

Interview with Leonel Castillo, city controller, Houston, Texas,
December 15, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter de Vries, transcribed
by Linda Killen.

Castillo: -- of the Democratic party delegate process. In Kansas City, we accepted Puerto Rico as a state. "For the purposes of this charter, Puerto Rico shall be treated as a state containing the appropriate number of Congressional districts." That put Puerto Rico up above I believe about twenty states. Which means that the Latino caucus at the national level of the Democratic party doubled its strength just like that. [Snaps fingers.]

Jack Bass: That will be effective in 1980 but not '76.

Castillo: No. In the implementation of this charter. . . . See, after we had the big emotional vote on compromise, on affirmative action and all, everybody was shaking everybody else's hand and being very happy and all. Chairman Strauss up there read an amendment to the rules that was not in the book and no one had a copy of it. But the amendment said that the implementation schedule will include that article three will be implemented right after this convention in Kansas City. And article Three includes this particular clause, in direct reference to it. Which means that these changes take place right now. That's what some of the McClusky people later got so ticked off about. They realized what had happened was that Strauss had given them a great victory and at the same time had taken it away. It happened to strengthen his hand and

it strengthened the Latino caucus. They also said that there shall be no quotas. You remember that? As a matter of fact on Article Ten, section seven--section six is the one we fought about, and section five said there shall be no quotas directly or indirectly by national or state parties. Section six was a big fight and a big, emotional vote. Section seven says "Notwithstanding section five above, equal division at any level of delegate or committee position, between delegate men and women, or committee men and committee women, shall not constitute a violation of any provision thereof." So women are allowed equal division between seats. And the Chicanos, or Latinos are allow [interruption] --will mean a lot more success in traditional terms. Meaning more people in office. The black gains are going to still continue to be hard fought, bitter battles. With other kinds of alliances. Despite the new politics of the Democratic party, it's still hard fought.

J.B.: How about the relationship between chicanos and blacks?

Castillo: That's a constant problem and a constant thing to work on. I wrote a paper on this back in 1966 to deliver at the Inter-agency Committee on Spanish Speaking Affairs at President Johnson's set up. About ways to bring the two groups together, parallel structures, and things of that sort. Together the two groups would easily control most of the big cities. Either individually or together, the two groups will control, or could control, most of the major cities in the country. Puerto Rican and black in some cases. Because of population and because of population growth. You've seen it with black mayors. But you haven't seen that happen yet in the big cities. Well, Los Angeles. The first

time around the chicano community voted for Bradley, excuse me, voted for Yorty. Second time there was emphasis on Bradley. Here in Houston, the chicano community first went for Welch and then later . It's not as liberal or as monolithic or as much a bloc vote as is the black vote. The black vote tends to be pretty much solid, strong, predictable.

Walter de Vries: And liberal.

Castillo: Yeah. Well, liberal if the Democrats are running a liberal. The black vote has been duped a lot of times, as has the chicano vote. I mean we voted for state comptroller for many, many years who never hired a black or a chicano. And he got ninety plus percent of all the black votes and all the chicano votes. And we voted for other guys who are no-good bastards it turned out. We just never bothered to see what they did after they got into office. Whole bunch of them. All over the country, I guess. But what I see in Houston, I see some changes here that are really fantastic. You take a thing like the population growth. Maybe you've already gotten all this stuff from somebody else. In Houston, the Mexican-American population, in the last decade, grew at a rate of 145 percent roughly. The black population grew at the rate of 45 percent. And the Anglo population at 14 percent. This trend has continued for the past. . . or has persisted for the past thirteen years. Which means that in the very near future, like fifteen years, the Mexican-American will outnumber the black in every one of the big cities in Texas. It's already true, of course, in San Antonio and El Paso. The only cities where this isn't true are Houston, Ft. Worth,

Dallas. Of the big cities. And it will be true of those cities in a matter of time.

W.D.V.: Is this based on birthrate?

Castillo: No, it's immigration and birthrate. Principally immigration. No one left on the farm. And people are coming from San Antonio and other cities where there are great numerical majorities and just pouring in here. Plus healthy economies.

J.B.: Are there any corresponding shifts on a state-wide basis?

Castillo: Yes, on a state-wide basis the same growth pattern tends to be true. The Mexican-American growth rate is just zooming. The black rate is also very rapid but not as rapid. And the Anglo rate is not nearly as rapid. Overall, throughout the state. So that right now, the Wall Street Journal, admitting to its own problems with these statistics, says that one of every five or one of every four Texans has a Spanish surname. One of every five or one of every four. I think the phrase they use "and certainly within a few years one out of every four Texans have a Spanish surname." That's an enormous change and it's going to have an enormous impact.

W.D.V.: What will that mean in terms of the legislature and state-wide offices?

Castillo: In terms of the state legislature, we'll see at least that percentage or a little bit higher in the legislature with people with Spanish names. Although a Spanish surname is deceptive. Because there are a number of legislators who are chicanos in the legislature who have English surnames, or Anglo surnames I guess you'd call them.

J.B.: Aren't there also legislators with Spanish surnames who have nothing to do with the brown caucus?

Castillo: Oh, hell yes. Some of these guys are very conservative. That's the purpose of the lobby. But I think once we hit them with the lobby and hit them with--

J.B.: Tell us about the lobby again.

Castillo: The lobby is something new and it's one of many, many new kinds of things that have been happening. The lobby is an attempt to get all the state-wide chicano groups, the LULACs, the GI forum, the chambers of commerce, the women's auxiliaries, the women's Democratic club, all these sorts of things from throughout the state to come together and set up a full-time, paid lobbyist. Just like Common Cause and the oil lobby and everybody else. And advocate issues from a different perspective, namely, the perspective of what's best for the Mexican-Americans in Texas.

J.B.: What will be the kind of issues?

Castillo: I think one of the crucial, basic ones will be school finance. That affects everybody but it's a good one. It's also affecting a low income Mexican-American school districts and other low income school districts. So it's good not only because it helps the specific goals of this group, but it's also good because it's a good coalition issue. It's a good one on which you can make ties with blacks and poor rural whites and poor urban school districts. It's a good coalition issue as well as a good issue. You know, it's got everything with it. Another one that's not as good on coalition but is very important is what's

called the illegal problem. Maybe you've heard about this, maybe not. But the good neighbor commission indicates that last year Texas had one million illegals in this state. One million. That means that if there are twelve million Texans who are here legally, one of every thirteen Texans that you see is here illegally. One of every thirteen Texans, roughly, is illegal. That's not included in that one of every four that I mentioned earlier in one of every five. That's a whole separate class of people that really are invisible in terms of the census, in terms of provision of services, in terms of all the usual indicators. It's a classic case of the poor subsidizing the rich. The poor being Mexico. And Mexican nationals being the guys who subsidize the economy of Texas. They do all the dirty work. All the exploitative jobs. They are exploited continuously. The unions want to ship them all out of the United States, penalize employers. The Mexican-American leadership has taken a somewhat more compassionate point of view. They are brothers and they have great misery in Mexico. To send them out of this country, back to that enormous misery, doesn't seem just somehow. Although you can't have them here, competing with American citizens for jobs. We're seeing a Mexicanization of the state. Illegals, these are not migrants. These are illegals who go all the way up to Chicago and Toledo and Detroit and all the Midwest. Huge colonies up there. And they are slowly but surely moving eastward so that now you have Mexican-American communities in east Texas. All the way into Louisiana. Right along the border. Just going to go right on through--

J.B.: These are not American citizens.

