

INTERVIEW V

DATE: March 2, 1972  
INTERVIEWEE: J. J. (JAKE) PICKLE  
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ  
PLACE: Congressman Pickle's office, Cannon Building, Washington, D.C.

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F: Jake, where were you at the time of the assassination? What had you been doing to set up the trip?

P: Like most Americans, I can remember that moment very vividly.

F: There are four or five times in my life that I can pick out, the rest of it runs together, but that's one.

P: That was sure one of them. It's in the same category as Pearl Harbor, and I would add another one--it's in the same category as the day President Johnson announced that he wasn't going to run. That one is burned into my hide also.

I was at my campaign headquarters trying to make arrangements for the runoff. The assassination occurred in the special election between the primary and the runoff. We were facing the runoff in about three weeks from that date, between three and four.

F: Between you and Dobbs?

P: Yes, Jim Dobbs was my Republican opponent. It was a special election, but he was a Republican and I was a Democrat.

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I was at my campaign headquarters, and I was in a little private room talking to Dr. Bob Montgomery, my dear friend from University days. We were talking about how we could make the best approach for the runoff. I was having my problem because the liberal wing of the [Democratic] Party was reportedly willing to make deals with the Republicans to let a Republican be elected. Then the liberals thought two years later they could consolidate and move out the Republican. I had my problems [I was] trying to iron these [illegible] out, and Dr. Bob was counselling with me on what we should do. I had told the staff not to bother me, that I wanted to talk now and not to have interruption. We hadn't talked for ten minutes until the phone rang again, and I rather exasperatedly picked it up and told them, "Yes?" They said, "We just must tell you that we've heard a report on radio that President Kennedy has been shot in Dallas and may have been killed." I turned to Dr. Bob and reported that to him. He said, "My God," and bolted upright in his chair. Without another word we both tore out into the hall, and Dr. Montgomery was lost in the shuffle. I don't think I saw him for three months after that.

But that affected my campaign. It affected my opponent. He had waged a very arch-conservative, hard-hitting John Birch type of campaign, in my opinion, and that public sentiment was strong. The report he got was that when President Kennedy was killed it might have been done by those connected with, or associated with, or in sympathy with the far right movement. Some reporter gave him that

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wire report or rumor. And he must have been dreading it, or was wondering if that might have happened. It affected him so much that he broke down emotionally and publicly cried about it, and said that he was embarrassed that his friends might have done that. Naturally, it affected the whole campaign because the whole nation kind of went through a--

F: People weren't really very interested in the congressional campaign.

P: Not at all. And people also wanted to cleanse their souls. Those who had been super righteous and so very bent on tolerating no moderation realized that sometime you can develop that feeling to the point where it's hatred. I think the whole country dropped back into a kinder, more sympathetic self-confessing, soul-searching attitude. And because of that, and because President Johnson was from my district and my home town, the election was over the moment that the assassination had occurred and people realized it.

We, either side, didn't campaign really for about a week, and then the next two or three weeks we formally renewed and went ahead. But it was a foregone conclusion, I felt, and I think everybody in the district felt that that was the case. So that was the part of the assassination.

F: Did the President advise with you at all on your campaign, or was he too much occupied back in Washington?

P: An odd thing is that after the President had been sworn in and he had made his speech to the Congress, for the two or three weeks



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before the runoff election quite often in Austin I would receive phone calls from the President. He would talk maybe twenty or thirty minutes about the campaign and about things in general. He wanted to do and offered to do anything that I wanted. He wanted to help. I've often thought what an odd thing in the sense it was that here I was, running for a congressional seat, and here was the President of the United States from the White House calling me two and three times during the week to talk for thirty or forty-five minutes about the campaign and about things in general.

F: Did you get the feeling--you and I both are two-bit psychologists--that this was a sort of rest period for him when he talked with you?

P: I don't think it was a rest period at all. I don't think that he really had in his own mind his sense of direction, that is, exactly how and what he was to do. He didn't have his campaign one, two, three, four, lined up as he wanted. Meantime, he felt, I assume, that here he was, president of the United States, he was in a sense the most powerful man in the world, and he wanted to do something. He didn't know what to do except just talk and visit. I think also in his mind was the realization that this was the first congressional race in the United States since he became president, and he wanted to be sure that this one was won by a Democrat and certainly someone who was friendly to him. I'm sure that entered into it.

F: I'm sure that nothing would have been much more of a slap than for his old home district to have turned him down.

P: That's right. It was important to him. It was important nationally because it was the first congressman to be elected after the assassination. So he was interested in that. But I think also, on a personal basis, he just wanted me to know that he was thinking about me. And it seems such an odd thing that here I would be getting calls from the President of the United States, talking at length about a lot of things, his own problems, his own comments, his own discussions during the day, and things of that sort.

F: Had you been on a first-name basis with him back when you worked with him?

P: Never, never, no! A lot of people would say, "Lyndon, this," and "Lyndon, that." I don't think I ever called him Lyndon in my life. When he was a congressman, it was Congressman Johnson.

F: You didn't have to make that shift as some people did.

P: No. It was Congressman Johnson; it was Senator Johnson; it was, when he was vice president, Mr. Vice President; then of course Mr. President. I don't believe I've ever called him Lyndon in my life. I just don't think about it. Some do, and even now like to refer to him as "Lyndon," but it was always the thing to do, i.e. call him Mr. Johnson. He was such a strong personality that all of us on the staff called him Mr. Congressman--oh, sometimes, when he was congressman, we referred to him as "T.C.:" And affectionately among our friends, that meant "The Congressman." He was The Congressman indeed!

