

INTERVIEW VI

DATE: September 17, 1982

INTERVIEWEE MARY RATHER

INTERVIEWER MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Miss Rather's residence, Gonzales, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: [We had] essentially [reached] 1944, and you were talking about how--

R: It occurred to me that although we have gotten as far as 1944, that perhaps I never have really gone into detail about Mr. Johnson's congressional office and how busy we all were and why we were so busy. So much happened, and it would all happen so fast, and we were all working day and into the night, that I think that's one of the reasons that I can't remember very well. There were too many things going on.

As a result of the 1941 campaign for the United States Senate, which Mr. Johnson lost by a very, very few votes, he became a statewide figure instead of just a congressman representing the Tenth District of Texas, which only had ten counties in it. People from all over Texas, from Amarillo to Brownsville, from East Texas to El Paso began coming to our office when they came to Washington, or began writing us letters, writing the Congressman letters, or phoning long distance. There's sort of an unwritten law or rule among the Texas congressmen that you won't fool around in somebody else's congressional district. You take care of your district and let them take care of their

Rather -- VI -- 2

district. But it was almost impossible for us to turn down people who had been so wonderful to Mr. Johnson in his 1941 campaign, although we would always tell them, "Well now, you must go talk to your congressman, or you must write him or you must phone him, and Mr. Johnson will be glad to cooperate with him." And that's the way we tried to handle it. But if you--I'm not going to talk too long, I'll try to make this brief and get through with it--will [look], as you go along in those years in the early forties and, well, all the way up through 1948 when he ran for the Senate again and was elected, you'll see that people from Wichita Falls are asking him to help Wichita Falls get an air force installation there. Or people from East Texas are asking him to help on something that they need, and it's that way all over the state.

G: Why do you think they asked him rather than, say, Pappy Q'Daniel or Tom Connally or their own congressman?

R: Well, maybe they did, because we certainly asked them to handle it that way. But I just think he had inspired a lot of confidence in a great many people. He had acquired the reputation of being someone who just never stopped working, and the result was that we in the office never stopped working either.

There was another problem--not a problem, but we had a handicap in the office; I guess it would be a problem. Slowly we lost to the military all of the young men that worked there, and we were constantly getting new employees. And Congressman Johnson was partial to young men rather than too many women around. I guess for one thing maybe the men could work harder, and the women would lots of times have to go home and cook supper for their husband when he got off from work. Then he'd call lots

Rather -- VI -- 3

of people, like John came by for a little while, John Connally, and helped in the office. Then he had to go away. He was in the navy. Mack DeGeurin came for a while, stayed until he had to go do something else. It was just one after another; you'll find their initials in these files, or their names, coming and then having to leave after a few months or at the most a year. But I don't know that anyone stayed a full year. We worked so hard and so fast, our heads, my head at least, was just swimming all the time. We were getting more letters than any other congressman from the state of Texas and probably as much as the senators were getting each day.

My job, I had to sit right inside the front door. I had four telephones on my desk, and they were all ringing all the time, and the front door was constantly opening with somebody coming in. It could be a man from Fort Worth or it could be a man from San Marcos here in the Tenth Congressional District, all having a problem that they wanted to get solved. The entrance room had several desks in it where other people were working, pushed back to the back, and then in that space between them and me we had chairs for the visitors who came, constituents who came, or the Texans, because they weren't all just our constituents. I took care of them and the phone, and then I would get someone in the office, Walter [Jenkins], but after a while Walter was gone, and then O. J. [Weber] was gone, Norman [?] was gone, anyway, someone would talk to them and try to help them and make a phone call for them. Then I had to keep up with Mr. Johnson's appointments, people that he had promised to see, committee meetings that he had to go to, when he needed to be on the House floor when a vote was about to come up. I had to answer a whole lot of the mail; I often had to stay there at night to get the mail answered. My head

Rather -- VI -- 4

just was swimming all the time, just going so fast from one thing to another, that I think that's one reason some of these things have not stayed very well in my mind. We were the busiest office on Capitol Hill, though, we really were. And everybody knew it; even the other members knew it. I just wanted to [mention that]. Maybe I can shorten that when I read it over.

G: Now he did spend a lot of time that year, in 1944, in Austin meeting with the mayor and the city council and other people on post war planning and discussing employment and conversion back to a civilian economy and housing, and things of this nature, to prepare the Tenth District for the transition to peacetime. Do you remember his emphasis on that and work there with the city?

