

INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 22, 1968

INTERVIEWEE: W. MARVIN WATSON

INTERVIEWER: Dorothy Pierce

PLACE: Postmaster General Watson's office, Washington, D.C.

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P: General Watson, to begin with I'd like to establish your background and verify that I have the correct information. You were appointed postmaster general by President Johnson in April of this year, 1968. Prior to that, from February 1965 to April 1968, you were a special assistant to President Johnson and served as appointment secretary. In 1964 you worked on Mr. Johnson's election and also were elected Texas Democratic state chairman. From 1957 to 1965 you were executive assistant to E. B. Germany, president of Lone Star Steel Company located near Daingerfield, Texas, where you presently have a home. Is this background information all correct?

W: It is all correct. It is true that I was executive assistant to the President of Lone Star Steel, but I officed in Dallas although our home was in Daingerfield.

P: When did you first meet Lyndon Johnson and what were the circumstances?

W: He was a candidate for the [U.S.] Senate in Texas in 1948 while I was a student at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. As a candidate he was in Waco campaigning on several occasions. But during this campaign, as a student, many of us decided which Democrat that was in the race that we wished to support. I chose Lyndon Johnson as the candidate

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that I thought would best serve my home state and so worked in his behalf as a student in the city of Waco, Texas at that time.

P: Did you meet him on your university campus at that time?

W: No. I met him downtown in Waco at one of his trips, one of the rallies that they had there.

P: What were your first impressions of him?

W: One, that he was a very alert man; two, very knowledgeable on the problems of our state and I thought offered the best solutions to those problems.

P: When did you first personally yourself become involved actively in Texas politics?

W: Well, I think I was active in 1948 on behalf of a candidate. It was not until 1951 that I became active in party affairs within the state, and at that time I lived in Daingerfield, Texas.

P: In what capacity did you serve?

W: I had no official capacity in 1951. I just worked within my precinct and within the four precincts of Morris County, Texas at that time in behalf of organizing or attempting to organize Democrats to have an active and ongoing organization within that county.

P: Would you continue with that and bring it up to the present as far as, well, prior to your 1965 appointment to the White House?

W: All right. In Morris County we did organize or attempt an organization that would be active in the Democratic Party affairs of that county. In 1952 I worked on the county

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level reference the Democratic candidate for president and the Democratic ticket of Texas. Then of course in 1954 and 1956 and so forth, each election year I did the same.

It was in 1954 that I became interested, actively so, in the Democratic candidacies for governor. We had a run-off election in 1954 which was an awfully close election between then-Governor [Allan] Shivers and candidate Ralph Yarborough. Then in 1956 Governor Shivers did not run for re-election. Several people did run. The two that were in the run-off were Price Daniel, who had served as attorney general of the state of Texas and prior to that speaker of the [Texas] House of Representatives, and then had run for United States Senate in 1952 and was elected to that position. Then in 1956 he came back to run for governor in the state of Texas. The run-off election was between Daniel and Yarborough. I had known Price Daniel for some time as a friend and so I attempted to assist in his election and worked within twenty-two counties of Northeast Texas in his behalf and campaigned with him when he was in those particular counties.

It was also in 1956, that being an election year in Texas, we have two state conventions. The first is for the purpose of electing delegates to the national convention, and the second is for the purpose of adopting a state Democratic platform which the [nominee for] governor of the state of Texas runs on, and to elect committeemen and women for the State Democratic Executive Committee. So 1956 was an active year for those that were involved in the political affairs of the state in a party way. It was there that Governor Shivers, having bolted the Democratic Party in behalf of President Eisenhower in 1952, some of us felt that that same posture would be taken in 1956.

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Therefore, at the precinct level and at the county level of our party conventions we passed a resolution endorsing Senator Lyndon B. Johnson for the favorite son candidate from Texas. So when the convention for the election of national delegates and national committeeman and committeewoman was held in Texas in 1956--it was in Dallas--the convention did elect Lyndon Johnson as the favorite son candidate to the national convention. There was a conflict about who should serve as national committeeman and committeewoman. Eventually Byron Skelton was elected as national committeeman; Mrs. Frankie Randolph was elected as national committeewoman at that time.

Then at the [September] state convention, which was held in Fort Worth that year, Price Daniel had been declared the winner by something over three thousand votes as the Democratic nominee for governor. So then the party struggle at that convention resulted between those who supported the Democratic nominee Price Daniel, and those that still supported the candidate Ralph Yarborough, whom Price Daniel had defeated in that primary. So eventually the party machinery in Texas, being made up as it is, each of the thirty-one senatorial districts appoints a person to the various committees of the convention, and it became [on] a committee of rules or credentials or platform and so forth that the votes became very critical. Eventually that convention was controlled by Governor-Elect Price Daniel. This only became possible after the then-Speaker Sam Rayburn and the then-Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson worked within the convention with their friends throughout the state in the simple theory that Price Daniel had been nominated by a majority of the Democrats, and therefore he deserved the credit or deserved the support

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of the Democratic Party of the state. So the platform that he and his people had proposed was finally adopted.

Personally that was the year that I felt like I would like to represent the First Senatorial District of Texas on the executive committee. I attempted to be elected to that in my senatorial caucus and I failed. So I went back into my home area knowing that I would try again in 1958. So when the 1958 convention was held in San Antonio, Texas I was finally elected as the committeeman for the State Democratic Executive Committee from the First Congressional District. I was re-elected to that position in 1960 and 1962, and then in 1964 I was elected state Democratic chairman.

P: Did you have any contacts with Lyndon Johnson in the fifties?

W: Oh, yes. It was in 1951 that I really first got to know him personally, as I represented Northeast Texas in water conservation projects, particularly in the Cypress Basin, which Daingerfield had a direct interest in, and also on projects and programs for that part of the state that involved such things as housing and matters of that type, and particularly those things affecting the cities that the federal government was really just now becoming involved in, which were water and streets and sewers and problems of that type. In fact, even the fire department of our little hometown, there was a program--I do not know when it originated--that allowed surplus equipment to go to small communities of this type that were not financially able to buy elaborate fire equipment.