Castillo: No. But over a period of years they will be. Their

children will be and their wives or their spouses and their ties and all. They're adding a lot to the community and they're changing the character of this whole damn state. Slowly but surely, as they drift eastward and as the Puerto Ricans come westward and as the Mexican nationals come through California, the country is clearly being Latinized. Very clearly. Of course the Latins are also being Americanized. So we have one of those strange kind of blends. Don't know exactly what it will all end up being. But it's not going to be anything we've had before, that's for sure. These numbers are just amazing. In the Southwest, Texas, when the minorities get control of the cities, as will happen, it will be very different than in the east and Midwest. If I or a black or any minority person became mayor of Houston, it would be hard--there's no question of that--but not quite like Newark. Where the mayor, Gibson, has thirty percent of his population on welfare. And the ex-mayor is in prison and all of these crises and they can't maintain the streets and they can't open the libraries. All those kinds of problems. The cities in which Mexican-Americans are located, for reasons that I don't fully understand and probably are not explainable, seem to have healthier economies. Houston is ranked as the healthiest economy in the United States, together with Indianapolis. But Dallas is right up there and so's Ft. Worth. San Antonio, of course, is not. San Antonio is hurt. El Paso is hurt. But that's because of the border problem. Los Angeles is hurt, but not as badly as some of the East coast. Then of course we've already had some changes in Arizona and New Mexico. Colorado. The speaker of the house in Colorado is going

to be a chicano this time. Things have changed, and are changing rapidly. But more rapidly for Mexican-Americans.

W.D.V.: Do you see a similar proportion in the state legislature?

Castillo: Or higher.

W.D.V.: Okay. What about state-wide elected office?

Castillo: That will be a little bit harder at first because of the money. It's possible, right now, to win a state-wide elected office. But that's not because of the name, because of the ethnic group, because the system is so screwed up. I'm not totally cynical in saying you can get a bum, a complete bum to be governor. But you can get someone who's not really all that competent or all that experienced or all that astute. But if he has \$800,000 or \$1,000,000, he can go a long ways toward winning. Or she. I've been through a number of these state-wide campaigns with people who lost primarily because they didn't have the money. Had nothing to do with their issues or their ideological stance or their style of campaigning and all the other stuff you talk about. And I don't even think it's the fact that they're liberal and the other is conservative. The fact is, they were always outspent. Barefoot Sanders was totally outspent by John Tower. Half the people don't even know who Barefoot Sanders is except that he's got a funny sounding name. Sissy, the first time she ran, won in Harris county sixty percent. But the farmers, of course, you have a whole different set of facts about her. And we had no other material to get out there. Bill Hobby really had no public office experience at all. Worked for the Houston Post here. But he was able to get \$800,000 out of his own pocket. Dolph Briscoe.

If you put him in a competition, he wouldn't win against people with experience in office. He wouldn't be elected spokesman of any group of activists. Except that money comes through. And the Common Cause reforms haven't changed any of that. They have not changed any of that. If anything, they've made it harder for low income people.

J.B.: In what way?

Castillo: Now you have to document everything you spend. The requirements are more stringent in terms of reporting and all. Well, for a rich guy that simply means you hire an accountant to take care of your reporting. For a low income person, that means you go out and hire an accountant that you can't afford. So you've got another expense. And also, the documentation for five thousand \$10 contributions is a lot more expensive than the documentation for five \$50,000. You know, just five entries on one and on the other, just thousands of entries. You'll have more problems complying just because you've got to spend and you don't have the money to spend. That's just a mechanical book thing, a paper thing. There's another problem and that's that these reform laws in no instance set limits on how much you can spend. So the rich are still going to spend more than anybody else, at least in Texas. And the reform laws, so-called, usually, even when they call for disclosure, leave it vague at the end when they say how much you're worth. But you'll know exactly what a low income person is worth. And all you'll know is that a rich person is rich. See, toward the upper levels of income they say you don't have to say how many shares of stock you own in AT&T. You can just say it's between 500 and 10,000 or something like that. It

really won't matter when you've got that much. But they'll know exactly to the penny how much I make. You know, with or without income tax reports, they'll know exactly what I make and what low income people make. But I won't know what this great big rich guy makes except that he's very rich. And then finally, they give the illusion of reform and there is no difference. Maybe the federal laws have changed a bit, but not the local. The local laws have really not changed much at all. So the ball game hasn't changed much. We can outorganize, we can do out-thinking, we can do ground work, we can do homework, we can do precinct work, and all this sort of stuff. And that will make up for a lot of the money. But you have to work twice as hard and twice as long if you don't have the money. I'm a case in point. I have to go to--don't have to, I like it as well--but I go to events year around and I give three, four, five talks a week. You know, every week of the year. Saturdays and Sundays included. Just all year long. To get the message across. And also to get some exposure. If I had a lot of money, I could cut that number of meetings by 100, appear on television for three weeks and get twice as much exposure. But I don't have that money so I go. Do it on foot. It's things like that. The rules have changes a bit, but they haven't changed much at all. No significant impact. And the lobbyist rules, you know, really haven't effected anyone yet. There's been a lot of show and a lot of discussion of reform, but very little reform. That's my view. The Common Cause lobbyist is going to go work, according to today's paper, for the newly elected comptroller. That's fine, and I worked for that guy that was just elected. But people start to worry

already about what happens to Common Cause lobbyists. I don't mean to pick on Common Cause. I've paid my membership in that thing, you know. But I just want to make clear that a lot of minority people are not all that excited about Common Cause. It may have helped nationally and it may have helped on some other things, but as far as helping us politically, it really hasn't done much. As far as opening doors. And we're going to have to win seats the same way we won them in the past. Same old dirty work. Precincts and mail-outs and meetings and phone calls and all that sort of stuff.

I'm involved in minority issues, moreso now than I was in the past. Except that I don't run a minority based campaign in Houston. My constituency is less than ten percent chicano. Most of my constituents are, I guess you could call them middle class Anglo or middle America or white America, whatever you want to call it. Then I have a huge black constituency. 400,000 blacks. Up until this governor was elected, I had the largest constituency of any Mexican-American in the United States. Then this governor of Arizona was elected. Now his constituency is the largest. But the thing is, I try to speak on what I call populist issues as opposed to minority issues or chicano issues. I don't speak a whole lot about chicano issues. I do and I don't back off from them and I don't back off of support on black issues and things of that sort. But I don't, as a priority, focus on that kind of issue. As a priority I focus on property tax reform, on transit ideas, on efficiency in government. Things of that sort. What I call bread and butter issues. Picking up the garbage kind of issues. Spaying and neutering of dogs.