Well, I was elected on December 17, 1963. Within a week's time that state machinery had been complied with, and the election

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board had met, and they had sent their certificate by wire to Washington. I don't remember whether I mentioned this or not, but I was--

F: We haven't gotten you in Washington.

P: All right, I'm on the way to Washington now. I came in the night of December 23, and had been invited to spend the night with Mr. and Mrs. Warren Woodward, my lifelong friend from Big Spring who was then with American Airlines here in Washington.

F: What is there in the water in Big Spring that turns out people like you and Woody?

P: I guess it's more in the soil than in the water.

F: Well, you've got more soil than water.

P: Maybe it was a little vinegar that I got out of my dad's grocery store.

Woody had invited me to spend the night with them, and I accepted, so my wife and I flew up. He met us at the air field. Just before we left Austin, we received an invitation from the President and Mrs. Johnson to spend the night at the White House. I sent word back that I declined and told them I appreciated it very much, that I had already accepted another invitation. You see, I was raised up to say that if you accepted and you say you're going, you'd go there, just like you'd dance with them you brought to the dance.

F: "Who brung you."

P: So I said, yes, I'd go to Woody, and I declined the invitation to spend the night at the White House the first time I was going to be in Washington, and here Mr. Johnson is president. I didn't realize that an invitation from the President and Mrs. Johnson is



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almost like a command to come. But I said no, and the President accepted it. I guess he just said, "Well, Pickle doesn't know the difference." And that was the truth. I didn't.

Well, I did spend the night with Woody.

F: Once in a while you can get by on ignorance.

P: There was four or five inches of snow on the ground. We didn't get to bed until about two and had to get up at six because the Congress was still in session. The Congress was voting on a foreign aid bill. I was sworn in at seven o'clock a.m. on December 24, Christmas Eve.

F: Why so early?

P: Because the Congress was in session. They hadn't been able to pass a foreign aid bill; Congress had delayed and delayed, and President Johnson wouldn't let them go home. They were still in session, and they'd set this last vote that morning for a vote on a foreign aid bill. That would be my first vote. Therefore, since the Congress took up at seven o'clock on Christmas Eve, I had to be there and be sworn in first.

The certificate that they had sent by Western Union was sent to the clerk of the House and had been misplaced. They couldn't find it. When we got to his office before seven, about six forty-five that morning, Ralph Roberts, the clerk, was not there. We couldn't find the certificate. Finally we went up to the Texas delegation, Homer Thornberry, whom I was succeeding, and Wright Patman and others said, "Let's see if we can't work this thing out." They talked to the leadership on both sides and they agreed

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that they would swear me in, even though they didn't officially have this piece of paper. But it was in the newspaper and it was done and they knew it was done, there was no contest, and they did agree to do it. Charlie Halleck rose and said to the Speaker when the question was raised if there were any objections to being sworn in, "Well, Mr. President, in view of the time of the year and in the hope that we all will have the Christmas spirit, I would not object that we let the gentleman from Texas be sworn in."

F: You're kind of a Christmas present to Congress, aren't you?

P: I was. I'm the only man in the history of the United States, I guess, who has been sworn in at seven o'clock in the morning on Christmas Eve.

The odd thing about that too is that the vote was on foreign aid. They debated it and discussed it, and by eight o'clock though, or approximately, they had a vote scheduled on the foreign aid bill. Now, mind you, that during the campaign I had made some big statements that I wasn't too much in favor of foreign assistance, but I was willing to help those countries that would help us and cooperate with us and who had proven it. But I did not want to go up and give money and vote appropriations to countries that might kick us in the shin and cuss us, and who weren't really our friends. This is the same story, the same comment, you hear today, and after I've been here eight years that hasn't changed but very, very little.

The question before us, though, was part of the foreign aid



bill had a provision in it that would call for the sale of wheat to Russia. And of course this was absolutely foreign to the thinking of most Americans, that Russia, the country we were "fighting," this Red menace, this communist country, that we would even think in terms of trading with in any respect, was something that most members of Congress, a lot of them, just couldn't accept no matter what! This was the situation. Even though Canada was selling wheat to Russia in large amounts. So were Australia and other countries of the world. Yet we had an abundance of wheat, they had a shortage, and the question was would we sell them wheat--for cash on the barrel head--I think for about 40 million dollars. But it was a very bitter vote. It was part of the bill. The Republicans--all of them--voted against selling the wheat.

In spite of my statement back home, mindful of my district and my friends, and mindful that LBJ was my president and that I was going to see him again in a few minutes, when it came time for a vote on foreign assistance in 1963, I voted "Aye."

I remember when I got back to Austin that afternoon, I walked down the street and some of my friends had just heard on the radio that I had voted for this bill. They, being conservatives, said, "What in the world! We thought you said that you had reservations or objections about foreign aid." I told them I had reservations, but I recouped in this manner: I said, "Now let me tell you. You'll remember during the campaign I told you that I had been to Washington, that I was familiar with Washington, I knew where the offices were, and I knew who was in charge, and I had had some experience, and you wouldn't have to break in a new man; that I could go there, and the first day that I was in Washington I could

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be effective." I said, "Now, just think of this! The Congress has been in session for a full year, has not been able to get a foreign assistance bill passed. I got there and within an hour, we passed the bill." Of course, they laughed a little and chuckled and just scratched their heads and said, "Pickle, you won't do," and walked off. But it was a sort of affirmative thing.

