

INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 14, 1979
INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH H. SKILES
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Skiles' office, Denton, Texas

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G: Let's start with your background briefly.

S: Okay.

G: Are you from Denton? I know you went to North Texas [State University].

S: Yes. Yes. Lived here most of my life, sixty-some-odd years.

G: How did you get involved with the NYA?

S: I think I had a letter from Price Daniel, who was then in Baylor University. The sum of the substance of it was that he was organizing a campus club, Young Democrats, and asked if I wouldn't be interested. Somehow or other he had gotten my name through Texas Press, Intercollegiate Press Association. But we did organize the first young Democratic club in Denton, County, largely from students of North Texas State. That was the beginning of the thing. It seems to me like there was a man named McDonald Leech [?] who was the state president at the time. If you will recall the history of the Young Democrats, the primary purpose was to, of course, help President Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.

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G: Did you have any contact with Lyndon Johnson during this period at all?

S: No, I did not. Price Daniel, McDonald Leech [?] are names that come to my mind. Burris Jackson [?] of Hillsboro, his brother, Joe Bailey Humphreys of Dallas, who is now a district judge, those are the names that come to mind real quickly.

The first word that I can remember hearing about LBJ, Pat Roberts, who still lives in Denton, was a congressional aide to Congressman [W.D.] McFarlane I believe. He told me about this very outstanding young congressional aide who was elected speaker of Little Congress. It appealed to me because I had been somewhat of a campus politician. But it just barely made an impression. Pat Roberts said, "This guy is something else. It had always been traditional for this speaker of the Little Congress to be selected but we just took it over." LBJ's name was first mentioned to me I think at that time.

The very next time I remember [hearing of him was] reading in the Dallas [Morning] News that he had been appointed NYA director for Texas. It surprised me a bit because a few weeks or a few days before I had read that a fellow from Port Arthur or Corpus [Christi] somewhere down there, had been appointed. I think his name was DeWitt Kinard.

G: Did you know Kinard at all?

S: Quite well afterwards. He was a member of the state legislature the same time I served. But I never did unravel the mystery of

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how he was announced as the NYA director and then very shortly thereafter a more detailed story in the Dallas News [said] that indeed LBJ had been named.

G: Did you ever talk to Kinard about this to get his version?

S: No, I really didn't.

G: How did you get your position with NYA?

S: After I read this article in the Dallas News I was waiting around to hear the results of the state bar exam that I had taken in June. This was in late August I want to say. I read this announcement that LBJ had been named NYA director, and being among the unemployed I thought, "This sounds like it might be an opportunity." So I wrote a detailed two-page letter in which I outlined my career, which was largely what I had done at North Texas as a student in student publications, Young Democrats. I also told him that I had been an unsuccessful candidate for county judge the previous year and had been defeated in the runoff by just a few hundred votes, despite the fact that I was not twenty-one when I announced and was, in fact, only twenty-one about two weeks before the election. And I concluded with a request that he consider me for a staff position or a job.

(Interruption)

We were at the point where I had written this very strong letter of endorsement for myself. Within at least a couple of days, or not much more than two or three days, about long enough for the letter to get to Austin and be read by somebody, I had a telephone

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call to meet Mr. Johnson the next day in Dallas in the lobby of the Adolphus Hotel at eleven o'clock, as I remember. So the next day, as I said, in the lobby of the hotel, I saw this big, tall fellow coming, taking big, long strides across that lobby, followed by Bill Deason I believe. Bill was carrying a briefcase and Mr. Johnson was just walking fast. That was my first time to see LBJ in person. His first words, of course, after greeting me were "Is all this true?" He got this folder from Bill Deason. I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You got beat for county judge?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Why?" I didn't know whether to be cute or just avoid it as well as I could. But I said, "Well, I think the truth of the matter is a lot of people thought I was too young for the job." He said, "What do you think?" I said, "I think they were probably right."

So very briefly then we visited for perhaps two or three minutes, and very quickly he said, "Okay."

Let me digress just one minute. [As] a carryover from my campaign for county judge, I thought every politician in Texas should wear a big Stetson hat, so I had on my campaign Stetson. Being a person of about five foot seven inches in height, it was quite a contrast and I'm afraid not a very favorable picture. Mr. Johnson had no hat, as I recall. But anyhow, he looked me carefully over when he saw this big Stetson I was wearing. So in two or three minutes after he talked with me, just very briefly, he looked at the file again. He said, "Okay, I want you to be in

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my office Monday morning in Austin, nine o'clock. And there's just one other thing. Leave that damn hat in Denton." So that was the beginning of my relationship with President Johnson.

G: Did he talk to you at all about North Texas politics? Was he interested in knowing any--

S: Only the question about my own loss, which, as I related, I had put in the letter of application to him.

G: Do you recall what he was up there in Dallas for to begin with?

S: No, I don't think I ever knew why. Bill Deason later told me that when my letter came in they had, of course, received others. When they started to Dallas, LBJ handed Bill the letter and said, "This seems to be the best of the lot right now." They brought the file along with them.

G: How did he describe your job to you?

S: I had no idea what to expect.

G: So I assume you arrived in Austin on Monday morning.

S: I did, and without the hat. To this day I've never worn a Stetson hat. For a man that can wear them I think they're very nice and magnificent. LBJ could wear one beautifully, but that morning, even though this was a time when men generally wore hats, he was bareheaded. I recall that, because it simply emphasized my own uncomfortable position, sitting there with this great big hat on, being very inappropriate, I guess I should say.