That's a kind of issue I like. Makes a lot of sense financially. Birth control for dogs. Because if you have all these stray dogs, and they're not around, you can save money by not having them around I should say. And it's also a good issue emotionally. Because everybody gets out there and picks up messed up garbage in the morning. Some dog knocked over your bag or something. Got to pick up all that junk. An average citizen relates to that. Plus those dogs scare people as they run around in packs. And it's a serious problem. In developing countries there's no such problem because stray dogs are eaten by people for food. Right now in this country we have so much affluence that we have a lot of stray dogs.

W.D.V.: We're just eating dog food.

Castillo: We eat the dog food because we're poor. But we don't eat the dog. In other countries, they eat the dog. That kind of issue I like.

W.D.V.: Can you tell us a little about your background.

Castillo: I grew up in Galveston, Texas. Went to college at St. Mary's. Very active in student government there. President of YDs, president of student government, associate editor of the newspaper, president of the students for civil liberties. We used to march and demonstrate, integrate theatres, 1960, San Antonio. You know, the pre-SCLC type stuff. Then I went to New York. Worked for a little bit in the city there. Just a little while. And then I went to Peace Corps for four years. First group to go to Asia, to Phillipines. Worked there as a volunteer, then volunteer leader and then staff person heading up a

section of that. Then I came back, went to graduate school at Pitt. Got a master's degree there in what's called community organization. Through the School of Social Work, primarily, but it's also through the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. Urban affairs and studies and things of that sort. I've never done any case work. Even though my degree came from a School of social work, I've never done any social work, even in school. I've always been in this sort of stuff. Planning, organizing. While at Pitt I worked with the United Negro Protest Committee, which, as the name implies, handled things like police brutality, demonstrations, pickets, boycotts, NAACP activity. Things of that sort. Lived in a black community there. I don't know, I guess it was 98 percent black. A few of us that were not black. Worked there. Even carried signs in 18° snow. I can't imagine doing that again. I die in that snow. Went from there, got my degree and did some consulting work. Came to Houston, got a job here with the settlement house. Community work called manpower development. Went from there to another job, same sort of thing. Manpower development called Project . Then went to work at the diocese of Galveston-Houston where they were trying to set up some social services programs and help the bishop with his community service. I went there to maintain a low profile so that I could go to law school and get educated. My father was teasing me. Said "These other degrees, they don't count for anything. You got to have a profession." Like a lawyer or doctor or architect or engineer. Something substantial, a real profession. You know, community organization is not a profession, according to him. So the first day at work we

started to boycott the public schools here. It's a long story, but almost accidentally and inadvertently I ended up as the chairman of a school boycott of the public schools of Houston because the chairman resigned with fifteen minutes to go before a big rally. And I was the only one there who was willing to take the job. So we had 4,000 kids out of school and we ran our own schools, freedom schools, schools. That went on a while and I was always on tv and radio and everything else because of that. It was all sort of backward that I got into it. Since then I've just been sort of going on and on. I guess I attended not even one-fourth of all the classes at the law school. I passed a few of them, much to my surprise. And I probably could have finished law school if I'd stayed in it. I would have been a horrible imposition on any client, because I never went. . . . The research class that they had, I think I showed up a total of thirty minutes in the whole semester. See I was actually in court, handling all sorts of stuff, and the jails, while the other guys in law school were in classes discussing cases. I was in the actual court house, being sued or suing or filing charges or whatever. I stayed with the bishop and kept working. I was studying the charter to run for city council. And the more I studied the charter, the more I realized that the city councilmen had very little power, very little leverage. And that the real leverage came from the controller. Because the controller had all these duties, the right to sign checks. And if they're not signed by the mayor and the controller, they're no good. No one can be hired unless the controller approves. I have to certify that there's money available. About two

hundred people I'm holding up right now, for one reason or another. I have to make the estimate of revenue. How much money we'll have next year. That has some priorities. And the controller invests all the city's money. Couple hundred million dollars a year. He also does all sorts of things that nobody knew about. What I liked, he had the authority to serve as the GAO of this city, the official watchdog. The past controller never did that, stopped doing it many years ago. So, I ran and I won and I started serving as the GAO and I had a ball. The first two years it was really a ball. Every week I'd come up with another dirty citizen of the week award. Fined Gulf Oil and Humble or Exxon now. The famous River Oaks Country Club. We have a big country club here. John Connally type people there. George Bush type people in that neighborhood. Called River Oaks. It's an exclusive country club. Very prestigious. Membership much be about \$18,000 a year. \$18,000 to get in if they let you in. It's a very beautiful place. [Points it out on wall map.] This whole thing here is River Oaks Country Club. And that was paying less taxes than this neighborhood here, which is Third Ward, lowest income, black neighborhood in the city. So I just had a news conference and said these bastards aren't paying and they ought to pay. And I showed the official records and all that business. The mayor defended them saying that they were prestigious citizens and that they provided esthetic values to the city and also that they provided green space. I said to hell with the green space, they got to pay, just like everybody else. They all objected, and so on. Now they're paying. And I'm pleased. The big fight this year was over how much they should pay. Not whether they should pay or not. Which is an enormous step.

J.B.: Before they had been totally exempt?

Castillo: No, they were paying at a rate that was set in 1954. It was just a ridiculous rate, way, way down. I take on one of those kinds of things about every week. Last week I took on some big names and one of their charitable outfits. They run a kind of orphanage thing that's been operating since 1920. They had never paid their water bill since somewhere in 1920, 1930. They owed the city \$37,000. \$38,000. In addition, we were giving them a grant every year. Jeez, must have been \$50,000 a year that we gave them. These are very rich people. The Togg's. Probably wouldn't mean much to you, but Ben Togg, Henry Togg, these are big names in building Houston. Malcolm Levitt. People on the board of Rice University. Things like that. And I wanted them to pay their water bill. So they pressured me a little bit about cutting off the water for the orphans. But yesterday they agreed and now they're paying their water bill--backed up. I'll give them the grant this year and then next year I'm going to try to cut them off. There are a lot of other charities in this city that need money and why give it to them?

J.B.: You're how old now?

Castillo: 35. I get into a whole lot of those things, those kinds of fights. I could go on and on for hours about those fights.

J.B.: You said you looked at the charter and saw that city councilmen really didn't have much clout.

Castillo: If they wanted to exercise it, yeah.

J.B.: And the controller did. So you decided to run for controller.

Castillo: Also, it was [an elective] position. I'm enough of a realist to know what's involved in that, too. The guy had been here

since 1945 or so. And he'd worked for the city before that. And he had not had an opponent in twenty-five years. And everyone assumed that he was automatic. Even the head of the Democratic party at the time thought that it was an appointed position. He didn't know. So I had a meeting with a group of advisers and asked them what I should do. And being good friends of mine, they unanimously said forget it. So I ran anyway. And I won.

W.D.V.: When was that?