So it was through matters of this type that I was in Washington and I did get to know him. Primarily, however, it was through conservation, where seven very small

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Northeast Texas communities formed together and made a water district. The official name is the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District, where the federal government in 1946 had authorized a flood control project to be built in Cypress Basin. These seven towns, through their representatives, decided to petition the federal government to add height to this dam, and in so doing creating a water supply for the Cypress Basin. The little water district, seven towns through their representatives, would pay the federal government for the expense of adding the height to the dam, acquiring the additional real estate, relocating the utilities involved and clearing the land involved. So it was through projects of that type that I got to know him rather personally.

P: Would you describe a couple of the times where you personally were in contact with him beyond the official capacity of contacting him as your senator.

W: Oh, I think possibly one. I did contact him because he was my senator, senator from Texas. Out of that obviously grew a friendship. He must have believed that I had the interest of the people of that area at heart and so he more or less accepted that representation and would work to correct the problems that existed there in the realm of things the federal government was involved in. Of course, during that time I got to know Mrs. Johnson. So I was in their home on a few occasions back during those days as he was a senator. Of course, I know that I worked for his re-election in 1956 [1954]. So it was a personal thing. It was in 1956 that I became one of his district coordinators. He had, as all personalities that run for statewide office in Texas have had and still do have, his own political organization in the state. That's made up of a district chairman, which covers a

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certain number of counties, and a county chairman, and of course all hope to have even a precinct organization where they have representatives from each of the precincts. So I took on the responsibility of attempting to organize my congressional district, which included eleven counties in Northeast Texas, Congressman Wright Patman's district, in behalf of Lyndon Johnson. Our part of the state did support the Senator in his re-election.

P: General Watson, some political terms are going to come up and reoccur, both in Texas politics and in national politics and in your position in the White House, and so I'd like to ask you if you would classify your political philosophy?

W: I'll be happy to classify it. Some people often refer to me as a liberal, others as a conservative. It's really based on what subject that might be discussed. I really consider myself a moderate if there must be a label because I do believe that there are certain functions within the society in which we live that the federal government must involve themselves in. I think there is a historical background for that reasoning, and that is the states and the local communities literally have not taxed themselves or taxed their people to such an extent that they can afford the services to satisfy the desires of their own hometown people, their own people from the various states. And if the desires are not satisfied there, then who will satisfy it? I think the problems that are created by it and those that run across state lines, they're the problems the same in Texas or New York, California or Connecticut, then eventually if the states and local subdivisions do not respond, then the federal government will respond. So in those areas I think the federal government should be involved. Where a state will take it upon themselves to furnish the services needed

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and desired by the people of their state, then I think the state should do it. So I sometimes walk a narrow line in between the two, but basically where a society is not being satisfied.

For instance, on the very problems, some of the problems we have today, where a good percentage of our people in this country do not have adequate food and proper food, then obviously it would be better if a county or a city or a state accepted some of those responsibilities. But as far as I know, few have indicated any responsibility. Therefore there must be a program set up that would satisfy the needs of these individuals, and I think the great majority of Americans agree that that condition should not exist in the most affluent society of all history. So that then becomes a federal program, in my opinion, not because it should have been that way but only because events have forced it to be that way. Housing ends up in the same category. Decent standard housing should be afforded the people of this great affluent society. Where a state and where a city has failed to do so, then there's really no other government agency left except the federal government to assure that these things are done. So I think those things will be done, whether peaceably or whether it will be after the battle, so to speak. But the needs of a society where we're such a rich nation must have some response.

P: Do you define the terms conservative and liberal as being respectively to the right and left of federal aid and state aid?

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W: I really do not. However the newspaper accounts and the writers sometimes define it that way. Therefore those of us that may disagree with it sometime find ourselves in having to almost accept it because that seems to be the thing that people agree on.

P: You won't have a semantic battle then.

How would you describe your present relations with Mr. Johnson?

W: Very personal, very cordial, very friendly.

P: How would you characterize him?

W: He's very likely the most complex personality I've ever known, one that really only has one purpose in life, and that is to assure that this country in which we live, this economic system that has developed such a strong nation, that it survives the problems that it has internally and externally. Really the only thing that I believe he wants out of life is that, one, the country be at peace, and, two, the world be at peace, and, three, that each of us recognize our responsibilities and try to exercise some control over those responsibilities, but giving the best we can to either our country or to ourselves. And so he is not a selfish man. All he wants to do is to create an atmosphere and an attitude where each of us will contribute the most that we have.

P: Has he changed much from your first impressions of him in 1948 to your current closeness to him and comprehension of him as a man and president?

W: Oh, yes, he sure has. I think earlier I had said something about his re-election in 1956. Obviously he was not up for re-election in 1956, it was 1954 he was re-elected to the

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Senate. It was 1956 when he was elected favorite son from the state of Texas at the national convention.

Oh, yes, I think he has changed. He's changed because, one, the knowledge that he had in 1948, or 1951 when I first got to know him personally, has increased considerably. His knowledge had been limited to those experiences that he had had since the early fifties. Obviously he's grown because his knowledge has grown of the nation's affairs and the world's affairs. In that respect he's changed. But his desire and his willingness and his eagerness to learn the facts literally has never changed. He has always been interested. But in those early days he was literally not in a position to know, and as he grew in stature and as additional responsibilities were given to him, it becomes obvious that more information was furnished along at the same time.

P: Do you see in Mr. Johnson's personality an ambitious approach to politics?

W: I think through the times, whether recognized even by him or not, that he had an ambitious approach to politics, if that means additional responsibilities. I think his life exemplifies that because, one, he had to be elected to Congress against great odds from the Tenth Congressional District of Texas, and he succeeded. He had to be elected to the Senate, and although as we know, he was not elected to the Senate the first time he ran--a governor defeated him--then the second time that he ran in 1948 he was elected, and he defeated a governor of the state of Texas. So that was no easy matter, to go from representing a few people in one congressional district, to representing two hundred and fifty-four counties of our state.

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So it was a hard route, but he made it. He made it because he had a dream, he had a vision, and he had a program which would solve some of the problems of our state, and in return I think he may have set a pattern for settling and solving some of the problems of other states. But he was elected in 1948 on that basis, and then of course has grown in stature from originally being elected to the minority leadership post to the United States Senate to the majority leader post of the United States Senate. Each of these steps allowed him to learn more. Each of these steps allowed him to progress further until the time in 1960 when he decided finally that he would accept the nomination for presidency of his party, and he was defeated in that effort.