G: By the time you arrived in his office I suppose everything was already set up in the Littlefield Building, is that right?

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S: It was in the Littlefield Building, but space was at a premium. It was still very much in a sort of a disorganized state. He had not had very much time to get things going. He had a corner office on, I believe, the sixth floor, am I correct? The first offices were on the sixth floor of the Littlefield Building.

G: Yes.

S: And then an adjacent office at the time I think was manned by Edna Dato, but anyhow, I had an office desk-to-desk with Jesse Kellam, which wasn't too good, because he was doing some very concentrated work on programs and so forth, and I was doing a lot of interviewing and loud talking and dictating and so forth. It didn't work out too well. But this was all the space we had at that moment.

G: What about Bill Deason? Where was his [desk]?

S: Bill was there. In my own mind I thought he was second in command. I think actually in the organizational schedule probably J.C. Kellam had a more responsible assignment, but Bill being an old friend and so forth was certainly very much there in authority and handling a lot of things for the Director.

G: Was L.E. Jones working then?

S: He might have been. I can't recall whether he was there at that time or came in later. I thought of him as being a student in the beginning and working only part time and had worked previously. In fact, LBJ had coached him in debate as I understood it. My recollection of that particular situation was that at that moment he was a student, perhaps part-timing it.

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- G: You said that you were interviewing people initially, for staff positions or field positions?
- S: I can't remember why I was. I think we were trying to appoint what we called NYA advisory boards in the different counties, usually starting with the county judge and people like that. Since we hadn't broken the state down into districts, subdistricts, and so forth, we were just starting where we could, writing people and asking them to serve on NYA advisory boards, the purpose being that they would serve as the local organization to clear these work projects that we were going to set up for these youths.
- G: What sort of people would you look for?
- S: Leadership in the community. They didn't necessarily have to be public officials. In fact, as I recall most of them were not. But the county judge and the mayor, superintendent of schools would usually be a good starting point, because these programs that we were thinking about would be in some way related to the responsibility of these different people.
- G: He also established a statewide advisory board.
- S: Yes.
- G: Do you recall how the members of that board were selected?
- S: No. I had nothing to do with that. I remember it now that you refresh my memory on it, and I know most of these people.
- G: Did that board meet very often?

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- S: I don't know. This would have been a headquarter's function. My particular responsibility would have been out in the district and county level. But I do remember these people. I'd say that it was a very good board in my opinion.
- G: Real blue ribbon.
- S: You bet.
- G: I have a note here that LBJ visited with Governor [James V.] Allred almost as soon as he arrived in Austin to take that position. Did you ever hear anything about this?
- S: I don't know that firsthand, but I would assume that it would be eminently correct. He had a great sense of proper relationship, and I'm sure that he would have made such a move.
- G: Let's talk about the NYA and the WPA. You observed this because you did liaison work with the WPA, did you not?
- S: Right. I was in the state office about a month. The work of these advisory boards obviously needed to be spread out, so the Director sent me to Lubbock, Texas where Calvin Hazlewood was running a little local office and I think had one girl working for him. My title was district director, and our district included about half of Texas because I simply hadn't had time to break it down into smaller categories. So Calvin and I began to appoint advisory boards all over West Texas and were doing real good, impressed the Director that we really were getting the job done for him.

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About a month after he sent me there, he called me to come into Austin, bring my things with me because I was going to get a new assignment. When I got to Austin he told me that he had to have liaison between the Works Progress Administration in San Antonio, that they wanted to move him down there and that he damn sure wasn't going. Those were his words, I remember. He didn't make any explanation to me why he didn't want to go, but I understood--anyhow, that I was to go down and be his representative on Mr. [Harry] Drought's board, and meet with him and staff, and the problems between the two organizations would generally be funneled through my office unless it was something that he personally had to speak with Mr. Drought about. So that was the next assignment from about October or November until I resigned, turned it in to practice law. That was my duty.

G: What did you think of Harry Drought?

S: I thought he was--in fact when I left to come back I wrote him the usual letter. I did thank him for his contribution to my tenure there and so forth. I was prejudiced in favor of my own boss, obviously. I judged Mr. Drought in that light even now.

G: How were they different?

S: Mr. Drought I think was an attorney originally and a banker perhaps. He certainly didn't have LBJ's warmth and devotion. His staff included some very fine people: General Bob Smith, engineer from Texas A&M; McNugh [?], I believe, who's now dead. But these were competent professional people. But they did not work with the same

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loyalty and enthusiasm as we did for our own boss. I'm not dodging your question. It was hard to like Mr. Drought personally. He wouldn't let you get that close to him. By contrast, you know, you loved LBJ. You didn't mind doing anything to further his program.

G: I have the impression that Lyndon Johnson wanted everything done yesterday, and Harry Drought was a much slower, more deliberate [person].

S: He was that for sure. I'll tell you one incident that--and I don't know the name of the man who came down from Washington; perhaps your research will name him or somewhere in the file you'll find [his name]. He came down in the spring of 1936, I believe--this would be about right--to make a tour of our NYA program. On Saturday morning Mr. Johnson had me come down to the office and meet this fellow and go over the program with him. I think we made one or two trips around the city and got back to the office about noon. LBJ asked me if I thought Mr. Drought might be in his office. I said, "Well, I'll call him and see." He said, "Well, tell him that Mr. So-and-so is here from the NYA national headquarters and we'd like to drop in just to say hello.

