

INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 18, 1970  
INTERVIEWEE: WILL WILSON  
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ  
PLACE: His office at the Department of Justice,  
Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: This is an interview with the Honorable Will Wilson, Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division, in his office in Washington, D.C., on June 18, 1970. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Will, I guess we might as well be informal in this, since we've known each other too long to be otherwise. Let's trace very briefly your Texas background, at least up to the point when you became the state attorney general.

W: All right. I went to college at Oklahoma University, where I got a degree in geology. I then studied law at SMU and graduated in law at SMU. I went to work for the then law firm of Turner, Rodgers and Winn. It became Turner, Rodgers, Winn and Sellers. I worked for them between four and five years. I became an assistant attorney general under Gerald Mann, as I recall, in 1941, and stayed there until after Pearl Harbor, when I went in the Army. I was in various posts in the Army until after World War II, and came home in December of '45. I went back in the Attorney General's Office for a brief spell when Grover Sellers was attorney general of Texas; then resigned to run for district attorney of Dallas. I made the race in 1946; winning that race in '46, taking office January 1, '47. I had two opponents,

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or three, for a second term. I won that.

I stayed there until I ran for the Texas Supreme Court in 1950, against several opponents. I won that race, moved to Austin and took my position on the Supreme Court on January 1, '51, and stayed there six years through '56. I resigned in the last year to make the race for state attorney general. I won that one [and was] state attorney general three terms, which were completed in '62. During that period, I made two unsuccessful races: one for the United States Senate and one for governor. [Then I] dropped out of public life and practiced law from '62 until I accepted this position, with the beginning of the Nixon Administration in January of '69. I've been here a year and a half.

F: When did you first get acquainted with Lyndon Johnson?

W: The first time I met him was when I was district attorney in Dallas.

F: You weren't active in Jerry Mann's campaign in '41 for the Senate?

W: Yes, I was. But I wasn't in his office.

F: What did you do?

W: I was his Dallas County campaign manager.

F: But you never did get thrown in with Mr. Johnson?

W: Well, he was an opponent.

F: Yes, I know.

W: I didn't meet him though.

F: I didn't know whether you brushed him or not.

W: No, I never did meet him in that race. I met him for the first time in 1946, when I was district attorney in Dallas and he was then

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campaigning for the Senate against--

F: Well now, it was '48 when he ran again for the Senate.

W: Forty-eight, yes. And he ran against--who?

F: Coke Stevenson.

W: Coke Stevenson.

F: That's that famous 87 vote landslide.

W: Yes, I met him then. He came by the Dallas County Courthouse campaigning when he was setting up his campaign. He came in, and one of my assistants was a young fellow then named Henry Wade. He came by to see if he could get Henry Wade to be his Dallas County campaign manager.

F: Wade, as I recall, had been to law school with John Connally, too.

W: That's right. Wade and Connally were friends in law school. Wade declined and didn't take the job of campaign manager. But that's when I met Lyndon.

F: You just visited with him on that occasion? You didn't get involved in the campaign?

W: Yes, oh, yes. I had my own race.

F: Did you see much of him in the ensuing years, during his Senatorial period?

W: No.

F: You didn't. While you were either on the state Supreme Court or state attorney general did you have any relationship with him?

W: Well, not to amount to anything. I can't remember any on the Supreme Court. I don't remember that at all. I came through Washington when I was attorney general one time and visited up here,

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and he--

F: As attorney general, why, you would have had some tidelands oil involvement.

W: Yes. I handled the Tidelands Case, the second Tidelands Case.

F: I know that Price Daniel came up here as Senator to a great extent as a one-issue Senator, and that was to work on tidelands. In your work, did you tend to work with Senator Daniel, or did you see a lot of Senator Johnson, also?

W: He came in as governor the year I came in as attorney general, so I was not attorney general when he was senator. The case I handled was the second Tidelands Case, which involved the question of whether the Tidelands Act gave Texas three miles or three leagues. Daniel handled the first Tidelands Case when he was attorney general.

F: Were you able to utilize Senator Johnson at all in this?

W: I don't remember any contact with him at all, and I don't think he had anything to with that case.

F: This was strictly a legal--?

W: Strictly a lawsuit over the meaning of the Act, and I don't remember any contact with him about that.

F: As you come down to 1960, there's a question, of course, of who's going to be the Democratic nominee. I know you went in the summer of '60 before the Convention to a--I don't know whether you went to a meeting of the state attorney generals, or whether you just saw a poll of them regarding their preferences at the Democratic Convention in '60.

