and the climate was all set for a possible upset. A lot of young men had come back from the service and they were "loaded for bear," so to speak. They were out to "get Johnson."

F: A lot of these wheeler-dealer charges that went on that follow Mr. Johnson through the years really stem from this campaign, didn't they?

P: Yes, and I suppose you could say some of it stemmed around the fact that the Johnsons had made money or were making money; that he was a poor boy from a poor family, and now he had made money. This is a charge that's quite often leveled at anybody who's in public life.

F: And once leveled, you never quite get rid of it.

P: No. You find yourself explaining or defending, and once you start doing

that, then you are suspect. You are questioned from then on. In this particular case, the Johnsons during the war had bought KTBC. They had bought it primarily on money which Mr. Johnson had gathered together, and from Mrs. Johnson's money from an aunt in Alabama. The amount of money they paid for KTBC at that time was not a large amount. They had outbid whoever was interested in it and had obtained it. And nobody paid any attention to it. But when it began to make money all through the war years and immediately afterwards, then they were suspect, you see. They'd level charges against them. If any apartment building was constructed in Austin, somebody would say, "Oh, you know, Lyndon Johnson is behind that." I remember Gordon Fulcher, who had left the newspaper business and gone into construction business, had this to plague him for a long time. Every building that he put up or had any interest in, someone would always say--because he was a friend of Johnson's--that "Lyndon Johnson is his silent partner."

F: Hollers raised some question about how Johnson had obtained the house out on Dillman.

P: Yes. As I recall it, they made some reference [to] Brown and Root, who through the years has always been paraded before Johnson as his secret benefactor or source of funds. Because the house had come through the Brown people indirectly, they said well, that was another deal. These things were floating all through: all kinds of property purchases, construction jobs. The radio business had made the Johnsons suspect of making a lot of money.

F: Did they bother the Congressman personally, or did he just look on them as part of the--?

P: Of course, they bothered the Congressman personally, because here was a case where he had been in the Congress now about nine years; had developed a tremendous standing; almost by just a hair defeated for the Senate in 1941. He had gone to the war and volunteered as he said that he would; came back. He was recognized as one of the leading congressmen in the United States, and yet they would take after him with a great deal of opposition and vengeance in the district. The accusation was not about his service, but "Had he made money?" I think really underlying a lot of that was the feeling that Johnson was still a New Dealer, a Roosevelt man, or a loyal or liberal Democrat.

F: Which was enough to make him suspect in some quarters.

P: That was the beginning of the seed because the opposition had a rump convention, I remember, during the war, and rump conventions were the order of the day, 1946 and later 1948 and so forth. So I think really a lot of the old hands who wanted to change and slow down and to start the conservative movement really were objecting more to the philosophy, but they were using the profiteering approach as the main vehicle.

This brings to point another decision. We had to decide how to answer these charges. And as I said earlier, we met one evening in Senator Wirtz's home. There were a group of us around--John Connally and Joe Kilgore and Ray Lee and Gordon Fulcher; Buck Hood; Tom Miller, the mayor: Bob Phinney; myself; and one or two more. But we had a long discussion that night of how to answer the charges.

And most of us finally decided that the best way to do would be to let Mrs. Johnson answer the charges. Let her bring out the records and challenge the opponent. Let him have it between the eyes as if he were questioning a lady's statements and integrity. We all thought that would be a good approach because it would make it very difficult for the opponent to answer. We thought perhaps that was the order of the day, or that was the decision that evening until Senator Wirtz finally cleared his throat. With his cigar in his hand and tapping it gently over in the little tray, he said, "Well, I'll tell you boys, I never have thought it would set well with the people long if you hide behind a woman's skirt. I believe Lyndon better answer this himself head-on." It didn't take long to realize that probably that was the best approach.

And he did that night, by coming to Wooldridge Park, opening up all the records, and of course, in the presence of his wife, said, "Here are our records. Anybody in the world can examine them. I challenge you to do it, and if you find something that you want to argue or debate about, we'll do it tomorrow wide open to the public." That was such a bold offer and such a dramatic presentation of his financial records, and swearing that he would stand by everything in the book that no one came forward on the stand to challenge it. No one came forward later. And so that was an issue, but it faded after that.

But that 1946 campaign was the first real test. It was hot and heated all through the election. Though I was working on a district basis, the same kind of fevered activity was going on back in the

district.

I remember during the last week of the campaign the President's old friend Gene Autry came to Central Texas and appeared with him on some of his meetings. We would go into San Marcos or Lockhart, Luling, Georgetown, Taylor, and towns around there. We would have a presentation of Gene Autry on an old wagon bed or an old truck bed. It wouldn't be decorated. It wasn't fancy. It was right out on the courthouse square and under the blazing sun or under the tree. In both San Marcos and Lockhart, we had good trees on the square and it was a colorful sort of a setting. Gene Autry would come and say he was happy to be here, just happened to be here, passing through, wanted to appear with his old friend Lyndon Johnson, whom he knew when this election was finished in a few days, would be back in the saddle again. And when he'd crank down with "back in the saddle again," everybody would start clapping and cheering and then say, "Lyndon will be back in the saddle again." That was the theme. Of course, that was Gene Autry's song and it caught on. We had tremendous gatherings. Now, though the platform and the wagon or truck bed would be very plain, I had the job of being sure that the PA systems were wired in, that we had the best equipment possible, that we had to have a spare on hand if one went out. Because though it looked austere, a great deal of preparation went into the time that Gene Autry approached and the time he'd wave his hand and the pictures would be made when Johnson would get on the platform and put his arms around Gene Autry and together they would sing

and talk to the crowd. This was still the days when you could have political gatherings and it would appeal.