I called Mr. Drought and he was in the office, and when I told him what I had in mind he blew up. I won't use the profanity, but he did use a little profane language and said, "I won't meet with any s.o.b. bureaucrat from Washington, and you can tell him so!" I did when I hung up the phone. LBJ said, "What did he say?"

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and I said, "Do you want me to tell you exactly?" He said, "You tell me exactly." I did. I repeated exactly what he had said. We locked the office and started to leave, got on the elevator and who should be in the elevator but Mr. Harry P. Drought. So he met the man under those circumstances and he was quite embarrassed. I think he had no idea that he would run into us going down the elevator. But LBJ was not completely unperturbed in the elevator. The incident passed all right, but it was quite an embarrassment. Mr. Drought. But he did explode and did use that [expression].

G: What was his attitude toward Lyndon Johnson?

S: I don't really know, unless that he was a stepchild that should really be there, instead of having me, junior assistant. Although he never took it out on me in any way. He was very polite and very nice and very proper. But in answer to your question, I think he thought that LBJ was sort of an upstart that should have been there in San Antonio and not [in Austin]. I don't know of any great omissions or failures to cooperate with us.

G: Drought was sort of a protege of John Nance Garner I understand, or at least a supporter of Garner.

S: I don't know that much about him.

G: Do you recall any attempt by Harry Drought to bring the NYA under the supervision of the WPA?

S: No, I do not. I don't know that that was ever attempted.

G: Do you recall LBJ going down and meeting with Drought to coordinate things or work out administrative [problems]?

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- S: I have the impression that they were miles apart on that sort of thing and that Mr. Johnson didn't, any more than he had to, contact him or negotiate with him or anything. My work was mostly routine, of course, and negotiations on the higher level would have been through LBJ, but I'm not aware that he ever bothered too much. I think he liked the situation where he was in Austin; he had a man in San Antonio for whatever he's worth and that was it.
- G: Now he had several down there. Bill Deason did that at one time.
- S: This may have been after I left, and I'm sure there were some comings and goings between the staff. I think several times Jesse Kellam was there coordinating our program with whatever responsibility the Works Progress Administration had with us. Bill possibly came down after I left. I don't know who my replacement was.
- G: How did the NYA have to depend on the WPA?
- S: I think really in a strict interpretation, the way it [was] set up we really were a part of it, but we just simply avoided the marriage in the strict sense of the word. As I understood the responsibility of the total thing, [it] was Works Progress Administration with NYA being the branch that took care of youth and special projects for the youth.
- G: What I'm asking is in the day-to-day operation, how did you have to rely on WPA, whether it be for payroll certification or getting their lists of people who were certified?

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- S: Yes, this was part of it. They furnished us the list. I'm not sure about the appropriations; I think the appropriations were all tied into one program with NYA having a certain designated part of it. I never did really get into that part of the financing. But I do know that we had the coordination to do with their staff.
- G: Did you have a hard time getting their lists?
- S: No, I can't recall any real problem, any failures on any of their staff members, and to this day General Bob Smith remains in my judgment a very fine individual. He was the associate, as I recall, and a very competent individual. McNugh was like a lot of engineers, a very frosty sort of individual but very competent, and later on, when I was at Texas A&M as director of student activities, I became a good friend of his on the staff. We were opposites in the sense that he worked for Mr. Drought and I worked for [LBJ], but he was strictly professional and whatever we needed we got.
- G: I guess early on one of the main objectives of the NYA, particularly that fall of 1935, was to get programs established for students so that they could remain in school.
- S: Yes, the jobs and actual work assignments in the school programs. Of course, Jesse Kellam was largely the school authority and the director of school programs. We had these other programs building state roadside parks and so forth strictly for kiddos that were not in school, just a job. We also had these camps. One camp I recall was at, I believe, Glen Rose, the first one I ever had anything to do with prior to going to Lubbock. We got the Texas

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National Guard to pick these kiddos up different places and transport them and transport the camping equipment to this camp. I think it was Glen Rose, Texas. That type of thing. These were kiddos that were not in school, not in college certainly.

G: I gather that Glen Rose had the prospects for being a successful program, but ultimately failed either because of the bad weather or inability to hang onto supervisory personnel or something like that. Do you remember what went wrong with that?

S: Well, I was only up there the one time. I think Herb Henderson and I went along to represent the NYA staff. I wasn't impressed with the facilities too much. Now later on, from San Antonio I went up to Lake Medina there, and someone else had a real nice camp. I forget the name, but it was much better, and I think it fared better in the program. This was for girls, a girls camp. Those two camps are the only two I remember having anything to do with, other than knowing that they existed and so forth.

G: These were training camps, teaching skills, say sewing? They weren't educational?

S: No, these were from poor families and, as I said, as I remember these were kids that were not even in public school. They just needed a job; they needed whatever training we could give them.

G: Do you recall LBJ and Jesse Kellam working with college officials to set up the school aspect of this NYA?

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S: Not really. I knew that it was going on but this was not an activity that I figured into very much.

G: He met with President [Cecil] Evans of San Marcos, I believe.