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- W: There was a meeting of the state attorneys general immediately ahead of the Convention. The group met in San Francisco, and those that wanted to go to the Democratic Convention went on a chartered car by train from San Francisco to Los Angeles. I was on that car.
- F: I rather gather that the attorney generals had a feeling that Kennedy was not their candidate, or at least was not likely to be a winning candidate.
- W: I don't remember much about that. Johnson came by San Francisco on his way to the Convention, and he did make an appearance of some kind, or met a group of the attorneys general. Maybe he made an appearance before their meeting. I don't remember that. I did see him there and discussed the thing with him, and I remember distinctly that he met with a group of postal employees who had come to see him at the same time, a committee of some kind of postal employees, in the hotel there in San Francisco. It's been a long time ago and I don't remember now, but he did come by. But he was there only a few hours, maybe one evening, maybe not all of an evening.
- F: Did he have your backing for the nomination?
- W: Yes, I supported him. I had been designated as one of the delegates to the Convention, and I suppose everyone in the delegation was supporting him. He was, of course, the incumbent Senator.
- F: This was looked upon by the Texas delegation as more than just a favorite son nomination, too. That is, this was a serious bid.
- W: He was a contender, yes. He was a national contender. Nobody thought about it as just a favorite son thing.

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F: What was your feeling at that time? Did you think he could get the nomination from your assay of the Convention spirit?

W: I didn't know that much about it. I got into the thick of the fight, and I campaigned fairly hard among the delegates for him. Since I'd never been in national politics and it was the first convention I'd ever gone to, I had no basis for a realistic appraisal of what his chances were. We were enthusiastic, and it was like a football game; you were rooting for your side.

F: Was there great consternation, as depicted, when he accepted the vice presidency?

W: Well, of course, there was. I was one of the people that advised him to take it. We had fought a pretty hard battle, and everybody was kind of mad and, you know, wrought up about the situation. I got ready to leave on a vacation. I had planned to leave the day after the Convention and take my vacation, which we did. But the night that Kennedy had been nominated--

F: As I recall that wound up about midnight or so.

W: Well, it was the next day. Kennedy had already been nominated. No, as I remember, the vote was over late in the afternoon or early evening.

F: Is that right?

W: Everybody broke up and everybody was mad. So we all went back to a very shabby hotel where we were, and then we went out for dinner. I came in after dinner; it must have been ten-thirty or eleven o'clock maybe, between eleven and twelve, and I went by Lyndon's hotel suite. Of course the press was all outside and they had a bunch of guards

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and all, and I got through the guards and went in and talked to Walter Jenkins. There were very few people there. I think Mrs. Johnson was there; Walter was there, and I don't know, not many people. I told Walter I was leaving in the morning, and that I had understood that he was going to be offered the vice presidency if the Kennedys wanted it. I'd gotten that from the Massachusetts attorney general.

F: So it had been rumored previous to this?

W: Eddie McCormack, who was then Massachusetts attorney general, [and I] rode down together on the train from San Francisco, and we discussed that possibility. I told Eddie that if Lyndon lost the presidency and was offered the vice presidency I thought he ought to take it and would take it. Eddie was at that time a Kennedy man; later on he broke with them. So I went up and told Walter that I was leaving on my vacation and I just wanted to put in a little plug, and that is that as I analyzed the situation, if Lyndon ever wanted to be President that he should take the vice presidency. If he was through with his ambition to be President, then he shouldn't, but if he wanted to be President he ought to take it, based on the fact that whatever happened he couldn't continue as Majority Leader under the circumstances. If Kennedy ran and lost and he didn't take it, he'd lose out with the Party, and if Kennedy won and he had turned it down, he wasn't in any position to work--

F: To work with the new President.

W: --with the new President.

F: Then he would be spurned.

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- W: That was just my judgment, that he'd never be President if he passed that up. If he wanted to be President, he'd better take it. As a matter of fact, Lyndon's told me a number of times, I was one of the few people that told him that.
- F: I think most of the advice was to the contrary at the beginning.
- W: Yes.
- F: You know then that Walter conveyed your sentiments.
- W: Oh, yes, Walter did that night.
- F: Did you see the new nominee the next day at all?
- W: No, we left early the next morning. We went on up and we watched his acceptance on TV, I believe, but we didn't stay for that. We left on a [vacation].
- F: Did the fact that he was running in the summer of '60 for vice president of the United States and for senator from Texas give you any problems as state attorney general?
- W: Yes, it sure did. Because there was an act that had been passed to permit that, and that was attacked in Dallas in a lawsuit. I defended that lawsuit successfully. We were able to win an attack. I went up personally and argued the lawsuit in Dallas.
- F: Do you have any reasonably firsthand insight on how much Johnson sponsored that act and how much friends of his initiated it?
- W: I don't have any idea about the legislative history of it.
- F: Then there wasn't much question of purpose?
- W: Well, yes, that's right. It was obviously aimed at allowing him to keep his Senate nomination and run for vice president at the same time.



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F: Beyond that one defense, though, you never had any more trouble with that act?

W: Not that I can remember now. That was a case in Judge Blankenship's court, as I remember, in Dallas.

F: Homer Blankenship?

W: No, I can't-- [Dallas Blankenship]

F: It doesn't matter. What was your principal argument?

W: I would have to go back and get the thing in mind. It was dual office-holding, I guess, or something. It was constitutional argument about the constitutionality of that act, and as I remember it the constitutional point, from an intellectual standpoint, didn't really present too much of a problem. I thought it was a fairly clear constitutional law, and we won the case.