We went back into Austin the last two or three days of the campaign, and we went around to neighborhood communities. We'd have watermelon feasts. We would advertise in the newspaper "Free Ice Cold Watermelon." And that brought the crowd. We had them in the four sections of the city. And it was fine because, with Gene Autry and the watermelons and the closing spirit of a campaign, we had good excitement and good crowds.

F: Does any entertainer come like that simply because he is a friend? Do you try to compensate him?

P: I do not know. I know from my own experience that you do not compensate, but you have friends who in one way or another want you to be friendly too. I would imagine that Mr. Autry was obtained primarily through the recommendation of a Mr. Ed Weisl in New York, who represented in legal capacity the movie actors. He could say to them, "I think this would be a good appearance. Why don't you go?" In other words, you were just a friend of the industry, and therefore they'd send a man. But, so far as I know, there is no money exchanged and no pay for this. You just can't do it.

I found then that ice cold watermelon still had an attraction, and Gene Autry sure had an attraction. Of course, the young boys around the platform got engaged in a watermelon rind fight during the speaking and nearly ran Mr. Johnson crazy. I can still hear him trying to say in an aside, but in a loud voice, to Joe and Jake

and John or Walter or somebody, "Get those blankety-blank kids out from under this platform." They almost took him out of the saddle.

But that was an interesting campaign. It was the first time he was ever really challenged, and it showed though that by--

F: Actually it didn't turn out to be as close as you had thought, did it?

P: No, it didn't. We beat Hollers soundly, about 65 per cent to 35, as I remember it, or in that neighborhood. And I think he would have beaten him fairly easily if he had not put on a hard campaign. But I think this is what was in Mr. Johnson's mind. He was being challenged. He knew that he was one of the leading congressional contenders for future political offices. Had he run a close campaign and if it had looked like that he was becoming weak or vulnerable, this would affect him down the line. The campaign that he staged was not only one to protect his integrity, but to protect the claim he had, or thought he might have, as the leading Texas Democratic candidate so far as the future was concerned. So he spent time and money and effort. We organized backwards and forward thoroughly, so much so that what might have been a threatening campaign finally folded just by sheer force of meticulous organization and planning. And it was important, because he had 1948 looming, and if he had not won a very decisive victory in 1946, then I think that by 1948 he would have had trouble. I know that that was what he was thinking of at that time.

F: Before we leave this 1946 election, let me ask you two questions. One I started to ask you last time. He had been in office almost a decade now, and the burdens of office pick up simply because you can't please all of the people all of the time. Every year you leave some people a little dissatisfied, and, you know, it catches up with lots of politicians over a period of time. Did he worry about this, or did he just take for granted that if you made the extra effort that enough people would come along with him?

P: I'm sure he was concerned about it. I don't think he really worried. An incumbent has certain advantages. He's known. He's able to make appearances as Congressman Johnson or Congressman Pickle. This carries with it a sort of mantle of accomplishment and occupancy. That's important. He also is able to make releases, and he gets his name in the papers and gets a certain identity.

Every time, though, he casts a vote, he disappointed somebody or some group. And gradually there is a sort of an attrition that takes place over a period of years. You disappoint a man on one vote and it'll take a hundred other votes to get him back, because everybody is individually or, if you want to call it, selfishly interested in his own problem. So an incumbent does get hurt though, and he gets chipped at. Usually he doesn't know where some of the opposition lies. He just knows that this happens.

Now Mr. Johnson also during that period of time had to realize that if he was going to be the leader then he had to take positions openly and clearly in support of the times and the change. As such, he was very clearly still in the New Deal or the Roosevelt mold.

He was recommending changes in our whole political structure that were different from what our forefathers had operated. This really was drawing the line sharper and sharper between liberals and conservatives.

You could see the Dixiecrat movement building during that time, and Mr. Johnson was more or less their target, not because he wasn't for, in those days, a lot of the very basic things the South was for, but he was also for some changes. Being a leader he had to take the flag and go forward. So he got opposition that he wouldn't have received except for the fact that he was the recognized leader of the Texas group.

So that did enter into it, and he was concerned about it. But I don't think he was fearful that the opposition was going to be that large that he thought he had more advantages by being recognized as the leader than he was by losing.

F: He would pick up more than he lost.

P: That was it. He was going to pick up more than he lost.

F: One other question: In this very meticulous planning, did he take the active hand or did he have, in effect, an executive officer who was responsible for that and he just oversaw it?

