

INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE BYRON SKELTON

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

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approx. 2 hours, 2 tapes, 3 3/4 speed

B: We can start now, Judge. Why don't you just go ahead and start with what you have there on your notes--with your first or political acquaintance with Mr. Johnson?

S: Well, I first became acquainted with Lyndon Johnson in the late 1940's. I don't remember exactly when--the exact date. But I had been in the foreign service in South America from 1942 until 1945. After I got back to Temple, Texas, where I was practicing law, I became very interested in Democratic Party politics. In 1948 I became especially interested in supporting Lyndon Johnson for the United States Senate.

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Of course, I was aligned with the loyal Democratic element in the party, and Lyndon Johnson was definitely our candidate and we were moving heaven and earth to elect him. Well, as you know, the election was very close. It was finally announced that Lyndon Johnson had won the election by 87 votes. Governor Coke Stevenson challenged the vote in court, and the courts were sustaining Lyndon Johnson. But about that time, we had the state convention in Fort Worth. This was in September of 1948. And of course one of the functions of the state

convention was to certify the nominees of the Party to the /Texas/ Secretary of State who would in turn put their names on the ballot for the election.

Coke Stevenson announced that he was going to take a contest of the election to the State Democratic Executive Committee which meets a day or two in advance of the convention itself, and ask that committee to recommend to the convention that he be certified as the nominee instead of Lyndon Johnson, alleging fraud and chicanery and illegal votes and all of that. Of course, those charges were going back and forth on both sides. Anyway, the state committee met in Fort Worth the day before the convention and I well recall that we had a man in Temple, Texas, on the state committee. He was Frank W. Mayborn, who is the owner and publisher of the Temple Daily Telegram, and also now owns the radio and television station there. So, Frank Mayborn was in Nashville, Tennessee, at the moment, at the time the committee met, because he had a radio station over there. I realized that the vote was going to be very close and crucial, so I phoned Frank Mayborn from Texas to Tennessee and urged him to catch a plane and come to Fort Worth immediately and attend that meeting. He did.

B: Was Mr. Mayborn a Johnson man?

S: Yes. He was a Johnson man. Believe it or not, Johnson won in the committee by one vote. It was that close, and of course--

B: How big is that committee?

S: Well, there is a man and woman from each of the state senatorial districts in Texas. Around 62 or 63 or 64, or something. I forget how many senatorial districts there were at that time. It seems to me there were 31. But anyway, there were two from each district. He won and of course we felt like our vote was the winning vote, but I'm sure everybody who voted for Mr. Johnson felt like his vote won for him also.

B: Had any of the campaign bitterness lingered over into that committee meeting?

S: Oh, yes. It was a heated affair and bitterness was very evident all over the place. Everybody was working feverishly to get their votes lined up in the committee. Of course, the committee's job was to recommend to the convention what should be done. The committee's vote is not final; it is merely a recommendation to the convention which convenes the following morning. Well, after Stevenson lost in the committee by one vote, he announced that he was going to take the contest to the floor of the convention the following day. He had lots of support, because at that time [Strom] Thurmond and [Fielding] Wright were running for president and vice president on the States' Right Party. The Houston delegation and the Fort Worth delegation and others, we knew, were really supporting Thurmond and Wright instead of the Democratic candidates, and they were not really what we considered as Democrats. They were all for Coke Stevenson.

B: Did Mr. Truman get directly involved in the primary campaign?

S: No, I don't believe so. Not in this particular campaign. It so happened that because of my activity in the party affairs at that particular time I was designated as the floor leader of the loyal Democrats--the people who were supporting Lyndon Johnson and who were loyal to the party. By the way at that convention Robert W. Calvert, who is now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas and my good friend and law classmate, was chairman of the convention. Governor Beauford Jester was the governor; he's now dead of course. So early in the convention the chairman recognized me and I made a speech showing why the Houston delegation should not be seated. They were not loyal to the party; they would not take a pledge to support the nominees of the party; and in truth and in fact, everybody knew they were supporting Thurmond and Wright. So I made a motion that they not be seated; that the Houston delegation headed by a man named Bob Milner not be seated, and that in their place the loyal delegation headed by Sam D. W. Low be seated. Sam still lives in Houston and has been a loyal Democrat all through the years, and has been a collector of customs in Houston. There was a great furor on the floor of the convention, but it finally was put to a vote and we won. The Houston delegation was excluded from the convention, and we all were gratified to see how right we were. When they got up to leave the convention floor, they pulled out banners and flags from under their seats and

started waving them in the air. These banners were in support of Thurmond and Wright for the presidency and vice-presidency.

B: Was that a fairly close vote, too?

S: I don't recall the vote, but I don't think it was really too close, to tell you the truth. So then I made an additional motion to exclude the Tarrant County delegation, a Fort Worth group, and it carried. Of course, as a matter of fact, once we eliminated the Houston delegation and seated the loyal Democrats with their vote, we could do anything we wanted to because we had the overwhelming control then with the Houston vote.

B: Was the Tarrant County delegation also a Thurmond-Wright group?

S: Yes. And so they were excluded. They were the host group because we were meeting in Fort Worth. They became very bitter when we excluded them from the convention, and they started moving the furniture out of the hall and off of the stage where we had our typewriters and all of our material--adding machines, and what have you, to count votes. They even cut off the electricity and cut off the pipe organ that was furnishing the music. Not only that, they served notice on the convention that they were not going to pay the rent on the hall, that we would have to pay it if we wanted to stay there. They marched out leaving us without any furniture, without any lights, without any power, and without any rent money.

B: Was this at night or in the afternoon?

S: This was in the morning, as I recall.

B: You could still see what you were doing?

S: Yes, we could see what we were doing. It was right amusing. Someone backstage found a barrel back there and they brought it out on stage. We put our typewriter and other paraphernalia on it. Someone started singing "Roll Out the Barrel, " because that's what happened.

But anyway, at this point Mr. C. C. McDonald, a very fine Democrat from Wichita Falls, was making the keynote speech. Governor James E. Allred got up and interrupted him and announced to the audience what the Fort Worth group had done and were doing; and that we were going to have to raise money to pay for the rent on the hall; and that he was going to pass the hat. He did. As a matter of fact they passed several hats and we collected more than enough money to pay for the rent on the hall. A lot of this is just incidental but it does show you the intense feeling that existed there on that occasion. Of course, in the background was the Lyndon Johnson-Coke Stevenson contest, and everything depended on what we did there at that convention. Once we got the Houston and Tarrant Counties' delegations out, who were all for Coke Stevenson and who were supporting Thurmond and Wright, Lyndon Johnson was immediately certified as the nominee of the Party.

B: Where was Mr. Johnson while all of this was going on?

S: He was there around and about and on the stage and behind the stage and in the background. I never will forget, he came up to me there on the

platform as soon as everything had settled down and his situation was well taken care of. He came up to me with Mary Rather, who was one of his secretaries and who lives in Hillsboro, Texas--I believe she's presently working over at the White House. He said to me, "I'll never forget you for what you've done for me today." And of course I was real pleased that he felt that way.

B: During that meeting on the floor, was he working the famous "Johnson Treatment" on people?

S: Well, not so much. Really, he was leaving it to us, because he felt that we had it pretty well under control while he was working in the background. He wasn't too conspicuous out in front.

B: Was Mr. Calvert, the chairman of the convention, a loyal Democrat?

S: Oh, yes, all the way. And at that convention the then national committeeman, Wright Morrow, who is a lawyer in Houston, had been under fire from the loyal Democrats for a long time because of some of his statements and his actions in the party that a lot of the Democrats did not feel were in line with being loyal to the party. A motion was made that he be removed as national committeeman from Texas and that I be elected in his place. That motion carried, and so my name was certified to the Democratic National Committee as having replaced Wright Morrow on the committee. Just to carry that story on through for you briefly, the National Committee at its next meeting did not seat me on the committee, taking the position that Wright Morrow had

been seated for a period of four years by the National Committee; and that a state convention was without authority under the rules of the National Committee to remove a national committeeman who had been seated for four years. Of course, I was later made national committeeman, but that's another story down the line.

B: Was there something more to it than that: to the reasoning of the National Committee? More than just procedural? Were there political implications?

S: The National Committee didn't meet and act on this until after the election was over in the fall. In the meantime the story goes that Wright Morrow personally guaranteed--he's a man of considerable means--a national television broadcast for President Truman. By reason of that he, in a way, ingratiated himself with the people on the National Committee. He did help during the campaign to that extent anyway. That of course was in his favor when the matter finally came to a vote. The rules of the National Committee, by the way, have since been changed and a man can be removed now if he has been shown to be disloyal to the party. But that is something that has come about in recent years. I just mention it in passing.