S: They were, as I understood it, very close. In fact, you know of course that he worked for Dr. Evans when he was a student there. But later on, when I was a member of the state legislature, Dr. Evans was still president, a very effective president of that college, although by the end he was getting up in years. But he always stopped at my desk when he was in Austin, which was fairly frequently, because it's so close from San Marcos. He soon learned that I was an ex-NYA staffer and an admirer of LBJ, so we used to talk about a person like that that we both mutually admired. But I don't know what role he played in the total program of the NYA.

G: Would he talk about LBJ as a student at San Marcos?

S: Yes, you know, recollections of him. He was quite proud of him.

G: Anything in particular that you remember?

S: No, it's been so long I just can't remember, except I can see the old gentleman right now coming down the aisle and I knew where he was headed; he was headed for my desk.

I remember opening I think it was the campaign for the Congress or the Senate. We had the campaign opening in San Marcos, particularly in the Mexican section with someone who could speak pretty fair Spanish, telling those people about the rally that night. I believe that was the race for Congress, I'm not sure.

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- G: In September, 1935, he addressed the American Legion Convention in Dallas. Do you remember that?
- S: No. I don't know whether that was the occasion when I met him.
- G: It could have been. Do you remember anything about Dr. Mary Hayes' visit to Austin?
- S: Dr. Mary Hayes?
- G: Yes. She was with the NYA's national [office].
- S: No, and to be honest, I don't recall the name.
- G: Aubrey Williams visited in the spring of 1936.
- S: Yes.
- G: Do you remember that visit?
- S: Yes, just faintly. I remember meeting him and being more impressed with my boss than with him. It was quite a contrast. Of course he was a very capable administrator and a very competent man, but the short time I was with him--which would be a matter of twenty or thirty minutes at the most, and only as part of a larger group with him--I thought we had the best of the leadership.
- G: Was this in Austin?
- S: Yes, and I think we toured him somewhere. I think he came to San Antonio maybe and paid his respects to Mr. Drought, although I don't recall this for sure. I am of the opinion--this is just maybe a guess--that we were called into Austin to meet Aubrey Williams. We did make some trips somewhere but I've forgotten just what it was.
- G: Can you recall the relationship between Aubrey Williams and LBJ?

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- S: I thought it was all right, satisfactory. I never heard anything otherwise.
- G: Was it cordial?
- S: It seemed to be. It seems to me--and here again, this is so far back in time--that LBJ and someone else and I took Mr. Williams to meet a train out of San Antonio to go back to Washington.
- G: In going through the files one has the impressions that first, LBJ was always trying to get more appropriation for Texas, more money for projects. The other thing [was that] he was always trying to expedite Washington approval of projects. Do you recall these two efforts?
- S: No, this would probably have been a function of the state office and I probably would have been only on the fringe of it so far as relating things to him or hearing a playback from the consequences of that. So far as having anything myself to do with it, no.
- G: But do you recall his talking about this?
- S: No, I don't, a direct conversation.
- G: Aubrey Williams evidently suggested the idea of having FDR stop and dedicate one of these roadside parks on his way to Dallas? Do you recall that?
- S: No, I do not. I would guess that Z. Starr Armstrong might have been the particular district director, I think, that would have coordinated that. I'm not sure.
- G: Other interviewees have discussed the meetings on the weekends of district officers--

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S: Yes, those were held.

G: --and going over regulations and clarifying them. Can you describe that?

S: Yes, I remember being called in. Several times three or four of us, or more, would stay out at LBJ's house. "This way," he explained, "you can save hotel and we can get more done." One particular time I remember, in the winter of 1936 the gas supply in Austin failed completely and it was pretty cold in the LBJ residence, but we did spend the night there, three or four of us. But those were held regularly. I'm not suggesting that it was every weekend, but several times during my tenure I was called in to Austin for those meetings.

G: What would you discuss?

S: All phases of our program, our problems. I guess the best way to say it, we'd get our batteries recharged to go back out the next Monday and work a little harder.

G: Early on was it a question of getting together in the evenings and on weekends to review the regulations and learn them and interpret them?

S: This possibly was part of it. But LBJ was so charged up about this thing and he infused all of us with this same devotion. No one felt like it was an imposition to come back after supper and work. If he said meet on Saturday and Sunday as well, this was just part of what we gladly did. I don't recall anyone ever complaining of that or feeling that it was something that was an imposition.

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G: What motivated him during this period, do you recall?

S: Of course, he was still quite young, although he had already achieved a certain amount of--quite a bit of--success in terms of recognition. I think it was just the drive that the man had in wanting to be the best state NYA. I know in the appointment of advisory boards, a little matter like that, he was thrilled that we had more advisory boards than any other state. We had more people working, more girls at camp, more boys working on parks and so forth. I thought the roadside park idea originated with LBJ and [was] worked out between him and Gibb Gilchrist, who was the then-highway engineer. I think the first one in the state was down near New Braunfels on the way to San Antonio.

G: Yes. Did Herbert Henderson have any role in planning that project?

S: I'm not sure what Herb's role was in that. As I recall Herb's function, he was a detail man. He could write speeches, projections, and letters. He was just quite good at that sort of thing.

G: Do you recall whether or not LBJ had to persuade Gibb Gilchrist to go along with the project, the roadside park idea?