P: If I don't make anything plain in all of these interviews, I want to make this plain: Mr. Johnson not only took a hand in all of this planning, he was the planner, and anything that we thought we were going to do, we'd better check it with the managers and they with Mr. Johnson because he knew everything that was taking place and

would involve himself in such meticulous little details that we used to laugh about it and wondered why in the world he'd want to take time to fool with how handbills would be printed.

I remember in the 1946 campaign we were going to make our appearances and our sweep in the various counties. We had arrangements that we would go into a community like Round Rock. I was to have gone ahead to be sure that that was in the paper. Secondly, I'd get everybody up and down the street notified. Third, I would send out a penny post card to all of the poll tax holders in that whole area and invite them to come in at a certain hour at a certain time. Fourth, I would have the PA system go up and down the streets before he came into town. Fifth, I'd have handbills printed which said: "Hear Lyndon Johnson speak. Round Rock, corner at so-and-so at a certain time." I might even go into town and start a little controversy: "Now, did you hear that Johnson is going to let old Hollers have it today?", and get that rumor floated around town. And we had several other things that were in agreement.

I remember one time we were going to the little community of Bertram--Bertram and Burnet. And I didn't send out the handbills because the territory was pretty widespread. I didn't really see any way I could really get out in the communities to get the handbills put out. I had sent the post cards out. They had the telephone campaign underway with our leader. So I bypassed this and told Mr. Johnson as we rolled into town that we didn't put out the handbills in this community because I thought the best thing to do

was just go ahead and concentrate on the post cards and the phone calls because of the distance involved and so forth. And he told me, "Young man, I don't want you to do any thinking. You just do what I tell you. Our agreement was that you would send a handbill?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Well then, why didn't you send a handbill?" I said, "Well, I thought--" He said, "I'll tell you again. You're not supposed to be thinking. You do what we have agreed to do unless I tell you to change it." And I smarted under the rebuke and the criticism, and I clouded up a little bit. He finally reached over in the car--we were driving along--and he said, "You heard me, and you'll find out that that's right. You stay with what we agreed, young man, and you'll be better off."

F: You get yourself a game plan and you stay with it.

P: That's right. But there he was, concerning himself about little handbills being put out in a small community that I thought really had been covered satisfactorily. I would have debated it, but he didn't want to debate. He just said, "This is what we agreed to do, and you do it in every place." I guess he assumed that if we did put out the handbills that might bring another ten, fifteen, twenty five people out, just by itself. And there's a lot of difference between twenty five people out to hear you than two hundred people, because it's all the difference in the world in both what the press sees--no matter how they vote, no matter whether they're for you strong or not--but what the coverage is and more particularly, what it does to a candidate. Because you get a certain exhilaration when

you're able to get up and talk to a group and it's a good-sized group and they respond well. It boosts a man more than anything else. That's that momentum, and he had it in that campaign. He sure did plan everything. He did in every campaign. He did when he was in the White House. And today he's doing the same thing.

I can tell you a little story that happened. This is getting out of context, but it's along the same line. We dedicated the LBJ Birthplace and Boyhood Home last week. We flew from Washington in two separate Jetstar planes. Secretary Hickel was on one plane along with Chairman Wayne Aspinall, chairman of the House Interior Committee; and John Saylor, the ranking Republican on the Interior Committee; Miss Julia Butler Hanson, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee of the Interior Committee; my wife and I; and a couple of others. Another plane full of congressmen and dignitaries came down.

We were met at the [LBJ] Ranch with the Governor [Preston Smith] of the state and a lot of the other state officials. We had a wonderful dedication. It was 92 degrees, and everybody sat out under the sun but it was hot. We all became embroiled with the heat. At the end of it, the President commented that he apologized for the heat, the sun, in a way, but he said, "The sun's good for my hay, and we need to get it baled today. And I know you'll understand if we don't let this meeting go on." Everybody laughed and applauded.

We went back to the lawn up at his house. We were all mingling around. Here was the President thanking the judges and the Secretary

of Interior and all the state officials and close family friends who had come out. He and Mrs. Johnson were moving around on the front lawn of their home, telling them that they appreciated their coming, and all of us were exchanging good comments about the dedication and the occasion when Chairman Aspinall and John Saylor wanted to drive down in the back pasture, primarily over in what they call the Danz pasture and see some of the deer and cattle.

While they were in the car, they heard this voice come on their intercommunication system. All automobiles connected with the Ranch have one of these intercom systems. They heard Volunteer--that was the President's voice--and he was asking his foreman where was the tractor that was supposed to be down there baling the hay. He said, "Well, the tractor was plowing down in another pasture." He said, "What's it doing plowing?" "Well," he said, "we let the man who would normally be running it down there on the baler come up for the dedication." The President said, "Listen, the dedication is over with now. The sun's out, and that hay ought to be cut. You get that tractor back up here to pull this baler. We could plow any day. Today's the time to get that hay cut, and you get him up there. I'll be down there in thirty minutes to check with you." Now, here was a voice coming on that little short wave system in detail telling that foreman to get that hay cut and plow some other day, and that today was the day for the hay. This was going on at a time when all the high United States officials were mingling around and exchanging good greetings, while he was back there acting as

foreman of the Ranch. So it shows you that he concerns himself about details, whether it's campaigns or whether it's--

F: Keeps his eye on the sparrow?

