INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES W. WILSON

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: His office in Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

F: Jim, let's go back very briefly into your career. You're a Texas boy.

W: Well, I was born in South Carolina. And as we go along, I'll tell you a story about that. I came to Texas as a very small child--less than a year old--and lived in San Antonio through high school. [I] did one year of college at Tulane; the rest of the time, here [University of Texas], through law school, and I've lived here in Austin, except for the times I was in the Navy and in Washington, since I got out of law school.

F: How did you get into what was then Senator Johnson's orbit? You did start with him as a Senator, am I correct?

W: Right. Well, when I got out of law school I went with a law firm which was then Powell, Wirtz, and Rauhut. Incidentally, I just got back from the dentist, so I may muff some of my words. And at that time, a very bright, young lawyer with the firm was John Connally. This was in June of 1951, and Senator [Alvin] Wirtz died in November, and I stayed with the firm 'til February of 1952. I had just served a few months before I had to go into the Navy.

F: Let me ask you one thing before we leave that. Did Connally, at that time, look like a young man who was going to stay with the law practice, or was the feeling around the firm that this was just a kind of transient position, until he moved on to something else?

W: Well, I was so green and new that I probably really didn't know much of what was going on around the firm.

F: (Laughter). You were the last one to get office gossip.

W: That's right. Probably the secretaries knew more than I knew.

F: Undoubtedly, I'd say.

W: Yes. But I would say that I had the feeling that he was not too happy with the situation in the firm. After Senator Wirtz died, I think it became apparent to a number of people that it was just a matter of time until he left. And he did leave the firm the first of January, just before I left to go into the Navy.

F: Was Senator Wirtz around long enough for you to get much of a feeling for him?

W: Yes. I worked with him very closely on a number of matters.

F: Tell me something about him, because he keeps looming as one of the. . . oh, you can pick your number, but three to six most important people in Johnson's life.

W: Almost an infinite number.

He was . . . Of course, this was just before his death, and he must have been seventy to seventy-two at that time. He was a kind of a curmudgeon. He could be very gruff. But on the other

hand, [he] had one of the best minds I've ever encountered and [was] in many ways a great liberal. Of course, he had a tremendous background from the Roosevelt days, and I reminisced with him on a number of occasions about that, and he told lots of stories. But, I remember, for example, talking to him about privilege against self-incrimination. And I was spouting some of the stuff I had just learned in law school about the bases for it, and . . . Oh, I can't remember just what the things we discussed about it were,but he came down very strongly as a civil rights advocate in that sense of the word. He was a man who had not lost any of his hair. He was a very handsome man--gray-headed--and a very strong personality and a tremendous lawyer. It was really a great experience for me. He treated young lawyers as an intellectual equal, but was not hesitant to be rather explicit when he felt you hadn't done something right. He was just a great man to be around.

F: So, you could see enough in that brief encounter to see where young Congressman Johnson would have felt impelled in his direction.

W: Well, let me say . . .

F: You don't see young Congressman Johnson without realizing it.

W: That's right. And I can see where,as a Congressman and as a Senator, Johnson would rely on his judgment because he had superb judgment. And I am aware, during the time I was there, that Senator Johnson would call him rather frequently, as he did John Connally, as well. So, in that sense, I can see where he would be impelled in this direction. They were

very different types [of] personalities. Wirtz was much calmer and could relax--at least when I knew him--and was not, well, using your word, impelled to be doing things all the time, like Johnson was.

F: Let's get back. You went in the Navy.

W: Right. I knew John Connally from this period of time. And I don't know whether this is relevant to your subject, but . . .

F: It all is.

W: . . . my recollection of the brief period I worked with John on a number of things, and my recollection of him is having one of the keenest legal minds I have ever encountered. At that time, of course, I was mainly briefing, researching, and so forth, and I would go research a subject for him, maybe, for several days. It would take me a day or a day and a half just to get familiar with the area and then come back to him to brief him. Maybe he had to meet with a client, or go before a committee, or something. And I was constantly amazed at the rapidity with which he could grasp very sophisticated legal concepts [about] which he really had no reason to have any more than the vaguest notion that any intelligent lawyer would have. He's really got a tremendous legal mind. I think people give him lots of credit for the kind of political mind that he has evidenced, but as far as I'm concerned, I wouldn't hesitate to see him on the Supreme Court of the United States, Attorney General, or just anything he'd care to do.

F: Yes. If he'd stuck with the law, he'd have gone.

W: Right. Anyhow, he left the first of January, and I left and went into the Navy.

I came back to the same firm, and it was the same firm I am with now, except, the names have changed, and the personnel. In May of '55 I was . . . After a few months, Ben Powell, Jr., who was with the firm at the time, went to Brown and Root--was the vice-president and general counsel--and I was working with him. The work I was doing involved an awful lot of travel to Houston and so forth, and I was really not too happy with it.

In the fall of '57, Will Wilson offered me a job on his staff in the Attorney General's office. So, I went up there, in January of '57, doing oil and gas and water law work. I stayed there [and] was very happy in my work there.

It must have been in November of '58 [that] John Connally called me, and told me that Senator Johnson was looking for a young Texas lawyer to go on his staff; and that the possibilities were the subcommittee--the Armed Forces Subcommittee that he headed up and the Democratic Policy Committee--you know, it wasn't settled which I would do; but to some extent it would be up to me, and would I be interested. I said I thought I would. I talked to Will Wilson about it, and he thought it was a good opportunity for me. I was interviewed one Saturday morning by Walter Jenkins and, then, by Senator Johnson, and we concluded the deal right then.

F: Did you decide at that time which job you were going into?

W: Yes. I think I told him I thought I would be more interested in

then, I had been in a position of working with a senior lawyer. I don't think that . . .

F: It really gives you a sudden thrust into responsibility.

W: Oh, yes. If you can cut it, it's a great place. I handled . . . I think I had four . . . In the two years I was there, I had at least a half a dozen cases before the Supreme Court of Texas that I handled entirely on my own. It was just a tremendously challenging job.

F: Of course, you had a strong Attorney General, too.

