INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 30, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: James C. Wright

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

PLACE: Congressman Wright's office, House of Representatives, Rayburn Building, Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: I suppose we might as well be informal since we've known each other almost long enough.

W: We sure have, Joe.

F: Jim, tell us a little bit of how you came to be in the Congress of the United States, where you are from, where you went to school, and so on.

W: Well, Joe, as you know, I am from Weatherford.

F: Texas.

W: Weatherford, Texas, which is just some thirty miles west of Fort Worth. Since the redistricting in 1957, which took Weatherford out of my district, I have lived in Fort Worth. Mohammed didn't object to going to the mountain.

I came to be a congressman simply by reason of running for it, I guess. It's what I always had wanted to do. I suppose I can date my interest in serving in the Congress as far back as when I was a sophomore in high school. I had been studying world history and had come to the point in the progression of man when World War I was over and--

(Telephone rings)

W: The war had been won at great cost and sacrifice under the promise of making the world safe for democracy and fighting a war to end wars. Yet, it became very painfully apparent to me that the peace was lost by lack of vision in the United States Senate. I became imbued with the very deep conviction that Woodrow Wilson had been right and that his prophecy at Pueblo, Colorado was coming true. This was 1937. We could hear the war drums, see the war clouds gathering. It was almost inevitable that my generation, again, would be plunged into war. I decided, then, I think, that the best thing a fellow might do with his life would be to try to get in the field of public service, and of course, that meant, ultimately, the Congress, where he might work for those conditions that could make peace on earth possible. I had served as a member of the Texas Legislature and as Mayor of the little town of Weatherford; and in 1954, when I was 31, I decided that I would run for Congress and either enter this work full time, or get it out of my system.

F: You had Fort Worth in your district?

W: Fort Worth was in the district, yes.

F: And it's traditional that where you have a major city in a district that is primarily small town and rural, that the major city tends to dominate it. How did you overcome that problem?

W: Well, Joe, that's true enough. Weatherford, then, was a town of maybe ten thousand or eleven thousand people; Fort Worth was a town of some three hundred thousand people. At least three-fourths of the votes in the whole district were in Fort Worth, but I couldn't

let that bother me; that was the district in which I lived. I ran, contrary to several other well established precedents. For at least fifty years prior to that, an incumbent had not been defeated when he was seeking re-election, and I ran against an incumbent in the Democratic primary. Similarly, it was thought at the time that nobody could succeed in running for Congress without the active support of the so-called Establishment in Fort Worth, including the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and its publisher who was Amon Carter. I didn't have that, but ran anyway, and undertook to make up for it in getting around over the district personally and seeing an awful lot of the people. Things broke right. I suppose, in one way, I was lucky.There's a lot of luck in the business of politics.

F: You need to be lucky.

W: That's right. You can't afford much bad luck. Even those things in that race which initially appeared to be to my detriment, ultimately worked around the other way, and I was elected. Now, that's how I came to be in Congress.

F: Was this the campaign in which you took the ad in the Star-Telegram asking for a fair shake from it?

W: Yes, that's right.

F: Won you lots of support all over the state, I know.

W: Well, apparently it was successful. On the Thursday before the primary on Saturday, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram had run a front page editorial, in which it had said, among other things, "Who knows this fellow Wright from Weatherford? Who has the faintest

conception of what he stands for?" This was the straw that broke the camel's back. I had been giving them copies of everything I was saying, and they had not been giving it any play in the paper, and to the extent that people didn't know, it was because the Star-Telegram was not printing it. And so I took out this ad saying, among other things, "Mr. Carter, I will be your Congressman, just as I will be everyone's Congressman, but I will not be your personal, private Congressman. I will work with you, but I will not work for you." And apparently, it hit the public fancy. But I must say, Joe, that if it had not been for television, I wouldn't have been able to get my message across to the people. Television then was quite young. There was one station in the entire district, but in traveling over the district, I could tell that three out of every five farmhouses, for example, had television antennas. If they were listening, they were listening to Channel 5. So I spent most of my effort on television broadcasts, and this got me into the living rooms of most of the people in the district.

F: There was a period in there--to talk about Mr. Johnson for a minute--in which the Star-Telegram and Mr. Johnson got at cross purposes because of Senator Johnson's support of Adlai Stevenson. Were you aware of that at this time?

W: Yes, Joe, I was quite aware of it. I wasn't privy to any of the private discussions. I knew, however, that Mr. Carter became very incensed with Lyndon, because he, Mr. Carter, having supported Lyndon editorially for re-election in 1948, felt that he had

thereby purchased some right to dictate what position the Senator would take on the 1952 election. That, to me, is a rather naive assumption. Anybody who knows Lyndon Johnson, I think, knows that you don't buy any special influence with him. Johnson did what I thought he should have done in supporting Adlai Stevenson. Had he not done that, of course, in 1952, he would have had no future in the Democratic party. Lyndon was smart enough to know that. He also, I think, was loyal enough to support the party which had been his benefactor and in whose name he had run for office.

F: Yes. Did you have a feeling that since--without assaying candidates at all--that you were the more progessive candidate in the congressional election of '54, that part of the Star-Telegram's opposition to you was a carry-over from that, the fear that you might be a somewhat of a Johnson-type?

W: It might possibly have been, though I'm not sure that was the predominating consideration. I had supported Stevenson in '54 and done so actively. I had spent two days a week, in fact, at the state headquarters at the time when Mr. Rayburn had come down and organized one after the state Democratic machinery had defaulted. I worked, to some extent, with Mr. Johnson in that campaign, though not intimately. I had supported Lyndon in 1948 in his bid for election to the United States Senate and was known to be a supporter of Senator Johnson, but I don't think that was basically the reason the Star-Telegram opposed me. I think the reason they opposed me was because Mr. Carter was satisfied with the Congressman, with the

incumbent, Mr. Lucas.

F: That was Wingate Lucas?

W: Yes, Wingate Lucas was my predecessor. I think he would have supported Lucas, because Lucas was doing basically those things Mr. Carter wanted done; he just didn't want to consider anybody else. In fact, in the course of the campaign, early on, I called Mr. Carter and asked if it were possible that I might come out and visit with him briefly. He didn't give me that privilege, and said no, he was supporting the other man, didn't want to meet me. I thought that was sort of a closed-minded attitude and that didn't inure to my affection for Mr. Carter. I didn't feel that I owed him anything at all. But I didn't want to be bitter about him, personally. I just wanted to be Congressman. That's what it amounted to.

F: Well, you've become fairly senior in the meanwhile. You just keep on coming back.

W: Joe, people in my area have been very friendly, and very considerate, maybe very tolerant, of me. I've been re-elected seven times since that first time. I have had opposition, thus far, in the Democratic primary, only once; then, I was very lucky. I won by about 91 percent of the votes. I carried all the 153 precincts. So I have no complaint.

F: Yes.

W: I'm one of the luckiest guys I know.