P: His eye on the sparrow. John Saylor told me yesterday, "I believe that's one of the greatest stories. There we were riding around, and here was the President of the United States in the midst of all the festivities coming on in a very positive voice saying, 'Get that hay cut and baled.'" (Laughter)

F: Getting back to 1948, if Pappy O'Daniel had run again--I realize this is iffy--do you think that Mr. Johnson would have made his bid for the Senate this time, or do you think that the fact Pappy ruled himself out is what triggered Mr. Johnson?

P: I don't know. I think he would have run whether Pappy would have run or not. This was building. He had won the 1946 campaign with a strong vote. He had knocked down or at least eliminated--

F: Of course, he had nearly taken Pappy the first time around. He had been the winner for two or three days.

P: Oh, within thirteen hundred votes. We went to bed one night, thought it was all over with. I learned that time not to celebrate too early. I did that night and that was a mistake.

But it was building. He had won this 1946 race with a big vote. The stage was set in 1948, and he pretty much had to make his move then. Usually in this business the brass ring comes around once and you grab it. If you miss it, you've missed your time and whatever occasion presents itself to stake your claim out for this particular

advancement. Now, the Senate had tried to do this in 1941 and did not quite make it. Then he had to decide, come 1948, whether he was going to make it then or not. And I think it was inevitable that he would run. Pappy's decision not to run, I don't think would have entered into it too much because Pappy was going down in favor. I think it might have been easier to run against W. Lee O' than it would have been against Coke because Coke was a--

F: He [O'Daniel] had not been an effective senator by most people's judgment.

P: No, no. Here was Coke Stevenson who had held the governorship during the war years, during the time there was not too much focus on state government.

F: The best time in the world to hold it.

P: Right. Texas had developed a big cash surplus. You know, he hadn't spent money, didn't have to. Taxes, money was coming in. He didn't have to try a lot of new changes or meet new challenges. So he could be the taciturn, wise, careful, prudent, successful public servant. That was his approach, and that was his philosophy too. So, in lots of ways, Coke Stevenson was a harder campaigner to beat because here he'd been in the governor's office and just riding the waves. He was so strong that it took a lot of talk to decide whether Mr. Johnson would even dare to do it. I guess the odds were against Mr. Johnson four or five to one that he could win that race, and he knew it. He came to Austin, and we all talked about it at length. Here again I was privileged to sit in on the conference of making the decision.

F: What were you doing at this time, incidentally?

P: In 1948 I had been working with KVET as commercial manager of the KVET radio station. I was one of the part-owners. I had left the radio station in the spring of 1948 to set up our advertising agency, the old Syers, Pickle, Winn Agency. I was over there at the time, as a partner. So I wasn't as involved in the 1948 campaign as I had been in some of the others, except that when we held these meetings to decide whether he should run or not, he called together again some of these same men that we have mentioned.

I remember particularly one night we had a conference out on his lawn at 1901 Dillman, and Claude Wild,Sr., Tom Miller, Gordon Fulcher, Buck Hood, Paul Bolton, Ox Higgins, of course John Connally, Kilgore, and some others who I can't remember at this point, gathered. We had to decide: Would we challenge Coke? Could we win it? There was a need for a liberal voice, so to speak, or a progressive to be in this race, because it would affect the general southern strategy and the Dixiecrat movement. I think that was probably one of the factors that got Mr. Johnson to make the final decision: that year, that yes, he would run.

F: The situation was different from 1941. In 1941 he could go back to being congressman. In 1948 he takes all the marbles or he loses them all.

P: That's exactly right. So that was the big decision. Would we do it? And the fact that he felt that the Democratic Party, as he thought the Democratic Party should be established, needed a voice, needed someone to at least give the voters the right to make

a choice, I think that really was the main thing that got him into it. Also, had he not run in 1948 and Coke had been elected, then Mr. Johnson's chances of getting in the Senate would have been practically removed. He had to decide did he want to make the move or not, and we finally decided to do it.

F: There would have been four years to another senatorial election, and at that time he didn't know but what Tom Connally would go on forever.

P: That's right. So he had to pretty much say, "I'm going to stay a congressman, or I'll take my chance at the Senate and make it or not." So that's what he did.

An interesting part of that campaign was that Mr. Johnson had been congressman. He had made one statewide race; that was 1941, seven years before. The war years had intervened. A lot of people would now ask, "Who is Lyndon Johnson?" The question was, if we were going to tackle Coke at such great odds--Coke, and George Peddy from Houston was the other candidate--then we had to come up with something that would be new and different and would catch the people's attention. Because if he was going to be the voice of the New Horizons or the New Deal, he had to come forth with something that would show that he had that attractiveness. We talked about a lot of different gimmicks.