W: Right. And not only that, one that was, at least I like to think, inclined to make judgments as to people, and if he had confidence in you, he'd kind of give you your head. And before the end of it, he was kind of using me as a trouble-shooter in areas other than my particular department, which was also very interesting. When a case came up in which his relationship with the trial judge was very strained, he asked me to go in and try it. And that was an extremely delicate situation. But it was a great challenge.

F: Was Will Wilson, at this time, showing any disenchantment with the Democratic party?

W: Not at all. No.

F: This all developed later.

W: Right. And I was there when it occurred. (Laughter).

F: Okay. We'll come to that, because it's part of the story.

Did you see Senator Johnson down here, or up in Washington?

W: Here in the Federal Building in Austin.

F: What was the interview like?

W: Well, I had prepared a little statement, synopsis, of my

career up 'til then, and the only thing he really noticed on it, of any significance, was that I was born in Spartanburg, South Carolina. And he commented that Spartanburg was where Bobby Baker was from and said some very warm things about Bobby. He also mentioned the fact that Mary Margaret Wiley had spoken highly of me. Mary Margaret was from San Antonio, and her brother and I were contemporaries and very good friends. She was, of course, a good number of years younger than I, but I knew her when she was a little girl, and had known her slightly while she was in college, but, had not seen her for some time. And, of course, she had, incidentally, just gone to his office from the same law firm. That law firm has really . . .

F: Gee, you're running feeder line there. (Laughter).

W: (Laughter). For a while there, that was true.

Then when he came in--and I'll never forget this . . . I didn't know what was going on, but something . . . Walter Jenkins had done something not just exactly the way he had wanted it, and he just ate Walter out just right there, in a way that I thought was just inexcusable, and if I hadn't been so starry-eyed--as I look back on it--I probably would have turned around and walked out. That sticks in my mind. But he just looked at the whole synopsis I had given him and asked me a few questions. [They] really weren't too penetrating, and [he] said, in effect, "John Connally recommended you. And if you want to come, we're ready to go."

I had a case that was set for trial early in January, and I

asked that I be allowed to go ahead and finish that case. I didn't actually get to Washington until about the fifteenth, maybe, of January. I was not there when the session started.

F: What did you do after you got there? Did you have an assignment of duties, or did you just kind of stand around until you saw things to do? How'd that work?

W: Well, I had an office. My office was assigned to me in G-18, which was on the gallery, right off the Senate Gallery. I shared an office with George Reedy--a great big office. The most beautiful thing you ever saw. It had a marble fireplace and a huge gilt mirror over the fireplace.

F: You might have been the new man on the totem pole, but you had class. (Laughter).

W: Oh, boy, and crystal chandeliers. And during the winter, when you'd come to work, there was the fire, already laid; all you had to do was put a match to it. And it was just right off the gallery, which made it fairly simple to watch what was going on on the floor.

I really didn't have any assigned duties. The best I recall, I worked very closely with Harry McPherson, and with George Reedy, and with Bobby Baker. And I was told just to kind of follow them around, and watch what they did, and kind of learn the routine of handling the floor. And this was what I did.

I think--at least my impression is--that there's a tendency with Johnson for people to have kind of a new broom situation when they first go to work. So, at first, he would just kind of take

them with him everywhere; but if you don't really turn out to be one of those who he really has rapport with--like Moyers and so forth, this kind of tends to drop off after a while, and it did with me rather rapidly. And I kind of went into more routine duties.

At some times, he insisted that either Harry McPherson or I be on the floor at all times. And we were supposed to . . . Well, it's almost impossible to describe. But we were just to see that things went well and nothing got out of hand when he wasn't there. We were supposed to be completely informed on every piece of legislation that came to the floor and able to put our fingers on anything he wanted at any time.

F: Did you have the authority, for instance, if something didn't seem to be going right, to call him out of a meeting?

W: Well . . .

F: (Laughter) Or were things going too right?

W: Well, they were going . . . Well, that didn't happen very often. And I don't recall whether I had the authority to. I don't think I would have hesitated to do so, if I felt it was necessary. Actually, you really don't . . . It's not necessary, because there's always a Democratic senator who is acting as leader on the floor. And his responsibility is to see that things go right. And, if nothing else . . . Of course, most of the time no one is . . . Most of the time, there are very few senators on the floor. So that the great device, when you just want to mark time, is to ask for a quorum

call. Any experienced leader, if he sees that things are going wrong, just suggests the absence of a quorum, and they ring bells, and call the roll; and it just gives you lots of time to get things back on the track.

F: The Senate Majority Leader, wherever he may be, knows that something is going on and he better get up . . . ?

W: My recollection is that if we needed him, we would probably call his office, and then, they would get in touch with him and tell him what the situation was.

F: Well, now, you mentioned a while ago that your duties sort of went galloping in all directions. Was there any dividing line? He's got several offices there. One of them is Senator from Texas, which is a prime position; but he is also Senate Majority Leader, which is another one. Then, he's got these committee assignments. Were the staffs kept inseparable, or was there a good deal of intercommunication?

W: Oh, there was a lot of intercommunication, and everybody recognized that his position of Senator from Texas came first. There was all sorts of crosspollinating among the staffs. And I didn't know until several years later, but apparently I was carried on the Armed Services Committee payroll most of the time I was in Washington, although my title, as far as I was concerned, was counsel of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee. So I think that most of his top staff people were in the Policy Committee orbit, so to speak, except Walter Jenkins and Lloyd Hand, who were in the Texas office,

and Ken Belieu in the Armed Services. But I think most of the rest of people, who you might say were dealing with him most of the time, were in the Policy Committee area.

The bane of my existence when I was up there was handling constituents' mail. I just hated it. We handled all of the mail from any place other than Texas. And Harry McPherson and I got the Texas mail which dealt with legal problems, which was of more than routine interest, things that could not be handled in something other than a routine way.

Also, we often, when issues would get real hot, if they involved legislation or legal problems, we would usually work up the standard reply, which was sent in response to these questions. I had no idea what a tremendous operation handling a senator's mail is. It is just unbelievable.

F: Particularly one of national stature.

W: Right.

F: Did you answer a lot along on the line that "the Senator requests that" and sign it James Wilson? Or was it in his name?

