

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN TOWER (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

August 8, 1971

F: This is an interview with Senator John Tower in his suite in the Sheraton-Crest Hotel in Austin, Texas on August 8, 1971. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Senator, I knew you 'way back there in the academic days, which is still academic for me. When did you start to make the shift into politics?

T: Well actually I was politically involved during most of my teaching career.

F: So it wasn't really a break, it was a transition, wasn't it.

T: That's right, it was. I have always been politically interested, even when I was a little boy I was interested in politics. As a matter of fact, my first venture into politics was in 1938 when I was a lad of 13. I passed out handbills for a young man running for attorney general by the name of Ralph Yarborough.

F: I see. You didn't know what you were getting into then, did you?

T: And of course I grew up a Southern Democrat like every well-bred Texas lad.

F: You didn't know there was an alternative.

T: I didn't know there was an alternative. My grandfather Tower grew up in Louisiana during the reconstruction period, and so he influenced me quite a bit.

It occurred to me at some point in time after I had completed a good part of my college education that the Republicans nationally more represented my views on things, my conservative, capitalist, particularist, oriented ideas. And so in about 1951 I decided that I would identify myself as a Republican.

In 1952 I participated in the preconvention Taft-Eisenhower embroglio. I was elected a precinct chairman. And so from 1952 on I held an office of some kind.

I was a sergeant-at-arms at the national convention in '52, which was my first national convention, and was involved in a peripheral way in the Taft-Eisenhower battle in that year.

Subsequently I ran for the legislature in 1954 and was slaughtered by Vern [Vernon J.] Stewart who is still sitting in the legislature.

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And in 1956 I was elected to the state executive committee, and was named chairman of the party's committee on education and research. So I was very active politically. I was a delegate to the national convention in '56. I was Eisenhower's campaign manager in the 23rd senatorial district. The way the party operated it was that the state committeeman from the district pretty well oversaw the campaign effort.

F: How did your district go?

T: It went against Eisenhower. We only carried about three counties. We carried Wilbarger, Young, and Hardeman, as I recollect.

F: That was traditionally Democratic country.

T: It's brass-collared Democratic country. As a matter of fact, I was the first Republican to ever carry Wichita County, and I didn't carry it the first time I ran--didn't carry it until '66. So that's by way of background. That's how I got into it.

F: Had you ever met Johnson previous to this?

T: Yes. The first time I met Lyndon Johnson was when I was a student at Southwestern University back in about 1942, I guess. He was a congressman from that district, '42-'43.

F: He came over there?

T: Yes. He was of course the congressman from the old 10th congressional district then.

F: Temporarily that has been redistricted out, I don't know what the outcome is.

T: Right.

F: When did you decide to make that run in '60 against him?

T: Well, the party felt that we had a responsibility if we were to be a viable opposition party to mount a campaign against Lyndon Johnson. We didn't feel like we had any reasonable prospect of defeating him. And Thad Hutcheson, who had run in a special election in 1957 to fill Price Daniel's seat, did not want to run that year. Congressman Bruce Alger of Dallas, who was our sole Republican congressman at that time, did not choose to run. And so the party asked me, since I could articulate the party viewpoint pretty well and had been very actively involved in the party leadership in the state, to run and to use my candidacy as a platform for the Texas Republican position.

F: I'd like to go back a minute because of course politics in Texas have always had their peculiar flavor, but the Texas Republican party in a sense has had two histories: one down

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into the '50's, and one since the '50's. I've been very conscious of that because I've been getting some material ready on what has happened between 1950 and 1970.

T: Well, I think you can mark 1952 as the renaissance of the Republican party in Texas. Prior to that it was an old patronage clique of the type that V. O. Key well described in his Southern Politics of the State and Nation.

F: R. B. [Rentfro Banton] Creager.

T: Rene Creager was dead when I became active in the party. Henry Zweifel was his successor. My wife's cousin Orville Bullington was state chairman.

F: I knew Orville.

T: And also a member of the board of regents of the University of Texas. Back in those days Republicans weren't regarded as much of a threat, so the Democrats would appoint them to their boards and commissions sometimes.