F: Okay, Johnson gets to be vice president, and that creates the Senate vacancy. Before we get into that, you're busy enough with your own affairs in 1960 that you've neither the time nor the taste for any campaigning.

W: Oh, no. I was very active in the campaign.

F: You were?

W: Yes, after I got back from my vacation, I'd been there less than a day when I got a call from Price Daniel. He said Lyndon wanted to see me out at the Ranch about the campaign, and I told him I was tired. I'd just been through a campaign to get re-elected attorney general, and I had a fairly hard one, and I had a lot of work to do and a lot of other things. Price asked me to go out there, and so I rode out

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there, took my boy with me--he was then a little boy. We went out there, and Lyndon was by the swimming pool. He was really dejected. The roof had kind of fallen in on him for accepting the vice presidency.

F: He was getting all the kickback from those who didn't want him to.

W: Everybody was cussing him out, and it really had fallen in on him. So he was sitting by the swimming pool, and he wanted me to take the management of the campaign. I told him I didn't see how I could do it. I was tired and had been through a lot, and I had an awful lot of work to do at the office. So then he said something about Gerry Mann might agree to head it up if he could get somebody else to work on organizing. If I wouldn't do the campaign, would I take the job of precinct organizer or organizational chairman, I believe they called it, something like that. I told him, "Well, I might do that." But then he wanted me to go up to Kansas City to meet Bobby Kennedy to help set up the campaign. He said that that had to be the next day. There was a plane going up there--he was going to Washington--they had a special charter plane. There was a group coming up from Houston that were primarily labor dominated, and he didn't want the whole thing to be a labor-dominated group. He needed somebody to send up there to negotiate with Bobby Kennedy on organizing the campaign. So I agreed to go, and there were about twenty-five or thirty Texas people. We went to the Hotel Muehlbach, I believe, and there I met with Bobby Kennedy and Whizzer White.

F: Was the Texas delegation heavy with labor?

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W: Oh, it was practically all labor. It was a group out of Houston that had somehow been invited or organized or something. So we met up there, and we had a number of general discussions of the thing. It was the first preliminary organization meeting. Bobby was swinging around over the country, you know, in a group of regional meetings.

F: Did Bobby pretty well dominate it?

W: Well, he was the main figure. There was quite a bit of publicity about the meeting.

F: Was it an open meeting?

W: No. But the thing was swarming with newspaper people at the hotel, and there was a lot publicity about it. So then we came back, and I accepted the job of organizational chairman. I might say that when I first went out there to that meeting by the swimming pool, Lyndon had been trying to get hold of John Connally. He talked about the way the world was falling in on him; he said, "I can't even get John. He won't answer my calls. He's down at Brackettville, and won't take my calls." I tried several times to get John out in the campaign, not very successfully.

F: John sat that one pretty well out.

W: He sat it out.

F: Did Jerry Mann come in with you?

W: Yes, Jerry Mann came in and became the campaign chairman.

F: You all made an easy working team then.

W: There were a good many others on there. They set it up. But basically Jerry was the chairman, and I served as organizational director. I

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forget the other titles, but there was a letterhead set up.

F: Now a lot of Texans, and influential Texans, were outraged by Johnson's acceptance of the nomination. Could you gradually turn them around when you began to point out what this could mean to Texas?

W: Well, a good many people--

F: Was this your approach generally?

W: A good many people had turned, yes, although not nearly all, and a lot of people never did. Of course, our appeal primarily was to the Democratic part of the state. It was a straight Republican-Democratic situation. Oh, Price Daniel and Jerry were co-chairmen. Price agreed to be co-chairman. I suggested to Lyndon that he set it up that way, that he set up and put both state and federal officials out in front, and that's the way they did it. They made the congressmen chairmen of their districts. They organized the campaign by congressional district, put the congressman in as the titular head, and got a sort of working chairman to go with them as co-chairman of each district.

F: Did Johnson take a fairly detailed hand in getting the thing set up?

W: Originally, he did, yes. Of course, before long he was out otherwise. We set it up that way.

F: Now, if Mr. Nixon could have carried Texas, we could have had a different situation. Has he ever brought up this question, that in a sense you denied him the state?

W: I didn't deny him the state. But no, he doesn't. Of course, I'm sure he knows--

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F: I expect he appreciates a good worker.

W: It was all very public. He was very familiar with that.

F: Right. Did you see Mr. Johnson, or were you with him the night of the election?

W: Yes. They had a thing there at the Driskill Hotel.

F: What was his mood?

W: He was elated, of course. The returns came in as they did.

F: But it wasn't really clear cut until California--

W: It wasn't.

F: --came in, and it didn't come until the next day.

W: Yes. But, you see, Kennedy and Johnson were underdogs right from the start in that thing, and it came to be pretty clear towards the end that they were going to win. But it wasn't clear. I was down at the Driskill Hotel at a meeting they had in the ballroom and the room back of it, and that went on past midnight. I left and went home and went to bed.

F: But the thing was an indication it was still not clinched.

W: I don't remember what the situation was.