That effort primarily was done by other people. I happened to have been one of those that was present when John Connally, lifetime friend of the President, and Jim Blundell and George Bevel and Warren Woodward and I were banded together as a small group of friends of the President that worked first here in Washington without his support, to say the least, in trying to see if the possibility did exist for him to receive the Democratic nomination for president. Eventually, of course, as we all know, he was not nominated. But the successful candidate for the nomination did choose him to be the candidate for vice president in 1960.

P: General Watson, back in 1948 when you first took an interest in Mr. Johnson's politics, did you think then of Mr. Johnson's presidential possibilities? Did that occur to you?

W: Oh, no, not at all. When I was twenty-four years of age and a student, after having served some time in the Marine Corps, I'm not sure that I even knew other than except what a

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civics book may have told me, how you got nominated or elected for president. It was obvious those things did not run through my mind in reference to this man that was a candidate for the Senate. But I was thinking only in terms of the state of Texas at that time.

P: Were you very aware of the circumstances surrounding the very controversial eighty-seven vote victory in this 1948 election?

W: Oh, yes, I think I was aware of part of it, certainly not all of it. I was not in the state headquarters, so to speak, so my information was rather limited to what the radio or newspaper may have said about it in 1948.

P: What was your assessment of this selection?

W: Well, basically I think under the procedures that were going on during those days, that he was fortunate, very fortunate, to wind up with an eighty-seven vote lead, because you have to go back and realize he had a several thousand vote lead when the polls actually closed and the votes came in. But then there were found some boxes were still out, so I thought he was very fortunate to end up being the victor, because this same situation had existed when he was defeated for the Senate, when it was supposed by most that he had been elected to the Senate and then late returns proved that he had not been elected.

P: This was against Pappy [W. Lee] O'Daniel, right, in 1941?

W: Right.

P: Did you think there were any questionable activities occurring during this election?

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W: Oh, well, of course I was not involved in any precinct or any county election committee, and so I really do not know. You sometimes wonder when a man has run for a statewide office twice and the first time an apparent majority was lost, and the second time he was up for election, statewide office, it seemed that an apparent majority was being lost. So it did raise some questions obviously, but as far as having any facts on it, I do not.

P: Did you participate in any other capacity in this 1948 election?

W: No, I did not. Oh, I may have tried to talk Mother and Dad into voting for him, some friends, such as that, but that would be all.

P: How did you politically feel about the Democratic walkout at the national convention?

W: In 1952?

P: When they nominated Strom Thurmond, with Truman versus [Thomas] Dewey in 1948.

W: In 1948?

P: Yes.

W: Well, of course, I've always felt that the party should support the nominee, whoever that nominee may be. That those that may choose to support another personality, another individual, another philosophy, they should support that viewpoint as strongly as they know how. But once a majority [of] votes are in, then it behooves all of us to work within our party, whichever party the individual may have chosen, and to work for the election of that candidate of the majority view. That's true whether it's in a Democratic primary or whether it's in a Democratic convention. Conversely it's true for those that work within the Republican Party, that's just the philosophy that I have. Therefore I've

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always supported every Democratic candidate that ended up on the general election ballot in the Novembers. Now I may not have supported that candidate in the primaries, but in any event, I've always supported the party and I think that's the best position for anyone working within any given party.

P: I know you mentioned earlier that in 1956 that you were working within Mr. Johnson's political organization. In 1952 the national election, national convention, were you involved in Texas?

W: Only to the extent of the precinct conventions and county conventions. I did not attend the state convention.

P: Were you aware of Mr. Johnson's potentiality or interest in the national ticket either as a-- well, it has been said for vice presidential possibilities in a geographic balance of the ticket.

W: Only through the press reports on that. Of course, by that time I had met on a personal basis Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson, and by then I must admit that I realized that he understood the problems and the opportunities of more than one state and that he understood the opportunities of a people of a nation. Therefore from that time on, he not only would be interested in his own home state, but also interested in a much broader sense in the national picture.

P: Of course, that was the occasion when Shivers and the Dixiecrats bolted, as you've already mentioned. What do you feel that the Texas political climate was at this point?

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W: It was very obvious by the elections of 1952 and 1956 for the presidency of the United States in Texas, and for that matter the nation, that a great majority of voters supported General Eisenhower first for election and two for re-election. Texas certainly fell with the majority in that effort. So I assume that pretty well speaks for the climate of the state.

P: What sort of a reaction or impact did this have on Mr. Johnson in your judgment? He did stay with the party, of course, and I believe you did, too.

W: Oh, yes, he stayed with the party. Although in 1952 I did not work in the state headquarters for the election of Mr. [Adlai] Stevenson, in 1956 I did. He and Mr. Rayburn were--I want to say co-chairmen; I've forgotten the exact title. But he and Speaker Rayburn did head up the campaign for the election of Mr. Stevenson for president in 1956 I know. And of course by that time I was working very closely with the political organization in Texas, the Democratic Party, and of course did see the Speaker and did see Senator Johnson in and out of headquarters quite often as they traveled the state and tried to have what impact they could on the election. We had a few polls, if polls are indicators, that we were having a difficult time in Texas in 1956.

P: You're indicating in part that this was from the disruption of the political base beginning in 1952 with the bolt from the Democratic Party?

W: Well, if the bolt affected people's vote in Texas, I could say that. I do not necessarily believe that because a hundred people left a convention of any political persuasion that that necessarily brings several hundreds of thousands of votes along with them. But certainly it has some impact, I'm not sure that I know how to gauge that impact.

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P: Let's continue on to 1956 when you were more actively involved. Did you think that he was a serious candidate in 1956?

W: No, I do not think he was a serious candidate in the sense of his desires. I think those that recognized his ability both from Texas and really from Washington, and that would be primarily the congressmen he had served with and the senators, I think there was becoming a very sincere awareness [among them] of his abilities. And so, many did feel that he should receive serious consideration for a spot on the national ticket. But whether he felt that way or not, I do not know.

P: Do you think that this, in your judgment, was in any way a preparation for entering the 1960 campaign?

W: Not in the slightest. Not as far as he was concerned. I just know that there were others that believed very strongly he should be a candidate. But I do know some of the restraints that he stated, and I do know that he was not near as interested in being a candidate as others around him or some that knew him felt that he should be. So I see no relationship whatsoever between 1956 and 1960. In fact, in my mind I know there's no relationship.