F: Did you find yourself really having to fight that sort of private club?

T: I came in under funny circumstances. Orville Bullington sort of took me under his wing, and he was identified with the old crowd but he was more progressive than they were.

F: More aggressive too.

T: Yes, he was a Taft partisan. And so I was a part of the old guard group really when I came in, but my real sympathy lay with those who wanted to expand the party and make it a viable political force in the state. And so I was pretty well absorbed into it by the Porter faction immediately after the national convention.

F: That's Jack Porter down in Houston.

T: Yes. Jack never had any feeling of bitterness of recrimination towards any of the old guard that wanted to continue to be active. And so Jack sort of helped bring me along in the party. I'd say that Thad Hutcheson and Jack Porter had more to do with my surfacing as a voice and as a leader in the party in the state than anybody else.

F: I've been intrigued, looking at it strictly as an observer, with the new faces, new names--you're one of them, O'Donnell's one, and so forth--that have come in after--you and I are more or less contemporaries--the years in which there were just two or three sort of name Republicans in the state, and you just saw them year-in and year-out. But here suddenly you're developing a whole new breed. Was there an active recruiting, or did they tend to come in on their own initiative?

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T: I think a lot of them came in under the same circumstances as I did. We were post-war, young people that had been around and lost some of their provincialism, didn't want to feel hide-bound to the traditional political habits of the state, and some of us genuinely felt we ought to have a two-party system in Texas. That to enter the 20th century we had to not only do it economically and technologically but politically as well.

And so I think that O'Donnell and I are probably products of that kind of thinking. We did recruit others to come along with us. We, I think--people like us--helped transform the party in the state.

F: I've been struck by the fact that in a number of congressional elections, state elections, and so forth, that in some instances it wasn't so much dissatisfaction--you used to could breed on that to some extent--dissatisfaction with the Democrats, as it was the fact that you actually had in a specific race a more attractive candidate. And someone has gone out and sought good personnel.

T: We've always tried to recruit good candidates. We've gotten some charlatans, but we've--

F: Oh sure. Any party that hasn't is lying.

T: No party has a monopoly on that. But on the whole I think that we have in recent years at least offered better candidates than the Democrats, even when we've lost I think our candidates on the whole have been people of superior quality. But still militating against us is the fact that there are 254 counties in this state, and every one of them has got a courthouse. And it makes it an awfully tough nut to crack.

F: You have a real problem getting at the kind of full-time political center in each county.

T: In a hard fought, well financed, statewide campaign, we can carry the urban areas and we've done it. Eggers and Bush did it in losing last time, for example.

F: But you can't carry Mentone or Central City?

T: No, you get nicked and dined to death out in the smaller counties. In my winning the election in '61 I carried only 70-71 counties, something like that, out of 254, but I carried the population centers. In my '66 campaign I carried every county that cast 10,000 votes or more with one exception, and that was McLennan County.

F: Which is still back in the cotton culture.

Let's go back to '60. You've got an odd arrangement coming up in the sense that you're running against a phantom in a way. You've got a very powerful man you're taking on in Johnson; at the same time, you feel that he wants that as a consolation prize rather

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than as the number one prize.

T: Yes. Of course we capitalized on the fact that he was running for two offices at once--running both for Vice President and for reelection to the Senate. And we also capitalized on the anti-Johnson sentiment in the state, which was considerable.

F: Did you have any contact with him personally at all during the--?

T: I had no personal contact with him at all.

F: Now, he has got the power. He's the Senate majority leader, and that's one of the better offices in this United States. And he has got the long run on where the financing is, and the power to attract financing of course. How did you counteract that?

T: Well, we ran the campaign on a shoestring.

F: John Tower is mildly known, but he hasn't been running for statewide office--

T: I wasn't known at all; I was known in Republican party circles. My family was known in East Texas where my father had been a Methodist clergyman, and my two grandfathers before him. So our family was fairly well known in the eastern part of the state, but I would have to be ranked as an unknown. And what I did was capitalize on the anti-Johnson sentiment. A lot of people who supported me didn't know me from Adam's off-ox, but just didn't like Lyndon.