F: Did you see anything more of Johnson then immediately after that?

W: I went to a meeting at Denver of the attorney generals meeting shortly after that, and he called me up there and said that Kennedy was coming to visit him on the Ranch. He wanted Price and Ben Ramsey and myself to come out there and visit with him. I couldn't get back for it. I was at this convention in Denver, and I didn't get back for it. So I didn't go. Then I talked to him a time or two after that. I

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talked to him about making the race for the Senate.

F: Did he encourage you?

W: Well, yes, in a way. But I made the decision myself; it wasn't his decision. He said he'd vote for me, and I think he did.

F: He didn't ever really, though, come out and say that he was for one of the candidates. He stayed clear of that race.

W: He made no public statement, no, no public statement at all.

F: How do you account for the confusion that happened in that election? As you well know, at the time Tower could depend on his group, and to a certain extent Blakley could. But you and Jim Wright sort of cancelled each other, and of course Gonzalez and Maverick cancelled each other. I had any number of people say to me, I think quite truthfully, "Well, if I'd know thus and so, I would have voted for Will Wilson," or "I would have voted for . . ." somebody, you know. It's just like throwing money in the air and betting on the numbers that are going to be [showing].

W: Part of it was maybe a failure on the part of the national leadership to really pull the Party together. I think Lyndon might have saved all that had he taken a firm grip on it. You see, it was an open election and wasn't partisan in the sense that nobody was a candidate of a Party, although John Tower was the only Republican. But it was treated as nonpartisan election by the national Party leadership; I guess [because] they were so busy setting up their Administration. But that was a kind of vacuum. It didn't need to happen that way, but it did. Some of the candidates were--

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F: They could have changed the course of Texas history considerably, couldn't they?

W: Yes. Some of the candidates were either serving partly personal motivations or frivolous. Gonzalez got in there to advertise himself. He had no chance of winning, and he took the Mexicans away from anybody who could. Labor made a very irresponsible decision; they decided to go for Maury Maverick, Jr., who was never a contender. So they took themselves out of it, and any influence or responsibility they had was dissipated. So the thing just disintegrated into chaos.

F: Yes, there was that.

W: And I may say Lyndon went to Europe or somewhere else.

F: Right. Well, I remember that as a voter, you know, and there--  
(Interruption).

W: Where were we?

F: We were talking about the election of '61 and the fact that it was so chaotic and the fact that the voter was on the horns of a dilemma. He knew the man he might want to vote for, but he's also voting against the house. You're trying to vote sometimes to block somebody and he's trying to outguess--You know, "Where would my vote do the most good?"--since you diluted any real sense in this, I think.

W: Before we go on with that election, I'd like to make one observation about this campaign. I helped organize it and got the county chairmen and that sort of thing, and it wasn't easy. It was an unpopular thing.

F: It was uphill.

W: It was uphill, and many of the people who later came forward as staunch

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Lyndon Johnson people weren't there at the time, among them John Connally, Gene Locke and others. We tried to get John to take a prominent position, which he refused. He made one appearance that I know about, which was a nonpublicized appearance at the Ranch when he and I were the chairmen for Mr. Truman's visit, ex-President Truman. Other than that, he didn't participate. Gene Locke, I personally tried to get him to be chairman in Dallas, and he turned it down. The most that Gene Locke would do was hold a breakfast for businessmen, an unpublicized breakfast for businessmen in his home. But otherwise he stayed out of the campaign, and that was true of many people who during the Johnson Presidency became very prominent.

F: Did a lot of people at that time back off from you because you were participating in it?

W: Yes, I lost heavily in that. I lost heavily. I lost many of my lifetime supporters when I went to Dallas and argued the case, the constitutionality of the case there. Dallas had been my home, and many of my father's friends and all got very angry at me and left me because I was up there supporting Johnson and supporting the constitutionality of that statute.

F: So now then, in one sense, you're reaping the price of support. Did you ever, from either Kennedy or Johnson, get any intimations or offers of a position?

W: Yes. Johnson called me right after the campaign and asked me what position I would like to have, and I was not modest about it. I told him the one thing I was interested in would be attorney general.



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F: You had an uphill fight there, too.

W: Then he came back and said that that was not available because Bobby was going to be attorney general, and so I didn't pursue that matter any further. I thought that was not a good move on Jack Kennedy's part, to put his brother in as attorney general. But in any event, I wasn't at that time interested in anything else. Subsequent to that, after I had lost the race for Senate and was getting ready to run for governor, there was quite an effort made to--not an effort, but a tender made, or discussion of taking an appointment on a federal circuit court at New Orleans. But I had determined to run for governor and didn't consider it.

F: Time, March 24, 1961, discussing the nation in general and the Texas race in particular, had a lead paragraph in which it quoted you campaigning in El Paso for the Senate that people seemed to be apathetic about issues. Do you remember the situation at that time?

W: Well, they were so confused. You can't make an issue with seven or eight or ten leading candidates.

F: When you don't know whose carte it was, or what.

W: No, and really it wasn't a campaign in which there were many issues in that sense.