P: What were the problems that developed in organizing the state behind Johnson as a favorite son candidate?

W: In 1960?

P: In 1956.

W: Really there weren't any.

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P: No political factional splits?

W: Oh, there were some that said that he did not represent their particular viewpoint and that group tried to claim that they were the liberal faction of the Democratic Party in Texas. But there was no matter of substance to that split and there was certainly no--anyway, they were not successful by quite a few votes.

P: You said that you did attend the 1956 state convention in Dallas?

W: Yes.

P: Or--no, that's the governor's convention.

W: Well, the state convention in preparation for the national convention was in Dallas in [May] 1956, and if I recall correctly and I'm sure it's right, it was the state convention for the governor that was in Fort Worth in [September] 1956. So in preparation for the national convention, the convention was in Dallas.

P: You had indicated earlier that Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn both came in and helped that state convention, or was it the governor's convention that you were speaking of?

W: I was speaking of the governor's convention.

P: The governor's convention. Was that normal for the--?

W: I thought it was normal for any dedicated Democrat in this particular case to try to assist the Democratic nominee, in this case for governor. Yes, I considered it to be normal. I considered it to be abnormal that it was necessary for them to do anything except attend and vote.

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P: Was there any possibility of the conservative element in the state losing out to the liberal element in this thing if Mr. Johnson did not come in and bring his support in organizing the convention, or the meeting?

W: One, no one would know what the outcome would be if he had not been there. But certainly it was a stronger convention in support of Governor-Elect Price Daniel because he was there.

P: Is it possible in these governors' conventions that the various factions can replace the name of the governor on the ticket, it being their man as opposed to what the precinct voting has indicated? If they hold control of the state convention?

W: That was discussed in 1956, and if I recall correctly, there had never been such an effort made in the state as far as anyone there knew. But of course some in the convention felt that that was what they would be trying to do or were trying to do. But I do not believe the courts would have upheld such a position, because in that particular case Price Daniel had won the Democratic nomination in a statewide election in a run-off and therefore in that he received the majority votes of those who voted in the Democratic primary that year. It became apparent his name should be the one to go on the ballot no matter what a party or certain people in the party may have thought about that, whether they supported him or did not. And of course his name did go on the ballot and he was elected to be governor in November of 1956.

P: Were you involved in getting the delegations from Houston and El Paso to commit their votes to the nomination of Daniel?

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W: I was involved in trying to at least point out what I considered to be the reasonable position, that since a man had been nominated by the majority of those that voted, who had the right to deny him that nomination in the general election. I very likely did talk to individuals that may have been from Houston or El Paso or Austin, Dallas, or various places.

P: I'm sure you're familiar with what I'm talking about. This has of course been written about. In writing about it, it has been said that Mr. Johnson, of course, was the person who put the pressure on to bring these stray delegates into the fold. You were not in that capacity or working in that direction?

W: Yes, I had worked all day in that capacity and the night before as well.

P: Can you tell me a little about it?

W: Well, it was just a matter of contacting individuals that I knew from those particular counties from Texas and trying to convince them that this was the best thing to do in behalf of the party. Of course there were so many things [that] went on. We're speaking of the so-called governor's convention in Fort Worth, which was in September. For instance, if there were sides, the side that lost in that convention, they had printed up dummy tickets. Finally we recognized that there were people coming on the floor that were not official delegates nor alternates. So we obviously sealed off those entrances as best we could, because others were there to harass and to cause problems. Then eventually we found that there was one of the restrooms that had been closed off and they were coming through a window. Matters of that type. So you then realized that maybe

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everything wasn't exactly on top of the table, and so then you take whatever position you have to, always protecting the majority vote. So we then set about to take those positions and to go ahead and conclude the convention, which we eventually did.

P: I have read or heard said that whatever procedures may have been applied by one side, if they weren't, the other side would have. Do you believe that that is true, either in manipulating delegates or in persuading the delegates to vote on your side?

W: I do not recall any--in this convention of September, we have some background to go back and check the delegates from the various counties compared to their vote or their position in a convention where delegates to the national convention were selected in the month of May or June of the year. So I do not remember any delegates changing necessarily their position in the final vote. It was just a matter of trying to convince them to stay with their prior positions that Democrats should be nominated, the winning Democrats.

P: Of course, there was a question of credentials on some of the winning delegations, weren't there?

W: Oh, yes. Each convention is set up separately because, one, in the convention that prepares for the national convention, the first convention of the two every four years in Texas, that convention is organized on congressional district boundaries, which now there would be twenty-three. I would think in 1956 there probably were no more than at least twenty-one. Then the following convention, the so-called governor's convention, that's organized according to the state senatorial district boundaries, which are thirty-one. So

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from that viewpoint a district may change its position, but only because there were more counties involved in the first convention of 1956 in each of these caucuses than there were in the second. So because of that change, some counties being in a certain congressional district would not be in a certain senatorial district, that obviously there were changes made on that kind of basis.

P: I don't want to proceed through this too fast, because I know that you've had some very close involvements. Do any particular incidents or events stand out in your mind going back from 1951 up through to 1956 so far? I'd like you to include these if they do occur to you as we go along.

W: Are you speaking from a political standpoint?

P: Just in your relationship with the Johnsons or the political scene in Texas or your role in them.

W: Of course, there are many things that this man or his family did that were impressive to me during that time. If I wanted to speak in representing a certain area of Northeast Texas in reference to water conservation, it was through his efforts--and others from Texas--as a majority leader under a Republican administration in 1954 that finally the first construction funds were made available for what was eventually to be called Lake of the Pines. So it was because of his involvement that that became possible. So things of that type certainly I was very interested in. His coming to East Texas on a couple of visits where we went around the part of the state that I traveled a great deal, all of those

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things are of interest to me. But as far as being of interest to others, I think it's more of a personal interest.

P: Well, they in a way tell a little bit about the man. That's the reason I was asking you about them, if one of them stands out very strongly.

W: Well, of course, I first learned then what this man wants when you approach him on any subject. He wants the facts. And so it may have taken me some time to learn that.

P: Does some particular incident come to mind when you say that?