S: I don't know that to be the case. Let me digress just a bit and say two things about Gibb Gilchrist. First, when I was a member of the legislature, he would come over and ask appropriations for his State Highway Department. He had an impeccable reputation of telling you what he needed in straight blunt terms. You always could believe what the man said. Later on I became associated with him when he was the president of Texas A&M and I was on the staff

there for a couple of three years as director of the student publications, student activities they called them. I learned to love the man and to respect his integrity, but I would say that when LBJ and Gibb Gilchrist met there would be a clash of wills and that Mr. Gilchrist would probably have resisted unless it had a lot of merit to it. He would have been very firm. The fact that we got their cooperation tells me that the projects either had a great deal of merit or that LBJ was very persuasive about it. I don't know anything personally about that.

G: Gilchrist never talked about that?

S: Yes, we talked about LBJ because he knew that I had worked for him and he knew that I admired him. We simply talked about him as a-- at that time I think LBJ had moved on either to Congress or to the Senate. I don't recall ever talking to Mr. Gilchrist [about LBJ in the NYA], although we made many trips together over to Austin, because having been in the legislature he thought I could help some with presenting the Texas A&M case to the legislature. On those kind of trips, as well as other meetings with him, we talked frequently of LBJ, but not in the context of what happened when LBJ was NYA director and Gibb Gilchrist was the state engineer. But specifically, going back to your question, although I don't know anything about what happened when the two got together, I would suspect that LBJ was very persuasive.

G: Gibb Gilchrist later became associated with Coke Stevenson, didn't he?

S: I think he admired him very much. I don't think there was any--you mean a political connection?

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G: Yes.

S: I don't know of that.

G: Did you get the impression that the years in Washington as Dick Kleberg's secretary had served as a useful background or preparation period for the NYA directorship?

S: I never really thought about it until now because it's just never been raised, but I would say that they didn't hurt him at all. They didn't hurt the Director; they didn't hurt LBJ.

G: Now he spent four years in Washington during the inception of the New Deal. I'm just wondering if this Washington experience gave him some insights or perspectives that the rest of you didn't have. Did he draw from this in conversation? Did this provide him with a background that was useful?

S: I feel certain it did. I don't recall that he ever threw that out at us, his accomplishments in Washington or the fact that he was elected speaker of the Little Congress over the entrenched leadership that had always picked the man. I don't think he ever used that directly to us. But in the framework, in the context of what you're saying, yes, I would think that those years up there had given him some insights that we didn't have.

G: What I'm wondering is, where did he learn how to get things done?

S: I think he must have had a natural instinct for it, because he certainly didn't lose any time in getting his organization going, maintaining a separateness that was not planned and not really preferred, as I understand it, by the higher-ups in the Works

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Progress Administration or the local state leadership. He didn't flaunt that connection with President Roosevelt or his leadership and his contacts with Mr. Kleberg or anything like that, but he obviously knew how to use it.

G: Did you feel that he had a commitment to alleviating poverty at this point?

S: Yes, I did.

G: Did he talk about this? How did he verbalize it?

S: Of course, I can't recall specific words he used, but it was apparent to [us], and most of us were either his age or thereabouts. We were all young. Mr. Kellam was a young man himself then in terms of a total lifetime. He was probably the oldest staff member, unless it was Mr. Armstrong. It seems to me like Z.S. Armstrong and maybe Herb Henderson were up there a little bit, but not much. We were all young, most of us not more than twenty-five, under thirty, coming into this thing in a depression, the first job of any importance for a lot of us, this dynamic individual picking us up and pushing us and making us feel that we belonged to a team and that we almost had a holy mission. It was almost a missionary zeal that he used. I think he believed it. He couldn't have faked it, I don't think.

G: He instilled it because he himself had it, is that right?

S: Yes. Yes. If he had just been a smooth talker trying to get us to work hard, and he would quit and go off for the weekends, this wouldn't have worked. But he worked harder than anybody. I recall

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this, that he said, "I never ask my staff to do something that I'm not willing to do." He could make you believe that without any question. You might feel put out because you were going to work Saturday and Sunday instead of going home to a football game or something, but you knew that he would be there, too.

G: Did the rest of you ever try to get him to slow up?

S: I don't think so. (Laughter)

G: Was the correspondence pretty heavy in those days? Did you have a lot of mail to answer?

S: It seems to me like the advisory board thing, which he put great stress on, and I don't know--I really don't, I've never really thought about it--whether there was any unconscious political connotation to the thing or not. Whether he thought way back in the back of his mind, "I'm going to have advisory boards all over the state of Texas. They'll know about NYA, they'll know about Lyndon B. Johnson." But he put great store on getting advisory boards.

G: It sure couldn't have hurt him, could it?

S: No. It didn't hurt him.

G: Were these boards used later as a nucleus of a statewide campaign?

S: I'm sure that the contacts that were made, although I don't have any positive information, sure did give him a network of leadership apart from his own staff, who were already dedicated and working for him. Here were people in responsible positions similar to his

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state board. These were judges, mayors and so forth, that were pushing for NYA programs and NYA acceptances.

G: What was his attitude toward publicity at the time?

S: I'm not familiar with any set policy he had. He certainly wasn't abash about telling people about what he was doing in his organization and in the program. I think Herb Henderson may have had some role in news releases and so forth. I think Ray Lee did some of that later on, maybe, after I left.

G: Anything else on the particular projects? We've talked about the roadside parks and the training centers like Glen Rose.