W: Never. The way the mail was handled, I did not learn to sign the name and made no effort to. It was never suggested that I should. Everything that I did, I wrote for him to sign, and then it would go to Walter Jenkins, and he would decide whether he would sign it or send it to Senator Johnson to sign--whether he would sign Senator Johnson's name.

F: What was you day like?

W: Well . . .

F: There was no such thing as a typical day, was there?

W: Well, I guess not. It would depend, of course, on whether . . . If the Senate was not in session, it was fairly easy. You could get caught up on your mail and all of this stuff. When it was in session , the Senate would go into session at noon. And we would always be there, or one of us would be there when the Senate went into session. And that was always very interesting, because Senator Johnson would usually have a little press conference, right ahead of time, in which they asked him things. So, I did not get to work early. I'd get to work about nine o'clock, I guess, and read the record, The Congressional Record, which took a good bit of time. But after a while, you would get to the point where you could skim over it pretty rapidly. And [you'd] get ready on the bills you knew were coming up that day, so you could be prepared. And then, when the Senate went into session, you did an awful lot of standing around. This, after a while, could be boring.

But one of the things that was a surprise to me: most of the people in the Policy Committee did not leave their offices until Senator Johnson left for the day. Solis Horwitz was with the Senate--I had forgotten that--at the same time the first year at least. And,you know,he [Senator Johnson] would maybe have a group of people,a cocktail party,anything. It may be seven-thirty,eight-thirty, nine o'clock, and they all felt, though no one ever said anything, they always felt obligated to stay until he left, just on the off-chance

that he might want something.

I decided very early, when I did this for a few days and he never wanted anything, I just said, decided, "Well, I'm just not going to do this." And to my knowledge, he only wanted me once when I wasn't there on that kind of an occasion, and nothing of any significance happened. (Laughter). I didn't get in trouble about it. It was kind of hard to say what was a typical day.

It was different, I might say, in '59 than in '60. You may recall that in early '59, at the beginning of the session, he made what got a lot of attention then as his State of the Union Message. In '57 and '58, he had had just unbelievable success as the Leader. And in '59, he was expecting even greater things, but Eisenhower learned the formula, so to speak, and started this budget-busting thing. Everything that the Democrats would propose, well, the Republicans would not oppose them on the merits; they would simply oppose them on the proposition that they were exceeding the budget, and this was inflationary, and so forth. And, very frankly, it had just an absolutely frustrating effect on him. He was frustrated in his desires to do things. He found it difficult to answer the argument. It wasn't difficult to answer; it was difficult to articulate in such a way that the people would understand.

You may recall that there was a Herblock [Herb Block] cartoon at the time that showed Eisenhower--in his usual grinning countenance that Herblock put on him--sitting behind his desk. And there's

Rayburn and Johnson in front of his desk with their hat in their hand, bowed over. And Eisenhower is saying, "You may tell the men that they can keep their horses and plows." He really just beat them down.

So as a result, for a while there . . . At the same time the [Johnson] boom was really catching hold. People were really wanting him [Johnson] to run for President. And I, personally, have no doubt that he knew, at all times, that this just wasn't in the cards for 1960. And this was a very frustrating thing.

But, anyhow, what I'm leading up to saying was that he started having a series of what he called "staff conferences" every morning or a couple of mornings a week, maybe which were really the occasions in which he would get Walter Jenkins and George Reedy and me--sometimes Horace Busby, when he was in town. For some reason McPherson didn't go to these. And he was getting us up there ostensibly to get advice and suggestions and so forth, but they were nothing but occasions for him to let off steam. He would just talk for maybe a couple of hours. They were kind of--much of them were kind of mass chewing-outs, because we weren't inventive enough, ingenious enough, and weren't coming up with new ideas and programs and so forth. But, on the whole, they were good-humored, and this is when I saw him the most in kind of being himself.

F: Did he mention in those, to any extent, any memorable extent, the possibility of his making a real run at the nomination in '60?

W: Oh, only to deny that he had any intention of doing it, and [to say] that if he did it, then he'd have a chance.

At that stage, Adlai Stevenson--at least he said he [Johnson] thought--had the edge. But this changed, of course, as we went on.

Then another thing --- I'm not talking in any particular time span now. But bearing on that subject, it was very interesting as we got into the 1960 session. Of course, all of the candidates were in the Senate. Nixon was the Vice President, presiding on occasion, and [there were] Symington and Kennedy and Humphrey. And as far as basic capability was concerned--at least in the legislative context--there was no question, he was just head and shoulders above them all. He was the Leader. He never shirked one moment from his responsibilities of Leader, as Leader. And he was very much aware of his prerogatives as Leader. But at a time when he had, more or less, become a candidate, though not announced, I remember it was a rather . . . I wouldn't say pitiful, but you couldn't help but feel sympathy toward him, that, by God, he had to stay and keep this thing going. And here the rest of them would be gone for days on end--the rest of the candidates--and be in and out, felt no responsibility for keeping the machinery going, and so forth. And he had to stay day after day and be there to make sure the program, the necessities, the things that had to be passed, were passed.

F: Sometimes for good and sufficient reasons, sometimes not so good and sufficient, senators display a fair amount of absenteeism.

Was he a believer that if you're in the United States Senate, you ought to be in Washington and in the Capitol, or in your office? Or did that seem to bother him one way or another?

W: I don't have any recollection of his [attitude]. I know that he, personally, felt an obligation to be there. But on the other hand, he was not one of these that felt any particular necessity to make every roll call vote. There are some senators that if they miss a roll call vote, they just think it's the end of the world. But this didn't bother him. But I never heard him being particularly critical of people for not being there. He was more interested in them being there when he wanted them there.

F: Was Bobby Baker considered a sort of ex-officio member of the staff?

W: Bobby Baker was, of course, in a unique position. He was not really considered a part of the staff. He was a power in his own rights, so to speak, although there was no question he was. . .

F: He was in a position to work closely, there's no question about that.

W: I worked very closely with Bobby. But he was in a position . . . You might say it was as if he [Johnson] had two staffs. We were much closer--in the Policy Committee--we were much closer to the people on the Texas staff in a staff context than we were with Bobby and the people who worked for Bobby. For example, Bobby's secretary was not on the same status as our secretary. If we had an office picnic, for example, all of our office and all of the Armed Services Committee and all the Texas office girls would go, but no one from

Bobby's would. Of course, he was an elected--technically elected officer of the Majority, but there wasn't any doubt who decided whether or not he was in that office; that was Johnson.