F: To go back a moment, when did you first meet Mr. Johnson?

W: I met Lyndon Johnson personally for the first time in 1947.

F: That's when he was a Congressman.

W: He was in the House. This was the year before he ran successfully for the Senate. I came to Washington in behalf of some company business, in the interest of a company with which I was associated. I always had wanted to meet and get to know Lyndon Johnson, ever since 1941, when he had come so close to winning a special election against . . .

F: You decided he was more than a Tenth District congressman.

W: I had decided, at that time, in 1941, that he was a man who had something to offer to the country. So I met him at that later time, in 1947. Parenthetically, he was helpful to me in the business that I had come to transact with the government.

F: Any particular reason why you would have come on business, since he was not in your district?

W: Yes, because number one, I didn't want to incur an obligation to Wingate Lucas, who was my Congressman at the time, feeling that at some future time I might want to run against him. Secondly, I had the feeling that Lyndon Johnson would be more effective in helping anybody in a matter with any agency of the government than Mr. Lucas would, or perhaps more so than any other member of the delegation.

F: Yes. And then what, you said you helped him in '48, in what way?

W: Well, I helped work in his campaign in 1948 when he was seeking election to the Senate. I worked particularly in the run-off between him and former Governor Coke Stevenson. This is the one in which Mr. Johnson won by so small a vote. I worked in the Fort

Worth area and west, where I had more contacts and knew more people than anywhere else, and was proud to do it.

F: Did he personally direct you in this, or did he pretty much leave you on your own to handle it the way you thought best?

W: Well, he left me entirely on my own to handle it the way I thought best. I worked, as a matter of fact, directly with Fred Korth, who later became Secretary of the Navy, of course. Fred Korth, at that time, was a lawyer in Fort Worth, and incidentally, that was the first time I became acquainted with Fred Korth. He and I have since become very close, good friends. He and I worked together in that campaign. He was working mostly in Fort Worth; he gave me some missions to perform west of Fort Worth and I was delighted to do it.

F: This was the famous helicopter campaign which caught some imagination. Were you at any of the helicopter landings and speeches?

W: Yes, I was at some of them, but not many of them. I didn't spend much time with Mr. Johnson. I didn't want to do that. I wasn't asked to do that, and wouldn't have. . .

F: Worked people.

W: Yes, tried to work people, yes. I didn't want to spend my time with the candidate. For heaven's sake, he can take care of himself. I was trying to reach people that he wasn't reaching.

F: Did you get any sort of incidental benefit from this, when you offered yourself then six years later, carry over from the . . .?

W: Yes, only in that sense, in that I had met people and that I had

gained that much additional experience in the political arena.

F: Were you at any of the State Democratic meetings in either '48 or '52?

W: I was.

F: Were you privy to the fight on, first, Johnson in '48 and then what kind of delegation to send to the convention in '52?

W: Yes, I was involved in both those fights, on the side of Johnson both times; on the side of the Democratic party, I think, both times. I was pro-Johnson in ratifying and recognizing his election, his nomination, that is. He had won, I thought fair and square in '48. Then in '52, I was one of the relatively few who raised a voice in opposition to what the state convention in Amarillo did when it chose to certify a ballot that would list Eisenhower and Nixon as the nominees of the, I think they called it, the Texas Democrats. That, I thought, was a subterfuge and the misleading thing to do. I opposed it, unsuccessfully. We were outnumbered. That's all there was to it. Then Governor Allan Shivers had the convention pretty well in his hands. Following that, four years later, in 1956, I was extremely active with then-Majority Leader, Senator Lyndon Johnson, in working the counties in my congressional district and doing a little work elsewhere to help him win the May convention from former Governor Shivers, and to send to the 1956 convention in Chicago a delegation of Democrats who would not go simply for the purpose of bolting the convention and coming home opposing the nominees.

F: Did you encounter a great deal of opposition in lining up sufficient delegates to the state conventions to get what you wanted? I know that you, and Senator Johnson, Speaker Rayburn, and so forth, to a great extent, controlled that convention.

W: Joe, there was difficulty, of course. But in my district, which then consisted of five counties, I was successful in generating enough interest and activity to carry all of the counties, save one, for the Johnson slate, all the four bigger ones. The smallest county then, Somervell County, Glen Rose, we lost to the Shivers forces. I thought I had done the necessary work in that county, but it developed that I had overlooked one thing. A fellow--whose name I can't recall, and I'm sorry about that--was either state chairman or occupied some position such as national committeeman for Governor Shivers. He came from that county and he went in after I had been there and got all of his cronies and friends, and they . . .

F: This was before Byron Skelton, wasn't it?

W: It was before Byron Skelton. I'm sorry I can't, at the moment, recall the name of this fellow. I'm sure he was a fine man. I don't want to cast aspersions on him. It's just that time has passed, and I never knew him personally. But we carried Johnson County; we carried Hood County; we carried Parker County; we carried Tarrant County for Lyndon Johnson.

F: Did you come to the convention with a feeling of assurance that you probably did have the statewide votes to handle the situation?

W: That's very definitely true, yes. We knew very clearly that we had

the votes to handle the situation. We had a very definite indication of that as soon as the counties met and reported. In fact, we felt fairly confident after the precinct meetings. We had some counters who were pretty good at counting, and it turned out that Johnson beat Shivers very, very overwhelmingly in that contest.

An interesting thing did occur, which I had forgotten until this moment, at the 1956 convention. In the selection of delegates to go to the national convention in Chicago, there was a fight as to what delegates might be selected from Tarrant County, from that congressional district, to go to Chicago. The county group elected a lady by the name of Mrs. Jack [Margaret] Carter, a long time friend of mine; then, Mr. Johnson, I think, or some of his people, moved in the delegate selection committee to replace her, strike her name and replace her with a young lawyer named John Connally. I could see bitterness possibly developing from this kind of thing. Knowing John and knowing Margaret, liking them both, I voluntarily went before the delegate selection committee and suggested that they strike my name as a delegate and let me just be an alternate, and that they have both Mrs. Carter and John Connally go as delegates. And they did that. That was a sort of dove-of-peace effort, which, sometimes, all of us make in the interest of harmony in the ranks.

F: Now, you had no great trouble in Chicago that year, in going along then with the nominees?

W: No, not at all. Of course, Lyndon Johnson was the leader of the delegation; Sam Rayburn was its grand vizier. They worked together,

and most of us followed their lead without any difficulty. It was, interestingly, at that convention that a then-young Senator named John F. Kennedy received his first nationwide attention. I had known him earlier, not really known him, but had met him. I had read his book, Profiles in Courage, and thought it magnificent. I had invited him to be my guest on a television program that I then did from my district weekly; offered copies of his book, because I thought it such an excellent piece of work, to any high school or college student who would write me an essay on his favorite character in American history, and sent many, many autographed copies of first editions to students in my area, never dreaming that John F. Kennedy would attain the great fame that he did. I don't know who has all those autographed first editions now . . .