B: Before we leave 1948, were you active in what I suppose would have been the subsequent legal maneuvering over the certification? Was it not after the convention that the certification of that election went into the courts?



S: I was not active in that phase of it. I was active in another phase. These Fort Worth people filed a lawsuit to declare everything that happened at the state convention illegal. And I was one of the lawyers representing the officials of the convention and defending what the convention did. That case went to the Supreme Court of Texas and the Supreme Court held that what we did was legal. It upheld all the actions of the state convention. To that extent I was involved, because that did involve the certification. They tried to upset the certification of the state convention by that lawsuit. Now, there were proceedings going on in Federal Court, which I don't know whether that was what you were implying.

B: That's what I had reference to.

S: I was not associated in those lawsuits.

B: Can you now, over a distance of time, make any judgment on the validity of the various charges on all sides of fraud etc., in that election?

S: Of course, I have no personal knowledge of what went on in some of those boxes that were being contested or where they were making charges. I know the Stevenson people contended that the 87 votes down there--that particular box, I believe, was either in Duval or Jim Wells County--were fraudulent. I have no way of knowing; I didn't go down there; I didn't participate in any phase of that at all. I do know that on the other side of the picture there were charges made by the Lyndon Johnson folks that there had been irregularities; I cannot say positively on either side.

The mere fact that Lyndon Johnson had an overwhelming vote in some of those border counties doesn't mean a thing, because Coke Stevenson had been getting that same overwhelming vote through the years. And as long as he was winning, he never said anything about it. This time it was different because the vote went the other way. In answer to your question, I'm sorry I can't be of any particular help on that, because I was not directly involved in the vote contest.

B: Also, sir, in that primary campaign so far as Mr. Johnson's campaign speeches and so on went, was he going pretty well down the line with the Truman administration?

S: Yes. He was, and with the Democratic Party generally. We considered him of course to be a very great friend of Speaker Sam Rayburn and President Truman and that he would support the Democratic Party in whatever it undertook.

B: Was Mr. Rayburn directly involved in the campaign too?

S: Behind the scenes. Of course, he was for Lyndon Johnson all the way. But I don't think he made any speeches or anything like that.

Governor Jester died suddenly in 1949, I believe, and Allan Shivers was lieutenant governor at that time. So he /Shivers/ became governor. Allan Shivers had been elected to the state senate from the Beaumont district, and basically by the labor vote which is very heavy down in that area--Port Arthur and Beaumont. So far as anybody knew, he had been and was thought to be a good Democrat, as we speak of it in Texas,

and would support the party. The first evidence we had that that might not be the case was when we had the state convention in September, 1950, at Mineral Wells. To the amazement of a good many people, the old-time loyal Democrats who had been on the State Democratic Executive Committee were practically eliminated to the last man and were replaced by people friendly to Allan Shivers, many of whom had never taken part in Democratic Party affairs before in their whole lives. That action caused people to wonder just how he was going to perform as far as the Democratic Party was concerned.

The next thing that happened, so to speak, was the 1952 National Convention in Chicago. Of course, Allan Shivers, being governor and having replaced practically all the loyal Democrats on the State Executive Committee, had absolute control of the selection of the delegates to the National Convention. As a consequence all the delegation was pro-Shivers; but there was a rival delegation, because the fight by that time had developed in Texas between the Shivers element and the loyal Democrats. So there were two delegations to Chicago in 1952. The rival delegation took the position that the Shivers delegation should not be seated because they would not take the pledge to support the nominees of the party.

B: Were you with the rival loyalist delegation?

S: Yes, I was with the rival group.

B: At that stage of the game, who would be considered in Texas the leader of that group, or was it that clear?

S: Well, probably former Congressman Maury Maverick of San Antonio. He was one of the leaders of the group. Of course, I was one of the leaders also.

B: Was Mr. Johnson directly interested or involved in this?

S: No. Mr. Johnson was not directly involved in this particular fight in Texas.

If you will remember they had quite a good deal to say and do about whether or not they would impose a pledge on the delegates of that convention, especially a pledge from the Southern delegation.

Finally Allan Shivers was seated. His group was seated and--

B: Was there any kind of compromise at all or was his entire delegation seated?

S: His entire delegation was seated. Speaker Sam Rayburn told me later, in talking about this very thing, "I had a conversation with Allan Shivers before we decided whom to seat at this convention, and Allan Shivers promised me on his honor as a man and on his honor as Governor of Texas that if his delegation were seated that he would go back home and support the nominee of the party--the nominees of that convention."

He said, "I took him at his word and the convention took him at his word. As a matter of fact Allan Shivers made a speech to the whole convention which was nationally televised in which he indicated that he

would support the nominees of that convention."

That's the way I recall it.

B: I suppose Mr. Rayburn had a lot of influence in deciding which delegation would be seated.

S: I'm sure that behind the scenes he did, because everyone of course respected him tremendously.

So Allan Shivers was seated--his group was seated--and when the convention was over, he went back home to Texas. Immediately he announced that he was going to support General Eisenhower, the Republican candidate. In furtherance of that decision, he caused the state convention that met in Amarillo in September of 1952 to take an action that was unheard of certainly in Texas politics and maybe in every other state as far as I know. That Democratic State Convention, so-called, in Amarillo passed a resolution endorsing Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican candidate, for president and called upon the Democrats of the State of Texas and all the people of Texas to vote Republican in the national election.

B: Were you at that convention too?

S: No, I didn't go to that convention, because I knew what was going to happen. I knew that nothing good was going to come out of it, because Governor Shivers had already announced that he was not going to support the Democratic nominees.

B: Were you in any position to hear about that time, the reaction of Mr. Rayburn and Senator Johnson to Shivers' announcement?

S: Yes. They were just simply beside themselves that he would do such a thing as to come home and support the Republican nominees after what happened in Chicago. Even without that having happened, being the governor of a Democratic state and elected on the Democratic ticket, and purporting to be a Democrat, none of us could understand really why he took this action. Of course, he did say that he was influenced by the tidelands situation; you know that tidelands controversy was going on and--

B: The tidelands oil situation?

S: The tidelands oil situation. And that Adlai Stevenson had indicated that he was against the Texas claim to the tidelands and Eisenhower had indicated otherwise. So that was some excuse for Governor Shivers to do what he did.

B: Had there been other issues: Mr. Truman's Civil Rights proposal--

S: That may have been in the background too, but it wasn't nearly as prominent as the tidelands issue.

To move along, of course, Eisenhower won, as you know, that election in 1952. And he carried Texas by a big vote.

B: Did Mr. Johnson campaign in Texas for Stevenson that year?

S: Yes, he did. But I don't recall how much or how many speeches he made. He was, of course, for Governor Stevenson, and he did campaign for him but I don't think his campaign was extensive--I'll put it that way.

B: Was there any sort of Democratic organization campaigning in the State?  
A loyalist Democratic organization?

S: Oh, yes, those of us who had been in this fight through the years that I have been talking about were all working as hard as we could to carry the State for the Democratic nominees. But the problem was that we didn't have any official organization. The official Democratic organization under the leadership of Governor Shivers had gone over to the Republican side and had completely deserted the Democratic Party which they were supposed to defend and protect and promote.

B: I suppose that not only took organization but the financing.

S: Finances. We were handicapped with organization; we were handicapped with finances. So we were just not able to win.

Passing on to what I call the next phase of the whole situation down there: of course, after Eisenhower won, the Democratic Party [in Texas] was pretty much in shambles, because it had gone over to the Republican side--that is, the official party had--and we were all discouraged and didn't know what to do. I took the initiative and I called a meeting of a number of Democratic Party leaders from over the State to meet me at my cabin at Salado, Texas, down there on the creek. I don't remember who all was there; I remember Carlton Smith from Waco; J. T. Rutherford from El Paso, who later became congressman; Jerry Holleman was there; Gilbert Adams; Tom Moore; Creekmore Fath; Jim Sewell; Fred Schmidt; Kathleen Voigt. There were about 20 or 25 of us, but I can't remember the others. We had a meeting there to discuss "What do we do now?"

Finally we decided we would have a state-wide meeting over at the clubhouse at Buchanan Dam near Austin. We selected a date and

we had such a meeting. There were several hundred people there--a big crowd. It was decided at that meeting that we would form what we called a Democratic Organizing Committee, which later became known as the DOC. They elected me chairman of the committee, and our job was to start rebuilding the Democratic Party in Texas.