F: Leaving out yourself, who was best at working the Floor?

W: Bobby. There's no question about that.

F: He had a sort of political astuteness .

W: I'll include myself in that. (Laughter).

F: (Laughter). I wasn't going to ask you that--to be your own critic.

W: Well, he ran the floor. We were--McPherson and I--were more in a position of staff people to be there and in more of a technical position. Bobby was the political end of it. It was his job to . . . He ran the pages. It was his job to see that the senators got there. And if a particular senator wanted to be sure and be there at a time when a particular measure was voted, well, Bobby was supposed to see that it didn't come up, or at least convey to the Leadership, his desires. And this was an unbelievable, unbelievably difficult job. God . . . In 1959, the Democratic majority, I believe, was the biggest it's ever been. All these senators--you know, the top politicians in their states--prima donnas to the end--and to have to take into account all of these jobs and all these desires and so forth was just an unbelievable job; and Bobby did a tremendous job at it. I have to say that Bobby Baker is one of the most talented men I have ever come into contact with. He is also one of the most delightful. This was one of the reasons he was as successful as he was, because everybody liked him.

F: He never got harried on the job. He kept his sense of humor.

W: Well, he'd have some bad moments, and he'd get chewed out, really, more than most of us by Senator Johnson, actually, on occasion. But it never lasted. And he would sulk a little, maybe.

F: You got a feeling, in a sense, that these chewing-outs were ceremonial.

W: Oh, yes. Very definitely.

F: Just part of the ritual that you . . .

W: Yes. There wasn't any question in my mind that, as of that time, as far as personal relationship, Senator Johnson and Bobby Baker were very close. They loved each other in the sense that men love each other.

F: As far as you know, did anyone ever quit during one of these chewing-outs? I hadn't thought about this question until just now, but it seems to me that people just took them in stride and went on. Maybe it broke their stride for a moment, but they never thought, "Well, I'll show the so-and-so and let him have it."

W: I don't remember. I didn't get chewed-out, personally. I would be in these mass chewing-outs.

F: (Laughter). An indirect recipient.

W: And they never bothered me. But I didn't get chewed-out as often as some people did. I don't remember any of them quitting. There was a lot of quitting going on. There was a lot of . . .

F: Well, it's a highly mobile society. (Laughter).

W: Well, when I say that, I mean there was quitting, but not really quitting. This is one thing : when I went to Washington and on Johnson's staff, it was really a new experience for me. I have never been in a situation like this in my life. I was impressed. Although I had worked for Will Wilson, I had not been in the political end of his deal to that extent. And I would think that an Attorney General, at least that Attorney General, handled it in this way. But I was impressed with the lack of--what appeared to me to be a lack of genuineness in the relationship with constituents. Since then, I've become reconciled to the fact that this is a necessity of winning, at least, in the order of magnitudes that Lyndon Johnson won in Texas. And the other thing was the loyalty of the people around him, which seemed to me, really an odd kind of loyalty, more like the lover relationship. They would just take the worst sort of abuse from him and just come back for more. This was something I had never encountered before in my life, and [I] didn't like it. Very frankly, I didn't.

F: And most people never really questioned him or Walter on the basis that, "Look, I've worked my eight to five, and that's it."

W: Oh, no.

F: I mean, "If you want me, I'm yours twenty-four hours a day." Almost a priesthood.

W: That's right.

On occasion, I've used the analogy-when I say occasion, on very rare occasions when I've had to talk about this--people who worked for Johnson

who were other than just secretaries and mail people--people who were in a staff position of any significance . . . It seemed to me that everybody was in sort of concentric circles, and you were constantly maneuvering to try to get into the next closer circle; and then something would happen, and you would go to the next circle out, and your competitor would come in, and there was just, well, what you read about palace intrigue and so forth. And very frankly, this, more than anything, was the reason I left when I did. This was just not my bag.

F: Was there a certain amount of, you might say, spying, telling on each other?

W: No.

F: None, then?

W: No. Not that I was aware of. Of course, I may be tremendously naive, but there was a lot of--I wouldn't say a lot--there was some commiserating with other staff people that they weren't appreciated, and look what so-and-so was doing, and he really didn't . . . the Senator doesn't realize that he's taking advantage of him, and feeling sorry for himself. But I was not aware . . . If anyone ever went to the Senator with this, I was not aware of it.

F: Was it pretty clear cut that when you got down to finalities, that Walter was the one?

W: No question about it. No question about it. Walter . . .

F: Walter must have felt he was going in several [different] directions sometimes.

W: Well, Walter was absolutely loyal. He worked all the time. I don't see how a human being could live the way he did. But at the same time, he never lost his good humor. He made no effort at pretense of being the big-shot. [If] you asked him something, he was very open in his advice to you. If he thought you ought to take it up with the Senator, he'd tell you so. I did then, and do now, and always will hold Walter Jenkins in tremendously high regard.

F: If you wanted to see the Senator, could you get access to him fairly easily?

W: Oh, yes, without. . .

F: He wasn't remote, then, from the staff?

W: No. Not at all.

F: (Laughter). Maybe sometimes not remote enough, huh?

W: Well, you didn't have much time, and you may. . . Now that you mention it, I always had a feeling that he made you incapsulate things more than was really good. He would not give you the time to get out what the problem was. He would be wanting . . . (snapping of fingers) "Well, now, come on, get on with it. What is it you want?," and so forth. You may leave very frustrated . . .

F: He wanted a subject and predicate and no adjectives. . .

W: That's right.

F: . . . or qualifying phrases.

W: You really didn't have the occasion . . . You didn't have the opportunity to convey to him what you really wanted to. And he

was death on long memoranda, legalistic . . . He was always giving me a hard time about that my letters were not warm and friendly enough. They were too stiff and legal and so forth. And he would say things like--you know, some unbelievably complicated bill--he'd say, "Now I want a one page memorandum about what that bill's about." (Laughter). You know this is just . . . Your training as a lawyer is not necessarily in this direction, but, it is good training, I'll say that.