Castillo: '71. Took office in '72. I want to be fair to the old man now. He had done a good job. In the 1950s he had fought these same bastards that I fought in the 1970s. He fought every one of them. Won some and lost some. But he took away limousines from mayors and did all sorts of things. He had not grown with the times. Like so many other elected officials, he'd given all of his life and it was time for a change. It really was. He didn't think that computers were going to be here to stay, so he didn't really automate the office the way he should have. And a lot of things like that. He had just not upgraded the system. The GAO part of it, the internal audit, had not been set up. Things of that sort. But he had fought all these guys. You know Frank Sharp, the Sharpsville scandal. He fought him back in the '50s because they sold us some water districts that were bad. He'd gone all the way to the Supreme Court, I believe, on that one. The old controller was fisty when he was young and aggressive and healthy. But he stayed here longer than he should have. And he wanted to retire. I found \$8 million in a bank that drew no interest. Hadn't drawn interest in a number of years. And stuff like that. But it was continuous. Now I'm

in the press as much because now my work is more this kind of stuff and remodeling and renovating and upgrading. And the new mayor I agree with much more, philosophically. But he makes life kind of hard here because he and his staff are not as administratively experienced as was the former mayor. Welch. I fought with Welch a lot. The old mayor. The new mayor I don't fight with as much on a philosophic basis. But administratively, He just doesn't know as much as the old guy. It's new, you know. He's a new mayor and even though he's got a ph.d. in economics and a lot of guys around him, he's doing some of the same things that Lindsey did when he was elected mayor of New York City. All these bright young people all over the place that don't know anything about how to pick up garbage. Stuff like that. So I spend a lot more time than I used to and I'm doing more things, on other levels.

J.B.: What sort of a move toward coalition is there between blacks and Mexican-Americans? Or is there?

Castillo: There is. We've worked on it as long as I've been here and before that. Barbara Jordan is one of the first examples of what that could lead to, although she won on her own right as well as eventual. . . . You know, she'll win on her own regardless of which particular groups are backing. There used to be a thing here called, I think it was called the coalition. It was labor, AFL-CIO, Teamsters, white liberals, blacks and chicanos. When they were strong, about six years ago, they used to win every election that they got into. They only concentrated on legislative races, state races and other races.

. They won 22 of 23 seats. Something like that. They got a chicano elected. They got Curtis Graves elected.

Barbara Jordon. They were really good. But the Vietnam war came and tore the liberals apart. The liberals just broke into factions of doves and hawks and all that sort of stuff. The labor people were not as solid with all the other groups. And labor is shifting, as well. The coalition has pretty much slowed down and all the coalitions now are more ad hoc. The chicano-black coalition is something that a lot of us work on on almost a daily basis. Appointing each other to boards and supporting each other for particular positions and things of that nature. It's working very well right now.

J.B.: Do you mean that in Harris county specifically?

Castillo: And even on the national level. The Latino caucus endorsed all the efforts of the black caucus.

J.B.: How about on the state level in Texas?

Castillo: On the state level there is no Latino caucus. Nor is there a black caucus.

W.D.V.: Are you going to form one?

Castillo: That's part of what this is. For whom does this lobbyist work?

Castillo: There will be a group. The group will be named something like Mexican-American committee. And that will be the basis for a state-wide chicano caucus.

J.B.: Is there any sort of association of state-wide chicano elected officials?

Castillo: There is a legislative caucus right now. There is nothing like the joint center. We've talked about doing that. The chicano elected officials tend to represent a much broader spectrum of

political philosophies than do the black elected representatives. My experience has been that the black elected officials are usually Democratic, usually liberal whether they're Democratic or not, and usually they vote right, rightly, the way I vote on most issues. Chicano elected officials are usually Democratic, usually moderate rather than liberal, and they don't vote right, except on some issues. We have some people that really have horrible voting records. They represent all chicano constituencies. You know, in terms of what I'd call civil liberties or human rights. We're trying to work up something like the joint center. Part of our problem is that we've had more success than the blacks, with less opposition. And a lot of people would disagree with me on that statement. But we've had a lot of mayors elected, for a long time, in south Texas. That hasn't been true, you know, with the blacks in Mississippi and other places. This last go around we had a lot of people elected to different things. Even governors. But the political philosophies are really very different. We'll probably try to put together a state-wide meeting of all of the locally elected officials sometime in '75.

J.B.: Does that include legislators?

Castillo: Yeah. The legislators have trouble getting together among themselves. And that's just a handful of them. We'll probably try to be putting that sort of stuff together.

J.B.: How about the Congressmen?

Castillo: That's very hard to do. ^{Eligio De La Garza} ~~Pica dela Gotsa~~ has a voting record that's comparable to someone who's usually considered very conservative.

W.D.V.: How about Henry Bee?

Castillo: Henry B has a record that's about as progressive or ADA. Pica is closer to ACA. And Henry Bee is ADA. They're probably both ninety percent on each of those. That's how far apart we are.

W.D.V.: Would they join in part of a state-wide. . . .

Castillo: I don't know. Henry Bee doesn't much like to do this sort of thing and he won't take part in the Democratic party--

W.D.V.: What Mexican-American leader in the state does?

Castillo: Most of them don't.

W.D.V.: Why not.

Castillo: You ^{get} cut up when you take part in Democratic party--

W.D.V.: Then why are you doing it?

Castillo: Because I think it has to be done, whether you get cut up or not. And I don't think you necessarily get cut up. The odds are very great. I run for state chairman of the Democratic party. So I loose. But jeez! One labor leader said "Castillo, if you guts it, were cut out and on fire, I wouldn't piss on him." Two months after the election. He was one of my ardent followers. [Laughter.] But what's bad is that he worked for me here in Houston. See, your old alliances, your old local alliances, start falling apart on the state level. And most elected officials don't want to have anything to do with internal party politics. Because you can only make enemies. And also because it just takes a lot of time and a lot of aggrevation.

W.D.V.: Was that your first effort on a state-wide basis? Why did you do it?

Castillo: Well, I had never even been allowed into a state-wide

convention, to tell the truth. I went to the '72 convention, the national, presidential thing. And I wasn't allowed to be seated because of a deal that had been cut with some people, Wallacite people from my Senatorial district. So I went as an observer in '72. '74, the only time I was allowed to get into the convention, I ended up running for the chairmanship. So obviously, there's a lot of ego there. To think you can end up in charge of something you've never even been into. Anybody sense, you've got to go in there first. Be there a little bit. The guy I was supporting was a guy named Bullock. He withdrew with about a week or so to go.

J.B.: That was the state comptroller?

Castillo: Yeah, state comptroller. And after Bob withdrew, we had no one who was a progressive or liberal to challenge the conservative faction of the state. My feeling is that if we are going to move this state toward moderate positions, you have to constantly confront the conservatives. You don't have to always win, because you won't. But you have to constantly confront them, so that they'll start slowly moving. And also, from that same sort of perspective, particularly chicanos, but all the other minorities, could win more if they had something to bargain from. So that some of my friends told me that they voted against me because the governor offered them something. Position on a board, or position on a particular whatever it is, commission or something. We had that bargaining power. If I hadn't run there would have been no bargaining power. Or one less thing to bargain away. They were bargaining me away and I don't like that, but I understood it.

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--supposed to be. And if it really were as strong as it's supposed to be.

J.B.: So you wanted to test the Democratic party. And what did you find in testing it?