But anyway, that was my first vote. I might add one other little thing about that. It was an odd time for me, in this sense. I had gotten there late at night, I barely got any sleep, I got sworn in, we voted on the foreign assistance, and before the roll call was finished, word came from the cloakroom that Jack Valenti, I believe it was, wanted me to call the White House. I did. When I walked in the cloakroom they were saying, "Congressman Pickle, Congressman Pickle, the White House is calling you."

I got on the phone and they told me that President Johnson wanted to know if Mrs. Pickle and I would want a ride home to Austin within the hour. I said, "Why, yes, I think that'd be fine." He said, "Now, you'll either come in a cab or we'll send a car for you. It would be easier if we could send a car for you." I said, "You don't have to send a car." I was still thinking, "My goodness! Where am I?" But I didn't realize that it was standard procedure. Anyway I did have a car waiting in front of the Capitol steps. We went to the White House. I hardly got there in time to even walk in the White House until they said it was time to get aboard the helicopter.



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F: You had Beryl with you?

P: Oh, yes. I had Mrs. Pickle with me. We lifted off from the White House lawn to Andrews Air Force Base, but I discovered we were on the way, not to Austin, but to Philadelphia, where the President had agreed to attend the funeral of his friend, the former congressman from Pennsylvania, Mr. William Green, whose son incidentally has succeeded him here now.

I didn't know Mr. Green: I didn't know that Congressman Green had died: I didn't know any service was going to take place. I wasn't dressed for "any funeral." And Mrs. Pickle had on a big turquoise bluish green coat with a similarly loud, attractive new hat. The next thing we knew, we were flying through the air, had landed at Philadelphia, were whisked into a car that drove us to this big Catholic cathedral, and we were marching down the aisle, sitting not more than five rows from the front there attending the funeral of Congressman Green. Mrs. Pickle was so uncomfortable that she was crying out for the good Lord to understand because she must have looked like she was going to a spring picnic rather than to a funeral, mourning over the deceased whom we had never known.

F: She was going to a swearing-in.

P: Sure, but she didn't know we also would be going to a funeral. Then when the service was concluded, we were put into the car and drove back to that air field and then en route to Austin. Yet I got back to Austin by the middle of the afternoon. So I had come to Washington, been sworn in, voted on the wheat bill, gone to Philadelphia for a funeral and then back to Austin before most of the people had picked



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up that day's paper. So I traveled pretty fast that first day.

F: You could have failed to tell your daughter goodbye and she never would have known you had gone.

P: That's right. It went fast. But it was an interesting time, an interesting thing to remember.

F: What went on during those Christmas holidays? Did you get to see the President any? I know it was an austere Christmas.

P: Yes. It was an austere Christmas, but we did get to visit with them. We have over the years gotten together, usually on December 22, I believe it is, which is Mrs. Johnson's birthday. December 22 to the President is just like another Christmas because he worships the ground Mrs. Johnson walks on. And when she has a birthday, that is the occasion of the year. So over the years we've always gotten together, or usually have gotten together, during that time. We did during that period.

I remember when we landed on December 24, that afternoon, we went immediately to the Governor's Mansion. President Johnson wanted to pay his respects to Governor Connally, so we all drove up to the Mansion.

F: You went to Bergstrom on this occasion.

P: We landed at Bergstrom and then drove from Bergstrom to the Governor's Mansion where we got to visit and say "Howdy." The national press of course was in the midst of us then. It was a different day, I guess one of the first times that the President had actually been back since the swearing-in.

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E: It was the first, yes.

P: So it was a moment for all of us to remember.

We did see them during Christmas, but there weren't any big celebrations, and there weren't a lot of visitations or parties, so to speak, because it was a time of some mourning.

F: Did you go out to the Ranch?

P: I don't remember. Most of the time though, when we got together, it was at the Ranch. I don't think he came in at all.

F: What I wondered was, I presume between November 22 and his coming home that technicians must have been down there transforming that. He'd had a fair setup as vice president, but I'm sure it was nothing compared with what it was when he was president.

P: I'm sure of that. But I don't remember now that he came into Austin. I don't know of any parties as such that he attended.

F: He went to a New Year's Eve party at the Forty Acres Club. He integrated it with Andrew Hatcher. You weren't along on that?

P: I don't remember, I don't believe so.

F: Well, that's another story that we won't get into here.

P: It was a sort of somber time. I've thought back on that. That was some advent for a country boy from West Texas to have had all involvement.

F: Right, you didn't just slip into Congress.

P: No, I sure didn't.

F: Let's go back a minute because you brought up something we've overlooked to this point. One, how big a role do you think he

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played in getting John Connally as secretary of the navy, and did he play any role in John's resignation to go home and be governor?

P: I know none of those for a fact. I am certain in my own mind and from conversations I've heard that he was insistent and he was, if not solely, almost solely responsible for the selection of Mr. Connally as secretary of the navy. As vice president, he felt that he ought to have some person close to him in the Cabinet or on that Cabinet level. He had been a close friend always of John Connally, and he just thought John would be a good choice. So Mr. Johnson was his man, he did advance him, and I don't think there's any question but what John was selected because of that recommendation.