The one that finally was settled on, though, has turned out to be almost a legend within the state, and that was the use of the helicopter. Some of us thought we ought to have a trial bomb run between Texarkana and El Paso, and to show by the speed of flight

that those two cities could be bombed, or that we could travel them, to show how fast the times were changing; and that we had to get away from the old plodding, conservative type that Coke would offer. That theme didn't prevail. But we finally did agree on the helicopter. I'm not sure who really trotted out the helicopter idea, because the helicopter was basically new. I think it was John Connally. It was used some in World War II, but not a great deal. A lot of people didn't consider them safe. And by our standards today, they weren't safe then. It's a wonder that a lot more of them didn't crash.

But we finally got hold of a fellow in Fort Worth who had flown some of the boys--I think he was a friend of Warren Woodward's--a fellow by the name of Joe Mashman. Joe was a helicopter pilot, and a good one. The President had confidence in him, and we got him to come forward.

F: The President thought that the danger was outweighed by the showmanship?

P: Well, Mashman would tell the President, "We won't fly high, and if we have to come down, we'll just settle down in a corn patch, and it's all right." But the President also saw, as all of us did, that this would get a lot of attention. And all over the state in 1948, that little helicopter would come in to either the courthouse square or into the lot adjoining the courthouse square or the local football field.

F: How many could ride in it?

P: Only two or three--a very small chopper.

F: I presume Mrs. Johnson worried like a proper wife.

P: Oh, yes, and wouldn't ride in it, and didn't want to be involved in it. Usually it was just the pilot and Mr. Johnson. I'm not sure of the size. Maybe the writers, Paul Bolton or Roy Wade or somebody, would go with him in it. But it was a very small helicopter by our standards. The helicopter coming in to the little town, we'll say, of Brenham, circling the square, with a loudspeaker coming from the clouds, you know, "Come to Fireman Park," which is only two blocks off the square, "and hear "Senator" Lyndon Johnson." That would bring the people out. If it didn't bring them out, everybody in that community and that county knew that Lyndon Johnson came in on a helicopter. They would talk about that, and they'd laugh about it, and they'd giggle. When Johnson would come in and he'd circle the field around, he'd come out and say, "Hello, this is Lyndon Johnson. I'll be down with you in just a minute. Glad to be with you." And just as he was making his circle coming right down on the crowd, and just before it would settle, he'd open the door of the helicopter and throw his Stetson hat out to the audience! Here was the big Texas Stetson cowboy hat being thrown to the crowd from the helicopter. Of course we aides always had instructions. Somebody was posted and the moment that hat came flying out of the helicopter, we ran over and got it, and had to pick it up quick to use it again. Everybody thought he was giving his hat to the crowd, but we always had to retrieve it. It wasn't always easy, usually a kid would pick it up, and felt it was <u>his</u>. We had to wrassle with a few to get it back!

F: Throwing his hat in the ring.

P: It was a heck of a problem keeping that helicopter moving, because you had to have special fuel. You had to have a truck going in advance. Now, that sounds pretty good. If you're just going from A to B and you had the stage all set, that would be fine. But when you go from A to B, to C to D, to E to F, all over the state quick like, it takes a fast moving crew moving in advance of the helicopter. We have stories galore about the men who were trying to break the speed of sound in an automobile to keep ahead of the helicopter. And nobody saw that except the men who were working on it, and died a thousand deaths and worried till late every night of how they were going to get that fuel for that truck, or another truck, to meet him on time at Grand Saline or at Canton or wherever it might be.

All kinds of risks were involved in that helicopter. I remember that he was coming in to land at New London one time. The wind was blowing, and he was supposed to set down right alongside the monument that was erected in memory of these boys and girls who were killed at that big gas explosion over there. The wind blew the helicopter down so close that actually the blade nicked either that monument or a part of the school building, just really nicked it thin. And he bounced up in that air from that little nick--it was that close--and was able to pull back, circle around, came down and landed. Now that was just one of the types of near misses that we had with that helicopter. The crowd would "oohh" and "ahhh" and then laugh and say, "Old Lyndon really put it down, didn't he?" But it was a topic of conversation. Every campaign needs one, and that was the one when Lyndon Johnson would drop in out of the cloud with his helicopter.

F: Did you have any first-class snafus, or did most of it get done?

P: Most of it got done. We didn't have any crashes. We had to set the plane down a time or two for repairs, but there was no accident. While that was going on, of course, we had the old standbys back at the old Hancock Building, The Hancock home was on the corner of 8th and Colorado, or 8th and--

F: 8th and Brazos.

P: No. 8th and Lavaca--going north, north and south, where a parking lot is now, catercorner across from the Federal Building, the U.S. Courthouse. It was an old two-story home. In its heyday the Hancock family, for which they named the Hancock Theater, had a lovely home, and it actually set up on a kind of mound five or six feet high. It made an imposing sight. But it was an old colonial home, with a broad porch--almost around the whole house. We took it over and that was where our headquarters took place in that campaign.

F: It must have been San Jacinto then?

P: No, it's west. You come up 8th Street, going west, and then the City Hall and then the U.S. Courthouse.

F: Oh, the U.S. Courthouse. I was thinking of the new Federal Building.

P: It was on the southwest corner where the parking lot exists now.

F: That must be Nueces.

P: Or Lavaca.

F: Yes, Lavaca. There's where it was.