B: This means that there were two party machineries then, because Governor Shivers still had his--

S: He had the official organization and ours was outside of the official organization, because we had no way of controlling the official organization which was Republican actually.

B: What was the reaction of Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson to this development, the organization of the DOC?

S: I was going to come to that. Of course all of this action was taken--this organization of the Democratic Organizing Committee at Buchanan Dam--without any direct sanction or approval by Mr. Rayburn or by Lyndon Johnson. It was sort of a spontaneous movement among the Democrats down there to do something. You know, to start rebuilding the party and revitalizing it. So we started raising money and organizing across the State and doing a pretty good job.

Finally Speaker Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson and the then chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Stephen Mitchell, decided that while we were doing a good job with the Democratic Organizing Committee, we didn't have any official standing, that we were really



just a group of people trying to do a job without any official support. They felt that something ought to be done to make it official. After conferring with us--and by the way, most of this conferring was done by Speaker Rayburn; through the years in Texas any party matter that came along, Lyndon Johnson more or less left it up to Speaker Rayburn to make the decisions and do whatever he thought was best. I know I've talked to Lyndon Johnson many times along through these years about party matters and he'd say, "Well, you go see Speaker Rayburn, and whatever he says do, well, you do it, and I'll back you up."

B: Did it always work that way?

S: Well, there may have been differences between them behind the scenes, but by and large he let Mr. Rayburn run the party, especially the organizational part of it in Texas, pretty much as he desired. Of course, I know they conferred together all the time, and they were always together on what was done. I never knew them to have a serious break or disagreement on party matters in Texas. They might have had some, but I don't know about it.

B: Sir, this may be an unfair question, but do you suppose in things like that Mr. Johnson simply deferred to Mr. Rayburn, or do you suppose Mr. Johnson was perhaps staying out of a potentially dangerous situation?

S: No, I think it was more this way: I think he not only was deferring to Mr. Rayburn because of his age and his seniority and his position and his respect for him, but also because he had confidence in Mr. Rayburn. He felt like Mr. Rayburn had good judgment and whatever decision he made would be the right one. I feel like those were the things that were more controlling.

After we had had several meetings conferring about this matter of making our Democratic Organizing Committee some kind of an official body, it was finally decided that Steve Mitchell, the chairman of the National Committee, would appoint what was called a Democratic Advisory Council. He did and we all agreed to it. It would take over the function and efforts of the Democratic Organizing Committee; in other words, we changed from the DOC to the DAC.

B: And just the same people?

S: The same people basically. We did change officers. Jim Sewell, who is now District Judge at Corsicana, Texas, was made the chairman of the Democratic Advisory Council; I was made vice-chairman; D. B. Hardeman of Denison--I believe he lives here in Washington now--was made the secretary. And so, these appointments came out of the National Committee; we submitted a list of prominent Democrats across the State that should be on the Democratic Advisory Council, and Steve Mitchell sent membership certificates or appointments to each one of them. We met and organized and elected officers who were the ones

I've just named.

I was for this change all the way, but some of the Democratic Organizing Committee people were not. They felt like, "Well, we've built up a good organization here, and we're about to allow it to be taken away from us." That was particularly evident from the labor people and the more liberal element in the party. They seemed to have a distrust for this switchover, and so in order to make it official, so to speak, I called another meeting of this DOC group--Democratic Organizing Committee group that I had been head of--at my same cabin at Salado, Texas. We discussed the matter pro and con, and finally we took a vote whether or not we would go into this DAC from Washington. The vote was very close, just a few votes difference; I don't remember exactly how many votes. But anyway it was voted that we would consolidate with the DAC, the Democratic Advisory Council. Well, a number of people left that meeting not too happy. The groups I mentioned awhile ago. They were not too happy, and they were going along with some misgivings about it.

B: But they were going along?

S: They were going along.

B: May I ask at this stage of the game-- At this time who would you consider the leaders of the liberal-labor group?

S: Mrs. R. D. Randolph of Houston, who later became national committeewoman, was one of them; and Kathleen Voigt of San Antonio;

and Jerry Holleman, who later became, I believe, Assistant Secretary of Labor--

B: Jerry Holleman was a labor official at the time--

S: He was president of the AFofL-CIO, I believe; and Fred Schmidt was another one of the labor leaders; and of course Creekmore Fath was one of those people, too, that were somewhat suspicious of this new--

B: Do you know how that name is spelled, sir?

S: Yes, F-a-t-h. He was from Austin. I believe he is here in Washington now.

B: But at this stage of the game, they're going along--

S: They were going along with sort of a "Well, let's wait and see" attitude. But they were going along.

We started working then in the Democratic Advisory Council and we had a number of meetings across the State. The organization was being received with a great deal of enthusiasm. We were raising money and sending it to the National Committee, because the regular Democratic Party organization wasn't sending any money to the Democratic National Committee. I don't know whether they sent it to the Republican National Committee. I don't know whether they sent it to the Republicans or not, but they were not raising any money for the Democrats.

B: I gather the DAC had no connection at all with the Shiver regular organization?

S: No, not any. We held our authority and our allegiance to the National Committee for the reasons which I have just stated. We were appointed by the National Committee and we were working through the National Committee, but we did have some official status as you can see.

Everything rocked along until the 1956 campaign came up. Of course, during these several years that I have been talking about, we were trying--we, the loyal Democrats, the Democratic Advisory Council--to get control of the party away from Governor Shivers and his Republican-oriented group.

B: Aiming toward the 1956 election?

S: Yes, looking toward 1956. Well, the 1956 campaign--

B: May I ask here: there's a senatorial election right in there in 1954, is there not? Mr. Johnson's reelection to the Senate in 1954?

S: Yes. I believe that's right.

B: Did any of this get involved in that?

S: Well, there was some but specifically, I can't remember and don't think it cut much ice.

B: So far as I recall, Mr. Johnson had practically no opposition.

S: I think that's right. I don't even remember who ran against him, to tell you the truth. I should, but I don't.

But the 1956 campaign was crucial in Texas for a number of reasons. It was crucial to us who were working as loyal Democrats in the Democratic

Advisory Council, and it was crucial to Lyndon Johnson because he was definitely identified with the loyal Democratic Party, as against Shivers, who had not been loyal. So it all boiled down to who was going to be the leader of the delegation from Texas to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1956? We wanted Lyndon Johnson to be the leader, and of course we were desperately trying to take over the party from Allan Shivers in Texas. To tell you the truth, we were somewhat concerned and afraid that Allan Shivers might also say he was for Lyndon Johnson. Had he done so--had he taken a back seat and said "I want Lyndon Johnson for the leader"--then we wouldn't have had much to fight him with in Texas as a basis for taking over the Democratic Party in 1956.

B: Were there rumors of that possibility there?

S: Yes, there were rumors going around and we were afraid he might do it. On the other hand we felt that his vanity would keep him from doing it.

B: Was there any implication in those rumors that Senator Johnson and Governor Shivers were coming to some kind of agreement?

S: No, it was strictly a matter of political expediency on Shivers' part. I very well remember that an attorney in Houston named Marlin Sandlin, who is still there, and he and I came to Washington specifically to see Speaker Rayburn; to get Speaker Rayburn to openly come out for and endorse Lyndon Johnson to be the leader of the delegation to Chicago.

We urged upon him that if he didn't act pretty fast we were afraid that Governor Shivers would endorse Lyndon Johnson and if he did, then we would have problems in Texas because the people would be confused and not know which way to go and all that. We persuaded him that he should do it, and he did. He came out openly for Lyndon Johnson to be the leader of the delegation. Of course, Allan Shivers immediately announced that he, Allan Shivers, wanted to be the leader of the delegation. So that was the big fight in Texas in that campaign of 1956. We defeated Shivers soundly on that issue, and Lyndon Johnson was made the leader of the delegation.

B: This is at the state convention there in the spring of 1956?

S: In May of 1956, yes, the spring convention. You see, at these conventions, you've got to have an issue, and that was our big issue as I recall it. And we won. When you win on an issue, you take over the convention. So, we took it over and we made Lyndon Johnson the leader of the delegation. That was in Dallas in 1956, and they elected me at that convention as Democratic national committeeman.

B: Wasn't there some controversy over the election of the national committeewoman?