F: I don't either.

W: . . . but they're well worthwhile.

F: Just opens up the greed in my eyes. Well, in the '56 convention, you had a little fillip at it, by a sort of a faint, but still a definite belief that the convention could deadlock on a candidate and Lyndon Johnson might slip in.

W: Yes, we had . . .

F: Was the Texas delegation quite aware of this?

W: I don't know that the entire delegation was. Some of us were. Frank Ikard, and Homer Thornberry and I talked about it on several occasions, and John Connally. All of us, of course, were dedicated to doing whatever we might be able to do to make Lyndon the Vice

Presidential nominee if we failed in making him the Presidential nominee, We felt it probably a long shot to expect a Presidential nomination in 1956 for him, but I had already, earlier, publicly endorsed him for the Presidency. I did this in 1955, shortly before his heart attack, and then wrote a newsletter a week or so after his heart attack, saying that he was going to bounce back and still be a leader of the nation. I don't think I'm entitled to any kudos for prophecy, because all those who knew Lyndon in those days knew that he had a great deal to offer, that he had enormous insights, an uncanny instinct for measuring people, and an almost unrivaled ability to persuade people in personal forums, which probably was not matched by his forensic style on the stump. Well, it just wasn't; that's all there was to it. But we saw in him a great capacity, and any of us who had been close enough to him to observe him at work knew that he had an awful lot to give.

F: There was some surprise when Texas threw its votes to Kennedy instead of Kefauver, in that Vice Presidential horse race, which was, as you will recall, a thrilling affair. What's the background on that?

W: Well, I was for Kennedy from the beginning. I say from the beginning. I was for him when it came to the point of its being Kennedy or Kefauver. If I'm not mistaken, I think our first ballots went to Albert Gore of Tennessee.

F: Yes.

W: Then it came down to a question of Kennedy or Kefauver. I was for

Kennedy; not that I was against Kefauver. I just thought Kennedy would round out the ticket a little better, that he would have a somewhat more general appeal. I liked him a little better. Mr. Rayburn and Senator Johnson both were for Kennedy, and of course, they were the persuasive ones.

F: Did they talk to the delegation at some length about it?

W: Yes, we had a delegation caucus. Several of us said something for Kennedy. Wright Patman, who felt a personal loyalty to Senator Kefauver, spoke in behalf of him. I believe that Senator Johnson and Mr. Rayburn both spoke to the caucus in behalf of Kennedy. If they didn't speak to the caucus, they talked to enough of us personally to let it be known that he was their choice.

F: Why were they on that side, in your judgment?

W: Perhaps it was . . .

F: Kefauver had the progressive record that was as good as Kennedy's, and he came from, in a sense, their part of the world, and in that sense, was compatible. Why Kennedy?

W: You know, there are things that are inexplicable from a standpoint of a general observer, which are understandable only among people who are intimate with two principals in a contest. I had the feeling that Lyndon and Mr. Sam both liked Kennedy better, perhaps trusted him more fully, perhaps thought him less erratic and more dependable; this, on the basis of their personal associations with both John Kennedy and Estes Kefauver. It really isn't possible ever, simply by reading news dispatches and having a general

familiarity with events, to know always why somebody is going to be for one candidate as opposed to another, particularly if the somebody is someone who knows both candidates well and works with them day in and day out. I think it was personal as well as public.

F: Let's move back. In '48, you worked the country west of Fort Worth for Senator-to-be Johnson, and you, yourself, ran in '54. In that intervening six years, did you have additional contact with now-Senator Johnson that brought you closer to him?

W: Yes, Joe, I had a number of contacts with him. In 1953, for example, when I was Mayor of Weatherford and President of the Texas Municipal League, I arranged to have him speak at the state convention of the Texas Municipal League in Beaumont. As president of the League, I had the privilege of choosing the banquet speaker. I wanted it to be Lyndon Johnson. He came and made a good impression on those delegates, those mayors and city officials from all over the state; I think it may have been to some degree helpful to him at that juncture in his career. In addition to that, I invited him, and he was gracious enough to come to Weatherford, and I set up a joint meeting of all the civic clubs in order that he might speak to them.

Lyndon was not well known in Weatherford or in that immediate vicinity, at that time, and I wanted to be helpful to him; and from those and other contacts, we developed a rapport, a working relationship, and a personal friendship. Joe, I have not been one of those, really, most intimate with Lyndon Johnson, but ours has been a friendly relationship.

F: Did you contact him at all about your plans to run for the first time?

W: No, I don't suppose I did, though I'm certain he knew of them immediately following my nomination, my winning of the primary, which in those days, in Texas, was tantamount to election.

F: Those quaint times.

W: Those quaint old days. I came to Washington, and he was very gracious to me. He invited me to come over to the Senate side and sit there with him in the Majority Leader's office while he talked with various members of the Senate about crucially important issues at that time. I was flattered by this. I got a rare insight into his ability to gauge events. He had Senator [Arthur V.] Watkins, who then was chairman of the committee investigating Joe McCarthy that month, into the office, and they talked without any restraint with me sitting there and listening. I said to Lyndon . . .

Well, let me back up. When Senator Watkins left, Lyndon said, "Well, we're going to win this vote. We're going to censure Joe McCarthy." And I said to Lyndon, "What real good do you think this will achieve?" He replied, "Just this: that hereafter, when Joe McCarthy makes a wild statement, it may be carried in a small account back on the financial pages or somewhere else. It will no longer be headline news, because he will be thoroughly discredited." You know, let me confess, I didn't believe that. I thought Lyndon was overestimating the value of a Senate censure.

But a sequel to that is interesting. In January of 1955, just

a few months later, I was over on the Senate side at a time when the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations was having hearings on Mr. Eisenhower's resolution to protect Formosa. This was the first big vote in that session. Joe McCarthy came up to a group of news and television people standing outside the hearing room and started handing out a prepared statement. This was the first time I ever had seen Joe McCarthy, though I had developed a strong distate for him from his wild accusations and his character assassinations. Joe McCarthy offered these statements, and the newsmen took them, and nodded, and said, "Thank you, Senator," and turned away. McCarthy then said to them, "Well, I thought you might like to get a little sound on film." And one of them said to him, "No, thank you, Senator. The committee is about to break up, and someone may have something important to say."

F: I see. Oh, Lord.

W: This was devastating, I'm sure, to a man who had had only to snap his fingers to get front-page headline attention, theretofore. So Lyndon Johnson, as so often, had been right. He had correctly appraised the devastating effect of Senate censure on Joe McCarthy.

F: There's been some feeling that Senator Johnson stayed above that fight, or out of it to a certain extent. Do you think that he did at least maneuver it?

W: I think that he was above that fight only in the sense that a coach is above the football field. I think he was calling the shots. He was . . .

F: He stayed on the bench.

W: . . . coaching the quarterbacks every step of the way, and it was successful.