P: The house is torn down now. We had back there the old standbys. John Connally was overall strategy and the immediate contact between

the President and the campaign workers, both at headquarters and men in the field. Mr. Claude Wild was more or less the administrator. Claude wanted to operate the campaign from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon. That was the hours that he liked. John Connally wanted to operate from about eleven o'clock in the morning until about twelve at night. Both of them should have been making joint decisions so we could move forward. And during the primary, we had lots of problems unsolved because we couldn't get those two men working together in unity. There was a little friction there, and the hours and the type of outlook and the method of operation were so different, one from the other, that it made it a little difficult for us in headquarters to get things done. And this got to be a problem. After the primary, George Peddy was eliminated, but Coke lacked only about 1 per cent, or 1 1/2 per cent, of having the majority vote.

F: You just barely made a runoff.

P: Just barely. So we thought at that time, "Should we go ahead on it?" And of course the decision was immediately that we would go ahead on it.

F: Let me ask you one thing about personal relationships. I've known Claude Wild the last dozen or fifteen years, and he doesn't strike me as a type that Lyndon Johnson or the Good Lord himself could move any other direction than Claude wants to go. Was he that way as far back as 1948?

P: Well, he has always been a sort of a definite person.

F: I mean, I have great admiration for him, but he knows what he wants to do at all times, it seems to me, and he does it that way.

P: To an extent. He does know what he wants to do. He does make his appraisal. But then if the candidate says, "No, we're going to do this," he would enter into it and say, "Well, he has decided now. Let's go." So Claude is not a--

F: Claude would be the candidate's man then.

P: Once the decision was made. Now, you could almost guess his judgment on it. But Claude has the knack of being able to look at both sides, analyze how a particular move would affect the other side, and what their answer would be. He could say, "Now, if we say this, this is what they will say or can say." We could keep ourselves out of pitfalls by just him trying to reason out what he thought would be the best approach.

Now he was from the old school too. That is, he had come up under the Jimmy Allred days and earlier state elections, and he was still doing campaign as we would have had. Claude Wild wouldn't have gone to this helicopter business, I don't imagine at all. I can't remember, but I just know that he wouldn't have been for that. But he did have the ability to kind of reason out and keep us on a steady course. You know, you lose campaigns more than you win them. The mistakes you make, the foolish errors and blunders that you make by what you put out in a press release or what you put in an ad or what is said on a street corner--that can hurt you more than all the organizational work that goes on. Now, Mr. Wild could be an organizational man, but he was one who could anticipate what was going to be said and what could you say that would keep you from getting into

trouble. This was Wild's big contribution.

F: I presume then to a certain extent that, while you weren't satisfied with the primary, that your one goal had been to make the runoff in this, and that you had achieved.

P: Well, we wanted a runoff, but we wanted it by a better vote. Had we been within--

F: Thirty or forty thousand?

P: Yes, that would have been a lot better than the seventy-eight to ninety thousand, whatever it was, because that was so imposing. One, we knew that the tide kind of goes with the man that looks like he's going to win. Secondly, there is a drop-off usually of interest from the primary to the runoff. Some people say, "Well, I voted, and he has got it won," or "The other guy is going to lose." So that hurt us and was a concern for us.

But we had this same old bunch, Marietta Brooks and Julia Bryson down running the office; we had Charlie Herring, later our state senator, and Don Thomas, helping on this helicopter; Sam Plyler and Dorothy Plyler, Willie Day Taylor, Mack DeGeurin were all involved.

Now my part in that campaign was more limited to the Tenth District in Central Texas than it was on a statewide basis. I peeled off from my agency to work specifically on the campaign, but with the understanding that I would be more limited in this campaign, because I had not only set up a new agency, joined them, but my wife had had a cancer operation and was not well at all, and I had to stay closer to home. So my understanding was that I

more or less would stay in the Central Texas area, and I did.

But we put in a good strong campaign in that Central Texas area, and we won by such heavy votes in that area that I've often thought that even though there was a lot of conversation about the eighty-seven votes down in Duval County, or Jim Wells County, that the heavy vote we got in some of my Central Texas counties compensated for a lot of places where in the West Texas area, they were having a conservative vote. They talk about Duval County. The little old city of Granger used to give us a vote of about forty or fifty to one. I've often wondered why they didn't investigate Granger instead of just Duval County, because the votes there were just as heavy; those people had been just as loyal as they were in the other sections.

But this 1948 campaign was a hot, hard, bitter race. Well--after the primary Coke Stevenson decided to come to Washington, and I think that was his undoing.

F: That's where he lost, demonstrating what you said awhile ago.

P: He really made a big error. Had he not gotten himself involved in Washington--here again, you lose it, you don't win it. He had it won, but he came up here to take a "course," a quickie course on foreign affairs. He wanted to come over and talk to some of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and understand a little better the United States involvement in international affairs.

F: You'd been chipping away on him as being too local in his interests?

P: Yes. All at once, here he's going to come up and become an expert

overnight in foreign affairs. And when he came to Washington, he came out of the bush leagues to the major leagues, and the reporters were waiting for him. Mr. Johnson and his friends, i.e. reporters like Drew Pearson, had the stage set for a lively reception. Between statements that Coke would make about how he would handle an international situation and denying that he was up here to try to either give instructions, or assuming that he had already been elected and denying that, you know, Coke was on the defensive.