Now to jump from that point to the one where you asked, do I think he had anything to do with John's coming back and running for governor, I would say no, very definitely. I, in my own mind, don't think he felt that John could come back and bridge that gap. That he had never run for statewide office, he would be known as Johnson's candidate, the polls showed him with having no more than four per cent, or even less. He was not known on a state basis except as a friend of [Johnson's] and as one of the Johnson boys.

F: Yes. "Lyndon's boy, John." LBJ bumper stickers.

P: That incidentally was also the billboard they put up in my district during the campaign, "Lyndon's boy, Jake." They just changed it around a little and said, "Lyndon's boy, Jake."

F: He ought to get somebody named Ethelbert to run sometime.



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P: It was an interesting thing, Dr. Joe. They had those "Lyndon's boy, Jakes" all over the city. The boys were guffawing in the drug stores and the cafes about old "Lyndon's boy, Jake." It was a big sport.

When President Kennedy was assassinated, it was such a shock and indeed such a national shame on the American conscience that everybody reacted in their own way to show how they were affected. My opposition, the leaders of the campaign for Mr. Dobbs, who had put up the billboards and who thought it was awfully cute, suddenly realized it wasn't so cute because Lyndon's boy, Jake, was now the man who was going to be congressman, succeeding the man who was going to be president of the United States. And there was a great national mourning at that hours. They slipped out during the night, hired a group of men, and all over the city they pulled down billboards so that when the sun came up the next morning every Lyndon's boy, Jake sign in Austin had disappeared.

F: They were good at that. In my neighborhood in 1964, mine was about the only front yard that didn't have Goldwater signs in it. And when I got up the next morning after the election--

P: They were all picked up and gone.

F: There wasn't a one.

P: It's just like a cat burying its stuff. You know, they really got rid of it quick. And I can understand that, and I imagine my people would have reacted similarly.

Back to the point, I don't think that Mr. Johnson had any

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part in John's coming back. He wished him well. I'm sure he told him, "You've got my wishes and my prayers. I'll help if I can. You know I'm for you, and I love you. But if you're determined, you go with my best wishes." And that was it. I think that was about the whole story.

F: Let's pick up one other thing that you may have been privy to and may not have. Any idea at all of his feeling toward Price Daniel when Daniel decided to forsake the Senate to go home and run for governor?

P: I rather think the President did not believe it was the right thing for Governor Daniel. He became very fond of Price Daniel when he was here as senator. They made a good working team. Governor Daniel was a man of integrity and great determination to be a good public servant. He was honorable and clean and therefore Mr. Johnson liked to work with him and they got along fine. They were a good pair. I think he felt that Governor Daniel would have a good future in the long run if he'd stay in the Senate.

F: He'd have had it for life, undoubtedly.

P: Not only would he have had it for life, he would, and as of now, would have been a top committee chairman in the United States Senate, one of the senior men here. Governor Daniel, though, simply had a burning desire to go back to Austin and serve as governor. It was sort of in his family. His wife was related to General Sam Houston, and Governor Daniel had said always he wanted to be governor. He had four small children and he wanted them to go to school in Texas. It

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just preyed on him that that was what he ought to do. And all of it developed at a time when it looked like Senator Tom Connally was going to have difficulty being re-elected, that he was getting up in years and some of Senator Connally's closest friends were telling him, "Senator, you may not make it this time." So the fact situation was that in all likelihood Senator Connally would not have been re-elected, so Governor Daniel had--

F: Plus the fact that Governor Daniel at that time had Shivers in his past so he had weight somewhere.

P: So the question was, if you made a move at all, that would have had to be it. It wasn't anything that Price Daniel wanted to promote except the decision was there and he had to make it. I don't think Mr. Johnson encouraged him to, I think he would have preferred he stay where he was. And except for the fact though that he had this ambition--you see, Governor Daniel had four children, all in grade school and it was a difficult matter for him getting them in school. He wanted them to be in Austin and grow up as Texans. This opportunity came and Price Daniel at that time had to decide if he was going to come back or not. It wasn't something he had promoted, but he had to make a decision on it. He went back largely because this decision was forced on him, and he thought, "If I ever do this, this is my time now."

F: One other [thing] while we're on that. Did you have any opportunity to observe, first, Senator Johnson and then Vice President Johnson's relations with Senator Yarborough?

P: I have over the years many, many times. I guess we could write a



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book about that. They've had their difficulties, personality-wise.

F: They're both strong-minded men.

P: Both were strong-minded, both rather suspected the other was "fixing" to do something to him. Both had the respect of the other as public servants. I think Mr. Johnson probably regretted that he has had difficulty with Senator Yarborough. But you've got to remember that Senator Yarborough was a product of the old Democrats of Texas, the old liberal wing of liberal-labor Democrats, and they were expected to trouble Mr. Johnson.

F: But even there, he's not a team man, he's an individual.

P: And he wasn't a team man. He was an individual. Senator Yarborough just innately suspected whatever Mr. Johnson or almost anybody else was going to do to him, because he'd been kicked around pretty good, you'll remember, in Texas. He had run and lost and run and lost. A lot of people were talking about him and almost talking in terms of him being a "pinko" and so forth. And of course it makes a man become very antagonistic and susceptible of anybody who comes trying to sell him something.

F: Kind of aggressively defensive.