And too there was some resentment of the fact that he had run for two offices at one time. As a matter of fact, we parodied a couple of popular commercial slogans of the day. We had one that said, "Double your pleasure, double your fun; scratch Lyndon twice." And another one that said "Don't be half-safe, scratch Lyndon twice."

F: Could you feel the change in the tempo as that race went on?

T: Actually when Johnson was nominated for the vice presidency, there began to develop a little new interest in the Republican candidate for the Senate, and I began to attract a little money then. Up until that time it looked pretty bleak. So we mounted as hard a campaign as we could on a shoestring, and the latter few days of the campaign quite a bit of money came in. People started getting interested as it started catching fire a little bit to the extent that I was able to beat Lyndon in Dallas County and stand-off with him in Harris County.

F: Did you develop a pretty viable state organization at this time, or did you just--?

T: Yes, I think we did. And I think that the fact that we were running for something other than just the presidency, as we had in '52 and '56, tended to flush out the organization a

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little bit more. In the presidential campaigns we leaned heavily on the conservative Democrats, the Alan Shivers and his allies. But in this particular campaign many of the people that joined up with me to campaign with and for me identified themselves as Republicans, even though they had been Democrats before.

F: Any public official who is there for a long time just by the nature of things, a number of times you have to say no if nothing else, builds up a certain number of resentments from people, kind of an onus of public office.

T: That's right. And Lyndon of course still had the--it was still in the bitter aftermath of that 1948 senatorial campaign, and there were a lot of people that hadn't forgotten that, this was only twelve years later.

F: A lot closer then than it is now.

T: That was still burned indelibly.

F: That's what I wondered. Did people run to you with stories of mistreatment?

T: Oh yes, they did. And I might note that my co-chairman of Democrats for Tower at that time was Coke Stevenson, and of course a lot of his old friends and allies.

F: Was Coke active help?

T: I think Coke was a help, yes. He was not terribly active, but he had a lot of friends that identified with him.

F: And the fact they knew where he stood undoubtedly helped.

T: Yes.

F: Did you ever really get the feeling that you smoked Lyndon out on issues during this?

T: No. I don't really think I did. I think that he played it precisely the way I would have played it if the roles had been reversed, and that was to ignore me, which is smart politics in anybody's book. I challenged him to debates and everything else, and he never paid one bit of attention to me. And if I'd been in the same shoes, I wouldn't have paid any attention to me either.

F: Were you surprised at your final vote?

T: I think we felt pretty gratified that I got 42-percent of the votes.

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F: I've always felt really, looking at it strictly from a kind of coach's standpoint, that this was probably your finest campaign. The next two campaigns that came on, in which you actually won of course, you were carrying a lot more assets into it.

T: Yes.

F: You had a better bench to work with and so forth, whereas this time you came out with, what, nine hundred and some odd thousand votes. It was fantastic.

T: Right. Yes, I had some nine hundred and some odd thousand votes, about 42-percent--41.6 or .7--in the neighborhood of 42-percent of the vote. And actually carried Dallas County and carried the Panhandle.

F: Did that leave you any time to campaign for the Nixon-Lodge ticket?

T: Well, the way we did it was I always in making my speeches advocated Nixon-Lodge, as well as my own candidacy. Then I traveled with the candidates when they were in the state. They both embraced me, for whatever political liability it might have been for them.

F: You did get a feeling you picked up a certain reservoir of Eisenhower goodwill, which of course you had helped promote in this state?

T: Yes, I think probably we did. There were of course a lot of people that felt that Lyndon was more of a partisan Democrat than he was a real Texas representative.

F: Had you, prior to this race, ever considered going with the federal government under Eisenhower?

T: No, I had not, and had no interest in it, because I would have gone into some subordinate, faceless bureaucrat-type job, and I just wasn't interested in that.

F: Okay. The election is held, you have surprised everyone with the strength of your support. You know immediately that Johnson has two offices on his hands now. I presume at that time you made up your mind you were coming back for the special election.

T: No, I didn't make it up right at the moment. I began, hardly before the election returns were all in, to think in terms of what I might do. Actually I went back to some of the other people in the party--Thad Hutcheson, Bruce Alger--and talked to some of the party leaders. I thought that Thad and Bruce should have the option of whether or not to run in the special election, and they neither one again were interested in running.