R: Not very well. I might remember some incident if I were reminded of it, if it were called to my attention. I know though that he did spend as much time as he could that year in Austin when he could get away from Congress, because he was hoping not to have a campaign. And he spent a lot of time, as much time as he could at least, not only in Austin but going to other towns in his district. Not to have a political rally and not to make speeches so much as discussing something of importance to the town or to the state with the local people, and trying to tell them what he was doing. Like he would set aside [a day and] go down to Brenham and down to Washington County and Lee County, which was a little distance from Austin, halfway to Houston to go to Brenham, and stop in various towns down there in that area. He might do that for Monday and Tuesday, and then Wednesday and Thursday he'd go in a different direction, trying to cover his district as best he could whenever he did have a little time.

Rather -- VI -- 5

G: Was he surprised when Buck Taylor announced that he was going to run against him?

R: Well, we kept hearing rumors that he was going to, but Buck Taylor was a big old--well, I don't think he was real big; he wasn't very tall I don't believe. But anyway, he was a kind of a blow-hard, always talking about what he was going to do and saying very irresponsible things. A very unfair type of campaigner. I don't think we thought at first that he would really dare to run. But he did. He announced and he ran. Congressman Johnson, though, more or less ignored him. We just pretended he didn't exist.

G: Do you think there was any personal vendetta? Was there any reason that Buck Taylor decided to run against him?

R: Well, everybody in public office has some enemies. You can't please all of the people all of the time. You've heard that expression a lot. There were some disgruntled people in Austin, and a little of it spread all around to the other counties. I think that while Buck Taylor wasn't really anything except--I don't think the people that were feeding him information, false mostly, about Mr. Johnson, I don't think anybody thought that he could possibly win. But he was just put up sort of as a nuisance factor, maybe in hopes that--there was an election, you know, every two years for congressman. Well, we'll put a little dent in him this year; two years from now we'll try it again with somebody else. That's the way I looked at it. We didn't dignify him by mentioning his name, is my recollection. That was the policy.

G: Did Mr. Johnson feel that someone in particular was behind--?

R: I don't know. (Laughter) I think he had some ideas, but I don't want to name names.

C: Was it Dan Moody, do you think?

Rather -- VI -- 6

R: Well, of course, Dan Moody I know was a brilliant man in his prime, but he got bitter and harsh as time went by, and all of the things that Tom Miller said for a long, long time, they fed the fire. There were others, too, some. But Mr. Johnson always won with a big majority of the votes. I don't remember how many votes Buck Taylor got but my recollection is it wasn't many.

G: Now there was also some opposition to Sam Rayburn in his district, and I have a note that indicates that LBJ was somewhat worried that the oil men might put up enough money to beat Rayburn.

R: Well, that was the root of it, the oil. Mr. Rayburn had been in office so long and was such a fixture in Washington and was such a knowledgeable man and so good for the whole state, it would have been a pity for him not to be reelected. But it did have to do with oil. What was it? The price of oil I guess, they wanted more per barrel, that was it. I've forgotten the figures, but a barrel of oil didn't cost very much in those days, and the oil companies wanted more money for it. Now Mr. Johnson, in different ways, and I can't give you details, but [he] tried to hold prices down during the war, not only on oil but milk, eggs, chickens, and other things, too. And Mr. Rayburn was opposed to raising the [price]. Oh, my Lord, it seems to me they weren't getting five dollars a barrel for oil at that time, and the oil companies wanted more, but . . . Then there was a feeling, you know, you let one person raise the price of something, and somebody else in another business thinks they ought to get to raise the price, and it spirals and it grows on you. And then pretty soon, why then, maybe the people who had gotten to raise the price of oil, in another year or two they're going to want to raise it some more.

Rather -- VI -- 7

Well, I'll tell this, I might scratch it out when I read it. Paul Porter was the funniest man in the whole world. He was from Kentucky. He was the head of the OPA, Office of Price Administration. He said one day in my presence-- this wasn't in the newspapers--that raising the price of something, even though it was just a little bit, it was like a pregnant woman; it grows on you. That wasn't as well as he said it, but that's on the order of what he said, and I thought it was highly funny.

G: Well, why do you think that the oil people mounted such an effort to defeat Rayburn and did not also try to defeat Mr. Johnson?