F: You decided then to run for governor in '62, and this was when Connally came home to run.

W: Yes, yes.

F: You know the slogans that appeared on all the bumpers on LBJ: "Lyndon's Boy, John." Was he ostensibly Johnson's candidate?

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W: I was one of the ones that started that. When I got ready to run for governor I had lost the race for senator, and I guess a lot of people just flat counted me out, and maybe rightly so, from the chance of winning. But in any event Price decided he wanted to run again, and there was a sharp conflict between Price and me on that, because we'd had some conversations about that subject. I regarded Price's action as being a breach of an understanding, in effect. I had not run against him on a second term, and he had told me--you can't contract about things and you don't make binding agreements about things like that--that he was not going to run for a third term and I could rely on that. If I would not run against him for a second term, he wouldn't be there.

F: What do you think he did, just get ambitious?

W: Price is a very egotistical and self-centered sort of an individual, and he just wasn't willing to give up.

F: He liked being governor.

W: He liked being governor. So, in any event, he announced and I announced, and there were others.

F: Then Don Yarborough came in.

W: Don Yarborough came in and a fellow from Plainview.

F: A fellow named [Marshall] Formby.

W: Formby from Plainview.

F: This was when General Walker made his appearance.

W: Walker made his appearance and then Connally. Connally had been named Secretary of the Treasury for a very brief period, a year [or so].

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F: Navy.

W: Navy. Secretary of the Navy. So I went to see Lyndon and told Lyndon that I understood Connally was getting ready to leave the Cabinet and come back and run for Governor, that there were a number of people in there who had supported Lyndon and Kennedy, and I didn't think a Cabinet officer ought to come back and do it. There was Price and myself and Formby and Yarborough that I knew of, and maybe others; and there wasn't any way, first, to separate Connally from Lyndon, and, secondly, to separate Connally from the national Administration. It would look like the national Administration had endorsed a candidate against a group of people who had been their supporters. And more than that, I'd gotten out in front for him when it was unpopular just the year before, and Connally hadn't. I didn't think that they ought to endorse Connally and put him in the race for governor.

Lyndon said he had no control over it, that Connally had not consulted him, and that he didn't know any more about it than I did. I think Lyndon was telling the truth. From all I know about it now, I think Connally had transferred his allegiance from Lyndon to Kennedy, that Kennedy was building a foil to Lyndon, and that Kennedy made the decision and not Lyndon. I don't think Lyndon wanted Connally to run for governor. The dynamics of the political situation was such that he had everything to lose and not much to gain in that endeavor, and there were a lot of little things that indicated to me that the decision was--on hindsight, not at the time, but on hindsight--probably more Kennedy's than Johnson's. Johnson told me that he had not been

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consulted about it, either by Kennedy or by Connally, and he didn't know what Connally was going to do. Subsequently I got word through a mutual friend from Lyndon that he thought Connally had decided to make the race.

F: You'd hardly think a Cabinet officer would be leaving to run for governor and would let the thing get to the point of an open rumor without at least consulting his President anyhow. So Kennedy must have known.

W: I think that's right. And secondly, I don't think Kennedy had anything personal about it. I think he figured he had to carry Texas, and that Connally was the best man to do it. The Kennedy brand of politics was such that they didn't pay much attention to anything else in things like that. So it was probably just a pragmatic decision made to do it. Connally had come to me at the time of the Senate race, urging me to get into the Senate race, and he sent a group of oil men from Fort Worth who volunteered to raise a lot of money. Now they didn't produce in the Senate race, but Connally had been very active in getting me into the Senate race and all that. He came down to Austin twice from Washington for that purpose, and it's apparent to me now but it wasn't then. But in any event--

F: He was going to get you placed, in other words.

W: Yes, and I imagine he did vote for me. I don't know, but he was very active in getting me to run for the Senate. Then--where were we?

F: We were talking about the governor's race.

W: Oh, so I came up here to Washington to see Lyndon and called on Lyndon.

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It was not a good day; he was going to a funeral and he was busy. But I talked to him briefly, and that's when we had that conversation. I talked to Walter Jenkins a couple of hours about it and laid out to Walter the position that I was going to take, and that I thought that Connally's entry would do nothing but very badly divide the Democratic Party. What they needed was somebody to unite it and not divide it, and he would inflame the old Yarborough sores and forces.

F: Ralph had agreed to stay out.

W: That's right. And secondly, I thought it would be better for the national Party if they had somebody that would not revive the old Shivers-Yarborough controversy. He was going to do it, and the end result was that they were going to have a divided party instead of a united one for Kennedy's second term. There were a lot of things or arguments I advanced, but then among other things I told Johnson and Walter both that Daniel had been the co-chairman of the campaign committee and was running for re-election, that I'd been the chairman of the organizational committee, that Formby had worked and supported them, that Don Yarborough had supported them, and that the Administration ought not to put a man in against people who'd supported them. It couldn't be interpreted any other way and would be interpreted that way, and more than that, the only thing I saw to do if that happened was to make an issue of it. I didn't propose to take it lying down; I was going to make an issue of it.