F: When he was away from the floor, and you'd been working it, and there was a quorum call, or whatever, that brought him back, did he send for you and your confederates? In other words, did he get a briefing from you before he himself went into action?

W: Not usually. The thing about people like him that has always amazed me--and I've noticed this same thing in Ben Barnes, both in the Senate and in the House--is that they can come in a legislative hall and they can sense what is going on immediately. They don't have to be[told].He might ask a question or two, but there's not anything very lengthy involved. And to the extent that he did, he'd usually get it from Bobby, I think.

F: Did you have any opportunity to observe his relationships with Senator Kennedy or Vice President Nixon?

W: Nixon was a real enigma. He was cold and removed, aloof. I never saw him except when he was presiding. And the only time , other than that,I'd ever see him, he'd be walking down the hall, and he'd usually be by himself, unlike Johnson, with eight staff

members going along. He'd be walking out to his car, and he'd be alone. If he had any relationship with Nixon at all, I never saw it. I don't believe I ever saw him speak to him. Of course, the presiding officer of the Senate is absolutely nothing but a vehicle through which the Leader does what he wants to do.

F: Could you see a sort of a pattern in Nixon's coming? I know that, in general, Vice Presidents don't come to the Senate.

W: He would be there rather often when the Senate would open, when it convened at noon. And this is not uncommon. I think that this is often done. And then they would always have him on tap, if needed, to break a tie. And that happened on a couple of things. I can't remember what they are now. They seemed terribly important at the time. (Laughter). But not so much now.

F: And what about Senator Kennedy, who is beginning to emerge as the front-runner for the nomination?

W: They had a good relationship. As I indicated before, I think Johnson was jealous of the fact that Kennedy could just go running off any time he wanted to and not worry about it. Kennedy was not a legislator. He made speeches, and he had good staff people, and, when he was in charge of a bill, he handled it well from the standpoint with having done his homework and, I guess, knowing where the votes were as far as the larger constituency of the United States was concerned. But I remember, particularly, in a couple of labor bills, or at least one, where [Senator] Smathers, who was, you know, a good friend of his . . . And although

I didn't see it, I don't doubt that Johnson did participate in it. They just absolutely city-slicked him [Kennedy] on a couple of things. He [Kennedy] was, well, truthfully, naive as far as the Senate was concerned. Things would go on . . . He just didn't know what they were doing to him. He would just suddenly find himself at sea. I believe that what I'm talking about is the Fair Labor Standards Act, that bill. And Smathers or Johnson would want an exception, or to broaden an exception to take care of the laundry people, or the restaurant people, or something like that, and Kennedy wouldn't agree to it; and, you know, they'd just kind of swish-swish, suddenly it was done, and Kennedy didn't know what the hell was going on.

F: When did you begin to get the idea that Johnson really would permit his name to be entered?

W: That he would permit his name to be entered? I really can't . . .

F: Well, now, when John Connally and others opened that downtown office in '60, were you around at that time?

W: Yes. I was around.

F: Did you have any opportunity to observe the Senator's reaction?

W: He preserved the fiction with us, if it was fiction, . . .

F: Even with the staff.

W: . . . that he didn't have anything to do with that. Much of everything in our doings were on that basis--that as far as we were concerned, whatever the public image was, was the image as far as the staff was concerned. And I mean in other

things than just this particular, this presidential point.

F: Well, now then, you, as well as the Senator, inherited Ralph Yarborough as your junior senator in the period you were there. Did you have much opportunity to observe the relationship with Yarborough? Or was there much of a relationship?

W: There really wasn't much of a relationship, and I don't have any doubt that anything I say on this will be taken as absolutely biased.

But, let me preface what I'm going to say by saying that when I got out of law school, Ralph Yarborough was kind of carried around on a pole. He was just the greatest man that ever lived. I'm overstating that, but he was a man of great prestige among young lawyers. I was in the Navy when he made his first run for office, and so I was really not aware of the split as much, but I had always held Ralph Yarborough in great respect. And, when I went to Washington, I knew that the relationship, from what I had seen in the papers, was not as good as it could be. And I thought, well, maybe I cannot breach the gap, but at least be helpful to Senator Yarborough. But apparently, because I worked for Johnson, he wouldn't . . . there was no way of approaching him.

Yarborough was absolutely distrustful of anything Johnson would do, and as far as I could tell, without cause. Johnson sincerely would have liked to have had a good working relationship with him. But, I think in fairness, I'd have to say not as an equal. Because, you know, what the hell, he was the Leader.

F: Yes, he was the lion there in the den.

W: Yes. And I don't think people who haven't observed it realize what a powerful man the Majority Leader is. I don't have any doubt that if Yarborough had either been or had been capable of being among those who looked upon Lyndon Johnson with high regard and had taken just the slightest shadow position, you might say, they would have had a very good relationship because it was really unfortunate. And by the time I got there or had been there a while [I saw this]. When I first got there, I tried to defend and explain some of the things that Yarborough did as not being intentional efforts to hurt Johnson or to demean him, but I' ll be frank to say that the longer I was there, the more difficult it became. And my regard for Yarborough went down just very rapidly. I'm sure you've read The Citadel--well, I don't remember the writer; he wrote the book, The Citadel and he talks about the Club and so forth, and there's quite a bit to that, although it's overdone. But Yarborough was an out-man, and he never would have been aything else. He just didn't have the ability to be a legislator.

F: Had Strom Thurmond begun his defection while you were there?

W: I don't know whether you would call if a defection. He was . . .

F: Transfer, whatever . . .

W: Yes. Well, not to the Republican party. He was regarded by Johnson as completely unreliable, as someone that couldn't be counted on. If Johnson was going to do something, most of the senators, he

knew of where they stood, but he had to check with Thurmond on most things, because he could just go anyplace.

F: Johnson, about the time you got there, had put through the civil rights bill which had marked him, in one sense. He's got this whole batch of Southern senators with whom he remained personally friendly--and in some cases even intimate--Herman Talmadge, John Stennis, et cetera, et cetera, Richard Russell . . .

W: Russell.

F: Russell. Right. This situation never pertained with Thurmond?

W: Never did. No. It could not have been. Thurmond was . . . Thurmond is a red-neck, and he was just not the type. It just couldn't be.