R: Well, he wasn't very much in their good favor, Mr. Johnson wasn't, but Mr. Rayburn was such a well-known figure and was so respected on Capitol Hill, I'm sure they thought if they could get him, why, they could get the rest of them, too, that he was the most important one. He was such a good man, Mr. Rayburn.

G: Well, who were the oil men who were trying to defeat Rayburn, do you know? Were they people who were representing major oil companies or were they wealthy Texans?

R: Yes, I guess so. They're bound to have been the major oil companies and some of their people and wealthy Texans who had made a lot of money out of oil.

But you know, the oil companies, like Humble, for example, which is Exxon now, but other oil companies, too, Texaco and many of the big oil companies in the United States, who did business in Texas, had representatives in Washington that they sent to Washington. They were their [lobbyists]; they lobbied in Washington for the interests of their companies. Now it wasn't just the oil companies that had lobbyists up there, there were all kind of businesses that had lobbyists. But my memory is that the representatives

Rather -- VI -- 8

of these oil companies from Texas were very fond of Mr. Rayburn. They weren't doing it, but somebody else with their companies were. I particularly remember the Humble man and the Texaco man because I knew both of them well, and in fact went to college with the one who represented Texaco, with him and his wife both. They loved Mr. Rayburn.

G: Who was he, do you remember?

R: Jimmy Pipkin and Zenda, his wife. He later became one of the [executives] way up high in Texaco.

G: Well, did Mr. Johnson do anything this year to help Sam Rayburn? Did he raise money for him to help him get reelected in any way?

R: I don't remember that. Although I know he certainly talked to people from Texas that we've got to help Mr. Sam. You know, urging them if they knew any way, anybody in his district or anywhere to get them to speak out for Mr. Rayburn, for his reputation in Washington and accomplishments all through the years. I don't really think Mr. Rayburn knew how to campaign very much. He never had had to. He did the first time he was elected when he was a very young man, he was [campaigning] from daylight to midnight. But as the years went by he didn't have to do it as much. That stirred up a lot of anxiety for him though at that time, but he won.

G: Lynda Bird was born that year.

R: On a very cold, snowy, sleety March day.

G: What do you remember about that?

R: Well, unfortunately I didn't know that Mr. Johnson took her to the hospital that day, took

Rather -- VI -- 9

Lady Bird to the hospital. It was a Saturday or a Sunday, I've forgotten which. If it was Saturday, somehow I had Saturday afternoon off, although I usually worked on Saturday and sometimes on Sunday, too. A friend of mine from college days who was in Washington--well, he'd been called to duty in the navy, but he was just temporarily in Washington, and I was with him that day and trying to show him some of the things around Washington. We had a big snowstorm and we finally had to give up and come back into town. We weren't out in the country but we were just out in some of the suburbs. I didn't know about Lynda until the next morning and Mr. Johnson called me at daylight and said, "Where in the world were you?" and said that the baby came and he had been calling everybody to tell them about it the night before, and he never could get me. So I didn't know it until the next day. But he was awfully happy.

G: What did he say? Was he excited about it?

R: Well, he blessed me out for not being home waiting for the call. But I didn't know the baby was coming that day. He didn't either, really. I think I know what happened. It was very near the time, and the weather turned so bad that he was afraid the streets might get impassable. Washington is pretty good about cleaning off the streets, but this was a sudden, unexpected big snowfall in March, and it came so fast you couldn't clean the streets all at once. And he thought that he ought to get her to the hospital, because later on if they waited until ten or eleven o'clock at night, why, they might not be able to get there. And of course they might not have had to go until the next day, he had no way of knowing, but he took her on down. It was good that he did, because that [was the night]. At first I guess the doctors and nurses just let her stay there, but they didn't think the baby

Rather -- VI -- 10

was coming at first, is my recollection of hearing about it afterward. But sure enough, Lynda did come that night.

G: I have a note--excuse me, go ahead.

R: Were you going to ask about her name?

G: Yes.

R: Well, that's what I was going to tell you. He wanted to name her Lady Bird like her mother. Lady Bird was opposed to it. She said she didn't want anybody ever again to have that name, that it always attracted so much attention when people would hear she was named Lady Bird, which really wasn't her name; her name was Claudia. She seemed to think it would be a wrong thing to do for her child to be named Lady Bird and have to bear with it all of her life. So they compromised on Lynda. Mr. Johnson was adamant though that her second name be Bird, which wasn't Lady Bird's name at all; it was Claudia like I said.