F: Let's talk a little bit about the sort of relations that Mr. Johnson had in his Senatorial days with the Texas congressional delegation. I think we might go forward from that to his period as both Vice President and President and his relationship with the congressional delegation.

W: Okay. Joe, when I first came here in 1955, and for the next several years, Mr. Johnson maintained very close and very harmonious working relationships with the Texas delegation. On occasion, he and Mrs. Johnson would invite various ones of the delegation out to their house when they were living in northwest Washington. We would go out there sometimes on Sunday evening or on other occasions.

F: Did he tend to just have a few of you, or the whole shebang, which was a pretty large group?

W: It varied. I think there were occasions on which he would have the whole delegation, but there were other occasions on which he would have certain members of the delegation. I think maybe he would have a certain group in one night; then another group on another occasion and this promoted a close, harmonious relationship. As his duties in the position of Majority Leader became more and more demanding, and during the Eisenhower years, he at one point was the effective innovator in government. He would expect those of us in the Texas delegation to follow his leadership on certain things

which, while good for the nation and accepted and appreciated throughout the country, were, at best, viewed with mixed emotions in Texas. One example comes to mind. In 1957 there had not been a civil rights bill of any kind enacted by Congress for, well, seventy-five years, since closely following the Civil War. Lyndon Johnson engineered through Congress the first of what was to become a series of civil rights bills.

I remember there was great consternation on the part of Texans in the House who, tradition-bound, felt that notwithstanding their individual sympathies for the legislation, it could be fatal to them in their bids for re-election. Mr. Johnson and Sam Rayburn worked with us, and to some degree on us, to amass a total vote of affirmation from the Texas delegation. It was tough with some of the fellows. They, in the words of Senator Ross, could look down into their open graves. They thought it could conceivably mean their political demise. Of course, it couldn't. It didn't, in any case. But because of the Johnson and Rayburn leadership, we did get a majority of the Texas delegation to vote for that first Civil Rights Bill in 1957. This, no doubt, enhanced Mr. Johnson's stature as a national leader. It might have looked bad for him if his own delegation, from his home state, had failed to follow his leadership.

I remember one thing that Mr. Rayburn said to me on that occasion. He said, "Jim, I know that you want to vote for this bill and I expect you, like the others, may be concerned about its effect, but I'm going to predict that you'll be proud, in later

years, that you voted for it." His prophecy was correct. I am proud that I voted for it.

Then, thereafter, it was a lot easier, in 1960 and in subsequent years, to vote for civil rights legislation.

F: Did Mr. Johnson as Senator show an understanding for the fact that, in one sense, congressmen have to go back and run on their record much closer to their votes than senators do? I don't need to tell you, I can vote for something as senator, and I've got maybe five years before I have to face the public on it. Whereas, you've got to turn right around and go back again, while it's still fresh. Did he have that kind of an understanding in . . . ?

W: Well, Joe, he could not have failed to have that kind of an understanding. He had served in the House for some years before going to the Senate. He knew those political facts of life as well as any man in American public life. There were times when some of the members thought him too demanding of us. There were times when some thought him unsympathetic with our own individual best interests. But I don't believe, on balance, that was true. He never twisted arms unless he needed the votes, and on occasion, he did need the votes.

F: If he didn't need your vote, he'd let you vote any way you wanted to, that might satisfy your home district.

W: Yes, Joe. I don't think it's a question of his "letting" anyone do it, but he would not be insistent.

F: He wasn't trying to pile up majorities just so long as he got the

majority.

W: That's exactly right. Now, I suppose I am a little closer to the general philosophy of Lyndon Johnson than some of the other members of the delegation. It never was a painful thing for me. Usually, I wanted to do those things that he was asking for. I don't recall his making a personal issue of any of these matters with me. I don't know that he ever did with other members of the delegation. There were occasions on which he would twit certain members for their failure to support a certain bill, in a good-humored way; but the member so twitted would get the point, usually. This, however, was most frequently after the fact.

He could be demanding in some respects. I remember that in 1958, I think, Lyndon was able to get the Senate, in the very last days of the session, to go along with a bill, of his authorship, to direct a comprehensive study of all the rivers of Texas. He had gotten this idea from Senator [Robert] Kerr, and an enormous amount of good and beneficial work on the water developments in Texas has flowed from this resolution. However, it placed a particular burden on me by reason of the timing of the resolution. Lyndon prevailed upon the Senate Committee on Public Works to approve it by simply having the chairman of that committee call around and poll the membership. Then, it came to the Senate floor and was passed the same day, I think, and came over to the House. It happened that the House Committee on Public Works, on which I served and still do, had adjourned sine die for the year, for the session, and for the Congress. It was not

possible to get it back in session. Perhaps two days remained before we were to adjourn the Congress sine die; and yet, Lyndon called me in and said he wanted me to work that bill through the House.

I recognized its importance, and was able, fortunately, through much maneuvering, many telephone calls, much pleading, cajoling, to get the members of the committee all polled and unanimously agreed. Then I brought it up on a unanimous consent request, having arranged for recognition for that purpose from Speaker Rayburn, only to discover that one member of the minority--I think Harry McGregor--didn't interpret his response to my polling as a permission to bring it up and gave me a little difficulty by reserving the right to object. So that I withdrew the bill and went over into the Republican cloakroom and argued with him till I was a little bit angry. I felt that he had welched on an agreement with me and finally had to go and get John Blatnik from Minnesota to come and help smooth it out.

We finally got his agreement; then went back on the floor a second time, having talked Mr. Rayburn into recognizing me for that purpose, and he having asked, "Have you cleared it all the way around," and my having replied, "Yes." On this second occasion, H. R. Gross of Iowa, who was not a Majority Leader nor Minority Leader, but a somewhat self-appointed spokesman for a third party which consisted of himself and maybe one other, began asking questions about it and reserved the right to object. Finally, I

satisfied Mr. Gross and on the third attempt, got unanimous consent for its immediate consideration; [I] got the bill approved only hours before the final adjournment of the session of Congress.

This is the kind of thing that he sometimes could do. He is a master of the art of the possible, and he is not a recognizer of the possibility of the impossible.

F: Right. You had these, and have these meetings of the Texas congressional delegation periodically, open one week, and closed the next. Did you ever get any arms twisted in there, or did you merely talk over various pieces of legislation, and the people explain attitudes?

W: There is a sort of an unwritten rule in the Texas delegation that no arms are twisted. It has been honored in the main. Exceptions are so very rare that they serve only to make the point. As a general matter, it is accepted, in the Texas delegation, that every man is his own best arbiter of the rectitude of action and his own best judge of what his constituency will swallow. I think you just have to say that there aren't any arms twisted in the Texas delegation meetings.

F: When Senator Yarborough came into the Senate, did it make any difference at all in the tone of the meetings, or any difference in Mr. Johnson's attitude toward these luncheons?

W: No, I don't think it made any difference.

F: Things went on just as before?