W: Well, I think the very first time I called him after I moved to Daingerfield, Texas in 1951. This phone call took place in 1951. I put a call in to Senator Lyndon B. Johnson. I had only met him in Waco, so obviously he could not remember me. So the operator said that the Senator was not available--this was in the morning--and said would I talk to his administrative assistant, and I said no, I wanted to talk to the Senator. So that afternoon the operator called back and said, "The Senator is still not available, but his brother, who works in the Senate office very close to him [is available]. Would you talk to Senator Johnson's brother, who certainly will be in contact with the Senator?" I said, "No, I want to talk to Senator Johnson."

So the next morning about eight or eight-thirty Texas time the phone rang and it was Senator Lyndon Johnson. He said, "I understand that your message was such that you could not relay it through my administrative assistant or my brother. Now if you'd please give me that message, I'll try to see what we can do about it." In my particular case I realized all at once that my message could have been given to either one of them,

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but it ended up that it seemed desirable for me to bring some documents to Washington and to go over those documents with him. But from that lesson, I learned that it might be well to go through his staff, which I did, and they only made helpful suggestions. So that when finally in 1951 I had the opportunity to present what I considered to be a very important problem for Northeast Texas, when I got that problem to him it was staffed out in such a way that he could understand it in a few minutes. He knew the pros and cons of it. It was all on one sheet of paper, and he could then make a valid judgment on what his position should be. He made that judgment, and fortunately for me he concurred with what we considered to be a problem and helped us find a solution to it.

P: This was on the water conservation?

W: This was on water conservation.

P: Who was the administrative assistant?

W: Walter Jenkins. His brother Sam Johnson.

P: I'd like to carry on this chronology of events and elections up to 1960. You actively worked in this campaign. What was your capacity?

W: In 1960?

P: In 1960.

W: For the nomination of--of course, in 1960 Senator Johnson was up for re-election in Texas and there were some that very much hoped that he could be nominated on the Democratic ticket for president. Obviously I assisted in his re-election as senator. As I believe the record would reflect, I do not recall that he had an opponent in the Democratic

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primary. But if he did, it was a very minor one. He had no problem on being renominated by the Democratic Party of Texas in 1960. Then the personalities I mentioned worked in a headquarters here in Washington in trying to see if there was support nationwide for his nomination. This was not something that the then-Majority Leader really sanctioned that we do, but the feeling was running so strong in Texas anyway that he should be nominated that some of us just decided we'd see. The first thing that was done was Texas was organized. Johnson for President Clubs sprang up I believe in practically every county and many precincts.

P: Didn't you organize one of the first ones in Texas?

W: I believe I organized very likely the first in Texas. At least it was the first congressional district that was fully organized, which was eleven counties. We organized and later Congressman Wright Patman and others invited Senator Johnson into Northeast Texas, Congressman Patman's congressional district. He was kind enough to come. He had several speaking engagements. There we presented him a book on the list of those members of Johnson for President Clubs in each of the eleven counties. But this was going on all over the state at that time.

P: What did he indicate to you at that time when you saw him were his interests in the nomination?

W: He really gave no indication of interest. He thanked us very much for the efforts and for the confidence that we seemed to be placing in him. But as far as giving an indication of his personal desires, he did not. That was very evident, I must admit, to me.

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P: Why do you say that?

W: Well, because I'm not really sure how I expected him to respond. But I knew that there was such a sincere feeling of the people that I knew that he should be a candidate that I just couldn't imagine why he didn't say that he would be, because we felt so strongly about it. But he did not say that he was a candidate or that he would be a candidate.

P: Why do you think Mr. Johnson did delay in announcing? It has been said that this caused him to lose delegates.

W: I don't think there's any question about it causing him to lose delegates, but if we go back and look at that time of the year, one, an administration was finishing up eight years in Washington and yet the legislative program was one that was being handled by a Democratic Congress, Democratic leadership in both House and Senate, of course. And that this man, as majority leader, had a full-time job. He literally did not have time to go out and campaign. He did not have time to go to the various states, which is essential as we all know, and work with those that are trying to be selected or elected to be delegates to the national [convention] and eventually with the delegates themselves. He was somewhat tied down by his responsibilities as majority leader. Because of that, because if I remember correctly, it was about that time--no, it's somewhat before when the first civil rights bill was passed by the Congress in close to a hundred years. He had been through that grueling battle of the Senate being in session twenty-four hours a day.

So all of these things prohibited him from campaigning. I think, without him ever saying so, that this must have had some effect on his view toward this nomination. I

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must admit now as we look back on it, you really can't run a campaign for president without a candidate, a physical candidate that will be out and speaking to certain individuals and groups and so forth, and he did not have time for that.

P: As a member of his political organization, did you go to other states speaking for him or seeking support?

W: Oh, yes, I did that. I went to other states. But primarily eventually I moved to Washington for several weeks before the L.A. convention and worked here out of what we called headquarters, which was on the second floor or mezzanine of the Ambassador Hotel, a very limited space I must say, and a very limited [number of] persons involved. My job throughout was to at least know how many delegate votes we had and how many opportunities for delegate votes we had throughout the nation. So that was my function within that organization.

P: It has been said that even earlier in 1958 and 1959 Mr. Johnson was lending political support both in terms of money and in speaking engagements to senators who would be coming up for re-election in 1960, and this was part of his mindfulness of his possibilities as a presidential nominee. Do you think there is validity in this or were you aware of this happening? You were a member of the political organization.

W: Oh, I'm very aware of it. I was not personally involved in much of it, but altogether for different reasons. Those that would make such a statement are those that really do not know. He was actively interested as a Democratic leader of the United States Senate that those senators, those incumbents who were up for re-election, that he was there to assist

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and help them in their re-election. This is what he was doing, which is not an unusual pattern for any majority leader if we go back and study a little history.

P: You said that in working in the headquarters at the Ambassador, you were involved in keeping track of the delegate count and possibilities of the ones that would support the Johnson candidacy. Did you find in tallying your candidates that the Kennedy people had beaten you to a lot of states that would have fallen within the support of Lyndon Johnson?

W: Of course I could not say that these states would have eventually supported Lyndon Johnson, assuming that we had two candidates and they both started at the same time. I do not know. I can say that I believe they beat us to every state, that they had had people working for many months and that they had a well-run and organized group that was actively seeking the nomination of John F. Kennedy for president in 1960. So, yes, they beat us to every state I think. But we went ahead and made our contacts.

