

Jack Bass: You served how long in the legislature?

Frances Farenthold: Two terms.

J.B.: And that first has been referred to as the "reform session?"

Farenthold: That's right. It was the makings of the "reform session." The stuff that I used to introduce in that first session were just reforms of rules changes, because we didn't have a chance to begin to get anything else. The so called "reform session" came after that in 1973. But the impetus and the makings of it were in the 1971 session.

J.B.: What were these basic changes that occurred in the legislature at that time?

Farenthold: Really, where it started, I think, was the total controls that the speaker had. That was one of the things that we were starting out against. If you weren't on the team, if you didn't vote, regardless of what your constituency might be, if you didn't go along with the team, you were just ostracized. It didn't matter what the merit of your legislation was, you couldn't get started. And then, of course, early in the term, so far as I was concerned, I could see conflict of interests everywhere you turned. Because there was a kind of climate up there that if you didn't exploit your public office, you really weren't with it, you were sort of a square. For example, the things that you were hearing about were appearing before agencies of your clients and so on, on down the line. Investing in companies that might have something going on, all that type of thing. There wasn't even

criticism of it. I remember that on the floor of the house, a legislator telling me how much a group in a big city here had turned over to the speaker, who didn't have any "serious" opposition, as a campaign fund. These were all campaign funds for people that didn't have opposition, to speak of. It is all this stuff that you read about, but you just saw it firsthand there. So, it was a multi-faceted thing. It wasn't in the beginnings of it, but the impetus for it came out of the so-called "Sharpstown Banking Bills" and the disclosures made by the SEC about a year and a half after their passage. And you know, you can look back and say, "Oh, it looks all cut and dried and this was the reform session of the legislature," but it didn't start out that way, that is all hindsight. You look at one thing. I know that we were working for rules changes. For example, such things as that the conference committee on appropriations would have to use the guidelines of what came out of the house and senate bill, rather than going outside those guidelines, which has been what happened. For all practical purposes, the appropriations bill was written by the conferees. We went through the exercise in the house and senate, but it didn't mean anything. And this kind of thing didn't mean . . . and this wasn't the first session that that had been pushed. I can recall that in my first session, I had attempted as a rules change, to have at least a record of the committee testimony. Because I had had first hand experience with my experience with the land commissioner where witnesses would take an oath and then there was no record of what they testified to, which made the matter meaningless. So, it came from different problems like that, but then the substantive matter came with the Sharpstown Bills. And again, we stay with procedure because the procedure was so much a part of what went on and what didn't go on. For example the consent calendar where

one time and we were passing something that averaged a bill a minute. So that you had to do something about correcting the procedure before you could get to the substantive matter. What happened in a sense with the Sharpstown Bills, the speaker's head lieutenant got up and said that it was a good bill, that it would help the small banks and that was it. And because it was a speaker's bill, automatically, there would be whatever number of committee chairmen that we had and the vice-chairmen. That was part of getting those positions, so, I mean that there was no substantive discussion. And in a way, that's why I want to say that the procedural part was so much a part of what we were trying to do. But again, you didn't know where it was going to lead in the beginning and I still sometimes have second thoughts about where it has led now. I think we have the veneer of much, but I don't know if we have anything else. It wasn't cut and dried in the beginning. When we tried to get an investigation of . . . all I wanted when I asked the resolution, was to study the legislative history of those two bills. I did that in March of '71. Because I really wanted to know and I thought that it would be very informative to all of us, if we could just find out what went into the passage of a piece of special legislation. Who drafted it, where it came from, how it was manipulated, if you want to call it that. And of course, we were stopped there and I didn't intend to be stopped there. So, we went all different directions around the problem. I don't think that we know very much today.

J.B.: This is a bill that would have done what?

Farenthold: It would have gotten banks that wanted to get out from under the regulation of the federal FIDC and substitute state insurance, but in effect, without regulation. They didn't know what it meant. And that was why I was so curious to find out what I had voted on twice. Because there had been

two bills on the subject. But let's say that it was the catalyst.

J.B.: Was that the beginning of the Sharpstown scandal?

Farenthold: That's right.

J.B.: Well, we've been told that it really emanated out of the SAC.