Johnson said at the time that he hoped Connally wouldn't make the governor's race, but that he had no control over it. I didn't

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really believe that at the time. I think now, when I look back over the thing, he was probably right. I don't think he could control it. I think Connally had decided without consulting him, and that it was Kennedy's decision. I think it was part of, also, Bobby Kennedy's decision. I think it was part of the buildup to get at least an alternative to Lyndon in Texas, and they were using Connally for that purpose. In any event, Connally came on in the race, and it was a natural thing. I charged him with being sent home from Washington to govern the people of Texas and that sort of thing, and made an issue of his being sent by the national Party back to [Texas].

F: Sort of bring the word to the peasants?

W: Yes. But I think in the long run my judgment is that it helped him more than it hurt him. It may have been what put him out in front.

F: Kind of advertised him?

W: Well, it told all the people who wanted to go with the Administration where to go. See, it didn't take many votes to win that thing. There were so many candidates, and they were all grouped pretty close together. I don't think anybody got more than 20 percent, and they were in there running from 10 and 12 up to 20 percent, which isn't much of a spread in a race like that. It's just a question of who's out front, and he got out in front with the labor man, who was Yarborough. Now the situation was such that anybody could beat Don Yarborough who could get in a run-off with him, and Connally went on to beat him in the run-off. Connally made a very vigorous and aggressive campaign, made a good campaign.

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F: He was one of the better organized ones and better financed.

W: He had the most money of anybody, but that came partially from his being Secretary of the Navy because of the defense industry thing in Texas. Everywhere I went in campaigning the defense industries were lined up solid for him.

F: That's a hard gang to take on.

W: That was part of the benefit of being the Administration candidate.

F: Along about this time the Billy Sol Estes scandal broke. I know you were quite active in the investigation there. Did you ever see anything more than just sort of a normal relationship between an ambitious entrepreneur who wants to get on with an Administration and the Administration?

W: It depends on what you mean by the Administration. Billy Sol Estes had very close ties in the Agriculture Department, and I think corrupt ties there. Freeman was defensive in the sense of defending his Department. I don't think Freeman was corrupt. I think some of his subordinates were, and some of them certainly went out of their way to help Billy So Estes in any way they could.

F: This did take connivance from the Department, you're convinced of that?

W: No question about it in my mind. For instance, the transfer of the cotton allotments from the Southern states over there had to be done against their rules and over the internal objection of the bureaucracy. His being nominated to this advisory committee--I've seen the files on that--was . . . . Normally that kind of appointment coming through the federal bureaucracy with the kind of objections that were on the

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top of the file and a recommendation against it would have stopped anybody from being nominated to anything. It was overruled at the top, and in spite of the staff recommendations, he was put on that committee. They went out of their way to fire people who opposed him. He had a lot of clout in the Agriculture Department. He couldn't have gotten what he did otherwise. What he was doing, you know, was selling farms one foot wide across a section of land to colored people over in Alabama and letting them transfer the allotments. Say, if they had a twenty-acre cotton allotment, they would buy enough one-foot strips, which is an obvious subterfuge. That was rammed through the Agriculture Department from the top.

F: Each one of those assigned an allotment had to be approved?

W: Had to be approved. He couldn't have done it without good clout inside the Agriculture Department.

F: Did you ever in your own mind tie him up with either Johnson or Yarborough?

W: Well, all I know about it--

F: I mean we'll grant--I don't think this is an arguable point--that as a great beneficiary of the agricultural policy under the Democrats he was astute enough to support the Party.

W: I know nothing more than what was then publicized. I might say for this record, for the benefit of some scholar fifty years from now, that I kept quite a scrapbook on Billy Sol Estes, and I have donated that to the University of Texas Library. It's a big, thick thing, and it took a lot of work to compile it. If it's kept intact it'll have



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everything about Estes that was publicized, so anyone wanting to get the publicized facts can go to that scrapbook. It's in a collection I donated to the University of Texas.

F: Did you have a feeling that you were obstructed in your efforts to get at the facts?

W: Oh, yes. There isn't any question about it. The thing was thrown into bankruptcy. We were going like wildfire in Estes' records, and they moved in the federal court to put him in bankruptcy. The bankrupt trustee took the records, and the first thing he did was to exclude all the state people from the records. We never got into them after that, and from then on they were sealed, from the day the bankruptcy trustee took them over. He did not cooperate in any way, and that stopped further inquiry. You see, we just had two and a half days in his records. I knew it was going to happen that way, and so I sent a team of about ten people on the ground. I instructed them to work around the clock, and practically all the information we got on Estes we got in the first two and a half days, before the federal trustee was appointed and seized the records and sealed them. Then we went ahead and developed it with our courts of inquiry. But that was done on a very quick [basis]. Including all of his financial records, it was two and a half days.

F: You weren't permitted, then, to make any sort of ordinary careful, deep case that you would as a rule?

W: No, no. No, we never got back into them.

F: Why do you think that was, just because he did have that kind of

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clout, or because of the wanting to avoid scandal?