G: Isn't that funny?

R: Yes.

G: Did he want a boy?

R: Well, I think every man wants a boy and I think he would have been thrilled to death if she had been a boy, or if Luci had been a boy. But he never showed any signs of--well, anyway, he loved those little girls to death. Mr. Johnson always did love girls; he loved ladies. Of course, I don't know that he always thought women were as smart as men, but he liked ladies. I think he was always delighted to have had two daughters, loved them dearly, and he thought they were both beautiful and that they were both smart and that he

Rather -- VI -- 11

couldn't be any better off.

G: Some of the letters, I think before Lynda was born, seem to indicate that he was kind of hoping for a boy.

R: I think he was, and I think every man hopes for a boy. Well, women hope for a son, too, for that matter. But lots of women will confess to you though, "I sure am glad it was a girl." They feel closer and more understanding of a girl. But he never showed any disappointment; if there was any, it wasn't apparent even after they had a second little girl.

G: Now I have a note here that Aunt Effie [Pattillo] and Mrs. Johnson, his mother, were visiting at that time. Do you recall that?

R: Yes. I know they both came up there. Aunt Effie may already have been there, I don't remember. But I'm sure that his mother came hoping to be there when the first child was born and also, of course, hoping to be helpful around the house and with Lady Bird. She was quite fond of Lady Bird.

G: John Connally then was in the hospital with an appendectomy. Do you recall that at the same time?

R: Just vaguely, that he had appendicitis. Out I don't remember anything much about it.

G: Well, did having this newborn baby affect Mr. Johnson's schedule or change his work [habits]?

R: No. He talked a great deal about how much he had to work at home as well as the office, but he was a great teaser and exaggerator about things that--I mean he wouldn't exaggerate anything that was highly important and that you have to be sure of your facts,

Rather -- VI -- 12

but he talked a lot about how he--I doubt if he ever gave Lynda her bottle, but he might have told you that he did.

I don't remember Lynda as a baby being any trouble, by trouble I mean that she got sick or had any little things that some babies have. She was healthy, as well as I remember. You know, no more trouble than just any baby would be to keep her schedule.

(Interruption)

G: In May of that year your mother passed away and you left and moved back to Texas. Can you go into detail on that?

R: Well, I received the phone call one night. My brother was in Washington, too, at the Navy Department. And we both, of course, were prepared to go home at once. But transportation was a problem. Although I had spent years, since the war started, getting plane reservations for people, constituents in Texas, and from Texas, and getting them hotel rooms which were so scarce, I couldn't get myself on an airplane. I felt very bitter about it. My brother could have flown home. Being in the navy he had some kind of a priority when there was a death in the family, or he probably could have caught a naval plane that was going to Texas anyway, to Corpus [Christi], we'll say, or somewhere, if there had been any spare room. But he wouldn't go; he waited with me. I tried to get him to go on, but he felt that he ought to stay and come with me so I wouldn't come alone. So we came the next day then on the train that left Washington at night. By the time we did get home all the arrangements had been made. My aunt, my daddy's sister, had gone and Mother's sisters were there. Mr. Johnson told me to stay as long as need be, and I did

Rather -- VI -- 13

that. My brother, of course, had to go back pretty quickly.

G: Did you think at the time that you would leave Washington for a considerable period, or did you plan to go back after, say, a period of weeks?

R: I don't know exactly what I thought. I knew that it was going to be very hard on my father, and I didn't have any idea of going right straight back to Washington within a day or two after the funeral. I knew I was going to stay a while. There were lots of things that had to be done, and I could help him do them. I think it was after I had been there for a week or two that I must have told Mr. Johnson that I would not--I might have said I'll come back to Washington for a few days or something like that if I can help you find somebody else in my place, but I'm going to stay home with my father.

So I did from then on out for about a year and a half I guess, except that when he came to Austin, maybe not every time he came, but if he came and didn't bring some of his office staff with him, why, I would go to Austin and help him for a few days. That's the way I really knew a little bit about Buck Taylor's campaign was that we weren't paying any attention to it. We were ignoring him.

G: Okay. Do you recall anything of the [state] Democratic convention that May where you had two rival delegations?

R: Now did that meet in Austin?

G: I think it was Austin.

R: I think it was Austin. I think it met up in the [Capitol]. Well, I guess it was May. Was there another one?

G: Well, there would be another one again in the fall.