W: Yes, quite so.

F: Well, then, I'm right . . . Was it Bruce Alger that broke the

pattern of making it a Texas congressional delegation into a Texas Democratic delegation?

W: Joe, it was as a result of some things done by Bruce Alger that this change was made. It was not made, however, until 1960 or '61.

F: Your previous Republicans had been included. It wasn't . . .

W: Yes. Oh, yes. Previous Republicans, Ben Guill had been included. Bruce Alger was included when he came here. But Bruce would attend the meetings, sometimes closed meetings, at which matters were discussed. The virtue and value of a Texas delegation meeting is that everybody can be informal and say whatever he wants to say, secure in the knowledge that nobody's going to go out and parrot or repeat something that he has said in the privacy of the meeting. He doesn't always have to be on his p's and q's and conscious of how something may sound if it's quoted or misquoted. Bruce did not observe this rule. He would attend the meeting; then rush out and find the press, and tell them something that had been said in the delegation meeting. So it wasn't because he was a Republican. It was because he had no real regard for the gentlemen's rules of the delegation luncheon that we ultimately changed it. Bruce, finally recognizing how unpopular he had made himself, discontinued his attendance, and I would say that for the last four or five years of his membership in Congress, he just didn't come. I'm not certain that I recall exactly when the change was made. Maybe it was made in 1961, after the election of John Tower in that special Senate election, but in any event, it has been followed ever since.

F: Yes. Did you get much evidence of Mr. Johnson, during his period as Vice President, as far as being a member of the Texas congressional delegation was concerned?

W: Yes, he attended as frequently as he could. I think he was present most of the time, as I recall. I'm not certain that's correct, but I think it is. He was there whenever he could be there and continued his association with the delegation.

F: Did he call on you, personally, in the interest of pieces of Kennedy legislation?

W: Yes, I think on occasion he would discuss things with me, and I could see that he would be pleased if a certain bill would pass. Usually, it was a bill I favored.

F: You had no reason to doubt his complete loyalty to the Kennedy program.

W: Oh, absolutely none whatever. I had every reason to have complete faith in his loyalty to the Kennedy program.

F: There were never any reasons to suspect that he was frustrated as Vice President, that he felt he had stepped down, in a sense, over being Senate Majority Leader.

W: Yes, I think I may have read that into certain things.

F: This is something you feel, but can't document.

W: I think that's right. Never, at any time, did I hear him say that he felt he had stepped down. I don't imagine that he ever made such a statement, certainly not publicly.

F: Were you in Los Angeles at the '60 convention?

W: Yes, I was there.

F: Did you have any inkling that he was going to be offered the Vice Presidency?

W: Yes, I wanted him to be offered the Vice Presidency and hoped he would be offered the Vice Presidency. In fact, immediately following the nomination of Mr. Kennedy, I went to see Bobby Kennedy and I went to see Ted Kennedy, and I talked with Hale Boggs and he talked with some of the others in the Kennedy camp, all in an effort to demonstrate the advantages of Mr. Kennedy's offering the Vice Presidential nomination to Johnson.

F: What kind of a reception did you get from that?

W: I'd say a good reception from Ted Kennedy, a somewhat cold reception from Bob Kennedy.

F: Bobby's a little more direct than Teddy in this such thing. I mean, Teddy would at least take a little off the top of his bluntness.

W: Well, I think so, and in addition to that, I think Bob was a little less favorably disposed toward Lyndon.

F: Was there any argument in this, or did he just listen and . . .?

W: There wasn't any point in any argument. It wouldn't have served my purpose to have engaged in any.

F: I mean, he didn't try to rebut you, in other words?

W: No, he didn't. He, oh, made one or two somewhat sarcastic comments, which I let pass, because there wouldn't have been any advantage in picking them up. But then again, that may just have been indicative of his nature and his personality.

F: Did you leave with the feeling that you'd done some good, or what was your attitude at the time? Did the cow just overwhelm you?

W: I'm not sure that I really had any feeling as to whether I'd made any contribution to it or not. I was just trying to find people with whom I could make such a contribution, and I did this, incidentally, without any recourse to Mr. Johnson. I hadn't discussed it with him. I hadn't asked him if he wanted to be nominated, and he hadn't asked me to do this, certainly.

F: Was there a group of you who were doing this?

W: There were several of us who were doing this. Hale Boggs and I were doing it jointly; I'm sure there were others who were doing it, and Mr. Johnson didn't know we were doing it.

F: Was this on the basis that you'd make a pitch on the basis that Mr. Johnson was best qualified, or because of the sort of counter group of qualifications that he brought in the way of geography and . . .?

W: Both. Both that he was best qualified and could serve as Vice President more effectively than anybody else and that he would be the best candidate to round out the ticket.

F: When did you first hear that he'd been offered the Vice Presidency?

W: I'm not precisely sure.

F: Did you know about it before it was official?

W: Yes. Oh, yes. I was either . . .

F: Did you have any doubts that he would accept?

W: No, I personally didn't. I thought he would accept all along. I knew he wouldn't ask for it, but I thought he would accept. I

learned that it had been offered to him and that he had said, "Give me some time to think about it." During that period, I was sure that he would accept, in my own mind. I don't know what credentials I had to make any such determination. I had none, except just my personal feeling that he would accept. I discussed it, during that period, with people like Price Daniel and Speaker Rayburn . . .

F: John Connally?

W: . . . and others. I don't think I remember talking with John Connally during that interim of a few hours.

F: Price was opposed, wasn't he?

W: Yes, I think Price was opposed.

F: And Rayburn switched.

W: Rayburn switched. It was said that Rayburn had been opposed. I could tell that Price was opposed, and Price could tell that I favored it. I visited briefly with Mr. Rayburn about it and told him that I favored it, that I thought it was absolutely the thing to do and I couldn't say for certain at that time that he was against it. He expressed some thoughts, I don't remember, exactly, just what they were, but at least he gave me an audience and I said a few words with him, Joe. I didn't get into a lengthy conversation with him about it, because there were a lot of people in the room and there was a lot going on. And I think before I got everything said that I wanted to say to him about it, somebody came into the room and called him out. I think maybe he went up to see Lyndon at the time.

During all of this period, I was not all that close to Lyndon, as I said, during the period in the convention. He didn't call on me for advice. He didn't ask me into the really closed inner sanctums. He was relying primarily, in that regard, I think, on John Connally and a few others with whom he had had much longer and closer associations. So I'm not really a good authority on all that went on behind the scenes.

F: In a Presidential election year, you're always hampered by the fact that you've got to run, too, which cuts down on your freedom to help in a national campaign. Did you get much flak from your own district from the fact that Johnson had accepted the Vice Presidential nomination?

W: Some little bit, but . . .

F: Did it hamper you at all?