W: Well, it was a scandal, and it was growing very rapidly. The Kennedys were especially sensitive about it. Bobby Kennedy kept on the thing. He kept a phone open on it, and Jack Kennedy was advised hourly on the progress. I always suspected that they thought that Lyndon might be involved, and they were very sensitive to that. Nobody knew, of course, what was going to come out of it.

F: Did you talk to Bobby at all on this?

W: No. They sent two people down, a fellow named Barefoot Sanders and a man named Bob Rostall (?) from the Justice Department. He's still here.

F: What was his name?

W: Bob Rostall. They sent Barefoot and Bob down. Barefoot was then U.S. Attorney in Dallas. They had others that kept a very close tab on it. After the bankruptcy man got hold of the records and shut our people out, the trustee in bankruptcy, we started a series of courts of inquiry based on the information. It was in those that we developed the testimony about the Neiman-Marcus suits given to Agriculture employees, and that's when it really first came to President Kennedy's attention. But we had a court of inquiry in Dallas in which we proved that Estes bought suits of clothes for key Agriculture employees in connection with his getting the allotments through. That made the headlines in the Washington Post, and it was the first threat of scandal in the Kennedy Administration, so the Kennedys were very jumpy about it. I'm told that during those inquiries Bobby had an open line

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to the place where they were, and he got half hourly reports on what was going on.

F: "What turned up in the last half hour?" Right? Did you get any word at all from Johnson on this?

W: No.

F: He stayed--

W: I had one visit during the process of the thing from a mutual friend in Houston who came by one Sunday morning. And I had a visit from Gene Locke who came by also, at my home, to in effect discuss the thing. I didn't pay any attention to them. By that time, I was pretty hostile.

F: Yes. What really triggered your decision to change parties? Was it the national situation, or the Texas situation?

W: Oh, after I made the governor's race and left I'd resolved that I wasn't going to participate in politics to amount to anything any more. I was then in my early fifties. I decided that I'd spent most of my life in public life, and that if I was going to make any money that was the time to make it. So I opened a law office and stayed away from political affairs. I devoted myself to my law practice and to investments and basically to building some financial position. Then what really brought on the re-entry, I guess, was Waggoner Carr's winning the Democratic nomination for the Senate. I had run against Carr. He'd run against me, and I defeated him. We'd had a rather hot race. And then he went in as attorney general.

He had, I thought, given away some cases I'd worked very hard to

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make: the school bus case, the antitrust case against commercial solvents, and the Estes matter. He took very nominal fines in both of them, and they had been very active in his campaign when he beat Tom Reavley. I thought he had, in effect, repaid his political debts with cases that I'd worked very hard to make and [which] were especially hurtful to the Texas people and Texas government, the school bus case especially, the antitrust case. So I didn't think he ought to be United States senator. As between Tower and Carr, I decided to support Tower, and so notified Tower.

F: So did a lot of Democrats, as you recall.

W: Tower asked me to do something in his campaign, and I headed a committee of some kind and made some appearances for him. Then I cut some both TV tapes and radio tapes; you know, spots, and they used them extensively. The campaign manager told me they used them more than any other material they had.

F: I got exposed to them.

W: Yes. I got to be rather friendly with Tower in that campaign. I'd never known him very well. He and I had been opponents, but I didn't get very well acquainted with him. So we got to be friends, and he asked me if I didn't want to join the Republican Party. He said the Republicans wanted me, and I thought, "Well, the Republicans want me and the Democrats don't, so . . . ." It was more than that. To me it seemed that after Johnson the Democratic Party couldn't go anywhere but left, and hard left, and I thought the Republican positions were closer to my positions. I'm basically a middle-of-the-road to

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conservative, so out of all that, I decided to join the Republican Party.

F: Did you ever hear anything out of either Connally or Johnson on this decision?

W: No. I haven't seen Lyndon or talked to him, except once briefly at a wedding reception, since right before the governor's race. That happened at the swearing in of Judge James Noel in Houston, who was and is a good friend of mine. I went to his swearing in ceremony for federal judge, and Lyndon and Ralph Yarborough were both there, and others. At that time I was getting ready to run for governor, and I was sitting in the back of the room. So after the ceremony, why, Lyndon came over and said, "Will, I want to talk to you." I said, "Well, Lyndon, I understand Connally's going to run for governor, and I regard that as a basic breach of a good many loyalties. I don't think we've got anything to talk about." He said, "Well, somebody's been poisoning your mind." And I said, "Maybe that's true, but we really don't have anything to talk about." I turned around and walked away, and that's the last time I've seen him except to speak to him briefly at a wedding reception at one of our neighbors, Fagan Dickson, who was my opponent for the Supreme Court judge. One of his daughters got married. We were invited, went over there, Lyndon and Mrs. Johnson were there, and we shook hands in a line.

F: That was before Fagan ran against Jake Pickle.

W: That's right. Well, this was way back. It was after Lyndon was vice president and before he was president, but I haven't seen him since then.

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F: He never contacted you with regard to the '64 campaign?

W: No.