S: Yes, I was going to come to that. Speaker Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson were, of course, favorable to me to be the national committeeman because of my work and so forth; they were inclined to be favorable to Mrs. Lloyd

Bentsen of Houston to be the committeewoman. That was the rumor that was going around the convention--that we two were going to be elected. The Committee on Party Officers came out with the recommendation that I be elected, and I was elected; and then came consideration of the woman. In the meantime, some of these people who favored someone else--mostly the very liberal Democrats and the labor people largely from Houston and Austin and San Antonio--circulated circulars among the delegates that Lloyd Bentsen had supported Eisenhower in 1952, and therefore, Mrs. Bentsen should not be made the national committeewoman. Lloyd Bentsen denied it, and I don't think it was true--I have reason to believe definitely it was not true; he said it wasn't true, and I think he's a man of his word. There was no evidence of it anywhere. Anyway, he refused to let his wife's name be put up for the national committeewoman's place. So the Committee on Party Officers of the convention which makes the recommendation didn't recommend anybody for committeewoman. In all the confusion someone from Houston got up and nominated Mrs. R. D. Randolph of Houston to be national committeewoman, and she was elected--just so quick no one hardly knew what was going on.

B: At this stage of the game, what was the attitude of the liberal-labor group? Is that a fair terminology--the liberal-labor group?

S: Well, at that time it was.

B: What was their attitude toward Lyndon Johnson? Was there any animosity toward Mr. Johnson involved in this?



- S: Yes, this added fuel to the fire. They had begun to distrust him for some reason or other, and Mrs. Randolph was one of their leaders. When he did not openly endorse her at this convention, they resented it. Of course, I've always had a feeling that Mrs. Randolph resented it deeply, although I never did hear her say so. Many of her actions later on indicated that she didn't care for Lyndon Johnson at all, and I have a feeling that a lot of it goes back to this very thing.
- B: Was Mr. Johnson at this convention--the state convention in Dallas that spring?
- S: Oh, yes. He was there and so was Speaker Rayburn. They were very active in the background in connection with all the goings-on.
- B: Again, they were sort of caught napping there, after Mrs. Bentsen had withdrawn, without a recommendation for national committeewoman?
- S: That's right. Of course, at that convention we selected delegates to the national convention, and we were seated of course at Chicago in 1956.
- B: Was there also a group of Shivers' delegates?
- S: I don't believe they had a rival delegation. I don't believe so. I think we defeated them so soundly that they were not able to--
- B: That put the loyalists back in control of the state party?
- S: That's right, except that we still didn't have the state committee, because you select them in the fall convention. During presidential election years in Texas you have two conventions. The one in the spring selects the national committee members, and delegates to the national Convention,

and presidential electors. Then in the fall you select the members of the state committee. So we still didn't have the state committee.

That brings us then to the organization by Mrs. Randolph and the so-called labor-liberal group of still another organization in Texas. After this 1956 convention, Mrs. Randolph and a group of the labor-liberal--very liberal--people decided that they could take over the Democratic Party in Texas. As I see it, that must have been uppermost in their minds, because all of us together had had this experience with the Democratic Organizing Committee and with the Democratic Advisory Council; and they knew the leaders all over the State; they had the contacts; and they felt that this was the one big chance that they had to really take over the party machinery. They organized what they called the Democrats of Texas, which became known as the DOT.

B: Was this immediately after the Dallas convention in the spring, or was this on after the national party convention?

S: I don't remember that chronology. I think it was going on all the time--the preliminary work was going on to set it up. But now when they actually announced it I don't remember.

B: But in effect this was the reaction to that spring convention?

S: That's right. In the meantime in September of that year, 1956, we had the state convention again and selected a new state committee. We

selected loyal Democrats. It was always understood that once we got the party machinery back in our hands and had loyal Democrats on the State Executive Committee that the old Democratic Advisory Council, which in the meantime I had become president of--Jim Sewell resigned as president of the Democratic Advisory Council after serving awhile and the members elected me chairman, so I was chairman-- It was always understood that once we got a loyal state committee the old DAC, Democratic Advisory Council, would not be reappointed. The national committee was appointing the members each year. It was understood that it would disband and turn the party affairs over to the regular party committee. We did that.

B: Sir, may I ask, in the formation of the new party committee in September, was there some representation given to the group represented by Mrs. Randolph?

S: Oh, I think so. I don't think there was any line drawn on that score. I'm sure that they had representation on the committee; I can't give you the names at the moment.

B: They were not being frozen out?

S: No, they always had some of their group on the state committee from that time on. Anyway we, in a sense, with the permission and under the direction of Speaker Rayburn and Steve Mitchell--and I'm sure that they were conferring with Lyndon Johnson about it-- Anyway, with their full approval and under their direction, we disbanded the old Democratic

Advisory Council and turned the affairs of the party back to the state committee, because we then had a loyal committee.

Well, the new organization of Mrs. Randolph and her group called the Democrats of Texas, the DOT, elected Mrs. Randolph as chairman of that organization. She not only was national committeewoman now, but she was chairman of this, what I called, outside organization. And they proceeded to contact people all over the State that we had been working with in the DOC and in the DAC; and a lot of the Democrats frankly were very confused, because some of those people in the new DOT organization represented to these people across the State that they were a continuation of the old DOC and DAC organizations and therefore, they ought to go with them. It became real ticklish, and while I don't think Senator [Ralph] Yarborough ever openly approved the DOT, he did make speeches to several of their state conventions. But of course Speaker Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson were for the regular state committee at this point.

B: Did the DOT have any official recognition from the national party committee?

S: No, not any. Of course, I was on the spot because many of my friends who had worked with me through all those trying years were now over in the DOT. I couldn't see any place for the DOT because it seemed to me that they were setting up an organization outside the party that we didn't need and that it was just going to cause trouble and confusion.

I remember very well making a speech in Austin to the DOT group telling them they ought to disband, that we had always said we were going to turn the party back to the regular committee once the committee had been set up as loyal. Now that had happened. But they wouldn't do it--

B: Was this getting into pretty bitter personal clashes, too, by now?

S: It was getting pretty bitter, and the DOT group were attacking Johnson openly now. They were writing critical articles in various publications about him, and it was getting pretty bitter. That went on--

B: The various publications-- Was The Observer started about this time?

S: Yes, The Observer was going on, and Mrs. Randolph was subsidizing it very heavily because she was a woman of wealth and could do so.

B: And was considered the voice of the DOT?

S: That's right. And they were writing very vicious articles about Lyndon Johnson in this publication. This went on during those four years from 1956 to 1960.

B: Did this affect the outcome of the presidential election of 1956 in Texas?

S: Well, it may have.

B: Eisenhower carried it.

S: Yes, Eisenhower carried it, but I don't think that was a primary cause. I don't think it had reached that stage at that point to where it would be too much of a factor.

- B: Before you go on, may I back up just a minute to the 1956 national convention? When Mr. Johnson, as a result of these events you have been describing, was the head of the delegation and the favorite son Texas man and you were at that convention, I think. This is one of those questions that one suspects the future historian might ask. Was there any sign then of Mr. Johnson's presidential ambitions? That is, was there any sign that to him or to Mr. Rayburn the favorite son idea was more than just a political ploy to hold Texas for the Democrats?
- S: Well, I don't think it showed on the surface, but I have a feeling that it was in the back of their minds that we were building him up steadily and that the time would come when he could be a presidential candidate. It didn't break out in that convention openly, as far as I remember.
- B: Was there any possibility seen at the time that Mr. Johnson might accept the vice-presidential nomination in 1956?
- S: I don't think so. We voted for John F. Kennedy. The Texas delegation in our caucus at that convention voted to support Kennedy instead of Estes Kefauver, I believe.
- B: Was anybody thinking at that time that possibly there in Kennedy was presidential timber, too?
- S: Not too much at that point; I don't think so. Although Kennedy made a very fine impression. He gave that running talk. You remember that movie--moving picture talk--at the convention? It made a very fine impression. But I don't think at that point there was any particular

thought about his being a candidate for president. Of course, the Kennedy group may have thought so, but I don't think it was openly talked about.

B: Thank you, sir. Do you want to carry on?

S: Now that brings us pretty well to the 1960 campaign in Texas, and of course, Lyndon Johnson was a candidate. The loyal Democrats of Texas went all out for him. As a matter of fact, everybody did except there was a pulling back of this same DOT group. We had the state convention in Austin in the spring of 1960 to select the national committee members and send delegates to the national convention.

B: Would you pause again and back up a little bit? When did Lyndon Johnson become an open, avowed presidential candidate?

S: I don't remember.

B: Do you remember when it became clear to you?