He had with him a young man, Bob Murphy, Robert Murphy, who later was a district attorney at Nacogdoches in East Texas, a witty, delightful fellow; but Bob was rather free on his comments. They quoted Bob quite often in the papers here, and the answers had a southwestern or a country tone to them. I've forgotten just what all the answers were, but between Bob and Coke the whole state began to laugh that Coke just already had "appointed" himself as being elected. And he had already come to Washington to see how his seat will feel and where he'll sit, and he was just going to take for granted the people of Texas. Coke made some statements here and so did Murphy that got him in real trouble. From that point on, he was on the defensive. Coke never did really answer his position on Taft-Hartley. Through Mr. Johnson was supposed to have been a liberal and a New Dealer, he still had said that he was against the repeal of 14-B; that is, he wanted to keep the right-to-work laws on the books. Coke never would really take a stand on it. His refusal to be "forthright" made him appear unsure and vacillating. Either way, Coke looked unsure, and people back home began to question his qualifications on the national scene.

F: Johnson's vote on this had denied him labor's official support. Did you get the feeling he got unofficial support from labor?

P: I think he got unofficial support, yes. But in some quarters, he didn't. Always this has been kind of an interesting thing. Johnson has never had a hundred per cent support of labor, though the conservative wants to say, "Oh, he has got labor." Some of the labor leaders have never been really for him very much, and some of them openly opposed to him. And it goes back to this position he took early in his congressional life, that he was for the right-to-work, i.e. against the repeal of 14-B.

Now Coke, as I recall it, never would really state how he would vote. He took the position, and with some understanding, that this was a national matter. It wasn't a state proposition. He needn't express himself on it. But he never would come out on it, and Johnson just kept hammering, hammering him over. This is one of the things reporters seized on here. It just focused attention on the fact that Coke wouldn't give an answer, that he wouldn't do anything but smoke his pipe. Johnson kept saying, "You've got to have somebody who will be willing to speak for Texas, not just sit back and smoke his pipe and do nothing." But anyway, that was, I think, a turning point in the campaign.

F: In some instances I think the opponent, even though he has been a former governor of a state, could have come into Washington for a briefing and gotten it and gone back home, and no one would have paid him any attention. In a sense, did you feel that Congressman

Johnson had primed the people for the arrival of Coke Stevenson?

P: Not only primed, I would say he had briefed them thoroughly. Mr. Johnson had been here in Washington for several years. He had many friends who were willing to help him, or at least try to give him a reasonable assist, and were willing to counsel with him and talk to his friends and others about questions to ask--the things that would give them a briefing on this man Coke Stevenson whom they had never heard of and never seen. They therefore welcomed the chance. So there's no question but what Mr. Johnson was behind the scenes on a lot of these things. It boiled down to the reporters actually asking and popping the questions.

But had he not really set them up, Coke could have come in, made his little appearance, within a day or two gone on back, and all he could have said was, "Yes, I went up to Washington, checked with them, and just kind of visited. I talked to them." Then that would have been the end of it.

But instead Johnson made a state issue of his visit up here. And you'll find by and large that when a man is in an election and he wins a primary, he doesn't jump out and start acting like he's already elected. When he does, that's when the people say, "You're taking me for granted." That's in a sense what Coke would do.

But the election was tense and close, the closest race we've ever had. When we finally got the old eighty-seven vote victory and Coke or his people were saying that the votes were actually

stolen down in either Duval or Jim Wells Counties--Box 13, Jim Wells County, and some of those votes did come in late, just like the votes had come in late in the 1941 campaign when in East Texas sections the trend almost reversed itself for a twenty-four-hour period--the votes that were going on a three-to-two basis went eight-to-one. I've often wondered what all was involved in it. I was not down in any of those counties, so I don't know.

F: I rather get the feeling that sometimes those rural boys could show you big city boys something about handling votes.

P: Yes, they're relieved from the spotlight, and I suppose could do that. You know, people who play the political game know that these things probably have happened. The election judges take a few liberties here and there. I think this is very much of a rarity, though. Practically no election is ever changed when the votes are cast and the votes are counted. I've got a great feeling of integrity of election judges and officials through the state. Here and there, you'll have examples of somebody taking advantage. We all know that. But I don't suppose that any more advantage is taken in one section than in the other.

This, though, was a closing race, tense, changing at the latest hour, so of course everybody was full of accusations at that time. Mr. Johnson pointed out that in Corsicana and other places, we would gain and lose votes; that is, he was getting beaten out of votes, he would say. So both sides were in a proposition of claiming that if there was any miscounting being against me--

F: That was a problem down at Brownwood, too, as I recall.

P: And Brownwood. And when it was all over with, Mr. Johnson had only an eighty-seven vote lead. That is a mighty hairy difference. It's not even a fraction of a percentage; it's just so close.

F: That's not a good lead even in a justice of the peace election.

P: No, that's right.

F: Did he sit easy and take his congratulations or was he really quite tense over the result and felt that it might be denied?