Just as a matter of record, we always knew exactly where we were. We missed the final tally by two votes on the floor of the convention.

P: What was your tally?

W: So there was never any question. I'm not positive on the figures. If I recall correctly, I showed a tally of 401, I believe the vote was actually 403. But that would be subject to change by the facts.

P: Were you aware of what was called the meetings of the Board of Education with Sam Rayburn trying to persuade Johnson to announce?

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W: I may not have been aware of all of them. I was aware such meetings were taking place, yes.

P: What was the--?

W: It was a strange thing. I was aware of many meetings that took place on that subject. There were senators, there were congressmen, there were professional people, and just people meeting all over this town. I don't mean it was great ballroom meetings, but maybe a dozen, maybe fifty, trying to see what could be done. These were people that knew him, that had watched him work, realized his ability and his intense desire to do what he considered was right anyway. So there were meetings going on everywhere about trying to get this man, one, interested; two, so he would announce, and, three, of course, obviously trying to see if there was any way we could get him nominated. I think if the delegates had been people that had known him, then it would have been a much closer race. In fact, I think he would have been very successful in receiving the nomination. But of course, the delegates do not necessarily know him. The delegates do not necessarily see a majority leader working. So they really had no way to appraise him or no way to know him, unless there was an organization, and as I said earlier, an organization with a candidate who could go out and meet with these people, and we did not have that. So although those that knew him were 100 per cent for him, the majority of delegates just did not know him.

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P: Do you think there was any truth to the idea that has been put forward that he considered only recessing the Senate as opposed to closing it, and this was a form of keeping control of it until after the nomination, the convention?

W: Well, of course, I'd rather believe what he said, because those that try to read his mind may really not know. I believe he said, "We will be in session until we finish our business, because a new administration, a new Congress, will be elected next year. We have had our hearings, our subcommittees and full committees have met and considered and recommended, and the Senate should act." So he was trying to see to it that the Senate would perform their duties of acting on these proposals that were placed before that body. Whether they finished prior to the Democratic convention for that year or not, he felt that the responsibilities of the Senate should be exercised.

P: Did you all formulate any strategy prior to the convention?

W: Yes, I suppose strategy. We had to have a vehicle, which was bodies, people, to be in contact with the delegates from the various states. We had to know, for instance, if favorite sons controlled a delegation and if so, what control did they exercise. Those states that had unpledged delegates meant that every delegate and alternate needed to be contacted. Those states under the unit rule, of which all of these things were allowed in 1960--I might say 1964 and all years preceding that--we just needed to know how they felt about our candidate. And since such a structure was set up, if that's strategy, that's strategy. So people, friends, all on a voluntary basis, did set up and did visit with the

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various delegates and the various groups from within the states. So that strategy did exist, that organization did exist.

P: When you got to the convention, did you feel that John Kennedy and his supporters really controlled it?

W: There's no question, if you're talking about the physical facilities. There's no question they controlled it.

P: And the delegates?

W: Well, I won't say they controlled the delegates. As I said, there's no question where the votes were, and so we were never surprised about that. But the physical facilities, yes, they were controlled. I mean, in any convention someone must be the person that says you can have these many hotel rooms, or you can have this ballroom, or you can have this much space, or you can have these many phones. So those things were all being handled by those that supported the candidacy of Mr. Kennedy.

P: How had this happened if they weren't controlling the committee?

W: Well, they might control the committee, but they may not control the delegates. The delegates I trust were in each case all free people; they would express their own views. But the physical facilities that were normally under the auspices of a convention and its people, they did control those without any question.

P: In your judgment, is there any validity to the charge that Kennedy money had flowed to obtain delegates?

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W: Well, of course, I never saw any money from anyone and so I could not say that that was done, at all. Because really a delegate is an individual that was selected or elected from his state and after he is selected in whatever method, he's something of a free agent to make his own decisions. He is a person that each person running for or trying to seek the nomination usually ends up talking to, or the candidate's representative talks to him. So what is said between that man and that representative, of course I have no way of knowing. So there were obviously rumors and charges, what not, that were stated, but as far as being able to say this or that factually, I could not. And I'm sure, on the other hand, that those representatives that represented us in this behalf, maybe they were sometimes misunderstood.

P: Did you experience any frustrations or surprises that you didn't expect at the convention?

W: Oh, yes, I sure did.

P: Could you please tell me about them?

W: Of course, I had never been that involved with a candidate and I really did not have any knowledge of what went on at a convention other than my limited experience. But when you become involved in behalf of a candidate, then you become more aware of what's going on. For instance, small things such as automobiles. You find delegates like to have transportation in a city, whether it be bus or individual car. You find that delegates usually want to be in one or two hotels and there's obviously not enough hotel rooms to make that possible. So there are always small things. Gallery passes become important, because supporters of a candidate would like to be in the convention hall, particularly on

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the night the president is nominated. If you find that you only have a very few such gallery passes sometimes you ask a question, "Who has a majority of those gallery passes? Who is going to pack the gallery to demonstrate for a certain candidate?" When you find the answers to who has the hotel rooms and who has the cars and who has the telephones and who has the gallery passes, then you pretty well know that those that are in charge of the arrangements of the convention, who they support.

P: And in this case, who was it?

W: Well, in this particular case the successful candidate seemed to enjoy more of these than anyone else. Of course, you will recall there were more than two candidates as well.

P: What do you think was the final influence on Mr. Johnson to announce his candidacy? I wanted to ask that before we got into the convention.

W: I can't help but think here again, it's people that he knew and knew him. I could not swear to this. This is a personal impression. But the senators, the congressmen, the leaders of this nation in many instances, believed that he should be a candidate, because there's no question his success as majority leader had been brilliant. So they felt that he should be considered. I cannot help but think that eventually when the Senate finished their work and the Senate was through for that year, that then he then centered on the possibilities. I know he never believed he would be nominated unless something extraordinary had happened, because as I say, we always knew where we were with delegates, with votes if you will. But these people were so convinced that I believe that was very likely the deciding factor.

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P: Were you with Mr. Johnson when the speculation [started] and finally he was approached for the vice presidential position with Kennedy?

W: I was not.

P: Why do you think Mr. Johnson accepted this and gave up a very powerful and influential position as majority leader in the Senate?