Castillo: I found it very vulnerable, very weak. It's got a lot of money. They spent \$75,000 or so on that convention alone. I spent \$300. But I had a better organization than they had. I had superior communications. I had superior floor control. And I had a superior display of graphics and all that sort of stuff. I had all volunteers and they had all paid staff. I think with about two or three months of work, any well organized minority--I don't just mean me. Two or three months of work, anybody could take over the Democratic party. So I can understand how McGovern got all the delegates.

W.D.V.: Are you going to try next year?

Castillo: Probably, yeah.

W.D.V.: That leads us to Bentsen.

Castillo: I've changed my stance on Bentsen. I once said that I would find Bentsen personally repulsive as a presidential candidate. I've now changed that to say that I'll endorse the Democratic candidate. That's as far as I am on Bentsen. I'm meeting with his campaign people and all that next week. I'm not going to be out front pushing for Bentsen. You can be sure of that.

W.D.V.: But are you going to be trying to stop him from getting the favorable--

Castillo: No, I don't have anyone else right now. You know, who can I go for? I did like Mondale, but he's gone. I liked a couple of

other people, but they're gone. I met Udall and I don't see much chance. I'd almost rather go with Jimmy Carter, but I don't know anything about him except I liked him when I met him. That's hardly a reason to go for anybody. I think there are a lot of people that don't want Bentsen but don't want to come out against him yet. Because you've got to work with him until the last possible minute. There'll be no great love for Bentsen. He's got too much wealth. Controls too many chicano groups and things like that. In south Texas his power is immense. It's another one of those cases where even though he's a capable person, where would he be without that bread? Could he really out organize anybody? Is that just another case of a lot of money gets you just about anything you want in Texas? I don't see him as all that different from Briscoe in that respect.

W.D.V.: Is that the key to understanding Texas politics, money?

Castillo: Who put up the bread.

W.D.V.: It hasn't changed at all since you've been watching?

Castillo: Changed very little.

W.D.V.: Has politics changed at all--

Castillo: Oh yeah, it's changed a lot, because now they spend money to get the minority vote. And we spend effort to try to out organize them. And we can beat them on the local races. One man one vote districts, we can beat them. Regardless of the money. Because at that level, you know, the money won't count as much. But on the state level, it's still very tough. And we've made some mistakes, some organizational mistakes.

J.B.: How do you assess Hill vs Hobby?

Castillo: John Hill would have automatic advantage in terms of

competency and administrative ability and things like that. But Hobby would probably win. Because he has more access to media and more access to money. I don't think either one of those is going to be a great, progressive governor if either one became governor. Neither one of them ever says anything that's really much different than what we're hearing right now.

J.B.: [How about your mayor, He & Heinz?]

Castillo: Fred is interested in US Senate or governor. Something like that.

J.B.: Is he different from Hill or Hobby or more of the same?

Castillo: He's a little more liberal. He's not liberal, but he's a little bit--

W.D.V.: What's a Texas liberal?

Castillo: A Texas liberal is someone like Ralph Yarborough, who votes for all the progressive legislation. The civil rights bills and--

W.D.V.: Besides the mayor, who do you have in elected office in the state that you can identify as a liberal?

Castillo: Fred's not a liberal. He's moderate. He's a little bit to the left of Lloyd Bentsen. He supports Bentsen, usually. Did in the last campaign I know and probably will this time. But Fred won't support me on these other things that I get into. He won't get into that. He voted against me--or I voted against him, you can put it either way you want. We voted against each other on almost every issue up there in that Democratic convention. Kansas City. He didn't take part in Austin. He's smart. A lot of these guys, these local elected officials, they don't want to get into Austin. Because then they hurt them-

selves for later offices if they run for state office. And it made some enemies in Lubbock.

W.D.V.: Okay. What's a liberal, though? Everybody talks about liberals but can't point to anybody in office, really. State-wide office, at least.

Castillo: No, not now.

W.D.V.: Would you consider yourself a liberal?

Castillo: No. Liberal is a convenient label that we use for those people that generally cluster around the philosophy of Ralph Yarborough. Although Ralph probably might not consider himself a liberal, either.

W.D.V.: Is the label inoperative?

Castillo: Pretty much. Why do we keep using it?

W.D.V.: But it seems to be very important.

Castillo: It is, because that's a way to label people. It's unfortunate that we didn't pick the good guy label. We should have picked the good guy label. A conservative came to me. Conservatives the good guys, liberals the bad guys. Liberals would be those people that supported--to get really extreme--George McGovern because they believed what he said. Not because they were brass collar Democrats or because they hated Nixon. Liberals would be those people that really believed McGovern had some pretty good ideas. I supported him because of what he said. But I don't think he went far enough, either. I consider myself more of a populist, radical. Although all my talk is about GAO stuff and tax reform. Things like that. I consider that

J.B.: You consider yourself an insurgent Democrat?

Castillo: I don't know what that means. I know I'm not in the mainstream.

W.D.V.: We know of about six wings of the Democratic party. We have insurgents, radicals, liberals, progressives, conservatives and Wallacities.

Castillo: I don't know about all that.

J.B.: Sissy Farenthold said she came across the term insurgent.

Castillo: Makes sense. Sissy's not a very good politician. Sissy's a beautiful person and her philosophy is right, just always right. And she's articulate and intelligent. All that sort of stuff. But she's not political. Sissy won't work precincts except when she has to. Sissy doesn't like to go to precincts. This three talks a week. Sissy makes her three talks a week at the press club in Washington, D.C. and National Women's Political Caucus in Kansas City and the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Los Angeles. Not Los Angeles, Santa Barbara. And someplace in New York City for some foundation. Things like that. Amnesty International here or someplace else. See, and I make mine to the Rotary, to the Lions, to the Sierra--Sierra meaning the people who go out and look for people to join religious professions. That kind of Sierra. Not the other Sierra. And to the East End Civil Progress Association. Second ward Democratis. Third ward Democratics. Local rabbis, temples. You know, all those kinds of groups. Very different. The people I talk to on the three days a week basis, chicanos, whatever, are much, much more folks type people, I guess you'd say.

J.B.: If you talk about blacks and chicanos getting together on

populist type issues, you're really talking about tax reform, extension of public services. A role of the state in helping to solve social problems that are economic related. Regulation of business, these type of issues. How do those groups, that basically have issues stemming from relatively low economic status as a group and problems deriving from that--how do they relate to consumerism and environmental issues? As I understand it, this is somewhere someone like Hill gets a reputation of being progressive. On consumerism and environmental issues.