S: No, I don't remember, but I know that we were raising money all over the state for him and promoting his candidacy across the state, perhaps even before he let it be known that he would be willing to be a candidate. But when it was definitely known, I don't remember.

B: Do you think perhaps he should have started earlier and made it more clear and definite?

S: I don't think it would have made any difference, for this reason: My service on the national committee, as well as the final vote on the presidential nomination in Los Angeles, convinced me that whenever any question came up that raised any problem between the North and the

South, that the South was outvoted at least two to one. I saw it happen in the national committee on a number of occasions. Whenever there was a sectional question of any kind, the North and the East and largely the West would vote against the South.

B: This was within the party machinery?

S: Yes, within the party machinery. And that was just about the vote out in Los Angeles finally between Kennedy and Johnson. Kennedy won at least by two to one as I remember.

B: In other words, you believe that even if Mr. Johnson had entered the primaries before the 1960 convention, even if he had had some success, it still--

S: I don't believe it would have made any difference, because I don't believe the time had arrived when a man from the South could be elected president. And I don't think it would have made any difference.

So, we had the convention in Austin and the DOT group, headed by Mrs. Randolph--

B: Excuse me, sir, let me just make it clear for the record. This is the spring convention selecting the delegates and the national committee in 1960, before the national convention.

S: That's right. And Mrs. Randolph and her group had made it clear that they were going to take over the [state] convention, and if they couldn't, they were going to walk out. So we had the convention and they not only didn't have enough strength to take over the convention, very, very few people walked out.



B: Did Mrs. Randolph herself?

S: She was never inside of the convention. She was waiting outside expecting the crowd to walk out. Not even the labor people walked out. Jerry Holleman, who was then president of the AFL of Texas--AFL-CIO--didn't walk out; he threw his support to the President. The President--when I say the President, I mean Lyndon Johnson--and all of us who were supporting him had absolute control of that convention. Of course, I was reelected as national committeeman from Texas, and Mrs. H. H. Weinert of Seguin, Texas, who had been national committeewoman two or three times before, was elected national committeewoman, replacing Mrs. R. D. Randolph.

B: Was Mrs. Weinert particularly associated with any group or faction?

S: No, she's a very delightful person and very devoted to the Democratic Party and to Speaker Rayburn and to Lyndon Johnson and a very fine person all the way around. Of course, her complete loyalty to the party and to them could be counted on all the way. I think her selection was a very wise choice.

So, we went to the national convention then in Los Angeles; the overwhelming victory that we won at the state convention in Austin in 1960 really meant the end of the DOT, the Democrats of Texas headed by Mrs. Randolph, because it never amounted to anything after that.

They just sort of folded up and disappeared. Of course, at Los Angeles John Kennedy's people just overwhelmed us in the voting, as you know.

B: Were you active before or during the national convention in trying to round up votes for Mr. Johnson from other delegations?

S: Well, out there I didn't work with any particular group because I was having all kinds of problems on getting seats for our people at the convention.

B: You don't mean getting them accredited?

S: No, no.

B: You mean getting physical seats, a place to sit down.

S: Yes, that's right, for the delegates and their families. Under the rules of the national committee the term of office of a committee member extends through the convention; and so Mrs. Randolph was still the official national committeewoman until the end of the Los Angeles convention, although Mrs. Weinert had already been selected to succeed her. Mrs. Randolph insisted on getting half of the tickets at the convention and they were given to her. She then distributed them among her friends, and I had to make my one-half of the tickets take care of all the delegates and their families. So I had my hands full at the convention proper, really, working on that problem which interfered with my time to work on votes for Lyndon Johnson.

B: I've heard it said that Mr. Johnson's strategy at the convention was not as well organized as it could have been.

S: Well, it was pretty well organized, but as to that, I wouldn't be qualified to say. I do know that he did have some people assigned to various states to work on those delegates and to visit them at their caucuses and to try to win them over. How perfect his organization was I really don't know, because that was being handled a little bit different to my situation.

B: Was the Kennedy organization trying to make any headway among the Texas delegation?

S: Not too much. They didn't try to bother us too much, because they knew they couldn't do any good. They just left us to our own devices and they didn't interfere with us.

Of course, you know that Kennedy was nominated and we got down then to the vice-presidential selection which became a very delicate problem. When John Kennedy asked Lyndon Johnson to be his running mate, the first reaction of the Texas delegates was against it.

B: Was that pretty well unanimous in the delegation?

S: At first. But then some of us began to break over. For instance, Mr. Rayburn at first told John Kennedy that we didn't come out there to run for vice-president, and the only way that he, Rayburn, would ever give his consent that Lyndon Johnson would run as vice-president would be if Kennedy would publicly announce on the radio and television that he had selected Lyndon Johnson and wanted him; then he would consent. But unless that were done, he said, "We're not going out there in that

convention /on the floor/ and have a contest; we didn't come out here to run for vice-president."

But in the meantime, conferences were going on constantly between Lyndon Johnson and Speaker Rayburn and those of us in high position in the /state/ party out there. We were in a constant huddle as to whether we would approve it or not and what we would recommend to Lyndon Johnson. As I say, at first most people were against it. But the more we thought about it, the more we came around to the proposition that he ought to do it, if Speaker Rayburn's terms could be met, which I just outlined.

B: What were the motives behind both of these reactions--the original and then the change?

S: Well, the original reaction against it was that the people in Texas would feel like Lyndon Johnson let them down and double-crossed them in accepting a second spot; and that it would cause trouble in the party at home. That was the most prominent reaction against it.

The reaction for it was ~~more~~ or less my situation. I had become firmly convinced, as I said earlier, that I didn't think a man from the South or Southwest could be elected president any way at this stage of our history unless he first served as vice-president. And secondly, I knew that if Lyndon Johnson accepted this second place on the ballot, it would unite the Democratic Party in Texas, and we could go forward and keep the control of the party in Texas for the Democrats; but if he turned it

down and somebody else was nominated, then I felt that Mrs. Randolph and the DOT would come forth again and probably take complete control of the party away from the real Democrats. All those things entered into it.

B: Did you also think that a Kennedy-Johnson ticket would be a winning national ticket? More so than the other possibilities?

S: Yes, we did. We felt like Kennedy couldn't win without Johnson, in Texas; and we felt that Johnson with his influence among the southern states, in Texas as well as elsewhere, would add considerable strength to the ticket. So it was finally decided that he would run.

B: Again this gets a little ticklish, but was there any thought at the time that the offer of the vice-presidential position was just a political ploy and not meant by the Kennedy group to be a sincere offer?

S: We didn't feel so at the time. No, and I still don't think so. I think that John Kennedy sincerely wanted him to run and believed that he needed him. This is borne out by something I'm going to tell you about now.

After the election, after they had won, you will remember that John Kennedy went down to Florida the next day to see his father. Then he came to the LBJ Ranch; that's when he went deer-hunting, you remember? And they had 15 or 20 of us who held offices in the party in Texas down to the Ranch to meet with Kennedy and Johnson after the election. We were all there in the living room at the LBJ Ranch, and John Kennedy got up and said, "I want to make a little statement."

He said, "I want to thank Governor Price Daniel for what he did in the campaign, and I want to thank national committeeman Byron Skelton for what he did. I want to thank all of you for all that you did, and I want you to know--and I want to state here now openly and publicly-- that I could not have won this election without Lyndon Johnson. I could not have won this election without the support of Texas. I just want you all to know that."

And I think he meant it. And I think he believed that from the very beginning. Of course, we were all pleased but I think it was true. I think what he said was true, and I think he meant it.

B: Did you see the deer hunt?

S: No, I didn't see the deer hunt. They went out in the hinterlands and I'm sure they didn't have anybody around except the Secret Service and people like that.

B: What was the personal relationship between Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kennedy at that time?

S: As far as I know, very cordial. Very, very nice. I don't know of any problem at all at that point.

B: Were you going to go ahead and describe the 1960 campaign in Texas?

S: No, I--

B: I wanted to ask you, sir, were you not one of the ones that was instrumental in arranging the meeting between Mr. Kennedy and the Houston ministers?

S: Somewhat. However, I was given more credit for that in Mr. William

Manchester's book [Death of a President] than I was entitled to. But I traveled across Texas with the President--with John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. They made a tour all over Texas. That meeting was suggested and we all approved it and thought it was good; so it was arranged.

B: Do you remember who first suggested it?

S: I don't remember who first suggested it. But I do remember this very vividly. They wouldn't let anybody in the whole group go into that room except John Kennedy.