Farenthold: That's right, but it was the information from the SAC. We wouldn't have even known about it. This was one of the reasons that I wanted that legislative history of the matter. Because it was in effect, I think in August of '69, vetoed by Smith and still, there was only one political reporter that made some comment about it. And again, had it not been the SAC investigation, it would have gone and we wouldn't have known anything about it. It was interesting, because I

J.B.: What has happened insofar as procedural reforms in the legislature? You said that before, am I correct, that the conference committee on appropriations held in effect

Farenthold: Yes, those rules were changed during one of our special sessions in '71. I thought that here, you try and try and then when there is a complete turnover in attitude or pressure, things just float in. For example, it may appear to be a very small thing, but if you are going back to try and find the legislative history, it is very important to find out what witnesses testified. That came in as a rules change, limiting the conferees to the two bills came in as a rules change in the special session

J.B.: Before that, the conference committee could add or subtract anything? They could change anything? And now, they have to go to

Farenthold: That's right. And also

J.B.: Is there also provision for a pre-conference? In other words, they can go beyond that and with both houses?

Farenthold: That's right, yes. They can do that. And even by the special session, when Gus had been deposed or stepped down, the hearings were open. Before, they weren't. Secrecy was

J.B.: What hearings are these?

Farenthold: Appropriations, the conferees. I remember one time the reporters and I tried to track them down and they were meeting in somebody's apartment. So much went on . . . for example, posting. We had just such a battle in that session just to get the posting of committee hearings. I have now pushed most of it out of my mind, but it was a matter in 1971 of everyday, pounding on it. That's why I say that the reform session was really 1973, when the four or six so called "reform statutes" and

J.B.: What were these basic statutes?

Farenthold: Oh, they are everything ranging from lobby control to financial disclosure. I think that probably the most significant is a public information act, by far.

J.B.: Was that fashioned after the Florida Sunshine Law?

Farenthold: All I know, is that much of them came from the work of the Texas branch of Common Cause. So, there may be

J.B.: Who is the chairman or whatever of that group in Texas?

Farenthold: The man that was the executive director was Buck Wood, but he has resigned. And so, he was the one that went through all this. He worked with Price Daniel, Jr. The new executive director is a young man named John Hannah, from Lufkin. He was in the legislature at the time that I was.

W.D.V.: Is it sort of a generalization to say that Sharpstown affected the politics of the 70's?

Farenthold: Superficially.

W.D.V.: What do you mean? Didn't it get a different governor?

Farenthold: But what did you get? That's why I say it's superficial. At least that's my thinking, and I may have all kinds of preconceptions, but I think

W.D.V.: Well, it wiped out a whole lot of statewide officers, didn't it?

Farenthold: Yeah, but I sometimes think that that is pretty superficial, too. Because I don't know if the personality of those that go on make that much difference.

J.B.: Well, let me ask you this question

W.D.V.: But the procedures are different than they were in the '60's.

Farenthold: Yeah, in the house it is. I think the house and the people . . . I was not there in '73, but they told me that it was different. As I said, the only way that you could describe the situation in those two terms that I was in there, was that you were just in a straitjacket. You could do a lot of stuff, maybe, but it wasn't legislative. I said that I never went up there to be a private detective. Half of our time was spent on this here and something there and that type of stuff. But I understand that procedurally that everyone got a hearing on their bill. That may not seem so important, but during my time, it was.

J.B.: Ralph Yarborough made a comment in an interview with him, he said, "Texas is a happy hunting ground of predatory wealth."

Farenthold: What kind of wealth?

W.D.V.: He said, "The last happy hunting ground of predatory wealth."

Farenthold: I don't know if it is the last, but it certainly is that.

J.B.: He said that of all the fifty states, it is the happy hunting ground of predatory wealth. You would not consider that an overstatement?

Farenthold: No. I only say that I don't know if it is the last. I don't know that and I don't know that much about the other forty-nine states. I mean, I go around frequently and people will ask me about things, about experiences that I have had here and then they will say, "Well, it's not too different from our state." Which may be true. I think that there is a distinction in that there is so much money here. There's a lot.

W.D.V.: When did you first get involved in politics?

Farenthold: I guess that that depends on what you mean by politics. If you mean running for elective office

W.D.V.: Or just involved in the interests of it?

Farenthold: All my life. But I didn't run for public office until '68.

W.D.V.: In the period that we are looking at, from 1948 until 1974, what major changes have taken place? In Texas politics?

Farenthold: Not much. We have seen one thing . . . I am now referring to the legislature, but I think that you can refer to this in a broader thing. I asked my husband, who was serving there in the 50's, and I was serving there in the 70's, he came up to see me and I said, "What difference do you see in the legislature?" He said, "There is less racism." And I would say generally that the visibility of blacks and browns is there where it wasn't back then. If I could point to one . . . and that may not be standardized all over the state, either, but I would say that. Not where

power is and that kind of thing.