Castillo: He's done pretty well on consumerism. On environmental issues, well, he has done some things there, too. It's not too well known, and it's been very hard to make the point, but the groups that suffer the most from pollution are the minority groups. At least in Houston that's certainly true. It's very hard to convince the minority population itself that this is true or that this is a priority. So that a lot of people associate environmental issues with middle class or even affluent people. People who have time to worry about whether the air is clean or not. A lot of low income people still take the old Pittsburgh position. If the air is dirty, that's a good sign. That means you've got people that work and the factories and the foundries are moving. So it's a good sign, because that's where we work. You know, that's the kind of thinking they have. That's going to change. And Houston's going to see the first experiments in the new technology. Because people talk about it a lot here and they do things like that. And the issues are completely inseparable. So that people here are building. Like today's Sunday paper was kind of typical. Discussion in it of these guys here at the local university and a great big construction firm about the

building of a five hundred story building. The mile high. And the difference between the discussion of that here and the discussion of that in other places is that here they're serious about it. They're not just speculating here. The Astrodome is considered an old kind of technological thing. It's old stuff. Here they're building a thing called the, I think it's m-i-u-s. Basically, it's multiple integrated unified system. All that means is that you build a two hundred unit apartment house. And the water comes into it and it's used and it's recycled. And the air is recycled. The heating systems. Everything is recycled. You have a completely self-contained two hundred unit apartment house. The costs go way way down of running it. It's like a space ship environment. To give you an idea just how serious these guys are, this is a publication of all of the engineering groups, called Engineering News Record. They collected the electrical, plumbers, all those other kinds of things. They put together a book, their centennial issue, that focused on the future. What's going to happen in the future? They discuss what they're going to do to meet the problems of the future in environment and things of that sort.

[Interruption.]

W.D.V.: --Dallas and Ft. Worth. A long ways.

Castillo: Yeah. Well, the conservative projections here are for the doubling of our population. "To cope with increasing density in the face of land use limitations, cities will become more highrise. By 2000, buildings of one hundred stories will be numerous. And 150 to 200 story structures will dot the skylines." this kind of stuff just all through this thing. The engineers themselves

For example, it's now technologically

possible because of all of this environmental furor to treat your sewage matter in such a way that the liquid that you are finally trying to get rid of--the water--is fit to drink. And of course the solid waste we already sell as fertilizer to Florida. done that anyway.

So many boxcars. But you could take the water of the sewage that's been treated, and put that right back into the drinking water. That will cut your cost, maintain the water and sewage plant enormous amount. And water bills will go way down. We'll be fighting that kind of issue. Should the public vote on that even is a question. It's just a straight, scientific health issue. It's not something the public should vote on. We'll have a technocratic type issue on it. We'll have issues of that type. Quite a bit. Cars. Should we outlaw cars? Or, if you don't triple decker freeways. That's a triple decker freeway there. You have three different levels of freeways. Three levels. This one sits way up on top and is a bus lane. Rush hour, they're coming this way and the other hours, they're going that way. This is the kind of thing that we fit for Atlanta and Houston. Paratransit. Low density cities. And those things can go 200 miles an hour. Should you go that kind of route? Should you do things of that sort? We're going to be fighting those kinds of issues. There will still be the black, the white and all that kind of bitching. But we're really getting into that much faster than we even imagined. Universities don't have nearly the stroke they used to have and certainly the churches don't. Although in the black community they do. The Baptist ministers are very strong.

W.D.V.: How about the Catholic church?

Castillo: Without the Catholic church you can't make social

progress. The chicano community can't make very much social progress.

W.D.V.: Why not?

Castillo: Because they control so many things. Not really money any more. But the philosophy of so many Mexican-Americans is shaped by the Catholic church.

J.B.: What is the political role of the bishop in San Antonio?

Castillo: He's one of the people convening this meeting. I had to invite him as a convener.

J.B.: Is this a new role for the church?

Castillo: For him? Yeah. For the church, yeah. The church has always been active in politics. We've always had our state lobbyist. Very quiet, but he was there.

J.B.: But is the political role of the Catholic church expanding in Texas?

Castillo: Oh yeah. Except that the role of all the factions in the Catholic church is expanding as well. And again, you know, we run the whole gamut from Berragans to McLaughlins. The whole range. Chicano catholics tend to be more liberal. And the bishops did endorse Cesar Chavez and things of that sort. But in that kind of issue. Then on issues like abortion. The anti-women's caucus position. No one would agree it's anti-women. I think we're going to see this kind of issue, the issue of the recyclable buildings, recyclable cities, mass transit, issues of continuation of education for lifetimes, for almost complete lifetime. Things of that sort. Very different kinds of issues. And then the great immigration question that we don't know what to do with. What do you do with a million. . . .

W.D.V.: That one million aliens. Have they all come across the border just recently? Is this the accumulation of years and years?

Castillo: This is what happened last year. Just one year. One million people in one year. Illegally. The official figure that I saw for something like 1970 was 190 million legal crossings in one year.

W.D.V.: You don't mean 190 million.

Castillo: I do mean 190 million. That means both United States tourists and people coming back and forth. And that includes the whole border, all the way to California. That's the extent of the exchange between the US and Mexico. People go there, shop for the morning, come back in the evening, go out for the night, or whatever. Come work here. And so on. But that has increased. And a million in Texas who came last year illegally without papers. Some of them got shipped back maybe two or three times and just came right back. We deported I believe it was 800,000. The whole United States, last year. Like right now some of them know the system so well that they'll go to a certain bar here
give the guy \$10, wait for the policeman to come. The policeman picks him up, he tells him "I'm not an American citizen. I don't have any papers." The policeman gets him to immigration. Immigration ships him back to Mexico--at the expense of the US government. The guy's home for Christmas. Or, if he's in Chicago, he gets a flight back. They even have certain places where they congregate to be picked up. They even know which agents of the immigration to pick them up. They know the system. And hell, if I wanted to go home from Chicago, it's a great way to get home. One of the busdrivers here was interviewed on tv once. It was really funny. He works for the Continental Bus

line. Continental has a contract with immigration service to drive the people back to Mexico. He said he got a whole load of guys in his bus. They drove to Mexico, the border. They got off to Mexico. Then he went to the hotel there, Laredo or somewhere, and slept overnight. The next morning he came back to Houston, this time with paying customers. He said some of the customers in that bus were the same ones that he had driven over there the day before for free. And they'd gone and made their trip home, deposited whatever they were going to do, and got right back on the bus. It's against the law to aid and abet illegals. It's not against the law to hire them. That problem will grow. And until we think internationally, we can't solve it. So long as Mexico has great economic problems and Latin America and Central America, we can't solve the economic problems in Texas.

W.D.V.: You going to run for another office? Which one?

Castillo: Most likely. Not sure.

W.D.V.: Some state-wide?

Castillo: Probably. The one I really like is railroad commissioner.

W.D.V.: Wouldn't they pour the money in against you?

Castillo: Oh yes.

J.B.: Isn't railroad commissioner on a state wide level in Texas comparable to controller for the city of Houston. It's a hell of a lot of power there and it's always been ignored?

Castillo: Right.

J.B.: Why have the liberals always ignored railroad commissioner?

Castillo: There's something about people in politics, all the

factions. They like to go for status. Because so much ego is involved in politics. They like to go for positions that have visibility. I've had a great running, friendly debate with some of my friends in the black community about why should the blacks keep running for mayor. I say "Look, you don't want to be mayor of Atlanta. You want to be the chief finance man of Atlanta." Let the rich Anglos have the mayorship. They've got to borrow the money and raise the money anyway. Even if you are mayor, you won't own the bank. What you want is to be in charge of the finances. And then you can build a base and run for state comptrollers and county assessor-collectors. And run for things like this, all over. And get this structure built, the foundation for it. And mayors aren't that important. The mayor of Los Angeles is really not that crucial.

J.B.: What does the railroad commission do? They basically regulate gas and oil, right?