F: Bruce did not want to enlarge his field?

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T: I think Bruce felt comfortable being congressman from Dallas County. And, too, Bruce, I think, by that time maybe had gotten on the Ways and Means Committee, so he was in a pretty good spot.

And so the party leadership seemed to think that we really ought to make a go in the special election, even under the new rules that had been passed after Yarborough was elected by a plurality in '57. The legislature subsequently changed the rules to provide for the run-off.

So then I went to talk to Alan Shivers. And I told Alan that if he ran I would not. I just didn't think I'd have a chance.

F: You mean whichever ticket Shivers ran on--?

T: There were no tickets of course, but I felt that I would draw votes from some of the same people that were Shivers' supporters; that if he got into it, that I would have great difficulty in making a show. And too I had a high personal regard for Alan. So I went to him, and he said he wanted to think it over for a few days.

By that time Blakley had already announced, which I think confounded Shivers a little bit. I think that they had not expected Blakley to be any more than a seat warmer, and he decided to go for it on his own.

F: That he was just going to have the title and retire honorably.

T: Right. And so when Shivers finally made the decision not to run, he summoned me to his office, as I recollect, to give me his decision--

F: Here in Austin?

T: Here in Austin. And told me he would not run. Why I didn't set up one here, I don't know, but I had them set up a press conference for me in Dallas; I jumped on the plane to Dallas, got off the plane in Dallas and held a press conference and announced. That was in December, as I recall, of '60.

F: Right. Whom did you run against in a race like that? Or did you run against?? This is of course one of the most confusing things in the world, both for a candidate and for the voter, because you're in a sense betting against the house--you don't know who the house is.

T: The one advantage I had is that I could count on the support of all the Republicans, of course, and of a pretty good sizeable conservative following that I had developed during the course of my Johnson campaign.

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F: You were just fresh off of advertising too.

T: Right. It occurred to me that I was really a favorite for a run-off spot anyway, whether I ran first or second. And of course the Democrats' strength was diluted by the fact that there were five major Democrat candidates and only one Republican candidate, so that made it an almost certainty that I would get into the runoff. And as it turned out, I ran first, with about 35-percent of the vote; Blakley came in second with around 20 percent (these are rough figures); and behind him was Jim Wright, and then Will Wilson, and then I believe Henry Gonzalez and Maury Maverick in that order. Then that put me in the run off with Blakley.

F: Did you have any preference of whom you faced in the runoff?

T: It occurred to me that Blakley would be the best one I could run off against, because I had then figured to pick up the dissident liberal Democrat votes. I thought I would probably pick up most of the Maverick, Gonzalez votes, and probably a sizeable portion of the Wright votes.

F: Did you ever feel the hand of Johnson at all in this campaign?

T: No, I didn't. And I don't think Lyndon really realized that I was the threat that I was. I think had he known it, that perhaps a little bit more would have been done for Blakley, but I think they went too much on the assumption that in a runoff situation, a straight fight with a Democrat, I wouldn't make it.

F: You had gotten 35-percent, that was just about your top.

T: Yes. Under the old plurality system, of course I would have been elected right off the bat.

F: Hands down.

T: Too, Blakley, whom I think a very fine gentlemen, but he had no political acumen whatsoever--absolutely none! He was not a good candidate, he didn't like crowds, he was not a particularly good speaker. So he had his problems. He was adequately funded, and again I had to really scrap for money.

But too I think my political judgment was a lot better than Blakley's. Lynn Landrum(?) of the Dallas News used to refer to me as the "li'l perfessor" in a somewhat contemptuous way, but the fact of the matter was the "li'l professor" had been teaching political science for some years and knew more about it than Bill Blakley did.

F: Well you made sense, and Blakley seemed kind of lost.