S: It seems to me like we went to Houston to another camp. I spoke to you of only two that I could recall, but as I think about this thing it seems to me that we did go to Houston to a camp. This would have been late in 1935.

G: There was a resident camp at Prairie View, too, wasn't there?

S: Well, this would have not been in my jurisdiction so I don't recall. I think so.

G: A junior placement service in Fort Worth, do you remember that?

S: This I'm not familiar with.

G: Elimination of traffic hazards from highways and planting shrubs along the highways, do you remember this sort of thing?

S: Yes, I remember the beautification things.

G: They even used the term beautification, didn't they?

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- S: Yes. This was something that, of course, Lady Bird picked up later and did such a nice job with. The direction of programs like that would come out of headquarters. We would simply relate it to-- that is, I, as the liaison, would relate what we were supposed to do to the Works Progress Administration, ask for their help on whatever ways that we needed to coordinate with them.
- G: Was there a formula that you looked for in a successful NYA program? Say, something with a little overhead, didn't involve too many specialized skills, easily supervised. If you were trying to list the things that you'd look for in an NYA project, what would they be?
- S: Those probably would all be present, but as I recall those guidelines probably were sent down from Washington and the people that we put on those projects had to be certain types, certain ages, this that and the other. The prime purpose, of course, is to put as many kids to work in school or doing some useful work and distribute what seems now a pittance, but then seemed like a lot of money. But those guidelines usually came down from national headquarters and then applied locally within whatever range and discretion that we had on it.
- G: I understand that they trained welders, too, in these schools.
- S: Some of these schools, yes, and brick masons and stone masons. This Little Chapel in the Woods--by the way, it's on the Texas Women's University campus.
- G: Oh, I thought it was North Texas.

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S: No. It's a very beautiful [chapel]. It has stained glass, of course. I'm not saying that NYA had stained glass mechanics or technicians, but at least the total concept of the thing--it was designed by Ford, you know, the well-known architect.

G: O'Neil Ford.

S: The architecture of the thing is grand. But what stands really as a true monument is the fact that that was largely put together by kids, you might say, with adult supervision. But this was the hands of kids that had never laid a stone before we got hold of them, that did it. This is but one example, of course, of what was done in the program. I'd have to give the program A plus. I know we had some--to use an old term--boondoggling, but I think there was less of it in the NYA than on the bigger projects. These kids had absolutely nothing. The boondogglers were older and they had learned to loaf, I guess. I would have to evaluate, so far as I know, the NYA programs as having been very effective. It made quite a contribution to those days.

G: Did Eleanor Roosevelt dedicate that chapel?

S: That I don't know. She was here. I would say that she did not dedicate it. Do you have word that she did?

G: I've got a note here perhaps to that effect. What about blacks and the NYA?

S: I don't think we had any large number of black leadership. I don't think, honestly then, that we had any black staff member of great stature as I recall it. I don't think this was particularly a

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decision of LBJ. I just don't know how that happened, except looking back to those days, that was just the nature of how things were structured down here. I know they had projects. They were certainly open to all the projects we had. For example, in the Valley and in the San Antonio area, a large majority of our girls and boys on those projects would be Latin Americans.

G: He had a Negro advisory board. Do you remember that?

S: No.

G: Mary Branch and [Joseph J.] Rhoads.

S: I remember her name, but I don't know in what connection.

G: I guess there were representatives from the national office who came down and were black, people like Mary McLeod Bethune on the national board. Do you remember her visit?

S: I don't remember such a visit.

G: I suppose that one of the difficulties here, in a state like Texas with its size and the fact that it was so spread out, was trying to administer a program over an area that was that wide-ranging.

S: Yes, and during the nine or ten months that I was with the organization it really was just beginning to get topside when I returned to private law practice. Obviously, in the beginning--well, when I went to Lubbock I was supposed to be district director of a district that ran from the Valley to the Panhandle, perhaps half the state. As he had time, the Director broke it down into smaller districts, and this enabled him then to do a better job. Then as the program became better known and established through these advisory boards

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and through accomplishments and so forth, it had better acceptance. It was a brand new thing when he took it over. There was also the uncertainty of what would Congress do with it after the first year. But it proved to be a good thing. Even though my experience with it was only the first ten months when it was most in an organizational building stage, I've seen the value of it.

G: One of the letters in the files indicates that one of LBJ's chief concerns was putting youths to work and spending as little money as possible on overhead. In other words, emphasizing projects that would have the lowest cost per youth that was employed. Do you remember if this was something he harped on?

S: Well, not specifically. I mean, I can't recall the words or anything like that. But I know that he constantly talked about the importance in our program to get kids back to work and doing something useful.

G: Was there a problem getting youths certified by relief agencies?

S: Not particularly, except that to them it was comparatively new what we were doing, because I think before that it had been concerned with parents and older people and adults. Suddenly this new program for youth has dropped in their laps, so they had to do certain adjustments. But I can't recall that we had any problems in getting the list of certified kids and referrals for our program.

G: How about the problem of just notifying the kids that this program existed?