Castillo: Right. And they also control things like oil spills. They regulate all minerals that are extracted from the oil in Texas, except from the ground in Texas. And thirty-five percent of the oil in this country comes from Texas.

J.B.: In regulating it, what does that--

Castillo: Give you an idea of what that means. They set what's called the allowable.

J.B.: Let me rephrase the question. Suppose you became a railroad commissioner. What would you like to do? What's the power?

Castillo: Well, the first thing I'd do is get one more, because there are three of them. And you have to have two seats to really do

something. And the model, very frankly, is the Huey Long model. Public service commission, Huey Long, Louisiana. But you start with one. Well, the way it works is this. The oil companies in the state have oil wells. And the railroad commission, with the advice of a lot of groups, says "You are allowed to drill and to extract so much oil per months, or per day, from that specific well. Because we need so much reserve." Now, the determination of the reserve is very questionable. The geologists argue about it forever. If the oil companies have the big hand in deciding how big the reserve is, and you're only allowed to extract a little bit of oil, then the price of gasoline is effected because they can't get enough. Then the Arabs can have an embargo, or whatever, and we don't dig into our reserves at all because that would be dangerous, we say. And therefore, you know, we can't really change much in this country. But there are many people who argue here that there was a lot of oil, all through that Arab embargo, and that if the railroad commission had simply allowed the allowables to go up a little bit more, the United States would not have had an energy crisis.

J.B.: And the price of oil would not have gone so high.

Castillo: Right. And that there were many, many tanks that were full, and many, many wells that just weren't being pumped. And also, they deal with all the other minerals.

J.B. What is the relationship between the railroad commissioner and the land commissioner in so far as the oil on the public land?

Castillo: The land commissioner is in charge of the land in general. And his great power now is moving toward coastal, regional management, although he does have quite a bit of say on all uses of land

now.

J.B.: Including leases for oil rights.

Castillo: leases and things.

J.B.: But the railroad commission sets the allowables also on that state owned land. If the railroad commission increased the allowables on state owned land, the state's royalties would increase from that source. When the crunch comes. Next year, or whenever it comes. On the school financing issue. Isn't it really going to be on who pays for it? The question is more or less resolved by the equalization.

Castillo: We have to have it. I spoke with one representative of an oil company. They took me to lunch one day. He had too many drinks. I almost never drink. Almost a teetotaler. Not quite. But this guy had all his cocktails after lunch and he was telling me that if the Rodriguez case had been approved by the Supreme Court the way some of us had wanted, it would have cost his oil company \$100 million a year extra in taxes/Texas. That's how they figured it. And wouldn't that be horrible? They'd of had to raise the price of gasoline. I say, well, is it worth raising the price of gasoline in order to get a better education. Who's going to pay for the gasoline? It comes back to all that. That's the kind of stakes we're talking about.

J.B.: And this is really one of the reasons for establishing this new lobby in Austin?

Castillo: Oh yeah. That's one of the critical issues we'll be dealing with.

J.B.: You're going to have some input in that lobby in the type of tax programs they push for to finance schools. So what sort of tax

programs will you be pushing for? Or you would like to see the lobby push for?

Castillo: I'm pushing more for what are called progressive taxes as opposed to. . .

W.D.V.: Corporate profit?

Castillo: As progressive as I can get them. Meaning that the poor should not pay more. So you'd stagger it. Those with more would pay more. Proportion it. Whichever of those we can get.

J.B.: Where does property tax fit in to this?

Castillo: Property tax in Texas is archaic, obsolete, inefficient, unfair, inequitable, unconstitutional system. We can't enforce the constitution. To give you an example, the constitution says we shall tax all property equally. It says real and tangible, or real and intangible. But you take a bank like the First City National Bank. The one that John Connally's on the board of. Deposits of \$2 billion. Most of that's stocks and bonds and things of various sorts. They're on the tax rolls at I believe \$60 million this year. Not \$2 billion. How do you tax all of that intangible they have.

J.B.: No intangible tax in Texas, is that right?

Castillo: In effect almost. Supposed to be, but not really there.

J.B.: How about in terms of assessments of property?

Castillo: Oh, a total disgrace.

J.B.: And it's done locally all over the place? Even within the local taxable unit there's a lack of uniformity. Am I correct?

Castillo: Oh, tremendous. It's horrible. Actually, one of the

reasons I stopped doing the dirty guy of the week thing is that it's too easy. It's a cheap shot. After a while it's not even fun. It's just too easy to find another big piece of property that's not paying or paying at a ridiculous rate. And that's true throughout the state.

J.B.: Does the state controller have any specific responsibility?

Castillo: They deal more with sales tax rather than property tax. No one has responsibility on a state level for property tax. And property tax reform will be a big question. Except that since the US Congress has refused to deal with this issue, it's my very firm belief that in fifteen years American cities will be administrative agencies of the US government. And all the while they will complain but insist that they retain local control. This has happened in Europe already. The federal government, on a revenue sharing type program. . . income tax or progressive tax, hopefully. . . then sends sixty, seventy percent of your local budget back to the local governments. That's how they do it in Scandinavian countries. That's how city budgets are set. That's how the budgets of the big cities of the United States are going to be set. Through revenue sharing formulas. And property tax, because it's so inefficient and inequitable and so on will just become a secondary source of revenue. Right now it's THE source of revenue. It's the primary source of revenue. But we haven't reformed it and our failure to reform it means that you can't expand it. Therefore it will just decline in value, or in importance, I should say. And the revenue sharing formulas become crucial. And the new minority leaders talk about statistical formulas rather than

J.B.: Have there been any suits on the property tax in so far as

under the equal protection?

Castillo: Yeah. The best suit has been the Alabama suit, where they had to redo the whole damn state of Alabama. I get all the property tax reports here. There have been some specific things, but the Supreme Court said that the system in Texas was ridiculous and had to be overhauled. We just haven't done it. US Supreme Court on the case.

J.B.: But they didn't issue an order directing it.

Castillo: They said we think the legislature should solve this problem. It's clearly a problem and they should solve it. It's simply not an issue for us to deal with.

J.B.: Typical Berger court decision.

Castillo: Yeah, but that's what they said on a couple of things.

J.B.: Has that Alabama case been appealed, do you know?

Castillo: I know Alabama has started on an evaluation program.

J.B.: That's Frank Johnson's order, but I wonder if it went through the fifth circuit and went to the Supreme Court.

Castillo: I don't know. I know that the distribution of and delivery of service question has changed radically. Now the minority leadership comes in and asked for services for neighborhoods. And they are talking geo-indexing. And the minority leadership discusses computers, computerization, of everything from voting lists, you name it.

J.B.: You're talking about minority leadership where?

Castillo: Well, here and the guys in Newark that are doing the undercount fights. Some of the guys who have done the undercount fights in California. I don't know if you know what I mean by undercount.

J.B.: That's where the census.

Castillo: Yeah, and therefore they don't get counted in
or the community development formula

And some other groups that are joining into it now. The joint center, the black political thing, that's one publication on it. That's the kind of issue we're getting into now. And there's more and more sophistication as to how we're going to campaign.