P: Mr. Johnson, first, as senator had seniority, and he therefore thought he ought to control patronage. Then, secondly, as vice president, the only way he could have his hand in Texas politics is to more or less control patronage, and I think he probably in so many words told Senator Yarborough that he was going to control patronage. He, as vice president, could go to President Kennedy and say, "Now,

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on Texas matters I want to have the say-so." That would normally be given to the senator from Texas. But with a Texan there in the White House, then you can understand why there would be this clash. I think it was inevitable that it would come about. I think Mr. Johnson probably did exercise a strong hand on Senator Yarborough, and this was a touchy thing with Ralph Yarborough because every other senator in the United States was able to make a recommendation or to make a veto, and he couldn't do it automatically. It made him look ineffective and also frustrated him, and his own friends who said, "Why can't you appoint me, Senator, to this," were saying, "Senator Yarborough, you're fine, but you can't take care of your own friends." All this entered into it. I think it was a very natural development that neither one wanted, but it was a factual situation.

F: Did Senator Johnson make any particular effort, as far as you know, to give Senator Yarborough choice committee assignments?

P: I don't remember, I'm sure he did. You see, Mr. Johnson's voting record and Senator Yarborough's voting record in many respects would parallel. I've heard Mr. Johnson say over and over again, "I have a little trouble with Ralph, but I'll tell you. On matters of issues, I'd rather have him on my side than most anybody else." He was very firm that--

F: We had beautiful representation in the Senate all during the fifties.

P: They did. And on matters of national issues, he could depend on



Senator Yarborough on those votes. Gradually over the years they had their problems, but they never had any public clash. It was no deep bitterness about it, but it was a spirited power play. President Johnson, as a matter of fact, showed his feelings for the issues and for Senator Yarborough when he decided he would support Ralph Yarborough for re-election at a time when his friend, Congressman Joe Kilgore, was considering running for the Senate.

F: This is a good time to talk about that, don't you think?

P: Well, the only thing I will say about it, and all I really know about it is that Joe Kilgore was very popular, a strong man. He had been a good Johnson supporter back in the 1941 days when Mr. Johnson was running for the Senate. John Connally and I were helping run the campaign then and I was in charge of the speaker's bureau. Joe Kilgore was one of those who got on a bus or a car with a loudspeaker on it, traveled all over Texas and campaigned for then-Congressman Lyndon Johnson. So over the years they have been good friends. Joe had served notice on the White House--I say "served notice," he talked to them--I assume President Johnson, said that he was planning on it and they knew it. And finally at the last minute, the President had to say, "I'm going to support Ralph Yarborough. I'm not going to be against anybody else, but I'm going to be for Ralph Yarborough because Ralph will support my campaign and my issues." Probably better than he thought Joe would, as close as he was and as much as he respected Joe, because Kilgore was an exceptionally outstanding congressman and a good man.



F: A bit more conservative than the President.

P: But I think other groups, labor groups, liberal groups, national political leaders, all felt that Ralph Yarborough would come nearer supporting the Democratic ticket and the principles and platform than would Kilgore. They therefore thought that was important, and that tipped the scales as far as Mr. Johnson was concerned. As president, he felt he must look at the national scene, or not just the Texas scene.

F: Also keep you from having a good fight in Texas.

P: That's true. It kept that out. So there was a reason for it. Although I think Mr. Johnson probably always was very sorry that he was forced into, or thought he was forced into, a position of making that kind of choice because it hurt his association with Joe Kilgore. Joe knew that he "had been had." He was not happy about it at all. He felt the President had gone back on his word. But typical of a good politician and a statesman, he accepted it in as good grace as he could and went on about his business. Since then he has made a very outstanding success as a practicing attorney in Austin and retained his friendship with Mr. Johnson. That was not totally true of his family. Mr. Kilgore's family, particularly his wife Jane, still remember it and resent it. Although she tries to forget, she still remembers it. But history's finger has already written, and that was that.

F: Yes. Joe's timing was off.

While we're on personalities, did you ever see any evidence of the President's relation with Senator Tower? I mean, obviously

on voting records they're miles apart because he is part of the opposition party and he's one of the more conservative Republicans.

P: Yes, but on matters of national defense, particularly in Vietnam, Senator Tower supported the President. They really got along pretty well. Senator Tower was invited on occasion to go back to Texas with President Johnson on Air Force One. The relationship was very pleasant and very friendly. On a lot of social matters, poverty and education, Senator Tower would leave him. On a lot of other matters, though, that affected national security, Senator Tower supported the President. So they got along all right. There was never any problem there.

F: I was always struck by the fact that whenever I got included in some big affair out at the Ranch and it was a big affair, Senator Tower was always there.

P: He had been invited to the Ranch.

Of course, you know, men in those positions always take the attitude that "If I can't get you on this vote, I want you to go with me on the next vote." You know, you've got to always look down the road because if you try to make any one issue a personal matter, or if you become embittered about an issue or a vote, then you'll get yourself locked into a position where it's hard to retreat. Then next month and next year, you've painted yourself in a corner and you've cut yourself off from your friends, and it's not a good thing. So political leaders try not just to be hardshelled



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about it, but try to be practical, that every vote is not the big battle, and you have to live to fight the next day.