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- S: It seemed to work. The case workers, or whatever they called them in those days, apparently didn't have any problem of getting enough people to fill the jobs and the positions that we had.
- G: Was there a juvenile delinquency component?
- S: I'm not aware that there was.
- G: For example, you had kids who had been in trouble [working] in projects?
- S: I don't recall that we broke it down into that category or searched out their background. I think if the WPA or whatever the referral agency sent us, we accepted them and put them to work if we had the jobs going.
- G: You must recall some anecdotes of LBJ as NYA director, either as he traveled around or worked in this role.
- S: I recall going from Austin to San Antonio, returning from one of these weekend trips, conferences, and he had something to do there, I think a speech or something and was going to spend part of the time going around looking at our projects. But almost the entire trip-- just the two of us, one of the few times that I can recall that I had a long visit with him just the two of us--we talked politics. He thought it quite proper that he and I talk about politics because I had been an unsuccessful candidate for county judge. So we talked about it. I recall it very, very clearly. He peppered questions at me all the way: "How did you do this?" and "Why did you do

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that?" We talked about state politics. Of course, my experience in state politics then was pretty well limited to some ins and outs of the Young Democrat faction.

G: Was he interested in this?

S: He was interested in any phase of politics that I knew about. We talked about the rewards of political life. Of course, he was a past master. I don't know why I should be instructing him at that moment, but he was pumping me, as I assess the thing, to see what I knew about politics. Practically the entire time on that trip in his car we talked politics.

Later on, when Congressman [James P.] Buchanan, I believe it was, died, I was in Denton practicing law. I sent him a telegram: "A lot of people in Texas think the next congressman from the Tenth Texas District should be named Johnson. I believe you are the best qualified by that name. I urge you to make the race." I sent that wire from Denton and within an hour or two I had a telephone call and he said, "I got your telegram. I want to see you in Austin in the morning." (Laughter) So I went down and campaigned for him.

Of course, he resigned to make the race. I assumed that the thing to do was to go to the NYA office, and I was there preparing to do my bit in the political way, and he came through and harried me out. He said, "We can't have any politics up here. I'm getting some of my personal things. I've resigned. For goodness sake, let's not be up here. The headquarters will be so-and-so and

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Ray Lee will be running it. For the moment, I want you to take a piece of paper, a notebook and a pencil, and I want you to stand down on the corner of Congress and Sixth, and I want you to ask as many people as you can between now and noon how they feel about the campaign for the congressional race." At that time I forget who had announced, but three or four people had announced. He had indicated in the paper that he would be a candidate. I think he had just met with Mayor Tom Miller and they had concluded that both of them should not run. I considered it a great piece of strategy on LBJ's part that he convinced Tom Miller not only not to run, but to support him. But anyhow, I did that morning, that first morning I worked in the campaign, I stood on the corner of Sixth and Austin [Congress] and asked people their preferences in the congressional [race].

G: What did they say?

S: Surprisingly the majority of them spoke of Johnson as being their choice. The entire field had not announced. I think I used four or five names. The question would be: "I'm conducting a survey of the congressional race as it now stands. With these candidates in the race, which one would you prefer?"

G: Did you get any indication of how they felt on the court-packing bill?

S: No. You just wouldn't get into a long detailed discussion with them. You'd simply say, "As it stands now I read you these names. Which is your preference?" and put down a chalk mark if they [responded].

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- G: There was some notion that Mrs. Buchanan might run.
- S: I remember that but I don't think LBJ ever seriously thought she would. I think he felt like Mayor Tom Miller would be [in the race].
- G: Had he already talked to Tom Miller by the time you got down there?
- S: I believe he had talked to him the night before, although he did not tell me that. You know, he was so busy in details and calling and so forth.
- G: What role did [Alvin] Wirtz play in the campaign?
- S: I don't know. My work was largely out passing out literature. I'm sure that Mr. Wirtz was there, Mr. Wirtz' talent.
- G: How long did you work in the campaign?
- S: It seems to me like I was there two or three weeks. I was not there when he had his collapse and had to go to the hospital. That was just a few days before the election.
- G: Did you travel with him any during the campaign?
- S: No, not with him. I traveled with Sam Fore and Denver Chestnut. Do you remember those names?
- G: Kenedy Advance?
- S: Yes. Let's see. Lots of the times I just went out myself and listened to people, handed out cards. I'm not sure we opened that campaign in San Marcos or at Wooldridge Park there in Austin. But I recall going to a big rally in Wooldridge Park there in Austin, an LBJ rally.
- G: That did open in Austin.
- S: Did it? The other one was the Senate race, maybe?

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G: I think he made an initial speech there as well.

S: I also recall introducing him when he came to Denton in the Senate race. I recall--I think he was still a congressman--meeting him in Austin. I was in the legislature then and went down to the hotel to meet him and hadn't seen him in a long time. He wanted me to go back to Washington with him on his staff. I'd had that experience; I thought I'd better stay. He'd work me to death! But I was flattered that he would ask me.

G: Was he a hard man to say no to in a situation like that?

S: He was. You felt like a dog when you did. You just felt like you had let him down.

G: Really?

S: Oh, yes. I've heard, you know, the rumors that he was a hard boss and drove his staff unmercifully and all that. I didn't find it that way. He was very rewarding and generous to me. He'd brag on me, build me up. He let me know, of course, that the pace had to be maintained and he expected certain performances, but he never abused me in any way and I never saw him do that to anybody.

G: You get the impression that he was a hard man to say no to, to argue with. Did you have a problem doing this?

S: No, and I could make my points with him without. . . . Persuasive, yes; inspiring, yes; but dictatorial, not in that term as I understand it.