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- T: I exploited the divisions in the Democratic party too. The dissident Democrats voted for me.
- F: Were you ever actually approached personally by the liberal wing to talk about ways and means, what they would like to do?
- T: I certainly had communication with them. I guess Maury Maverick and I were about as friendly opponents as we could have been during the campaign. So I had some liaison.
- F: Has that ever caused you any problem since, the fact that you did have this support from the liberal wings--?
- T: No, because I never had to promise them anything, you see, I never had to commit myself on a position to them. As a matter of fact, they regarded me as a Neanderthal conservative, but they also felt I was an honest one because I wore the Republican label. And their mentality was that the conservative Democrats are not really Democrats, and of course still that's their view. So in effect they put it this way--"If we're going to have a Republican senator, let's have one that calls himself a Republican." That was their rationale.
- F: Were you surprised at how well you ran in the race?
- T: Well I just barely won it by a margin of about 10,000 votes--about 51-percent or a little less. Of course it was a low turnout. In a high turnout situation--
- F: What do you do to make people come out in a case like that?
- T: In this particular instance we had a superior means of getting our voters out, because the Republican organization organized in the urban areas using a page right out of the COPE handbook on political organization, the Peter O'Donnell's of this state who knew how to get people out to canvass precincts and do that kind of thing. This is what we did. We produced our vote and the other side didn't. There was not much interest in the race, and so in that particular instance we could wield an influence out of proportion to our numbers.
- F: I always felt that if you were just grading an organization in this case, that the Republican organization got the A in this instance for hard work.
- T: Right. The Republican organization performed and the Democratic organization didn't perform. The Democrats always used to fight in battles at primaries centered around courthouse cliques, whereas the Republicans started the fighting in general elections. Still the Democrats are not as good at fighting general elections as the Republicans are, although they beat us pretty regularly, but that's just by virtue of sheer numbers. Again,

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we polled a percentage of votes 'way out of proportion to the people that identified themselves as Republicans.

F: This is getting ahead of the story, but I think it's appropriate right now. Do you get the feeling that in some ways Johnson never made the transition completely from the courthouse?

T: Yes, I think so, probably never did, from the standpoint of his organizational mentality.

F: That's what I mean. That he'd get key people in "Litho" County and they'd look after him.

T: Yes, right.

F: And that the world has moved beyond that.

T: It has. That world of course still exists back in the smaller counties, the rural counties. This is where we have our difficulties and problems.

F: That's where you've got the long fight.

You went to Washington, and of course you're immediately catapulted into a national figure because you're the first Republican senator from this state since Lord knows when.

T: Since Reconstruction.

F: And of course you've also taken Lyndon Johnson's seat, which gives you a double exposure there. Now then, what was the reaction in the Republican circles--the Republicans have just lost a national election and are a little gloomy, although it has been a squeaker and they can take some comfort in that, but they have lost the White House anyhow? But here comes a new fresh ray of hope out of the man's backyard.

T: I was something of a unique figure, of course, and I think that my election did, after having lost the Nixon campaign in '60, I think my election did give the party a little shot in the arm. And of course the Republicans paraded me around Washington for days. I was in instant demand as a speaker for Republican affairs over the country, and so very early got to be a national politician really, and not just confined to state politics, and something of a national Republican figure--maybe not from the standpoint of the general public, but from the standpoint of the party rank and file. I was identifiable to the party rank and file.

F: Did that help you in your committee assignments?

T: Really, they made a great to-do about giving me the labor committee and the banking

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committee. But as a matter of fact, that's what was available, and that's why I got those two committees. I've long since departed the labor committee, but still continue to serve on the banking committee, and am the shadow chairman and ranking member.

F: Did Johnson swear you in?

T: Yes, he did.

F: What was that ceremony like?

T: I was sworn in at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, and Goldwater had been down in the state campaigning for me. And Barry had made a great thing about how the great day in his life was going to be watching Lyndon Johnson swear me in. And that day Goldwater had a speaking engagement some place else and was not there. But it was a party fund-raiser that he was just heavily committed to, and couldn't back out of. And so the then Vice President, Lyndon Johnson, when the hour arrived for me to be sworn in, said that he was delighted to welcome a new senator from his state, and his only regret was that the distinguished senator from Arizona could not be there. So he really put Barry down good!