F: I was struck by the difference in approach when they had the big astronaut dinner, following the trip to the moon, in Los Angeles, and Senator Cranston as a California senator, was not invited. I didn't think Johnson would ever have done that. Certainly Cranston was no Nixon lover, but he was still a senator from California, and I have a feeling that Johnson just wouldn't have gone this way. He would have had his worst enemy there if he had been the home state senator.

P: When I say that political leaders always live to fight the next day, you're right, that doesn't mean that they are always operating in accordance with the Good Book. Because each knows how to wield the knife and yet be human, each will do some kind of a mean or bitter thing at times. That's true of everybody, so that can't be said just of any one. It's a general rule.

F: Okay, let's come back now to new Congressman Pickle. You came back up here after the first of the year. Did you come back with the President?

P: Yes, flew back with him often.

F: That helped some on that travel budget, didn't it?

P: Yes. Incidentally, during those years it was a good shuttle bus for me because on quick notice, he'd say, "Do you want to go to Austin?" and I had my bag packed most of the time. It was ideal. I could leave here and go right straight to my home. So, of course, it was wonderful, wonderful years for me. When I first got here, I remember one



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incident. You know, if it was a question, "How would I--"

F: It made a national figure of you in a sense. You're not just one of four hundred and thirty-five, you're from the President's home district.

P: The members of the Congress said then, and still say, "This is Jake Pickle. He's the President's congressman." Of course I always turned it around and I would say, "No, Mr. Johnson is my constituent." I thought that sounded a little better, but, you know, President Johnson didn't always see the humor in that approach. I was known, though, then and now, as the President's congressman, and members liked to introduce me that way. And, really, that's sort of a pleasant approach. But I was here and I was from his district, and I was expected to vote for him, so in that sense they all took me to be Lyndon Johnson's congressman.

But it was a relationship, though, that would be difficult for some people to understand. One, I think the President respected the fact that I was hardheaded and that I was trying to make up my own mind, that I wasn't going to be just his rubber stamp. In the first place, he knew I wasn't altogether as liberal-minded on some issues as he because we had spent a lifetime discussing these matters.

F: Well, also, he had a national constituency and you had one which was localized, which makes a difference.

P: Exactly, exactly. And I might say, you could compare his situation as a congressman. When he was a congressman, he had the Tenth District and he wasn't a national figure, and it makes a different approach for the individual. But I think he respected that I had to

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plow my own row and tried to find my own philosophy about government and on issues. So, very seldom did he ever insist or try to put the arm on me on a vote. Now, I was constantly around him or Mrs. Johnson or the members of his staff, most of whom I'd grown up with, so there wasn't any question in my mind what he wanted and how he wanted me to vote. I knew the administration positions. I knew what stand they would like to see me take. But in most matters that ever came before Congress, strangely enough, hardly ever did the White House call me and say, "Now, the President wants you to do this, The President appreciates your vote." They'd call me and they'd poll me like they would any other member, say, "How do you feel about this," and I'd tell them. They would accept it. In only one instance was I really asked by one man to support a specific position of the President's, and that was when Jack Valenti called me out of committee one morning and reminded me that that day on the floor there'd be a vote on the rent supplement program, and that he sure hoped I could vote for it. I told him that I was committed the other way, and he said, "Well, this would mean a lot to the President, and you ought to do this. He's going to be very disappointed if you don't." And he moved in pretty hard on me.

Well, I worried about it and worried about it, but when the vote came up that afternoon I voted against rent supplement. I had tried to read about it, tried to study it, I had reservations about it. I had already told a group in Austin whom I had been meeting with that I'd come to the conclusion that it wasn't a good thing,

it wasn't the best approach. And because I had made that commitment, I didn't think that I was in a position to go back and change my vote. You can understand then that when I voted that way I was literally sick at heart, and for the next week I couldn't sleep too well. Every time I voted differently from the way I knew the White House wanted me to, particularly if it was a crucial vote, I felt like a dog. I just would worry and fuss to myself and go home at night to my wife who would finally say, "It's done. Forget it." But these things do affect you.

Most of the time, though, I had no contact with them on matters. I was not asked. They knew that I knew what the issues were and how they hoped I could vote. And I did try to vote for them on a lot of these national issues that were helpful.

I remember one vote, the first major vote we had here. The White House wasn't involved in it, but I sure was. That was the 1964 Civil Rights Act. I hadn't been in Washington a month until that bill was presented the first week of February. It had been debated for some time. It was the so-called Accommodations Act. It was a question really of whether a black man could come into a cafe to eat if he wanted something to eat, whether he could go to a hotel to sleep, whether he could go to the rest room of a service station and use the facilities.

F: I just came, incidentally, from Durham, North Carolina, yesterday where I interviewed Terry Sanford on just that subject. They were going to make Chapel Hill when he was governor the showplace for breaking it open.



P: It's a little hard to realize that in the space now of seven or eight years that we've gone this far.

F: Oh, Lord, that seems like a thousand years ago in some ways.

P: This was in February, 1964. I had campaigned on the basis that I would prefer that the local communities and the states would establish their own accommodations and settle their own questions and not the federal government. I had leaned as far as I could in the direction that we shouldn't have this forced on us.