B: The ministers, you mean?

S: That's right. They wouldn't let Speaker Rayburn go in; they wouldn't let Lyndon Johnson go; they wouldn't let me go; they wouldn't let anybody go in that meeting except John Kennedy by himself. And we had to go up to Speaker Rayburn's suite there in the hotel and watch it on TV, because they wouldn't let anybody in except John Kennedy.

B: Do you feel that the point he made there was as important as people generally believed it to be?

S: Yes, I do. I think it was very fine and one of the turning points in the campaign. I think it was very brilliant strategy, and of course, it wouldn't have been so brilliant if he hadn't handled himself so well. But he did.

B: Did you do any campaigning outside of Texas?

S: Well, I went down to--this was before the 1960 campaign--New Orleans and made a speech. This was before [the national convention in] Los

Angeles. They had a meeting down there and they had people representing Kennedy, and people representing Johnson. I went down representing Johnson; Pat Lucey, I remember, was state chairman from Wisconsin; he went down and made a speech for Kennedy. And I proposed to Lucey at that time "How about having a Johnson-Kennedy ticket? "

He said, "Well, that's fine, but let's make it Kennedy-Johnson." And it turned out that that was the way it was.

B: In the 1960 campaign, I was wondering if you saw anything of Lady Bird's train through the South.

S: No, she didn't come to Texas on that tour. I didn't see that. Of course, I wasn't at Dallas when they had that incident where they were spat upon up there; but I think that had a tremendous effect on people not only in Texas but on people across the country and especially in the South.

B: I've seen that referred to, too, as one of the major turning points.

S: Yes, I've heard that it was one of the major turning points in the state of South Carolina; that up to that time we probably were going to lose South Carolina. But when that happened, they switched. I don't know if that's true.

B: Incidentally, Mr. Johnson was also in 1960 running for reelection as senator. Did that cause any difficulty or problems?



S: Yes, somewhat. These DOT people seized upon that as being something unethical and wrong, and of course a special law had to be passed by the Texas legislature to allow his name to be put on the ballot in two places for two different offices. But it was done and people were all for it. I say they were all for it; some of them were not, but that was something they did use and talk about against him in Texas. But it didn't cut too much ice. I think the people that were talking against him were against him anyway.

That brings us down to this trip to Dallas, if you want to talk a little bit about that.

B: Well, I do, but there's one question beforehand. What's the relationship between then Vice-President Johnson and Mr. Connally in those years? When Mr. Connally ran for Governor of Texas in 1962, I believe it was, was he considered in Texas to be running as Lyndon Johnson's man, or doing it on his own?

S: No, I think he was doing it on his own. During all these years that I've talked about, the relationship between John Connally and Lyndon Johnson was very close. As a matter of fact, one or two of these conventions that I mentioned, I don't remember which ones now, John Connally was really the organizer of the organization. He was the man behind the scenes who set up a lot of the machinery and supervised a lot that went on at the conventions. And of course it was all for Johnson. And so they were very close. I don't think when John ran for governor that he was running as Lyndon Johnson's man. I think he just decided to run on

his own and did.

B: And they still remained friends?

S: Oh, yes. They've differed on some questions, but that's natural. They're both very strongly opinionated people, as you know, and it's natural they might disagree on some issues, but basically they're still very close friends.

B: Did you see much of Mr. Johnson while he was vice-president?

S: Yes, I did. I had occasion to visit with him frequently, not only when he was vice-president, but when he was Senate Majority Leader and in the Senate. Not only on political matters, but also on civic problems and undertakings, especially in Central Texas, like appropriations for dams on rivers and Fort Hood near Temple and other things of that kind. I had occasion to visit with him and enlist his support in many of those projects, which he always gave freely and abundantly, and was a great help to us in that regard.

B: I was wondering if you got the impression that perhaps Mr. Johnson was not exactly happy as vice-president?

S: Well, not particularly. Of course, Mr. Johnson has been a leader, as you know, throughout his political life and is accustomed to taking the lead and to that extent he may have felt that he didn't have the freedom of action that he would like to have. But I never got the idea that he was unhappy about his situation as vice-president. But only to the extent that he was accustomed to lead and couldn't lead as much as

vice-president as perhaps he could in other situations.

B: Did you see any signs of friction between Mr. Johnson and particularly the Kennedy staff during these years of the Kennedy presidency?

S: No, I wasn't close enough to what went on between him and the staff to really be able to answer that question. Of course, I have just my feeling, I can't prove it; that this staff--most of them--was from the John Kennedy country and they may have resented Texas and the Texas influence somewhat. I would probably think they did to some extent, but I never saw anything in the open about it.

B: In these same years, the Kennedy presidential years, was Mr. Johnson active in Texas politics. I mean the trips which you have just described, when someone went up to talk about a dam or Fort Hood, did they still go to Vice-President Johnson?

S: Well, to some extent, but not as much as we did when he was Majority Leader. Because with his being Majority Leader and Sam Rayburn being the Speaker of the House, we had the two top men in the two branches of Congress, and their efforts pretty much controlled what happened. But we didn't see Lyndon Johnson as much when he was vice-president as we did when he was Majority Leader and Senator.

/begin new tape here/

It became known in 1963 that John Kennedy--President Kennedy--was going to make a trip to Texas. In planning the itinerary, it was mentioned that he was going to Dallas, Texas, as a part of his trip.

B: Before that--trying to think of what the future historian might ask--the reason for the trip to Texas? Is it correct that the idea of trying to shore up the Texas party in anticipation of the election of 1964?

S: I have a feeling that that did play an important part as a reason why he came to Texas. The party was somewhat divided and I think that he /Kennedy/ felt that it could draw the people together; there was feeling between Governor Connally and Senator Yarborough, and this was spilling over into the national party scene somewhat.

B: In what way?

S: Well, if the party was divided in Texas between them, then in a national election it could hurt the Democratic candidates unless it was all patched up and everybody got on the same side. I think that President Kennedy felt that he could come down to Texas and make these appearances and travel around with all these people and get them back together.

B: Was the Connally-Yarborough split an outgrowth or a continuation of the old DOT-Regular split?

S: Somewhat. It probably had its roots in that development.

B: Were the differences ideological or just personal?

S: Well, I think a little bit of both, to be frank with you. Probably a little bit of both.

B: Had Mr. Johnson tried before the trip to Texas to get the two of them to come together?

S: I think in an indirect sort of way he had, but as far as I know, he never

had had them to meet and talk and actually get together. But I know that Lyndon Johnson was anxious to have harmony as best he could in Texas, especially during an approaching presidential election year.

B: Was anyone in Texas hearing talk at this time to the effect that Lyndon Johnson might not be the vice-presidential nominee in 1964?

S: Well, there was always that speculation in some of the newspapers, but I never paid any attention to it. I never felt that there was any basis for it and still don't. Some of the newspapers are always throwing up these trial balloons for sensationalism and other reasons. But I don't think there was anything to that, really. I don't think so.

B: You were talking about the visit to Dallas?

S: The national committee sent a man named Jerry Bruno down to Texas to work on this itinerary for the president's visit. I was not consulted about it, neither was Mrs. Weinert, both of us being members of the national committee.

B: Do you know with whom he did consult?

S: I do know that he was working with Governor Connally and his staff and as far as I know, those were the people that he consulted with. I know that I learned by rumor and heresay that they were going to Dallas on the trip. Mrs. Weinert and I discussed it, and both of us felt that they ought not to go to Dallas because of the bad political climate that existed up there. They had had the incident where the Johnsons were spat upon, you will remember; and they had the incident where Adlai

Stevenson was hit with a sign or placard when he appeared there; and General /Edwin/ Walker had just made a statement that John Kennedy was a menace to the free world--that was published in the newspaper. And of course, the Dallas News, for years, had been stirring up this feeling against the Democrats and the Democratic Party to where I felt that it was really unsafe for the president and vice-president to go there.

B: Did you feel that it was actually physically unsafe? Were you at this time anticipating--

S: Here's the way I felt. I felt like something would happen in Dallas. Now, I did not anticipate that there would be an assassination, but I honestly felt that they would throw rotten eggs or tomatoes or create some incident or some scene that would be bad or embarrassing to the president and the vice-president, and it could turn into physical violence. But I did not anticipate what actually happened. I had no reason to, but I thought the climate was such up there that something bad would happen.

B: Did you feel that the leaders of Dallas--the group of businessmen who I suppose are the effective leadership of Dallas--either could not or would not control this kind of thing?