And nobody could have been more gracious to me and to my family than Lyndon was that day. I was off doing something else--I think I was at a Republican policy luncheon or something--and he took my parents and my sister and my wife and kids all to lunch that day. They even made special gallery arrangements for about 250 Texans who had come up to see me sworn in. All the Republicans--this was a culmination of all they'd been working for.

F: This was a day to celebrate.

T: And he even allowed a little demonstration in the gallery, which is contrary to Senate rules, when I was sworn in. I might say it was not a wild demonstration, but there was a little clapping and cheering.

F: It also was a little different in that you didn't come in with a group of new delegates, you came in singly.

Did you feel that being from Texas at this time helped you in your Senate career, or hindered you, or made no difference?

T: Considering the nature of the Senate, to a certain extent representing a large state like Texas is an inhibition on you in trying to be a real influence in the Senate. Because a man from a big state has so many constituency problems that he has got to be personally concerned with, whereas a man from a state like Delaware or Wyoming--

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F: You often envy the old boy from New Hampshire, don't you?

T: Yes. They've got more time to spend on purely legislative business, so it's a little easier for them. That's why you see very often the men from the small states surfacing as the more influential members of the Senate, and it's just the nature of the job. But I've tried to balance it. And now I do have a leadership responsibility on my side of the aisle by virtue of my rank and position on the banking committee, and ranking position on some subcommittees.

F: Did you ever get to observe the Yarborough-Johnson relationship in those days? Or was that strictly on the Democratic side?

T: There was certainly no love lost between Ralph and Lyndon, that was always apparent. And of course as you remember on that fateful day in Dallas, Yarborough didn't even want to be associated with Johnson. But they tried to achieve a rapprochement after Lyndon became President, and it was of course due to Lyndon's intervention that Ralph didn't get a major opponent in 1964 in the primary. Joe Kilgore was all set to go, and that's no secret.

F: If there was ever a bride--

T: Yes, left at the church. That of course strained relations between Lyndon and John Connally. But they had sort of an uneasy truce going on during that period, as I judged it. Now I'm not privy to what actually went on between them--

F: Did you through the years, from the time you had campaigned for Yarborough, had you kept in any kind of touch with Yarborough or was--

T: Oh no. I was just a kid passing out handbills in '38. Yarborough ran third in the primary that year, behind Walter Woodull(?) and Jerry Mann. Jerry Mann eventually won. I didn't know enough about politics to know who the liberal was, or who the conservative was, or anything else.

F: He was just an old East Texas boy running--

T: Just an old East Texas boy. And a lawyer friend of mine there in Tyler had his son and me out passing out handbills--that's when I lived in Tyler.

F: Did you see much of Yarborough in the Senate?

T: Yes. Yarborough and I saw each other now and then. We occasionally caucused on some matter of common interest to the state. We worked together for example on the Hemisfair legislation. And our personal relationship was always cordial.

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- F: I would rather gather that Yarborough, again, would be in that liberal mentality that he would respect you as an honest Republican opponent more than he would some Democrat.
- T: I think that's true. I was of the impression, after I arrived there, that Yarborough would rather look 'way across the chamber and see me sitting over there than be sitting next to a conservative Democrat from Texas on his side.
- F: Did you get the feeling that Johnson did shortchange (this is during the vice presidential years) Yarborough on patronage?
- T: That's Ralph's impression.
- F: In other words, Johnson is still the most senior senator from Texas.
- T: Right. As a matter of fact back in '69 when I was of course trying to get some Republican appointments down here in places that had been held by Democrats, I ran into some problems with Ralph. And when I'd try to talk to him about it, he always said, "You know, old Lyndon always squeezed me out on patronage. He never gave me this and never gave me that." I haven't heard the President's side of that story, but I have heard Ralph's.
- F: So he felt pretty definite on this, huh?
- T: Yes.
- F: Did the Texas congressional delegation cold-shoulder you, accept you as a fellow Texan? I know of course that going back to when Bruce Alger was in Congress they had closed down--I think they did take Bob Rogers in, didn't they, when they used to have those Wednesday luncheons.
- T: They never let Alger in.
- F: But at that time they decided to make a straight Democratic affair.
- T: Yes, it was straight Democrat. Too, Alger and Sam Rayburn didn't get along. As a matter of fact, Mr. Sam despised Bruce, and so they just didn't get along.