F: What induced you to leave the Senator?

W: Well . . .

F: When did you leave?

W: Actually, I resigned in August, I guess it was, of 1960, just before the end of the session and after the Democratic Convention.

During 1960, as the campaign developed, or at least as the campaign for the nomination developed, he became more and more remote from the staff--at least in the sense, in the part of the staff that I was with. Reedy and McPherson and Gerry Siegel had come back. I had not played any significant role in what went on prior to the convention, and I did not see that I would be playing any significant role . . .

F: He didn't use your part of the staff as antenna for him on this. . .

W: Not at all.

F: . . . pre-convention work?

W: At the time, I guess I kind of had my feelings hurt, but I think, looking at it in retrospect, I can understnad this. He probably would have been subject to criticism using us to that extent, but he and Bobby were very close in that operation -- Bobby Baker.

So, in August, it just seemed to me that I was probably not going to play any significant role in the campaign, and it would be March before the Administration came in, and I knew it was going to be a close race. It wasn't because I thought they were going to lose, although I think he thinks that's why I left, but I just didn't feel like spending five months doing nothing. [It] probably may well have been a mistake, because everyone else that stuck with him went on to big things. And so I submitted a resignation, and he didn't argue with me at all, but Walter asked that I stay through the campaign, which I did. But I worked here in Texas working on . . . I came back to Texas and worked on the campaign primarily scheduling out-of-state speakers, senators who came to Texas to speak. I handled their itineraries and things.

F: You didn't go to Los Angeles.

W: No.

F: Was there the feeling among the staff, in the pre-convention days, that he just might get his nomination, or was it just looked upon as a futile fight?

W: Well, I don't know. It's hard to say. Very frankly, I had more rapport with Harry McPherson, for example, than I did with Reedy and people like Reedy. They lived a sort of a what I've called a . . . I don't know what is the right expression. Who is it that says, "Every day, in every way, everything's getting better and better." You couldn't get--you never really got an honest appraisal from him. Just whatever happened was the best thing and . . .

F: The eternal optimist, huh?

W: Yeah, and it was just really an unreal situation. I think Harry McPherson and I had no doubt. As a matter of fact, I didn't. There was no role for me in Los Angeles, nothing of any significance for me to do. I was told I could go if I wanted to at the last minue, but I decided not to go, because, very frankly, I saw no hope whatsoever of his being . . .

F: Were you in Washington when the convention was held, or were you here?

W: I was in Washington.

F: What was it like when the staff learned he had accepted the Vice Presidency, or the nomination?

W: Well, I don't think it had occurred to any of us that it would possibly happen.

F: It really was unexpected.

W: It was, yes. And I remember when I heard it. I was not at the office. I was at home. As a matter of fact, I was in a car driving somewhere, and I heard it. The discussion among the

staff, perhaps, you know, the discussion with Harry McPherson, his reaction was just like mine. But then, on the other hand, you talk to Reedy . . . Well, he would tell you how logical this was and how it was inevitable and so forth. So it's hard to say what the reaction was. (Laughter).

F: Well, when Johnson got back up to Washington, he now has a new role in the world as a campaigner for the Vice Presidency. Did it tend to make any difference in the way the staff operated? Or where the Senate Majority needs still sufficient that they dominated your work?

W: Well, if you will remember--and I believe I remember--we had the Congress adjourned for the convention, and then came back, and we had some tough bills and things, and so the staff work was even worse. There was a great deal of staff work to be done during that interim, as I recall. And we did not get in the campaign at all at this stage. I can't even remember what the issues were now, but my recollection is that, as far as the Democratic party was concerned, it was pretty much of a bust. Part of the session, just didn't get anything done.

F: Did you get the feeling during the time you were there that his commitment to civil rights, minority rights was real, or just pragmatic? How deep did it go? I realize this is subjective, but what is your feeling on that?

W: Well, I don't have any doubt that he has a very deep commitment and, at that time, had a very deep commitment on the civil rights

issue. I think it would be naive to suggest that the politics didn't enter into it, but he one of these people who I don't think he is at all prejudiced, and I think he was very deeply committed on the civil rights issue. He could--you know, depending on who he was talking to--he could play it any way he wanted to; and when he was talking to the Southerners, he'd just kind of lapse into his Southern patois, but he was constantly working, trying to work things out. But in answer to your question, I did think he was genuinely committed to the betterment of the colored people.

F: What about the space program?

W: Well, it's hard for me to form a judgment on that; frankly, because I think my thinking is colored by the fact that I didn't care anything about it. I think Reedy had a lot to do with his getting to be big in space, and I thought . . .

F: This would fit George's nature, I think.

W: That's right. It seemed to me that they thought it was a vehicle to make him a national figure on something that was not controversial. I mean, who the hell could be against space? So, as far as that goes, I think he thought the space program was important, but I also think he thought it was just an awfully dandy political vehicle.

F: When you were back in Texas, following the convention, did you have any difficulty, one, in getting proper name and significant speakers to come to Texas, and, two, did you have much of a problem of acceptance of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket among the people that you

worked with?

W: Well, I don't know what you mean by the people I worked with. I was working with . . .

F: Well now, you're trying to get people to come in to speak for this ticket, one, and at the same time you want to get a reasonable crowd and a friendly one and so forth. So you're trying to whip up some enthusiasm.

W: Yes, I had some, there was some trouble. Some senators, you just couldn't find any place for them to go, and this was Johnson's idea to have this, if you remember it at all. It was his idea to just bring in these senators, mainly Southerners and conservatives who were Democrats, and just have them go all over Texas, and I would really not do too much other than schedule them. I would call whoever was our campaign leader in that particular locality and work them through there. I remember I had particular difficulty scheduling Senator [Thomas J.] Dodd. Nobody ever heard of him. And then, Stennis was . . . Of course, Stennis, in my judgment, is a really great man. I really thought a lot of him. And I recall his calling me and saying, "Now, Mr. Wilson, are you sure that you want me to come into Texas?" And [he] said, in effect, that, "I still have to stand for election in Mississippi, and if people ask me hard questions, I may not . . . You know Texas is a lot. . ."

F: I may give a Mississippi answer.