Rather -- VI -- 14

R: In September there would be another one.

G: I have a note here that it was in Austin and that you were there working on a speech for that convention. Or maybe it was for some other occasion, but that you were there at the time of the [convention].

R: I can't remember that he attended the convention. I can't remember that he wasn't a delegate to it. I guess he could have gone up there and been an observer.

G: Not the national convention.

R: No, I know it, I'm talking about the--

G: --the one in Austin.

R: You see, after an election--well now wait, we hadn't had an election yet. You don't have any--well, I don't know. I guess it was then or else in September there was the state--well, that was the state convention, wasn't it, the Democratic convention?

G: Yes.

R: Well, they were rowdy, I know that, if that was the convention or if there was another one later. They were fighting. There were two factions in the Democratic Party, and one was against Roosevelt being renominated, and the other was for Roosevelt. The convention in Austin was up at the Capitol in the House of Representatives' room. And Joe Hill and I think Tom Miller had a fight, I mean a fist fight, and they had to be separated. Oh, tempers were running high! But one group was certified to go to the national Democratic convention in Chicago. When was this, in June that we're talking about?

G: May. I think late May.

R: May. Well, the national one met in June or July, probably July. Both groups went to the

Rather -- VI -- 15

national convention, and the one that was anti-fourth term for Roosevelt was the one that got certified first, and I can't tell you why. I don't know. Ed Pauley, who was the postmaster general--by the way, there used to be a time when the postmaster general of the United States was nearly always chairman of the Democratic Party. Did you know that?

G: Oh, yes.

R: Pauley was from Missouri, I think. It was probably the beginnings of Truman's ascendancy. There were two or three other rather important men from Missouri. Their names will come to me some time. I don't know why Pauley certified the first group that was opposed to a fourth term for Roosevelt, but he did. Because they'd been certified in Austin, that was it.

G: They had organized the convention,

R: Yes. But anyway, then he compromised in some way--I guess you'd call it compromise--and seated the other delegation, too, also from Texas. So then they had another fight. That was when Wright Morrow got up and walked out, and the rest of the delegation I believe followed him. He had taken his daughter Gen with him, Genevieve. She was a beautiful young girl, and he took her to the convention with him. She was sitting on the floor next to him with the delegates. He rose up and said, "Come on, Gen," I guess, and they got out, and the rest of them follows him. It was in *Time* magazine I think.

G: Why did he walk out?

R: I guess it was because Pauley certified the other group of delegates also. And when you

Rather -- VI -- 16

have two groups, two sets of delegates from a state, which sometimes happens at a national convention, although before it's over, why, one group might get eliminated. But until they are, each group will have half of the votes and the other group can cast its half of the ballots. If your state is big enough population-wise, suppose you have forty votes, well then, each group of delegates would have twenty votes each.

G: Anything on his role in the convention politics that year?

R: I don't remember whether he even went to that convention, do you, in Chicago?

G: I think that he did. He announced that he would not attend, and I think so did Rayburn. I'm not sure whether he went or not. He may have gone for a day or so.

R: I don't remember. I remember going to a lot of conventions, and if he went I imagine I went, too. I remember going to one that Senator [Alvin] Wirtz went along at the same time, and neither he or Mr. Johnson went on the convention floor. We sat in the balcony and watched all the [action], sat around the sides, sat there, oh, for hours all day long.

G: Do you remember what city it was in?

R: Chicago. Every convention I went to--well, not every one--the conventions that I did go to were in Chicago, and I went to three at least there I think. And I went to the one in Los Angeles in 1960 and the one in Atlantic City in 1964. I was a delegate only one time and that was the one to Atlantic City. It seemed to me we went to Chicago nearly every time except we skipped one year, one time.

G: Well, let's see, one year it was in Philadelphia, wasn't it?

R: Well, I guess you're right, but I don't know what year that was [1948]. I didn't go to that one. I don't know whether that was before I started going to conventions or afterward.

Rather -- VI -- 17

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VI]

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

MARY RATHER

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Nancy Kumpuris, of Little Rock, Arkansas, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted with my aunt, Mary Rather, on January 11, 1980, in Austin, Texas, and June 10, September 9, 10, and 17, 1982, September 8 and 15, 1983, and July 14, 1987, in Gonzales, Texas, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recordings may be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Nancy Rather Kumpuris
Donor

10-26-07
Date

Dr. Stewart
Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries

12-18-2007
Date