S: I felt like they could not. I feel that the responsible business leaders of Dallas on the occasion of this visit did everything in their power to make it a pleasant, safe trip. And certainly they were not to be blamed

for anything that happened. But the climate was bad, I mean with these stories in the Dallas News they had been writing for years; they were calculated to stir an unbalanced person up to where he would do some violent act. That's what I mean.

B: Can you speculate on the reason for that climate? Why such a situation developed?

S: It's hard to really explain it. I place most of the blame on the Dallas News, really, because day after day and month after month and year after year, that paper was full of stories and articles that were bitter; they were cynical, they were sarcastic, they were critical of everything that the Democratic Party or anybody connected with the Democratic Party had ever done. It was just a situation that was bad in my judgment.

B: Do you know Mr. E. M. "Ted" Dealey /publisher, Dallas Morning News/ personally?

S: No. I don't know him personally.

So I felt so strong about it that I wrote a letter to Robert Kennedy, whom I knew personally. The fact is he came to Temple during the 1960 campaign and I met him at the airport and introduced him at the Kyle Hotel there. I wrote a letter to Robert Kennedy telling him my fears and that I thought it would be bad for them to include Dallas on their trip. At the same time I wrote a letter to Walter Jenkins who, of course, was Lyndon Johnson's right hand man at that time, advising him of my

feeling that it was unsafe for the president and vice-president--or at least undesirable or inadvisable--to go to Dallas.

B: Do you know if anyone else was making similar warnings?

S: Yes, Adlai Stevenson had advised them not to go. And I believe Senator Russell Long, if I'm not mistaken, had also advised them not to go to Dallas. Whether anybody else did I don't know.

B: Were your warnings far enough in advance of the trip for the itinerary to have been changed?

S: Oh, yes. Not only that, I made a special trip to Washington after I wrote the letters. I didn't hear anything and I made a special trip to Washington and talked to John Bailey, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and also to this fellow Jerry Bruno, who was organizing the trip. He works with the national committee. And I told them of my fears and that I thought it was bad for them to go there. But still nothing happened.

B: When you came to Washington, you talked with Mr. Bruno and Mr. Bailey. Did you see Robert Kennedy personally then?

S: No.

B: Do you recall what their reactions were?

S: Well, they didn't seem to pay much attention to it. They didn't seem to think that I had any basis for being alarmed. They didn't say that, but they just didn't respond to my suggestion. And they didn't seem to inquire into it with any depth. They didn't seem to be too interested, actually.



B: Did Robert Kennedy and Walter Jenkins reply to your letters?

S: I don't believe they ever did. Later on I learned that it was discussed with the Kennedy staff because after Lyndon Johnson became president, Kenneth O'Donnell, who was one of John Kennedy's right hand men in the White House--I met him at a reception at the White House--mentioned the fact about the letter, and he said, "That is really a historic document." I know that it must have been discussed by them, because Manchester knew about it when he wrote his book. He came to Temple to see me.

But to answer your question, Robert Kennedy and Walter Jenkins, neither one, ever answered my letter.

B: You didn't contact Mr. Johnson directly?

S: No, I felt that the letter should be sufficient. Since they hadn't responded to it, I didn't want to make a nuisance of myself, because all I had to go on was my own fears. I didn't have anything tangible that I could point to that might indicate something was going to happen. I was not in Dallas when the assassination occurred; the fact is I was getting ready to go to Austin to be at the head table with the president and the vice-president at the dinner that we were having for them. We had sent out cards such as the one I hand to you now soliciting contributions, \$100 each, for people who might care to attend this dinner.

B: If I may read this here, this is the card for the Texas "Welcome" dinner to be held at 7:30 p.m., November 22, 1963 in Austin.

S: You may have the card if you want it; I have two or three more. I was getting ready to go to Austin from Temple which is only about 70 miles.

B: Is it unusual that you, as the state committeeman, are not traveling with the presidential and vice-presidential party in Texas?

S: Frankly, I thought so, and so did Mrs. Weinert.

B: She was not with the party either?

S: She was not with the party either.

B: This presumably is because of the arrangements between Mr. Bruno and Governor Connally?

S: We don't know. We were never told why we were not in that party and traveling with them. We had traveled with them during the campaign. But we were never told and were not invited, so to speak, to ride with him in Dallas. There was really no reason that I know of why we were not invited. But the basis for my answer to your question is this: I've always understood it to be customary that when the highest officer in the party, such as the president and the vice-president, go to a state, they always notify the members of the national committee ahead of time and invite them to be with them while they are in that state. It's just a sort of a courtesy that's always extended. It was not done here and why, we don't know.

B: Would you guess that it was possibly more Mr. Connally's doing than Kennedy's or Johnson's?

S: I don't know. I don't know who made out the list of those who would be

with the president and the vice-president on this occasion. I don't know, but at least that's the way it worked out.

B: You were in Temple preparing to go to the dinner--

S: That's right. When we heard on the television that the President had been shot. Of course, all plans to go to Austin were cancelled. They did not have the dinner, of course, and the money that had been raised-- very few, if any, people asked that their money be returned-- I think the money was used for the party later on.

B: Do you recall your immediate reactions, sir; that is, when you first heard of the shots in Dallas?

S: Well, my immediate reaction was that I had a feeling that the wild element, so to speak, in Dallas had assassinated the President. I felt that. As it turned out, that was not the case, but my initial reaction was that that group had done it.

B: Do you still feel that somehow or other the climate in Dallas was responsible for the individual act of /Lee Harvey/ Oswald?

S: I do. I still feel that way. I may be wrong; I don't want to condemn Dallas; but I feel-- Naturally, the Dallas News is not going to take anyone's life, but they can so inflame some person who is maladjusted to the point where he could feel justified in doing it. And I think the climate in Dallas had reached that point.

B: Did you hear directly of any incidents of the kind that have occasionally been described: people in Texas applauding or otherwise in that fashion greeting the news of the President's death?

S: I heard of one instance of it in Dallas at a school. When it was announced at this school, some of the small children cheered, which if true, and I don't know if it was true--I understand it was--would illustrate what I'm talking about. The feeling and the climate was so bad in Dallas that even small children felt that way.

B: What was the reaction in your hometown of Temple?

S: Well, my hometown of Temple is, you might say, the heart of Texas Democracy. In all the times when the State went Republican, those two times when Eisenhower carried Texas, our county stayed in the Democratic column. And the people were terribly upset when this happened. They, of course, couldn't understand it. They were bewildered and shocked and it was just almost a situation of disbelief that it could happen.

B: What did you do that afternoon, sir? Did you think of going to Dallas?

S: I thought of going to Dallas, but of course I kept up with everything on the television and naturally they were all leaving Dallas and coming to Washington, and there was really no point in going up there, so I didn't go.

B: When did you next see what was then President Johnson?

S: Well, let's see. I don't really remember. I don't remember when I next saw the President. Of course, I was with him in Atlantic City during the 1964 convention. But I know I saw him a good many times before that, but I don't remember any specific time.

B: Did his accession to the presidency make any difference in Texas politics?

S: Yes, I think it has solidified the Democratic Party down there, at least up to now. I don't know what this year the 1968 presidential election is going to show, but the people of Texas naturally were proud of Lyndon Johnson and they got behind him pretty well, and it did sort of heal all the old wounds and people started pulling together better than they had in the past, in my judgment.

B: There were no internal difficulties in the state convention for the selection of the delegates to the national convention in 1964, then?

S: No, there wasn't any problem there, not to speak of. I don't recall it. Everything went along pretty well and people were behind Lyndon Johnson.

I might mention the fact that about my appointment here to this Court, if you want to hear just a word about that--

B: Well, I was going to ask you first, is there anything you recall particularly at the 1964 national convention in Atlantic City? You were sent there as a delegate, I believe.

S: Oh, yes, I was a delegate. I remember, of course, very vividly the nomination of President Johnson and I remember the tremendous applause that Robert Kennedy got when he made a speech to the convention. Of course, that was largely in honor of his deceased brother, the late John Kennedy. Everything went off all right. We didn't have any particular problems over there.

B: This was your last year as national committeeman--1964?

S: Yes, that's right. I served eight years as national committeeman, and an attorney in Austin was selected to succeed me. I felt that it was time to give it up. I had had eight years of it and I had been through some pretty trying times, and it was time that somebody else took on the chores. So I gave it up and then on August 16, 1966, one day the phone rang, and it was Lyndon Johnson, the President himself, on the phone calling me from the LBJ Ranch.

B: You were in Temple?