W.D.V.: You said you were going to follow the Huey Long public service commission model if you got on the railroad. But then extend that, beyond the commission. You see where that propelled him.

Castillo: Yeah, I don't have nearly the things that Huey Long had.

W.D.V.: Do you see down the road running for another state-wide office, like governor, based on that?

Castillo: Yeah, much later. The kinds of things that Huey Long had, personally, temperamentally. I'm not mean enough to do the kinds of things he could do. You have to be a little tougher than I am to do that sort of thing. And I don't have nearly the same amount of hotspa. First of all, I don't see myself going that far.

J.B.: We got off the track. Suppose you got on there. Brainstorm a little. And you got an ally. There were two of you. What would you do? We talked about what could be done.

Castillo: We'd move into the international field right away. And we'd use these off shore terminals. Convert a lot of that to public use. Maybe raise some taxes on that sort of thing.

J.B.: Do they have any regulation in so far as taxes on the oil

industry?

Castillo: They don't directly, but they certainly do indirectly. When they testify in the US Congress, it has a great deal of . They are the regulatory agency for all the states, really. Their position on environmental safety has a great deal of weight. Their discussions on building this off shore terminal here, not terminal, superport-- their positions on all this sort of stuff has a lot to say. Their studies on what you should do about reserves.

J.B.: They determine who studies what, also.

Castillo: One of the problems that happens right now is that the Alaskan finds and some other things that are happening in the country are weakening the power of the railroad commission. Probably by the time I get ready to run for it, it won't be too important a position. But it will still be important in Texas. It will be able to do some things for the state.

J.B.: Who sets the gasoline tax in Texas in so far as the retail tax on gas?

Castillo: I don't know. The legislature would be my first answer, but I'm not sure.

J.B.: It's relatively low, isn't it?

Castillo: Oh yea. Texas. . . oil and gas. . . we're still paying lower amounts for more plentiful supplies, compared to the rest. This city itself, the economy of this area, is to some extent dependent upon the misery of the rest of the country. The economic situation gets better all the time. Our unemployment rate just dropped last month, from 4.2 to 3.7. That's quite a switch. When the rest of the country,

when it seems to be getting worse everywhere. I don't think it's going to happen state-wide, but one of the things that happened here--and I'm not naive enough to be totally misled--is that when I first ran and won, the newspapers referred to me as the chicano controller, the Mexican-American controller, always the ethnic adjective. Later they referred to me as the short-sighted controller, or maverick controller or independent controller. They dropped the ethnic description. I don't know what that means and reporters tell me that it was not conscious or anything. What designation they used anymore. I don't know how indicative that is of what will happen.

W.D.V.: What are you now, the insightful controller?

Castillo: Has a . One of the guys here said, it was copied from Ralph McGill, he said being a good controller is like being a good newspaper editor. It's like running unopposed for the position of chief son-of-a-bitch because I'm the guy that doesn't approve all of this. And there's 200 people that want jobs or or whatever. Or somebody who wants to buy something.

J.B.: What's going to be the issue in a state-wide campaign comparable to ^Pstayed dogs?

Castillo: Oh, ^Pstaying dogs won't get you any real good coverage here. It's just a good issue. State wide the same thing is property tax. Damn disgrace. Same thing local.

J.B.: In other words, equality in taxation.

Castillo: Yeah, just the basic bread and butter stuff. Reform of the government, that kind of stuff. Opening the government. But there are some very practical things that all of us should have, especially

people in my position. . . . Right now, if you won a state-wide job you'd probably lose. See, if I ran for lieutenant governor and accidentally won, I'd lose right afterwards because the job pays \$4,800 a year total salary. So you have to be a Bill Hobby. I couldn't afford to win if I ran. If I ran for state senate I'd make \$4,800 a year. I couldn't afford to win that position. I got one of the highest paying jobs in the state of a local or state official. I make \$14,800 a year.

W.D.V.: Is that one of the highest paid?

Castillo: Yeah.

J.B.: What does railroad commissioner pay?

Castillo: Must be in the thirties. Thirty or forty plus private plan if you want it. Oil company would take care of you if you want that. Oil companies will take care of you. You don't have to worry about that. But this job, 14.8. Actually, my wife and I have talked quite a bit about just retiring, or resigning, or, if you want to use a fancy word, taking a sabbatical for a little bit to get some money together. To work like hell in the private sector to make a little money and come back in a couple of years. My salary is fixed by law, by the city charter. And you've got to have a city-wide election to raise my salary. And it was set in 1940 or something. 14.8 a year becomes less and less. I have a travel allowance of about \$100 a month. Family and all that. The financial strains on elected officials are pretty bad. Ben ^{Reyes} Reyes makes about \$4,800 a year so does Gonzale ^{Barrientos} Barrientos . You know, legislators are honest for the first year, but after that, just to keep their families fed they have to get on somebody's retainer.

J.B.: Do you think these low salaries are deliberate, conscious

attempt by moneyed interests in Texas?

Castillo: At the time they were set, they weren't that bad. They weren't exactly rich, even then, but they weren't. . . . \$4,800 at the time it was set was probably like 14.8 is right now.

J.B.: Were those salaries set in the constitution or by statute?

Castillo: I think it's constitution. They can't change it themselves. But you know, you can't live on \$4,800 and it's just unfair. City councilmen make \$300 a month. They make \$3,600 a year. And we're the fifth largest city in the United States. The mayor makes \$20,000. We just passed Detroit.

W.D.V.: Is this the largest city in the South?

Castillo: Yea, then Atlanta, then Dallas then San Antonio. New Orleans is not that big.

W.D.V.: But in the South, the biggest cities, with the exception of Atlanta, are in Texas.

Castillo: I think so. See, the mayor makes \$20,000 here in Houston. He spent \$700,000 for his campaign. Who the hell can run? In my first campaign, I spent fifteen. Had a little bit of luck and lots of work. Second campaign, I spent twenty-five. The black comptroller in Cincinnati spent \$75,000. A much, much smaller city, of course. Not Cincinnati. St. Louis. The black mayor is in Cincinnati. I spent less than anyone else who ran, city-wide, as a challenger. Part of it is that I use all these other techniques. Computers and mathematical formulas. Yard signs. First time I didn't even use a single billboard. Oh, I did. I got two billboards in the last week. We've set up an organization here in this city about eight years ago. We're very

proud of it. I think Benny probably spoke with you about it. The kind of things we do.

J.B.: He told us a little bit about it, but we're late getting into it.

Castillo: It's called BASO. But it changes with each election because you have a different person running and that person brings in new workers. BASO's the basis of it, though. We do things like. . . we put out yard signs. Wooden stakes. Built almost our own little printing company that works for elections. And it's all low income people, mostly chicanos. We print our own material. Print our own brochures, write our own copy, print our own signs, cut our own wood, put all the stakes, everything on. My brother-in-law, who's got a degree in mathematics, outlines locations of where you put it all up and the times of day and night so you don't waste anything. We use computer time to decide where to mail and what kind of mailing and age groups and things like that. We do little stuff. Like, at seven o'clock when the polls close we send out pick up trucks to pick up all our signs.

[End of side of tape. End of interview.]