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G: During any of these automobile rides or conversations about politics did he talk about running for office himself and a career in politics at all?

S: I think I was the one who suggested that he run, that he would be a good candidate, that he should think about it. I think he was much too wise to reveal to me that that might be in the back of his head, because I'm not sure that it really was at that time. He was already challenged and already engaged in a conflict, not a conflict, but a program, a pursuit. I don't think he, at that moment, said, "I probably will, and if I do I want you to do this and do that."

G: Do you recall any NYA projects that he was particularly proud of or that may have been his favorite?

S: No, I don't.

G: What about Mrs. Johnson's role during NYA?

S: She was so sweet to all of us. She just seemed to idolize him and whatever he wanted to do. To be honest, I think he imposed on her a lot with his staff. He'd have us all appear at her house, sometimes announced and sometimes unannounced, and whatever was there was available: sandwiches, cold drinks. But she's a very fine, grand lady in my book. She came here, you know, to receive an honorary doctorate from TWU [Texas Women's University]. We just admire her tremendously here, personally.

G: Did she sit in on any of the meetings?

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S: No, she really, as I recall, never had any active role other than to be the wife of the Director. If he showed up with three or four hungry assistants it was all right.

G: I gather that meals were obtained rather sporadically, catch as catch can.

S: That's right. That's right. I'm not sure it was the same trip that we rode together from Austin in his car and talked politics, but on one trip to San Antonio we toured the city, he and I and Hershey Johnson, who was the district director. I'm not sure [if] Edna Dato [was with us]; I think she had gone back to Austin by that time, but I know there were three of us. And all day long he kept complaining of feeling ill and chest pains, just couldn't eat a thing. About four o'clock we stopped at a Mexican food place, and he ordered a full order of Mexican food and doctored it up with hot sauce and ate every bit of it! I didn't dare suggest that that would be sort of an improper diet for a man who had been complaining all day long about [feeling ill]. I remember that so well.

G: Did you get a chance to observe his friendship with Maury Maverick?

S: No. I knew that there was a great friendship there, but I was not present ever that I can recall where they were together. I was present several times when he visited with Malcolm Bardwell. I believe he was postmaster then in San Antonio. I'm not sure.

G: Or Dan Quill.

S: Dan Quill. That's the person I'm thinking about, Dan Quill. Malcolm was still in Washington, I guess. You corrected me.

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G: Anything else on the NYA period, any anecdotes or incidents?

S: No, I think since you've sparked my memory here, I'll do some reflecting. Maybe the next time you come by I can send them to you.

The only time that he wasn't very persuasive with me if he had something he wanted me to do was when I told him I thought I should come back to Denton and practice law. I'm not sure I should tell this, because it may be he wanted to get rid of me anyhow. But he quite quickly agreed with me, that he thought maybe that was the thing to do. Because, as I explained it to him, I said, "If I ever am going to practice law, I think now is the time I should make the move, because we're approaching the July appropriation, the critical time when we're not any of us for sure we'll even have an NYA program. I have the chance to go in with this older lawyer who used to be county judge up there and needs some help." He thought it over and very quickly said, "Well, I think perhaps you're right."

G: That wasn't like him to turn loose of people.

S: No, it wasn't; it wasn't at all. He would use every power he had, including making you feel if he could that you were just "letting me down and I wouldn't let you down. But you're letting me down if you're going to go back to Denton." He didn't pull that on me. He seemed to agree with me that maybe as a future for someone that had gone to the trouble of studying the law, I perhaps ought to get back to it. I think he also thought that I had an interest in politics that would be best expressed, of course, back in my home district where I could run for an elective office. Of course, the

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job I had was non-political and pretty well restricted against politics.

But anyhow, when the occasions came that I could support him then in an open political way I did. I'm very proud that I did and very proud of him. I feel very lucky that I've had the privilege of knowing a man like that. I rate him very, very highly in his accomplishments, and I forgive him all of the places where perhaps I didn't agree with him a hundred per cent politically and would think maybe he compromised to get this done or to get that done. I would rate him way, way up there, and I think history will do even better, a more important job than that. They'll rate him even higher than even I. I think the Great Society will be better understood if everyone could go to LBJ Library in Austin and listen and watch and see that thing unfold. I, as an attorney and as a former active politician or a state office holder, [whatever] you want to call it, a student of economics, I didn't glimpse the whole thing when I heard it and presented it and saw it in the press and read about it. But when I went to the LBJ Library and saw and heard and watched and listened, I really think he had a dream far beyond what he was given credit for.

I wrote Bill Deason. I saw the President speak from somewhere up in the Midwest with his back to the river and the granaries there in the background, and he talked about this country and what we had to do. I wrote Bill Deason a letter and told him that I was never prouder of our President than at that moment. Because what

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he was saying was a little controversial in a sense, and was not going to really make him some votes so much as it was telling the whole country what we had to do. I got back the nicest letter from the President that, "Bill Deason relayed to me the contents of your letter. You know that there should never be any doubt in your mind how I feel about you." I think that might have been the last correspondence I had with him. It wasn't necessary, really, to write him because, well, you knew he was going to do it the LBJ way anyhow.

G: I certainly do appreciate your time this morning.

S: I'm glad you came by and I hope I have been of some use to you.

G: Oh, indeed.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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