W: That's right. Texas is not as Southern as Mississippi. And I said,

"Well, Senator, I'm billing you as a military expert, and the places where we're taking you, we want you to speak on the military situation and so forth." He went through Texas--gosh, I don't know--had five or six stops and big crowds and so forth, and apparently, the question of race never came up once. He just had a great time. When he got back to Mississippi, he wrote me a letter to say how much he had enjoyed it and, in effect, what a new and marvelous experience it was to be able to campaign and not be constantly faced with this damned race business. It was a very touching thing.

F: Were you part of the entourage that spent a good part of the evening down at the Driskill waiting for the returns to come in?

W: Yes.

F: Where'd you get involved in that, at what point in the proceedings, and where did you pull out?

W: Well, I don't remember that much about it. All I remember is that's where I watched the returns, and it seems to me we were up . . .

F: You were up in Jim Hogg's suite.

W: Yes, part of the time. But I wasn't there too much. Very frankly, after about the first six months, I just didn't enjoy being around Senator Johnson as much as others, and I would be rather pointed in not being so. Because you'd get around him, and he'd just talk and talk and talk, and you'd just hear the same stories over and over and over, and the people, the retinue so to speak, they thought there was nothing greater than to sit in a circle around him and

hear him expound for hours and hours and . . .

F: And the repetition never bothered them?

W: That's right. It was the most incredible damned thing I ever saw. I never will forget, one time something was happening at the Driskill, and he had everybody on the staff up in the suite that he kept, or somebody kept for him up there, and my wife and I were there, and after about a half-hour of this and everybody sitting there in open-eyed wonder and listening to the same stories that we'd heard fifty times, I was just, frankly, bored. I remember I made some excuse--we had a baby at the time--that the baby wasn't well and we needed to go home, and we excused ourselves. I can't remember the occasion, but there was a dance, and so we went on down to the dance, and he comes down and saw us. But, you know, it didn't bother anything. I think this is just more evidence, to revert back to the reason I quit, I was just not the type that was a good staff man for Lyndon Johnson.

F: It's a question of how many times you want to hear the Sermon on the Mount?

W: That's right.

F: Have you had any relationship with him since the campaign of '60?

W: Oh, yes. I see him occasionally. There have been a number of occasions that have come up. And frankly, I enjoy him much more the few times I've been around him than I did when I worked for him. Because, I guess maybe the stories change as time goes, and I did then [feel]and when I see him now, he can be just one of the

most delightful people you can imagine. Two occasions that I recall that I had any contact with him, at all, of any significance was during the Will Wilson campaign, or rather . . .

F: This was for the senate seat or the governorship?

W: No, the governorship. When . . .

F: Kind of puts you on a rock and a hard place, didn't it, with John Connally?

W: Well, no, not really. I worked in Will's campaign very closely, very hard, and worked quite close to him when he ran for the Senate, and that was a loser if I ever saw one. It just . . .

F: That was set up to lose.

W: Well, you say--?

F: Meaning it was almost a no-win [situation].

W: Well, the reason I asked that was that that was what Will thought. He thought that Johnson--after it was all over--he thought that Johnson set it up for him to lose.

F: Oh, really?

W: But my analysis of Will's problem was that he was a very good politician and he knew how to handle the PR aspects of it, but when it got in beyond a name recognition campaign, he just was not an attractive candidate. But when it was all over with, he was apparently stunned, although several of us, Clint Small for example, and I, for weeks had been telling him that if he didn't do something pretty dramatic, that he was going to lose. And then he did.

I just really don't know the story on this, and you probably have heard it from others, but Will blamed Lyndon Johnson for his losing. Somebody told him that Lyndon Johnson had double-crossed him and had told Johnson people not to vote for him. Well, of course, Will then strikes out and gets in the governors race and running against Connally, and attacks Johnson. And, for some reason, Johnson thought that I ought to be able to go to Will and tell him to quit jumping on Lyndon Johnson, and at this stage Will wasn't listening to me or anybody else.

F: Did Johnson talk to you directly on this?

W: Oh, yes. He called me, and he had me out at the Ranch and all this, and I'm sure he considers that I performed miserably because I was not able to . . .

F: You let him down in this game?

W: The other time . . .

F: I would guess Will could be as stubborn as Lyndon Johnson on something like that, as far as calling him off.

W: Well, that's not only stubborn. Very frankly, I think Will kind of lost his stability after that.

F: You said before we started that you were there, more or less, when Will decided that the Democrats no longer held any promise for him.

W: Well, this was what I was referring to in the campaign when he didn't immediately, of course, move. And I did not work in Will's campaign against Connally. I did not . . . I felt, because of other things Will had done for me, that I shouldn't actively campaign for Connally.

Although I voted for Connally and, in retrospect, probably should have worked for him more, but obviously, he didn't need it. But that defeat in that senate race just embittered Will Wilson. And I'm convinced he's still seeking revenge. It's just an incredible situation, I think. And I can't help but believe this SEC thing is somehow connected with that very thing.

F: To go on with . . . you said there was another instance.

W: Oh, the other instance when I had some contact with Johnson was after Walter Jenkins' trouble. I believe that what may have happened is that Don Thomas may have said something to him that he should ask me to come back on the staff,

F: Incidently, identify Don Thomas for me, because, I keep running into the name, but just in passing like that. I know he's local, but I don't know any more about him.

W: Well, [in] the law firm of Clark, Thomas, Denius and so forth, he's the Thomas of the law firm. He is Lyndon Johnson's lawyer. [He's] probably one of his closest--at least at one time, I don't know now--as close to him personally as anybody. He handles all of his personal law business and does the law business for the television station. And, of course, I haven't seen enough of Johnson in the last five years to know how close he is now.

The impression at that time . . . Don and I had a very significant piece of litigation [of] which we were on opposite sides. And I had the feeling that he told Johnson that he ought to talk to me about coming back. And I noticed that when I would see Johnson

at cocktail parties and dinner parties, he started paying more attention to me than he had before. And I just did not want to go back to work for him, and I went to Washington and went to see Bill Moyers and told him that I did not want to come back, and I would appreciate it if he could see that I didn't get asked, because if I got asked, I didn't think I was man enough to say no.