P: He was careful in what he said. He just said he wanted to protect every box and see that none of them were destroyed and that his votes were counted the same as the other man. We immediately began to call on the courts to protect the boxes and the votes that were cast to be certain that they weren't changed. The other side was asking for the same thing. They were involved in a series of legal maneuvers through the federal courts that lasted for weeks and weeks before it was finally settled, each one appealing right on up. And Coke's people appealed it right on up to the time Mr. Johnson walked out on the United States Senate floor. But when he was sworn in, of course, then it was a moot question. Here again, just an example that elections very seldom, if ever, change from the time those votes are put in a box and counted. Pretty much, that's it.

F: Why was Box 13 singled out?

P: It came in at a late hour with a large number of votes, so automatically they said that there was something wrong, something crooked about it.

F: Did George Parr make a practice of just holding back the votes and then turning them in late?

P: Sometimes. I don't remember that it was a practice.

F: I haven't seen him yet.

P: I don't remember that it was a practice particularly, but in those days voters down through that area voted extremely heavy one way. I guess that Mr. Parr and his friends and the organization there usually paid for a great deal of the poll taxes. And those men--a lot of them Mexican--were willing to say to him, "How do you want us to vote, Mr. George?" And they would get together with their groups and they'd talk it over and decide who they were going to support, we'll say in this case Lyndon Johnson. Then nobody questioned it, everybody just said that was it. So they would say, "Here comes a vote of four thousand to one hundred and fifty." They'd say, "That couldn't be." But I can tell you that it can be. Everybody knows exactly whom they're supposed to vote for. They've got ballots that have been marked for them and have a sample exhibit. They know by word of mouth who they're supposed to vote for, and there's not even any question about it. I've seen that for years and years take place down there where they'd come in with heavy votes.

Now normally, those votes would be submitted and everybody would kind of laugh about it and say, "Well, that's old George's kingdom of Duval--the Duke of Duval." It was sort of a laughing matter. But in this particular case, this was a real close election. The ballots came in late, and there was the inevitable that they would say,

"They're stuffing the ballot box down there." Anyway, eighty-seven votes stood up.

I think, Joe, the most dramatic moment I've ever participated in or witnessed was at the State Democratic Convention in September, 1948, when the State Democratic Executive Committee met in Fort Worth to canvass the vote which would be the official tabulation: who won and who didn't. You can be sure that those votes--every county had been counted and recounted and added and re-added a thousand times by both sides. But you had to come to a vote that you moved that Lyndon Johnson be declared the nominee for the United States Senate. The Democratic committee was split close as can be, just almost as close as the election between Coke supporters and Johnson supporters. You remember Coke had been the governor, and a great many of those people had been put on the state committee by Coke and his friends, so he had his friends on the committee. Now, an adverse ruling by the Democratic committee would have said that officially the party said that the vote should be reversed.

The SDEC listened to all the arguments, and finally they began to call the roll. I believe Vann Kennedy of Corpus Christi was the secretary of the convention then. And they went down each person's name. The first five or ten were for Johnson, Coke, Johnson, Coke. Then Coke had a run from about the alphabet to G or H, in that area. On through the middle of the alphabet, he had about ten straight votes. It looked like Johnson had no chance to get that certification. Then the tide began to change. And the tension in that room was so sharp that anything could have exploded it. I was leaning up against a

pillar in the back listening and trying to make tabulation on my sheet--and keeping tab on my own heart!

F: Were the candidates there?

P: I do not think the candidates were there in the room at the time. They were in the hotel, the Hotel Texas, I believe it was. I was trying to write my tabulation down, and I think I'm kind of experienced in these things, but my old heart was pounding so much that I could hardly write as these tabulations would come in, because I knew what was involved. Finally, we got to where it was a tie vote. And we pulled back up. But one or two people hadn't voted. And he said, "The clerk will read the names of those who didn't respond." He called one or two names, and we couldn't find out where they were. Finally, as the last name was being called, and just before he brought down the gavel, a noise was heard in the back and somebody said, "Let me through; let me through." Finally someone pushed Charlie Gibson of Amarillo through the audience. And Charlie voted, said, "I say I vote aye for Johnson." And when he did that, that broke the tie, twenty-nine to twenty-eight, or whatever it was at that point, and gave the one vote margin. Vann Kennedy brought the gavel down and said, "Mr. Johnson is certified as the nominee."

F: That was as close as the election, wasn't it?"

P: The crowd burst into a cheer, and the opposition was hollering, "No, no!" It was so tense and so critical every second that I've often thought that that was perhaps the most dramatic moment in Texas politics I've ever witnessed. The certification of Mr. Johnson

before the State Democratic Committee in Fort Worth! Well, he was certified and the courts upheld it, and he became the senator.

And at that point he was entering into a new stage, a new area of Texas politics, and on his way to greater things.

F: You didn't know at that meeting that day that you were seeing the president being born, did you?

P: Oh, not at all.

F: But I think that is crucial at this moment.

P: That's right.

F: If he'd missed that, really he would never have made it.

P: That is right. That was the making of the president.

F: This is a good stopping place for you, isn't it?

P: Yes.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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