W: Because I believe that he would respond, as he always had and has since, to the party, eventually the party. Here a man had been nominated for president, John F. Kennedy, and that man believed that this man, Lyndon B. Johnson, could assist the party in being elected in November and would be a contributing factor to that success. That belief and his respect for the Democratic process I think was the reason he chose to go on the ticket. Really what other choice could he have made? He was healthy, he was able and had indicated he was willing to be the nominee for president. There was never any doubt in my mind when he was approached that his answer must be in the affirmative.

P: Do you think that the consideration that a southern candidate had not been elected for that high office for I think at the time it was about a hundred years, was a consideration on his part that he might never be able to be president?

W: Oh, yes, I don't think there's any question about it. That the things believed by people sometimes may not necessarily be truth or fact, but there were many people at least in this country in 1960 who honestly believed that because a man was from a certain geographical area of the nation he would not be acceptable for the majority of people in other geographical areas of the nation. So I think that was a very predominant factor, not only

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in Mr. Johnson's view, but also in the view of many people that were delegates or alternates.

P: Did you ever hear Mr. Johnson express that?

W: During those times, I do not recall him ever saying that at that time, no.

P: Do you think John Kennedy needed Mr. Johnson with him on the ticket to win?

W: I think the election of 1960, the final count, proves that more than any speculation that I might could make about what Mr. Kennedy thought. I think it's a firm fact that without it that very likely [he] would not have been successful in 1960.

P: I believe at this point you returned to Texas and were elected the state Democratic chairman, or had this already taken place?

W: No, no. I was still on the State Democratic Executive Committee representing the First Senatorial District, along with my committeewoman. But I did campaign with Mr. Johnson for the vice presidency on a voluntary basis.

P: In that campaign there have been mentioned three particular highlights, and I was wondering if you actively participated in any one of them. The ones I'm thinking of are the whistlestop tour of the South, the meeting in New York City of the American Liberal Party at which Mr. Johnson spoke, and the Adolphus Hotel incident?

W: I was there on all three of them. I traveled directly with the President. I never had heard that those three were the highlights but I can well see why two of them would have been.

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P: I think that each of them has been indicated in various things I've read as great turning points or contributing factors to the eventual election of Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson. Do you have other ones in mind that were that significant?

W: I think the success of the election in November 1960 for Kennedy and Johnson was really based on the participation of obviously the two candidates and the very sincere effort they made to go across this nation and to see and to talk and to visit with as many people as possible. Certainly the presidential candidate, Mr. Kennedy, was doing a great deal of work, as was the vice presidential candidate, Mr. Johnson. As far as Mr. Johnson's efforts, I think, one, the idea that he was able to go into most of the states and to visit with large groups at rallies and privately with the workers, with the party people, and to inspire them had a very favorable result on the election. And of course Mr. Kennedy was doing the same thing.

Now, of the three that you mentioned, if I recall correctly, the first of these three events did take place in New York with the Liberal Party. He did meet with them in one of the hotels there.

P: Were you present?

W: Yes. I suppose all of these things are of record. He was not particularly familiar with the platform of the Liberal Party in New York, and if I recall correctly, when he was introduced I believe a Mr. Alex Rose introduced him. His statement was in essence that "I do not know exactly what you believe in, but I might tell you some of the things that I believe in." And that was the minimum wage. That was social security. That was

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Medicare. And of course he explained each of these items. His record was well known on each of these. I'm not sure their record was nearly as well known. Because he had voted; he'd cast his votes. But they seemed to agree that these were things that they were also interested in. So when the meeting was finally over it was very obvious that those two, three or four thousand, whatever the number was in the ballroom of that hotel, that they felt this is a man that would serve them and this nation.

On the train trip that originated in Washington and terminated in New Orleans, Louisiana, I do think that this had a great impact on that part of our nation. That any man would take the time and the personal punishment that comes from riding a train on such a trip, whereas the physical arrangement was that people from the next stop would come up and get on at this stop. This man, as a candidate, would visit with them until they got to their hometown or their county or their area. They'd talk about the problems of the nation and their state, et cetera. They'd talk about the Democratic Party involvement and what the Democratic Party platform said about these particular problems or opportunities. So it was a constant work from early in the morning until midnight every night.

P: What was your capacity in this, by the way?

W: Of course, the vice presidential candidate has a small staff, as I'm sure the presidential candidate did in 1960. So really all of us did anything that needed to be done. Those that traveled with him consistently were only three; that was George Reedy and Bill Moyers and myself. So we did those things to be helpful.

P: What things?

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W: Those things that go in to make up a campaign: meeting people and getting them in to see the candidate and trying to get them out so that other people can get in, and making sure that the itinerary was set up properly, that the advance work was done properly, that the appropriate background on each state or each stop was available to the candidate. Just matters that go to make up what I trust was a good, smooth-running campaign.

P: Any speech writing?

W: Of course there's always some speech writing. For a man such as this your speech writing is really limited to what you want to give the press. So that when you're in one state maybe two thousand miles from Washington, D.C. that the press office here can hand to the national press, "This is a statement that will be made by the candidate at five o'clock today in this city." Therefore because that goes out in that way then the candidate must almost--well, he just must say those words. What we attempted to do was put that in ten to fifteen minutes and allow him thirty minutes or forty minutes on the schedule to speak. Therefore he could make these statements and then yet he could project his own image and position into this city or this state.

But anyway, we had the train trip and I think it did have an impact, because he saw many thousands of people both on the train and those that came to the train to hear the speeches. Mrs. Johnson was with him as well. We traveled in the train. I've really forgotten where we got off of the train for a short while and flew down into Florida and then came back and got on the train at the next stop somewhere in Florida. And [we] ended up in New Orleans, as I've said, with a great parade of I'd say probably two

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hundred thousand people in New Orleans, Louisiana that last night of the train trip. So I do think that had an impact.

I further think that there was a great impact in Dallas, which was a very unfortunate situation in my opinion, reference the political process, the democratic process in this country. There was a group of the opposite political party, major political party. It had a meeting in Dallas at one of the hotels. Their meeting had broken up, and of course they had been talked to. Their enthusiasm had been worked up considerably. Of course I was not there, but I understand that someone just mentioned, "the candidate for vice president, Senator Johnson, is due in Dallas. Let's just stay and be here." And so they did. We had arrived in Fort Worth the night before for a rally and had driven across from Fort Worth and had stopped in Grand Prairie and in Arlington and then into Dallas. His room reservation was in the Baker Hotel and yet the noon speech was in the Adolphus Hotel in the ballroom. So I think the treatment he and Mrs. Johnson received there, with the national press traveling with him, obviously the state press available, they viewed all of this. And I do think that had an impact.