And they were friendly enough to me when I first came there. They were apparently willing to look me over anyway. And Frank Ikard, who was the congressman from my district, about the first week I was there took me around--as a matter of fact, volunteered to do it. He couldn't have been kinder. Frank and I have been good friends ever since. He took me around and introduced me to each member of the Texas

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delegation, individually; took the time and over a span of about two days to walk me around the House office buildings and introduce me to everybody, sit and chat with them a minute, maybe have a cup of coffee or something like that. So I was immediately introduced to all the members of the Texas delegation. Then he took me in to see Mr. Sam. Mr. Sam chatted with me, gave me some advice, and said a few words about Bruce Alger, and concluded the visit by saying, "Well, young man, I've heard you're a gentleman. I hope you stay that way." So that was Mr. Sam's last advice to me.

F: He was at least superficially pleasant. Was Bruce, because of certain activities that we needn't identify, a little bit of a millstone sometimes for you to carry?

T: No, I wouldn't say that. Bruce and I got along very well together. Bruce is a very inflexible man, and a suspicious man. He questioned the intellectual honesty of men like Mr. Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, and so he just didn't make any friends. I have never yet publicly said one disparaging word about a fellow member of the Texas delegation, and don't intend to, although some of them have been inclined to say things about me publicly from time to time. I won't respond. As a matter of fact, Henry Gonzalez has called me a "shiftless skunk" publicly.

F: That's just good Mexican rhetoric.

T: Yes.

F: Where were you on November 22, 1963?

T: I was mid-air between Friendship Airport and St. Louis.

F: There's a certain protocol in this when the President of the United States comes into your state, it isn't always observed. Were you invited at all to be here--?

T: To my recollection I was not because this was strictly a party fence-mending operation.

F: This wasn't like the President coming down to dedicate NASA or something?

T: No. It wasn't anything like that.

F: Were you privy at all to the establishment of the NASA headquarters down in Houston?

T: No, I was not. You see, that decision was made, I believe, before I went into the Senate. It wasn't established there until about a year or two after I was in the Senate, but I mean the authorization I think had already been--

F: Did you ever have the feeling that there was any punitive activity against your home

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district back and around Wichita Falls because--?

T: No, there wasn't, because I didn't carry it the first time I ran, so there was no reason to punish it.

F: Closing Sheppard was never a threat?

T: No. And of course Frank Ikard represented that district, and Mr. Sam liked Frank.

F: And that's next door to Mr. Sam too, which makes a difference.

Did you hear the news on the plane, or was it after you landed, or what?

T: After I landed. When I landed in St. Louis, a TWA rep met me just as I stepped off the plane and said, "Senator, call your office. Something has happened to our President." And I knew he was in Texas. I flew to a phone booth and got through to my administrative assistant, and he gave me the word.

F: What happened to you the next several days?

T: I went back to Washington that night. I was actually on my way to St. Louis for a Midwestern States Republican Conference. I was to be a speaker. What we were really doing was doing some groundwork for Barry Goldwater--for his presidential candidacy. That's why I was out at the Midwestern States Republican Conference.

F: Did you feel that this sidetracked the '64 strategy, or intensified it, or what? Do you remember your reaction on that?

T: About ten days after the President was shot, Barry Goldwater summoned a group of his friends into his apartment here in Washington to make a determination about what we should do now. And most of us felt that we had the momentum, we were going, we could get the nomination for him, and we'd better keep on rather than trying to switch horses, or rather than stand down.

F: Did you get the feeling that--

T: We didn't know what the climate would be because we couldn't tell how popular Lyndon would be or anything like that, but we felt we should go on. Whether it was a right decision or wrong decision, I don't think that any Republican could have won in '64 regardless.

F: In retrospect, or maybe even then, did you get the feeling that Kennedy would have been a more vulnerable candidate?