F: Yes. That would be a harsh one.

W: So then, for a long time after that, he was noticeably cool.

But he's very congenial now, and I hold him in great admiration.

F: Does he have a kind of a "father-of-the-fraternity" attitude toward the people who have worked for him? Do you remember, in the sense of a great club of people who fought the fight together . . . ?

W: Oh, I don't think so. I think just, perhaps, to some extent, but I don't think that. He resents anyone that leaves him voluntarily, and I think that's . . . So that kind of keeps it . . . Now the people that he has placed in jobs and so forth, I think that perhaps there's a clubby atmosphere there among them and . . .

F: That's something I wanted to ask you. I've got plenty of evidence of his resentment of people who resign. And I've wondered about the people who've moved on to good jobs. In other words, [I've wondered] if he worked on the basis that nobody should leave him under any conditions, or if there does come a time when he thinks, "Well there's an opportunity for Jack, Jim or somebody," and helps them get it.

W: Well, I think it depends. For example, I know for a fact that he did not find the job that Lloyd Hand got when he left him, but I think Lloyd maintained a very good relationship. I don't know whether he resented him leaving at that time or not. I'm talking about when he left the first time. After he went as Chief of Protocol, there may well have been some unhappiness. I frankly believe that, most of the time, when he does have a good relationship when people leave him, [it] is because they've outworn their usefulness to him, and I don't mean this in any critical sense. I think they're just not . . .

F: There comes a time when a priest ought to change his parish.

W: That's right. They're either in a position where he can't move them to something lower, or they're unwilling to. And so he places . . . I have no personal knowledge of this, but I have heard of some situations where he placed people in just outstanding jobs just because they no longer performed the role for him that he wanted.

F: He doesn't really fire people, does he?

W: No, I don't believe anyone's ever been fired. I'm sure of that. I think if I'd wanted to, I could probably be somewhere in the operation now. But I think it's interesting that none of the people who were close to him--except Harry McPherson--when I was there--stayed close to him very long after he became President.

F: Right at the beginning, when you were saying that you were born in South Carolina, you said you would come back to that later. Let's

come back to that.

W: Well, that's an interesting anecdote. And incidentally, it's written up in Evans and Novak's book.

But one of the big fights we had on the Senate floor when I was there was the--I forget what they call it--but it was the labor bill--very highly charged bill. And Senator [John] McClellan had these various amendments that he was offering, one of which was known as the Bill of Rights Amendment. And one night we voted on the Bill of Rights Amendment, and everybody assumed that it was going to be defeated, and it passed. The next morning, when I came in, there was a note saying that Senator Johnson wanted to see me. So he said, "I want you to go back to your office and come up with something that I can say to explain my voting against the McClellan Bill of Rights Amendment." So I went back--and the same old saws and so forth--and suddenly something dawned on me that I thought I could really do something with. He had literally taken the Bill of Rights . . .

F: He being Johnson or McClellan?

W: No, McClellan, or whoever was doing his staff work, had literally taken the Bill of Rights and converted it to a labor context. It had due process and equal protection and all this. So I wrote Johnson a one-page memorandum, because he wouldn't deal with anything else, in which I said the Senate, the night before, had just passed the strongest civil rights bill that anybody'd ever suggested. There were just all these allusions of integrating--on the basis of

equal protection--integrating labor unions and forcing sort of an FEPC. And I'm convinced to this day, even though I was very much tongue-in-cheek, that it would have been used as such. Because he just literally borrowed the legal concepts that the Supreme Court had used to integrate schools and everything else. So it was the end of the day before I got this to him, and so I took it to him on the floor. He was sitting in his seat--the debate just going on around--and he read it. And as he read it, he smiled and so forth, and the way he handled it, I thought, was very interesting and a commentary on him. He turned around, and he looked, and the first person he took it to was from Alabama. You mentioned him a little while ago.

F: Sparkman?

W: No, the other one, the young one. His father was . . .

F: Talmadge, you mean?

W: Talmadge, yes.

F: From Georgia, yes.

W: Oh, Georgia, excuse me. He took it to Talmadge. And this is significant, because Talmadge is probably the best lawyer among the Southerners. And he showed it to him, and he says, "What do you think of that?" And Talmadge read it and turned white, didn't say a damned thing. Johnson didn't need a answer then. Then he started showing it around. I remember it really caused consternation amongst the Southerners. Then he showed it to Thurmond, and Thurmond just went into a rage. I remember he was talking to Stennis,

and he was saying, "Well, that's just not right, because the difference is this." And he had some crazy argument, and Senator Stennis said, "Oh, Strom, we'll never get away with that." Because they really were in a position where they voted for a civil rights bill. And I was just kind of standing over, naturally, just enjoying the hell out of the whole procedure.

So Thurmond comes up to Johnson, and he asks "By the way, who wrote this memorandum?" And Johnson looked over at me, and he points over there, and, says, "That boy from South Carolina." (Laughter).

But, anyhow, as a result they . . . I can't remember who all was involved. Kennedy and the Senator from Pennsylvania, I'm terrible on names . . .

F: Clark? Joe Clark?

W: Clark. Clark was very bothered, and I think it was significant for this point. Joe Clark was very bothered about the McClellan Amendment. There were some things in there that he thought were good, but of course, from a liberal standpoint, it was just unthinkable that you'd vote for the McClellan Amendment. But Clark and Humphrey and one of the Southerners--I can't remember--sat down within the next day and rewrote it. Then, even though it was passed and tabled and everything, they got enough votes to get it up again. And the portion of the labor law, now, which is comparable, which secures the rights of union members against the union, is the language which came out of this memorandum to the effect that

they passed a civil rights bill. But I'll never forget he said "that boy from South Carolina."

F: This would have been a beautiful piece of irony for McClellan, wouldn't it?

W: That's right. Oh, McClellan was furious. He was. And when he said, "That boy from South Carolina," I just nearly died.

F: Yeah, Johnson has an art for pulling out that sort of little thing.

W: And the only time was the day he interviewed me; he saw that the first thing on the sheet I gave him said, "Born: Spartanburg, South Carolina."

F: And it never came up again.

W: No.

F: Well, thank you, Jim.

W: I was delighted to do it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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