W: Oh, no. Certainly not. Joe, I never have let that bother me. I've been active in every Presidential campaign since 1948 and have been outspoken and done everything that I possibly could do to assist the Democratic nominees. I've never made any bones about that. Nobody is under any illusions as to my loyalties. The people in my district know that I'm a Democrat and an active Democrat, and those who disagree with me at least forgive me for it.

F: During that semi-travesty--and I say that because of the peculiar Texas law that permits almost anyone to enter, when you run for the Senate--did you consult with now-Vice President Johnson at all on your race, or receive any encouragement, or did he stay out of that?

W: Joe, I ran for Senate, of course, in 1961, in an attempt to fill the vacancy created by Mr. Johnson's election to the Vice Presidency. I had the feeling that he was friendly to my candidacy. I didn't ask him for an endorsement, because I knew he had a good many friends in the race. If you recall, I was the first to announce. I thought I would be so formidable that I would frighten other aspirants out of it. Seventy-one others followed my lead. There were seventy-two candidates in the race. I think with a little help behind the scenes from then-Vice President Johnson, I would have been elected, because it was very close. I did not expect him to stick out his neck, however. I didn't ask him to. I didn't try to put him on the spot.

There were some in his office who were definitely for me and would tell people that they were personally for me. Included among those was Walter Jenkins. There were others who might be for other candidates. Cliff Carter was for Will Wilson and made no bones about it. Some people were saying that because Cliff Carter was for Will Wilson, that meant Johnson was. Of course, I knew better, and I'm sure that some of Will's people were feeling that Johnson had too many friends of mine on his staff. In fact, I understand that Will Wilson got real mad at the Vice President because of it, thinking that he had helped me.

F: Think that's why Will finally turned Republican, that and the general disenchantment . . .

W: It's conceivable . . .

F: . . . that he never got the offices he wanted?

W: Will Wilson became a very bitter man, I think, and that's sad. I never got bitter at Will. I suppose it's easier to be gracious in a situation like mine.

F: Will's a personal friend of mine, with whom I do not discuss politics anymore.

W: Well, you see, I think the problem in my case was that the damn sorry Belden poll was telling everybody that I was running fifth when in fact, I was running a very strong third, and with just a little more help, would have replaced Mr. Blakely in the run-off with Tower and, I think, would have beaten him. In fact, Mr. Johnson told me afterward, in a discussion about the race, that all of his friends and advisors were telling him that I just didn't have a chance; that's what they were telling all over the state and the travesty of it is that the . . .

F: Do you think that was from reading the polls, or do you think that that's 'cause they were favoring somebody else?

W: I think it's because they were favoring somebody else, but they were reinforcing it with the polls, and the Belden poll, in that case, was crooked. It was crooked in the sense that Belden had sold his services not only to newspapers but additionally to Blakely, and those services included the right of Blakely to prevent the publication of any poll he might take. Therefore, the last poll that was published in that race was published three weeks before the election, and by its own admission, had been taken three weeks prior to that. So that the last poll

published by Belden in that race had been taken six weeks before the election.

F: Failed to show any trends.

W: Well, it failed, I think, to demonstrate the last six weeks' trend that I'd been peaking toward and pointing toward, which the election itself very vividly portrayed, because I almost made the number two spot, which would have put me in a run-off with Tower. And I think this, of course, is one of the things that probably kept some of the Vice President's friends from helping me more at the time. Of course, what they got was Tower, but I lay that at the door of Joe Belden's practice of selling his poll to papers and, at the same time, to a candidate, which I think is a very, very clear case of a conflict of interest.

F: I might as well put this in the record. Senator Blakely has refused to see me or any of my group. He says, "I'm through with politics forever. I don't ever want to hear it mentioned again."

W: Well, too bad he didn't decide that before his second statewide defeat.

F: Right. But did you ever hear the President express himself on being succeeded by Tower, which I'm sure must have annoyed him?

W: No, I never heard him express himself on that. Joe, I never opened the subject or put myself in the position of his discussing that particularly.

F: After he became President, under those tragic circumstances of Kennedy's murder, did the President make any attempt to sort of

bring the Texas delegation into line, now that they, in a sense, are one of the factors that could make or break his program? Did he pay any more attention to the Texas delegation than he did to anyone else's?

W: No, I don't think you could say that he did. I don't think that he could.

F: Aside from the fact of the new people.

W: Sure, that's all. After Mr. Johnson became President, he had so many things clamoring for the twenty-four hours he had in each day, that his contacts with the delegation inevitably were fewer. The President of the United States just doesn't have time for the amenities of social friendship. There were occasions when he would invite some of us over to the White House, and I think on certain Sunday afternoons, maybe, he favored some of his old friends from Texas with such invitations. But in the early days of his Presidency, particularly, he was so deeply engrossed in trying to gather together all the threads and strings of the government, and set a tone and a pattern for Administration, that none of us really expected to see much of him personally, or to have much personal contact with him or from him.

Perhaps the only specific matter on which Mr. Johnson as President somewhat leaned on me involved the Highway Beautification Bill. Mrs. Johnson, Lady Bird, was deeply dedicated to this goal. Mr. Johnson wanted a bill passed exactly as it had passed the Senate. This, I think, was 1965. It was not possible to pass the bill as it had

passed the Senate.

F: What was the problem?

W: Well, we couldn't have amassed the votes for it that way. We had to change it, and . . .

F: You ran into more opposition.

W: Yes, precisely so. That was a heavily lobbied bill. I think the President had an emotional involvement in it.

F: Kind of a present to her, in a way.

W: It was a present to his wife, I expect, and I was floor leader for the bill. I knew that we couldn't pass it in just that shape. There were administration people constantly sitting in on the committee in its private deliberations, in its closed executive sessions--Alan Boyd and two or three others--and we would . . . Someone would propose a certain amendment in an effort to change the balance from unfavorable to favorable. Boyd would then say, "Well, I'll have to take that up with the White House." And then he'd come back and say, "No, we can't accept it."

Well, of course, the White House can influence legislation and should attempt to, but the White House has no real prerogative to tell a committee that it can or cannot do a certain thing. Ultimately, I became very provoked about this. On the day the bill was to come up in the House, we had a little meeting with Speaker McCormack, Majority Leader Albert, and a few others in the Speaker's office, about the bill and the floor strategy for the bill. Carl Albert brought up the fact that he was hearing an awful lot of negative comment on the

bill, and he wondered if we shouldn't accept certain amendments.

F: So far the Senate bill is pretty much intact.

W: Well, no, we made a few changes in the House Committee, but not enough to enact it on the floor. And Carl asked if we couldn't take some sweeteners. Larry O'Brien, who was sitting there at the time, said, "Well, now, I'm not at liberty to authorize any changes without contacting the White House personally." At that point, I got pretty sore and said, "Carl and Mr. Speaker, these guys"--referring to the White House people who were there; there were three or four of them sitting there--"don't have the authority to say anything, and they're not going to agree to any amendment; it isn't their responsibility. At this point, it's our responsibility and so far as I'm concerned, they can sit up there in the gallery and watch us do it. I'm dedicated to passing a bill, and I'm going to accept those amendments that I think will aid in the passage of the bill and no more." Following that, things calmed down, and we did just that and we passed a bill. I don't think Mr. Johnson was ever fully satisfied. I think that he felt that it should be more stringent. Liz Carpenter, one time, undertook to tell me that it should be, but I . . .