S: I was in Temple, Texas. He said there was this vacancy on the United States Court of Claims here in Washington, and he would like very much to appoint me to the Court. Of course, I told him how honored I was and he went on to say that he and Lady Bird would be delighted to have me and my wife, Ruth, here in Washington with them. And so I agreed to accept the appointment and was sworn in on November 9, 1966, and have been here ever since.

I might say in passing that Lyndon Johnson, back in the late 1950's, was on the Board of Trustees of Scott and White Hospital there in Temple, Texas. I was the attorney for that hospital for about 35 years, and was the attorney at the time of his service. He would come to Temple and sit with the board--

B: Who chooses the board?

S: The hospital organization. It's a non-profitable, charitable hospital group, and they select the members of the board.

B: Did Mr. Johnson take an active interest in this?

S: Yes, he did. He was very interested in it while he was senator. He resigned when he became vice-president because he felt that he didn't have time to devote to it. But it was very close to his heart. He was really interested in it. Of course, on the occasions of his visit there, we saw a lot of him. I remember one occasion when he and Lady Bird and Luci were out to our house for dinner there in Temple, and we enjoyed it very much. We got to know them very well. And that friendship has continued down through the years. I think he's a great person.

B: Sir, a question that that brings up: is there any noticeable difference between Lyndon Johnson, the public man, and Lyndon Johnson, the private man? That is, when you see him at dinner at your house or at the Ranch, is he a different kind of man from what he appears to be in public?

S: I would say yes. I would say that individually and personally he's a very sentimental person. He's very emotional. He's very loyal to his friends and you don't see that drive that you notice in his official capacity, when he's with his friends. He's relaxed and considerate and courteous and friendly and somewhat sentimental, I would say.

B: What does he talk of on occasions like that? Does he talk of things beyond politics?

S: Well, he talks about the Ranch and he'll talk about his cattle and his

Pedernales River and things of interest just like anybody else, really. He's down to earth and he doesn't put on any airs. Of course, when he became president, that very fact creates a sort of a barrier. You just don't say "Lyndon" any more; you say "Mr. President."

B: Do you and your wife still see them socially?

S: Yes, we do. My little daughter came up last year from Lubbock with her three children and Lady Bird was very kind to have them over and they went swimming in the White House pool and had a great time. They're very gracious and very down to earth people.

B: Why do you suppose it is that that aspect of President Johnson doesn't come over in public?

S: Well, you mean on television? He has some difficulty in that regard, not too much, but some. It's probably because he's not his natural self on the television. He doesn't relax as he does when he's with you privately, or when he's out campaigning on the stump and speaking off the cuff. He can really excite an audience and take them with him, in his speeches. On television it seems to be a more of a cut and dried affair and he just doesn't relax and be himself like he can when he's out and away from television. That's the only way I can explain it.

B: In that first year when Mr. Johnson was president-- again, I'm trying to ask a question that I suspect will come up in the future--did you see anything of the relationship between Mr. Johnson and Robert Kennedy? While Mr. Kennedy was still in the Cabinet?



S: No, I didn't see anything that might throw any light on probably what you're driving at--that is, whether they got along or whether they had trouble or what.

B: The rumors or whatever it is--a clash of ambitions, I guess.

S: I don't think you'll find the answer to that question until and unless you can talk to someone who may have been with them when these things happened, if they did. And of course there would be very few people who had the opportunity to observe anything like that, if there was anything. I myself wouldn't be with them when anything like that would happen. So I wouldn't know whether they got along or whether they didn't.

B: Another question, sir, there again has been some speculation that the National Democratic Committee has sort of fallen on hard times during Mr. Johnson's presidency. Have you seen anything of that, or would you agree with that?

S: I sort of share that view. Why it has happened I don't know. But the national committee has not been the strong committee, the strong organization, in the last few years--even since John Kennedy was elected, going back that far--that it was before that. It just doesn't seem to have the organization nor the drive nor the position in the party that it really ought to have. Why that is I don't know.

B: Is it possible that Mr. Johnson being the kind of man that sort of likes to do everything himself has put it in a back-seat position?

- S: Well, I doubt that that's the whole story. There may be something to that. I know that President Johnson is a leader and he's a perfectionist and he knows that when he does something it'll be done well--that may be the reason why he does so many things himself rather than delegate them to somebody that he cannot be too sure of. But I don't think that's the whole story. I just don't think the leadership in the Democratic National Committee has had the drive nor the contact with the grass roots members of the committee that it has needed to have. I don't think they've given enough responsibility to members of the committee nor enough recognition to them in their own states. I am a strong party man and I believe in party organization from the ground up. I think that's the way to win an election and to build a strong party.
- B: Do you think perhaps that's affecting the presidential campaign that's going on now?
- S: I think it's having some effect, yes, I sure do.
- B: Sir, you mentioned Mr. Johnson's unwillingness to delegate, and his drive. Do you think perhaps he carries that too far?
- S: Well, now, I don't want to be misunderstood. I say sometimes it may appear that he's unwilling to delegate some authority. Naturally, a president has to delegate authority. I remember on one occasion talking to President Truman after he left office. I asked him about that very thing, if he didn't have to delegate a lot of his work to people. And he said of course he did. He said, "I always try them out first before I

ever given them any authority. "

Of course, this is beside the point, it's just a matter of personal interest, but he went on to say, "There was one job that I never did delegate to anybody. And that was the job of granting a pardon to anyone who was in prison. I always took those records myself and read the complete record and made up my own mind. I never let anybody decide those questions for me. "

There are just not enough hours in the day for a president to do everything that has to be done in the office of the President. He has to delegate authority. Where you draw the line nobody knows except the President himself, I'm sure.

B: Do you think his judgment of men is pretty good?

S: I do.

B: The men he picks to be his immediate advisors?

S: I think he has picked some excellent men and they've done a good job. I think he has exercised good judgment in that regard.

B: Does the President ever get involved nowadays in strictly Texas politics?

S: I would say no. If so, he covers up his tracks to where you can't see them. I don't think so. As far as I know, he hasn't intervened down there.

B: Were you surprised when he announced his withdrawal from the presidential campaign?

S: As a matter of fact, I was. My wife and I were at a private dinner party

the night before he made this announcement. Out at former Congressman Frank Ikard's home here in Washington. He's president now, I believe, of the National Petroleum Institute. He's a former Congressman from Wichita Falls. And Lady Bird came early, the President came later, and we all sat around with him while he ate his dinner in the dining room, and he was completely relaxed and jovial and discussed events of the day and never gave any indication whatsoever of what he was about to do. And the next night when he made this announcement I honestly couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it. But I think the President, if I may say so, felt that many of the people that he had done the most for since he has been president had turned their backs on him, and had deserted him so to speak.

B: You mean groups of people? Rather than individuals?

S: Groups of people. My basis for that is some remarks that he made the next day after he announced he would run for office again. He invited all of those people who had been working in his office here--"Citizens for Johnson," you know, they had such an organization over here at the Watergate Apartment Building--and my wife had been working over there as a volunteer worker. She was one of the group. He invited them all to come to the White House, and they sat there in the Cabinet Room. He made them a little talk. While I don't want to be in the position of quoting the President on what he said, still she gathered from his remarks that he was somewhat disappointed that groups that he had done the most for seemed to be

against him. And of course he indicated that he didn't have to be president, he didn't need the job. And he loved to be with his friends and his family back in Texas. So she got the idea that he just thought it might be time to let somebody else worry about the problems of the office.

B: Do you suppose Mrs. Johnson might have influenced the decision?

S: Well, I have no way of knowing definitely, but I feel like she probably did.

B: How influential has she been in his career?

S: I feel that she has been very influential. I think she has been a real partner in everything that he has done. She's with him almost constantly and while I don't know and I can't prove it, I have a feeling that she has been in on many of his critical decisions, because she is a very intelligent person and has good judgment. She knows politics, and I'm sure that he has relied on her advice a great deal. I have that feeling.

B: Well, Judge, is there anything else you would like to add or anything that you have left out? Any anecdotes--

S: No, I don't believe so, except that it has been a real disappointment to me that President Johnson is not running for reelection. I believe he could have been elected.

B: You think he could have made it?

S: I think he could have made it. But on the other hand, it's an awful lot to ask of a man to give four more years of his life with such terrific

problems that he has had and will have during the coming four years.

But I think he has made a great president and it would take volumes, really, to enumerate all of the great things that he has done. I think he will go down in history as one of our greatest presidents.

B: Thank you very much, sir.

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By Byron T. Skelton

to the

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