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- T: Yes. As a matter of fact, we had a Gallup poll in hand from the month before that showed Goldwater with a slight edge over Kennedy. Kennedy's popularity was in the descent at that time, and that's why he was doing a lot of this political fence-mending in that period.
- F: I've always felt that about the best thing a President can do for his image is to get shot.
- T: There was a little bit too much Camelot going on, you know. And it was rubbing a lot of people the wrong way.
- F: But now you've got a new opponent and a whole new ballgame.
- T: Right.
- F: But were you optimistic as '64 developed, or did you merely feel that you had to get a position established to give Johnson something to run against?
- T: We felt we had to go on with our game plan regardless of what Johnson did. But in the final analysis, as time wore on, we knew we were had. We knew that something cataclysmic would have to happen before we could have any reasonable prospects for victory. And we were like lemmings marching to the sea. It's the strangest political experience I've ever had, and I don't expect to ever have another one like it.
- F: Did you have a certain suicidal feeling, or were you kind of undergirded by a feeling that "we just got caught on circumstances, and over the long haul this is a good thing?"
- T: We thought that it was just possible that Johnson would just not be acceptable to his party after Kennedy.
- F: It's still too early for that. You'd have been right if he'd had longer.
- T: But as a matter of fact I feel reasonably certain that Kennedy would have dumped Johnson in '64. That talk was rife in Washington.
- F: Did you have any real insights on this, or was this just kind of an amalgamation?
- T: Well obviously I was not privy to the crowd around Kennedy, to their discussions, but it was a little bit apparent to everybody. The general impression was certainly that this was what Bobby Kennedy's aim was, to dump Johnson. And if you remember the fierce, angry reactions to Johnson in the period immediately following the assassination, not just the circumstances of the moment but something that was coming to the surface all along, I think. This is all my own view, I should hasten to add, I have nothing that was in the way of evidence that substantiates this, but this is the way I saw it at the time.

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- F: Well, I think you and I would be agreed that if they could have blocked the line of succession they would have.
- T: They would have. And I think one of the reasons that they wanted to get rid of Lyndon in '64 is they wanted a stand-in vice president so they could in effect name their successor without having a Vice President that may have a power-base of his own and could in effect challenge the President's organization at the national convention.
- F: Did you get to know Humphrey at all well in this period?
- T: Oh yes, as senators do get to know each other.
- F: Did you get the feeling that from the time where you have in a sense recovered from the Kennedy shooting and we're beginning to think about politics again--?
- T: We didn't recover from the Kennedy shooting for a long time. As Bill Miller, our vice presidential candidate in '64, said to me after the election, he said: "The American people were not prepared to assassinate two Presidents within a year." And what was really working against us was the sense of guilt and recrimination over the Kennedy assassination, and we were never in the ballpark.
- F: In that early period of the Johnson Administration when he was calling in various people and trying to get a grasp on things, did he ever call you down, or was he talking to Republicans? He was bringing people in the first few months with great regularity from everywhere, including Congress.
- T: Yes. I don't recall being called in until we got into the Viet Nam thing, and then he did call me in. But he did invite me to the White House on several occasions. He always made it a point to stop and talk to me. Then when I pitched in on his side on Viet Nam, his side to the extent of supporting the basic policy but being opposed to his piecemeal gradualism approach, that apparently was the thing that--and I would take him to task on domestic issues with some degree of regularity--but the thing that apparently he chose to acknowledge about me was the fact that I supported him on his most difficult, and as it turned out, fatal issue.

So when I would go to Viet Nam, when I'd come back, he'd call me for a little debriefing. I'd sit with him and with Walt Rostow and just give them my impressions, that sort of thing, so he had an interest in what my impressions were.

End of interview.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement
By John G. Tower
to the
Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, John G. Tower, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. Please substitute paragraph "b" as indicated and paragraph "c".
3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.
4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed by John Tower on April 25, 1972

Accepted by Harry J. Middleton for the Archivist of the United States on February 27, 1975

Original Deed of Gift on File at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 2313 Red River, Austin, TX 78705

AC 74-256

Preparation of "Gift of Personal Statement"

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- B. If you wish to restrict the use of your transcript for a period of time beyond the date of the opening of the Johnson Library, a new statement will be prepared (either by you or by us) deleting paragraph 2 and substituting the following, with one of the alternatives:

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