I think each one of these contributed to the victory of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket in 1960. I think the program that they outlined to this nation also had an impact. So all of these things contributed really to a victory, although as we all know it was a very narrow victory. So anyone that wanted to preach it either way I suppose could work up in their mind the facts that caused any one of these to be the contributing factor. But there

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were so many things happened, I'm sure all of them made a very fine contribution to the eventual success.

P: Were there others that in your judgment were of this level of having a tremendous influence or significance?

W: I think so. Eighteen stops a day across this nation and meeting with people and talking to them explaining the Democratic program and opportunities I think contributed as much as anything else. These were just things that the press could write about; these are things the press could read other reports on and draw a conclusion from. So as I say, I think they did contribute, but to find the one key, the one contributing factor to the success, I just could not say that any one of these was the contributing factor. I think all of them contributed to the success there.

P: How would you judge Mr. Johnson's rapport with the national press that was along with him during this campaign?

W: Really, most understood what he was trying to do. There were some that did not. I must admit, very sadly admit, that I do not think that Mr. Johnson, whether he be senator or vice president or president, has ever really enjoyed a fair understanding by the press. As long as I make such a statement, I must admit that I do believe that the future relationship with the press will be much more favorable than the past.

P: During the campaign and as a member of the state Democratic committee, were you ever unsure of Texas going for the Johnson-Kennedy ticket?

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W: Of course because we were all from Texas, or at least I was from Texas and the candidate was from Texas, we worried about it a great deal. But those that were doing the work in Texas, some that I talked to, they always assured me that victory would be in the Democratic column in 1960.

P: Was there much of an impact in Texas, or I should say resistance to the ticket on the basis of John Kennedy being a Roman Catholic?

W: Oh, no question that I think that that entered into it in some people's minds. But on the other hand, you can point to people that are not Catholic that felt a great sympathy for him because he was Catholic and people were making such statements, having such attitudes. So what the final result would be, I do not know. I know my grandfather, who is now a retired Baptist minister, he supported Mr. Kennedy for president because he thought that he was the best man. So you can pick examples out either way. But I do not know who got the best end of the deal on either side.

P: Who was responsible, in your opinion, in persuading or deciding or advising Mr. Johnson to keep his name on both tickets, I mean as a senatorial candidate and as the vice president?

W: I don't know that anyone advised him of it. It was the only logical thing to do because, one, the Democratic primary took place before the national convention by six or eight weeks, and so he was not a candidate for president or vice president in fact until after that convention, and he was the majority leader of the United States Senate. He was a senator from Texas. As I recall, when the state legislature passed a law which permitted this, I

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think there were only one or two or three votes out of a hundred and eighty-one votes that opposed that. So it was rather unanimous throughout Texas as far as I could see that this be done.

P: You don't feel that there was any problem created by it?

W: No, I don't see any problem whatsoever. I think the vote in Texas proves that.

P: Do you recall any specific, or were there any particular incidents during the campaign, since you were so closely involved, even of an anecdotal nature, that come to your mind?

W: No. Oh, there were many instances, of course. I think one that the press picked up and seemed to enjoy as much as any other was on the train trip. The first stop the train made [on] the whistlestop tour was in Culpeper, Virginia. I think we arrived there at eight or eight-thirty in the morning, it was rather early. The vice presidential nominee at that stop, as the train was really literally about to pull out, he asked the crowd that was gathered there, he said, "Let me ask you one question. What has Nixon ever done for Culpeper?" That seemed to have caught fire on the train, and throughout the balance of the trip that was one of those things that was talked of among all the people on the train.

P: Who had worked up the strategy of Mr. Johnson's end of the campaign?

W: I do not understand. You mean what he would do as a--?

P: As a candidate.

W: He pretty well decided that. We in the Democratic National Committee headquarters had our liaison people that worked with Mr. Kennedy's people in deciding. If Mr. Kennedy was going to be in a given state today, well, we tried to delay our arrival there for an

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appropriate time in between the visits, those type things. But the candidate pretty well decided what needed to be done. One, I suppose in every major political party, the platform is written, the candidates are selected, and one of their jobs is to explain that platform to the country and to work with their workers of that political party. So you can go do that after you're selected and a platform is available.

P: In coordinating your campaign with the presidential candidate, were there any problems involved in that?

W: Not that I know of. Of course, we were only in Washington two or three nights during the campaign. That was the only time I was here. I was never told of any problems. So if they existed I was unaware of them.

P: You felt that the two staffs were working compatibly?

W: As far as I knew they were. The things we requested we received. I assumed that if the presidential candidate was requesting anything I'm positive he was receiving it.

P: Between the 1960 and 1964 elections, did you see the Vice President very often?

W: I saw Vice President Johnson quite a few times but here again, his position in the federal government had changed considerably. He was now a man that had the views of the nation. He was a man that needed to know and was learning of the world at large. Texas had two United States senators and so those things that I may have contacted Mr. Johnson on in 1959 or 1958 became things that I should contact our senators about in 1961 and so forth. So I never had those kinds of contacts with him again. But only on a personal

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basis, if I was in Washington I could go by and speak, drink a cup of coffee and just have a visit.

P: Do any of these events at times at this period particularly stand out in your mind or were they significant?

W: Well, they were significant to me, here again on a personal basis, that Vice President and Mrs. Johnson were kind enough to have me into their home.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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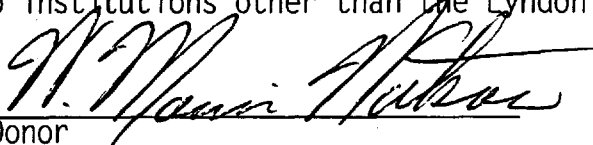
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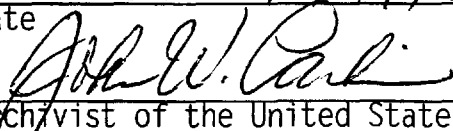
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