F: So basically your association ended that day in '63?

W: There at that swearing in when I said, "Lyndon, we've got nothing more to talk about." Apparently, we didn't.

F: You haven't had any contact with him since you came up here?

W: No, I haven't. I don't feel any animosity towards Lyndon. I was mad at the time, but that's long since gone.

(Interruption)

In the Kennedy-Johnson campaign, when I was serving as the organizational chairman I also worked out all of the itineraries for Kennedy on their trip. On his first tour he went across the north part of the country, came down the west coast and came into Texas at El Paso. I went out with Lyndon to meet him out there, and we met him that evening at the . . . . No, he was late coming in. He came in and went right to bed. Then they had a breakfast for him, and that's where I met him. We were all at the head table, Mr. Rayburn and a group of people, so Lyndon introduced me to him. At that introduction, of course I guess it was a little polite thing to say, Lyndon told Jack Kennedy, "Will here had more to do with my taking the vice presidency than any other one person."

F: Very interesting. Did Marge participate in any of these little kind of women's parties that Mrs. Johnson and the Kennedy's [had]?

W: Yes. She traveled with the Kennedy women, got acquainted with them when they came on their visits, went with them to the various affairs.

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F: How did these seem to go? I know I ought to ask her, but--

W: She has very definite feelings about some of them. Out of that, she did not like Jackie Kennedy. She became very impressed and personally fond of Ethel Kennedy.

F: You mean she became disillusioned with Jackie before the rest of the country?

W: She just didn't take to Jackie at all. And she traveled with her and some of the other [Kennedy women]. I may be wrong. Maybe she didn't travel with Jackie. I don't believe Jackie was on those tours, but those sisters were.

F: Yes. The sisters and sometimes the mother. It was a little bit of a floating population. There were enough Kennedys; there were always several available.

W: Yes, they were available. But she liked Ethel Kennedy.

(Interruption)

I can quite sincerely say that I don't have any personal animosities towards Lyndon out of all this, and I think he made for himself and for the Democratic Party the right decision in accepting the vice presidency. I don't feel like it was a mistake at the time then or now on hindsight.

F: I think he did also accomplish this, and that is he did in one sense obliterate the geographical animus against where a president comes from. I thought his and Goldwater's running in '64, one from Arizona and one from Texas, just almost did away with the past.

W: Yes.

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F: He couldn't have done that a scant four years ago.

W: Yes. And then, secondly, I think that without Lyndon Kennedy would not have won it. We certainly wouldn't have carried Texas, and probably other states. So I think Lyndon's accepting that was a major factor in the Democratic Party winning it.

F: What did you think of him as president?

W: I thought he made a pretty good president. I thought he made a strong president in many ways. I think he had some weaknesses, and one of them was he surrounded himself in the White House with relatively weak people. He selected people who were more in the category of an aide than a real adviser, and his tendency to surround himself with people who were not heavy enough probably cost him a good deal. I thought he made a very poor choice of attorney general in Ramsey Clark; I think he thinks that from a number of things I've heard. But he badly needed a hard-hitting, aggressive attorney general.

F: You and Ramsey both came from Dallas. Had you known Ramsey when he was growing up? I know you knew his father.

W: Yes, I've known them both, Tom and Ramsey. I knew Bob Clark real well, and I personally like Ramsey as a person. I think he's more of a teacher. He was not a prosecutor, and he wasn't an aggressive man. He was philosophically inhibited inside of himself with his very sincere and deep philosophical beliefs, which kept him from being an aggressive law enforcement man. Lyndon more than anyone else needed a hard-hitting attorney general.

F: Do you have the feeling that a good bit of your work now is



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inheriting the Johnson-Clark policies?

W: No. Actually, of course, our work comes from the general law enforcement conditions, and I think the relatively weak tenure in the Attorney General's Office contributed some. But our problems are more basic than that. I think where they hurt Lyndon was the inability [of] the public to believe that he could handle the riots and all the law enforcement problems. He needed--instead of the permissiveness that seemed to come through when the TV showed pick-up trucks backing up to stores and running off with loads of goods--somebody in there fighting instead of in there saying, "We must not hurt the feelings of the demonstrators." That he didn't get. It didn't come through. That hurt him as much, I think, as anything else in his public stance in his Administration.

F: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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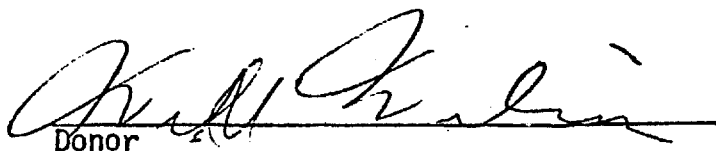
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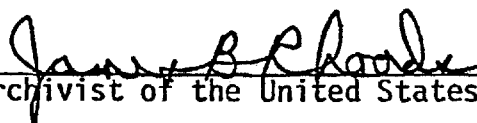
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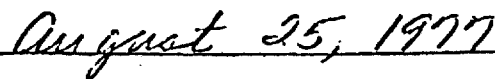
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