F: The President never talked with you personally about it?

W: Oh, yes. He talked with me personally about it.

F: But I meant after it was passed, about . . . ?

W: Yes, on subsequent occasions, we discussed the bill, and later amendments to the bill, and the executive implementation of the bill. In the latter, I must say, in all candor, that I think Alan Boyd and

others charged with the responsibility of its administration did not fulfill the legislative mandates. There were some discussions about this, always friendly discussions. There was never any hostility, certainly. But I was charged with the responsibility of doing certain things in the House with respect to that legislation. I thought I was the best judge of what I could and could not do and, ultimately, just had to assert that prerogative. Mr. Johnson personally never asked me to do other than that, but some of his emissaries apparently expected me to.

F: Yes. Other than the fact that anytime you pick up the phone and it's the White House calling--that's a subtle pressure in itself, because that's the ultimate seat of power--is it possible for the White House, despite the charges that heavy White House pressure is being exerted on this or that congressman, to exert much pressure, or do you have such a precise separation of powers here that you pretty well have to work it your own way? Now, I will admit that, I think we both admit that you could influence my vote on something. Now, I'm not suggesting. . .

W: There's a great difference between persuasion and pressure.

F: Yes. I mean, I'm talking about where you have a bill that you have some responsibility for as a committee member, as a floor leader, or whatever, where you're directly involved in the bill, not just where your vote's being counted.

W: Joe, I've been in Congress, at this point, for fifteen years. I don't believe that any President with whom I've served, and that's four of them, has ever exerted any pressure upon me. There . . .

F: You haven't felt the hand of one President any more than another?

W: Oh, yes. Of course, I have. Mr. Johnson more than any other, simply because I knew him. The only other President that I really could say that I knew was Mr. Kennedy, and I didn't know him nearly as well as I know Mr. Johnson; but neither Mr. Johnson nor Mr. Kennedy at any time did or said anything which I would interpret as overt pressure, or as a threat of the withholding of any friendship or favor, or as the promise of the extension of any friendship or favor. Both of them, on occasion, have talked with me about bills and asked for my support if I felt that I could give it, and in almost every case I gave it, but in most cases it was something that I wanted to do. There were a few occasions when I disagreed and simply had to tell a President that I simply could not support a particular proposal.

F: No threats of withholding of certain assignments or certain favors, either real or imagined?

W: Joe, in fifteen years, I have never had that experience. Other members may have. I never have had that experience.

F: Now, this is subjective; I don't know whether it can be answered, but you've had four Presidents, three of whom served their apprenticeship in the U.S. Congress, the latter three. Can you see a difference that it makes when a man comes up through that route, in his activities in the Congress? I mean in the White House, does it make you any more knowledgeable a person on what the limitations are and also, conversely, what the possibilities are?

W: Well, Joe, of course, my personal experience is limited to those four Presidents. With Mr. Eisenhower and with Mr. Nixon, I've had

extremely limited personal contacts. I would just have to say, yes, that the fact a President has served in the Congress makes him a better emissary to Congress. It makes him a better leader of Congress. It makes him more able to know how to approach members of Congress. That's just plausible.

F: Yes. Did you feel a real excitement in '64-'65, when all that spate of legislation was going through, or--I'm using the collective "you" here--did the Congress sort of feel like it was just being goaded and pushed at sort of a reckless speed?

W: Well, I didn't feel that way. I felt an emotional thrill. It was a very exciting period. Of course, I was for most of the legislation. That might make a difference.

F: That's something I would like to include, and that's how would you evaluate Mr. Johnson's legislative program?

W: By any standard of measurement, you must say that it embodied a greater volume of truly major legislative reform than that of any other President. I except not even Franklin Roosevelt, who would be a very close second. More was done during the Johnson Presidency in the field of education--by dollar volume--in the field of public health, and in the field of environmental quality control than had been done in all the preceding Presidencies combined. This is a matter not of opinion, but a matter of verifiable dollar volume. Think of the things that had been debated in the political arena for a generation: federal aid to education, medical care for the elderly. Joe, these had been political footballs for fully a generation.

F: You and I cut our teeth on them.

W: We cut our teeth on them. When I was a freshman in high school, I was debating the question of medical care. When I was a freshman in college, I think, the debate subject was federal aid to education. Now, in all of these years, people had talked about them, but they never had done either of them. It remained for Lyndon Johnson to make the dreams come true. Sitting in the cloakroom, following the vote on the Medicare Bill, one of my colleagues remarked, somewhat whimsically, that it's a little sad to see the problem solved. It made such a nice thing to talk about. (Laughter).

F: Right. I like that. In the period from his senatorship and your Congressional career, right through the Presidency, you've, of course, always got to go back to your district, and you've got to receive credit for what you have done for the district. Did you find it easy to work with Mr. Johnson on the matter of who breaks the stories and who gets the credit and so forth? Was there competition for him, as the Texas Senator, to take credit for something that happened in your district, the location of some facility, the making of a grant, or was he pretty considerate in funneling a lot of that through you so that you could break the story?

W: I don't recall that he ever deliberately funneled anything through me, but I don't recall any problem in that regard ever arising. It was a kind of catch-as-catch-can operation. I think I was always treated fairly enough, and when he was President, of course, and when

he was Vice President, there were numerous occasions on which things happened to the benefit of my district and I was to some degree involved in their happening. On all of those occasions, I felt that I got all the credit that was coming to me. I don't think ever, under any circumstance, I have been ill treated in that way.

F: Did the awarding of the contract to General Dynamics for the TFX have any effect on your own standing in one way or another within your district?

W: Well, yes, Joe. Of course, it boosted my stock. It did not come at a time when it could have influenced an election. It came in 1962, in November, perhaps two weeks after the election, and that was one of the few times in which I had Republican opposition. So that the announcement didn't help me win an election, but of course, it boosted my stock locally.

F: Yes. Was this a political decision, do you think, or do you think this was a case where Mr. McNamara, with his computers and so forth, said this is how it could be handled best? This puts you on the spot, but we can close it.

W: Joe, I'm prejudiced. I have been so close to that matter for so many years that my judgment may not be an objective judgment. I think it was the right decision; I think it was a defensible decision and I think subsequent events have largely vindicated that decision. To a degree, yes, it was a political decision. But I think it was the right decision.

F: In your district, is it generally accepted.

W: I beg your pardon?

F: Within your district, is it generally accepted as the right decision?