Well, here I was in Washington and this bill was brought up. My wife was in Austin. I'd take the bill home at night and read it, and I read that bill backwards and forward. And I analyzed. I tried to reason with myself, with my mind and with my heart. And all during the debate that week--it took a whole week--I was wondering: "What is right? What is best?" And I couldn't get away from the fact that our customs and practices just weren't right, period. It just wasn't right that a black man couldn't go in a cafe and eat, couldn't go to the rest room in a service station, couldn't get a hotel; somehow that was just basically wrong. And [I felt] that all the fears that they told me were embodied in this bill might or might not happen, but the fear was so strong. Anyway, when the vote came up I voted for the 1964 Civil Rights Act. That's the granddaddy of them all! There were only four Texans who voted for it. Congressman Albert Thomas, Congressman Henry Gonzalez, Congressman Jack Brooks and myself. There were only one or two others in the entire South, and that was, I believe, Claude Pepper from Florida, and Charles Weltner of Georgia. And one other man from Tennessee.

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F: Is Claude Pepper somebody I ought to see?

P: Yes, because, early on, he had been to Austin, he was a U.S. senator; he had been to Austin when Alben Barkley was vice president.

F: He goes way back.

P: And he is such a dear, dear gentleman and great statesman, you ought to interview him.

Anyway, to conclude that, I voted for the 1964 Civil Rights Act. We didn't get to a vote until Friday, about eleven o'clock at night. I had been invited down to the Rotunda with some friends here for a little midnight snack after the vote.

F: Where? Here in the Cannon Building?

P: No. The party was at the Rotunda, which is about a block and a half from here.

F: Oh, over at the restaurant. I know the Rotunda.

P: Tiger [Congressman Olin] Teague had invited us down there with Slick Rutherford and Omar Burleson and several of them. I had finally gotten there.

When I came back to the hotel, it must have been one-thirty or two. They said, "There's a call for you from the White House." I looked at my watch and I saw that it was about one-thirty or two. "They said for you to call, it didn't matter when."

F: You're still living at the hotel then.

P: I was just staying temporarily at the Coronet when Mrs. Pickle was coming back and forth.



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So the request was to call, no matter what time. I said, "Well, I believe I'll call in the morning." They said, "They're insistent. They've called several times." I said, "Well, all right." So I went to my room and called. The operator said, "Oh, yes, Congressman Pickle, we've been looking for you. I'm sure glad you called in. Just a minute." I said, "Well, who's calling?" She said, "The President." I said, "Don't wake him up." She said, "He told us to call when you came in, it didn't matter when." So I said, "All right." She put the call through, and the President said, "Now, Jake, I just want to tell you. I couldn't sleep tonight without calling and telling you that I was proud of your vote. I know it's the toughest vote probably you'll ever have, but you did right. And you'll remember it, too. It was basically the thing to do. I know how tough it would be for you. I don't think I'd have had the courage to do it, being from Austin and from the Deep South. I just don't think I could have done it. But the fact that you did that, that meant a lot to me. History will prove it, too. I just want you to know before I go to sleep tonight, I want to tell you I'm proud of you." I tell you, that call made me so proud I nearly cried.

F: That made you feel good, didn't it? Did you get any kickback on that other vote where you voted against the President?

P: No. On that and other issues, I never got a kickback. The way they would do it, I would receive the "cool" treatment. They



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would always be pleasant, but I wouldn't be invited down for dinner, and I wouldn't be asked to go play golf or other things. Not purposely, but they just didn't call me up.

F: They'd just temporarily forget you.

P: Always, over the years, I think Mr. Johnson has invited me down to be with him or to go and do things because I think he enjoys being around me. I do him. We don't settle a lot of national issues, don't try to.

F: You've got a lot of association there.

P: We just have pleasant visitations. He likes to tease me, and I respond accordingly. He likes to talk about some of the things we did. You know, there aren't many people around as it's situated when you're President where you can do that. So I was often invited down.

But when I'd vote one of these times, and it wasn't the way they really wanted, I could always feel--perhaps it was a bit of my own imagination, but it was also the fact that I knew they knew that I hadn't voted the way they wanted. Those things bothered me. But I had made commitments. I voted against Medicare because I had said in my campaign that I was going to. I didn't see how I could come up here, listen to the debate, and then just flat go back and do the opposite of what I'd said. So I think they respected that.

By and large, though, I supported the President in many, many,

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many instances that a lot of people wouldn't. Some of my old conservative friends, because I came from the "establishment" in Texas and had served as executive secretary of the State Democratic Executive Committee which was then controlled by the conservative wing, they felt that I automatically was a big conservative, was going to vote against all these things. That's not my philosophy. That has never been my philosophy. My old daddy was a big Democrat. Incidentally, I could fill a whole book telling you about a visit he made up here one time with the President. But I came out of a Democratic family and I've always been taught to be sort of a moderate and a progressive. I've tried to maintain that image, not because I think it's necessarily the political thing to do. In my district, voting for foreign assistance or voting for poverty programs would not be a popular thing. Those items, those issues, really don't have any constituency. You have little support back home. But I feel like a country has got to have a certain policy, and I've tried to adopt it.

So I generally have supported the President, and even now I support President Nixon on a lot of matters that his own Republican leaders don't support. I've got a better voting record probably in the support of the President's issues than the Republican members from Texas have. Maybe they're trying to prove their independence also. But it's all part of the pattern.

F: I don't want to take too much of your time, but I want to go back and pickup a few loose ends today. When were you and Mrs. Pickle



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married? I shouldn't ask a man that, should I? (Laughter)

P: We were married on December 17, 1960.

F: Okay, this is at the conclusion of a hard campaign for president and vice president for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Was he able to come to the wedding, and was it that kind of wedding?