W: Oh, certainly, in my district, it is. Yes, of course. When you have a plant that's the biggest employer of people in the district, when you have maybe 25,000 people working there and the rest of the economy, to a degree, dependent upon their having their jobs, certainly. That question answers itself, really, when you confine it to my district. Now, whether it's generally accepted throughout the nation as the right decision, I don't know. I would be surprised if it were, because there's been so much adverse publicity emanating from Senator McClellan's comments and others that I would expect a great many people in the United States to feel that it was a bad decision, a bumbling decision, and that the F-111 is not a good airplane. I must say, however, that in the past year, most of the publicity has been very good, contrary to that which began immediately after the award of the contract and lasted for several years. Newsmen, of course, are always looking for something bad. Bad news makes better news than good news. I could talk until I was blue in the face documenting the positive things about the program and about the decision and I would get covered in the Fort Worth papers, but I wouldn't get covered in the national press. Some fellow who had very limited knowledge of the situation could make a negative comment, and he'd get front-page coverage.

F: Right. When Tower came back for re-election, you considered running against him.

W: Yes.

F: Did you discuss this at all with the President?

W: Yes.

F: You want to talk at all about that? And I may say, personally, also, for the record, that I hoped you would and could.

W: Yes, I'll comment a little bit. This is one of the occasions in which I had some little difficulty understanding Mr. Johnson's position. In 1965, perhaps in August, Mr. Johnson called me one day to thank me for having signed a discharge petition for home rule in the District of Columbia, and he was very effusive on the telephone that day. He said, "I'm going to see to it that all those people who are interested in human rights in Texas know of your courageous stand in this regard." And he said, "I'm going to undertake to do other things, too, for you." And he said, "You deserve to be in the Senate, and I want you to come down here to the White House before we adjourn this session and talk with me about it." Well, of course, that made me feel very good, and later, I called and made an appointment to do that.

Meanwhile, I had written down a number of things that I thought he might do to be helpful. I took him a copy of the sheet on which I had written those things. When I got there that day, we sat and talked, and I thought him just a little more distant or perhaps I should say a little less eager to do the things that he earlier had indicated that he wanted to do and had volunteered to do. I had written down the names of certain people in Texas whose help could

be crucial and whom I knew to be friends and supporters of his, people whom I did not know well personally. I tried to limit the list to, I think, maybe twelve or fourteen people. I suggested that if he wanted to help, he might say something to these people. He went down the list one by one, and his reaction was somewhat disappointing to me. He would say of one, "Well, he'll be against you." He would say of another, "He ought to be for you." He would say of another some rather negative comment and, in the end, offered only to talk with a couple of them. This, I thought strange in light of the comments he earlier had volunteered;I wouldn't have asked him to do this if he hadn't earlier volunteered.But as I left,he said, "Keep in touch."

Finally, it became evident to me that I was not going to be able to raise the money in big chunks, as is somewhat traditional in Texas. It takes an awful lot of it. I made a statewide broadcast, pointing out as frankly as I could the costs of seeking statewide office and simply putting it in the laps of those who heard the broadcast. I said, in effect, if 25,000 people will write and tell me that they'll participate to the extent of $10 each, that will be openers, and I'll run.

Immediately after having put that broadcast on videotape and having purchased the time for its broadcast, I called and said that I would like to go down to the Ranch and talk with the President, to which he readily agreed. I flew down there and had quite a conversation with him. He was awakening from a nap and had a speech that night in Austin, I think, to some national association meeting there.

We talked, however, for at least an hour, and the sum total of it was not encouragement. I asked, "Mr. President, just how important to you is it that Tower be replaced by a Democrat who will support you?" His answer,though I'm not purporting to quote him directly was, "Not all that important." I said then, "Mr. President, how much more good could I do you and your program if I were a member of the Senate than I can do you as a member of the House?" His answer, while flattering, was not encouraging of the race. He said, "Not a hell of a lot." He said, "I'd rather have you than almost any senator, and you can do me more good right where you are than 90 percent of them can do me in the Senate." Well, this, of course, was flattering.

F: Yes, but that doesn't answer the question the way you wanted to.

W: It didn't encourage me at least and I left there pretty well determined that unless I got an overwhelming response to the broadcast, that I would be ill advised to run because it seemed rather clear to me that I wasn't going to get much help from him. And I got a good response from the broadcast. I think about eight thousand people wrote, and maybe $50,000 came in. I think $48,000, if I remember rightly, but it wasn't anything like enough to start on such a race. I ended up the 1961 race owing, I believe, close to $70,000, and it was a long, hard, slow struggle trying to pay that off. My kids, at that point, were just getting ready to go to college, and I could see myself winding up going for broke, winning or losing, owing two or three hundred thousand dollars, and mortgaging their futures to do

it. So I sent the money back and just bowed out.

Now, let me add as a postscript to that comment that Lyndon Johnson didn't owe me anything. Anything I've ever done for Mr. Johnson, I have done because I wanted to do it. He owed me one thing only: that was to be a great Senator, and a great Vice President, and a great President. I am satisfied that he paid all these obligations.

F: Do you think he had a candidate in that race?

W: No, he didn't have a candidate in that race.

F: He just let Texas go its own way on this?

W: Yes, he just let Texas go its own way and Texas went its own way, and it went the way I told him it was going to go. I told him that in my judgment, Waggoner Carr could not defeat Tower. Now, I don't know that he made any comment about that. I got the impression that it didn't make an awful lot of difference to him personally one way or the other; and so he didn't owe me anything. When a man's . . .

F: Well, I was interested in this because, of course, at one time he was so completely the sort of Party man and whether maybe he was wearying a little bit of it. Is there something to that?

W: Well, all things being equal, I'm certain that he would have preferred to have had a Democrat in the Senate rather than a Republican, in almost any seat. I thought Tower had been unnecessarily abusive of the President on a few petty occasions, nothing really big. But there's no reason why he should have risen to that and, Joe, just as a matter of political philosophy and a matter of just plain fact, a

man who is President has been given a lot more service and a lot more favors by thousands of peoples than he ever can repay. If he were to have been in a position to do for each of us, individually and personally, what in the way of service we had offered on occasions for him, one of us would be President, and he wouldn't be. No President can repay political debts. You can't count your help for a candidate as a debt that he owes you to pay you back by helping you when you want something personal or aggrandizement that comes from election to a higher office.

So I never did consider that Lyndon owed me anything. I think some of my enthusiastic friends were tempted to be a little provoked at him, well, more than that, just mad as hell at him on several ocassions when they felt that he could have bailed me out, when I had my neck stuck out, and he didn't do it. But I never did encourage that feeling. I've always done everything I possibly could to discourage it and to remind people that I didn't support Lyndon Johnson for the Senate, for the Vice Presidency and for the Presidency in the expectation of his doing something for me, and [that] he didn't owe me anything.

F: Any other glimpses that we ought to cover? I'm through with questions.

W: Joe, there are so many, I don't know where we'd end if we started. I think we've pretty well covered it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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Jim Wright
Donor

9/12/77
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

September 26, 1977
Date