P: I don't know whether I told you or not, it was an odd thing. I had gone to Los Angeles to campaign for him and did the best we could. I just kind of "nursemaided" the delegation out there, trying to move them around. I did it as an individual favor, not as a hired PR man, but just simply because I wanted to do it, and Governor Daniel had asked me to go, and Senator Johnson had also asked me to go.

Between the time of the convention and the time that Mrs. Pickle and I were married I had been appointed a member of the Texas Employment Commission. Beryl and I decided we were going to get married, and we did get married on December 17.

F: You always do things just before Christmas, don't you?

P: So, oddly enough, December 17 is the date of our marriage and also the date that we were elected; that is, December 17, 1963.

F: Nice anniversary present.

P: Yes, indeed. December is a favored month for me.

What were we talking about?

F: We were talking about whether the Vice President-Elect came to the wedding.

P: Yes. When we set the date of December 17, it was going to be a family wedding. She had lost her husband and I had lost my wife.

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We just got our family together. My brother came down from Big Spring. We went into the little chapel at the First Methodist Church.

F: In Austin.

P: In Austin. Dr. Marvin Vance, who was the pastor of the Methodist Church, had come from Jacksonville, and he knew Beryl and her folks because that was her home town.

F: I didn't realize she was the Tomato Queen.

P: Well, she was. She also was a Presbyterian. The Boltons were Presbyterians over there, but because we knew Dr. Vance and I was going to the Methodist Church, Beryl gradually came over to the Methodist Church and we decided because we were so fond of Dr. Marvin, that we'd be married there. Incidentally, we would have been married on the sixteenth, I think, but Dickie, our oldest son, Dick McCarroll, was then a gung-ho high school basketball player. He had made All State, he was Austin's star basketball player and he was a damn good one. We had a basketball game the day before and we couldn't get married on that day. And he had a tournament the first part of the next morning, so we couldn't get married until eleven o'clock on the seventeenth. Dr. Vance, incidentally, I think missed a Bluebonnet Bowl in Houston to stay over for that occasion.

But we were walking in the church. I got there a little late, as I have on a lot of occasions. When I walked in, there were President and Mrs. Johnson at the chapel.

F: Had you issued them a specific invitation?

P: No, not at all.



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F: They just knew you were getting married.

P: I guess he knew it because Mr. J. C. Kellam had inquired of me about a week before, "Are you going to get married." I had told him. He said, "Well, I wish you well." I didn't invite Mr. Kellam or anybody. But I'm sure Mr. Kellam told Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Johnson decided that he wanted to come. There he was, the Vice President, he was in town, and though he was uninvited, so to speak, because we didn't invite anybody out of the family, up he showed! Before we started down the aisle, he said, "I just want to thank you again. One, you came to Washington when I was in the Navy and you served as one of my assistants and helped run that office when I was down in the South Pacific. Now, you've gone out to Los Angeles for Governor Daniel and for me, you've done a lot of things like that. When I need you, you're always there. I want to tell you I'm for you." And he handed me a little stipend that he wanted me to have. "Here's a wedding present," he says, "If you go somewhere, have a good time." I thought that was very touching. It sure impressed me.

Then we went out to Beryl's sister's, Mrs. Walter Benson, for a reception. He went right out there, too. There was the Vice President of the United States just walking through the house as big as you please, and Mrs. Benson and her family off wondering, "My goodness, how strange politics work!"

F: It probably shook her, didn't it, to have a vice president walk in on you.

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P: Well, you know, you feel badly. You ask yourself--why didn't you invite him! But you also know that he knew that I wouldn't object at all if he showed up, I'd just be proud of it, but I wasn't going to ask him to come because I didn't want him to think--

F: That he was obligated.

P: That's right.

(Interruption)

P: I could make a good recording on the stories about when my dad came to Washington for a visit, but that's long. I could also put some insight perhaps [into] what he did on the weekends for recreation around here. I could also maybe talk about the Tet offensive. That's an interesting story--how it affected him, what he was doing, how did he operate, and what did he do during that period. So if you want to have another session, we might talk about some of those things.

F: I'm going to have another session with you. I want to talk about that, I want to talk about your whole association.

Did you go on any trips with Mrs. Johnson other than right here in Central Texas?

P: No. Like down the Rio Grande? No.

F: Did you ever go on any long trips with him?

P: Oh, yes. One of the most interesting things, I think, was in March 1968. He called me up one day and said, "Do you want to go to Texas? I said, "Yes."

The next thing I know I had flown to Houston at the NASA



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inspection; then I had flown to Marietta, Georgia, for the unveiling of the C-5A, the big Lockheed transport plane; then we had flown from there to Puerto Rico for a couple of days. One time we'd flown to California out at Camp Pendleton; then spent a night on an aircraft carrier. I believe those were two different trips. And back to stop in Kansas, and then the stop at the Williamsburg church where the preacher kind of lit into--

F: Oh, you were there for that?

P: I was there for that.

F: We'll talk about that.

P: Sometimes when they said, "Do you want to go to Texas?" three or four days later I'd end up in Austin.

F: Did you pack for a prolonged trip?

P: Oh, of course not. (Laughter)

F: You got stuck once in a while.

P: At the moment that seemed awfully important, but not in the long run.

F: Not in memory. Okay.

P: We can talk about any of [these things].

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview V]

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