W.D.V.: There has been no basic shift of power?

Farenthold: I don't really think so.

W.D.V.: That should mean that big wealth still pretty well takes the nomination of statewide office?

Farenthold: Sure.

W.D.V.: Some people say that they don't do that anymore, they just exercise a veto over it. They will defeat you.

Farenthold: Well, what's the difference? They can defeat you unless you appear to be amenable. So what is the difference? I don't really feel that I am at liberty to discuss my lawsuit against the present governor, but in tracking things, we see where it is much the same power base. I am not at liberty to discuss it, but it has come back full force to me one more time.

J.B.: Is that the purpose of that lawsuit, to demonstrate that point?

Farenthold: No. (laughter) The purpose is to see that the people who claim to be reformers live up to it.

J.B.: You mean specifically referring to the governor of this state?

Farenthold: That's right, and then campaign financing. We talk about house bill 4, you know, everybody patting themselves on the back and this same old process, the same old corporate practices continue.

J.B.: How do you evaluate Lloyd Bentsen? Both as a Senator and as a potential presidential candidate?

Farenthold: I have absolutely no time for him and I may be so colored in my own thinking that I can't properly evaluate him. I know where he comes from, what he represents and how he got to where he has. I mean, to see

Bentsen do it is nothing new. I just feel very deeply about it, and maybe I am not being realistic in this and the kind of campaign that he waged in 1970. This is not the first time that you have seen Texans come in with the business support and then move to the left for national consumption. I just hope that the rest of the country doesn't fall for him.

W.D.V.: Does it basically go back to the 1970 campaign?

Farenthold: One aspect of it would. I would probably never support Bentsen knowing where he comes from and the interests he represents. Basically, his own thinking, his own being. And certainly, the '70 thing just added one more.

W.D.V.: Well, he said that he made some mistakes in that campaign.

Farenthold: He knew what he was doing. He knew exactly what he was doing.

J.B.: We keep hearing that the next governor of Texas is likely to be a moderate, whatever that is.

Farenthold: I don't know. All I can say is, just beware of moderates from Dallas. They all tag themselves as moderates up there, the dominant Democrats. The next governor . . . we won't have another election for three and a half years, four years almost.

J.B.: Do you see Texas politics moving in any specific direction?

Farenthold: No. It's just standing where it is right now. I don't see anything else.

J.B.: The only real change that you see, though, is that racism is less prevalent. Not dead, but less prevalent?

Farenthold: Certainly.

J.B.: Less visible?

Farenthold: Less visible. I really think that it is. On the surface,

in the positions that are held. You know, I phoned Ralph Yarborough a couple of months ago about . . . I wanted to get something about some piece of legislation that he had sponsored in the Senate. And we started talking, and he said, "You know, it is much more difficult today to defeat . . ."the political establishment or whatever you want to call it . . .I've forgotten what term he used . . . "It's much more difficult today than it was in the 50's." He was telling me this and I said, "Yes, I think that is probably true." Because you just can't beat today, lear jets and computers, speech writers, I mean, particularly the place that society has come to. Or a DeLoss Walker, if you want that. I mean, I think that is because the method of campaigning and all has changed so.

J.B.: How do you assess DeLoss Walker's role in that '72 race?

Farenthold: I would rather not get into the subject.

J.B.: I wish that you would, really. And the reason that I say that is that here is a man who ran six campaigns in states in the South and he has candidates, twenty-eight candidates successful in something like twenty-two races.

Farenthold: I have something that I have to speak to him about before I discuss him. It was something that was brought to my attention in Arkansas and I just have to find out whether he is responsible for what is attributed to him or not, before I go any further into that subject. And I have never laid eyes on the man . . . (interruption on tape, speed increased and tape turned off.) . . .I have no idea.

W.D.V.: And yet, people perceive themselves in this state that way and line up that way.

Farenthold: They don't line up that way. By and large, I think that there are all different kinds . . .

J.B.: You are speaking of Texas liberals?

Farenthold: Texas liberals. I spoke to a young man that wrote an article for Texas Monthly that I saw in Kansas City last week. He said that a line that he really wanted left in one of his articles about a Congressman-elect from here had been cut. And he said that Texas liberals have "the loyalty of the Greek junta." I don't know what a Texas liberal is, I have no idea.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but it is a very meaningful term for a lot of people, they see politics in those terms, as the liberals and the conservatives.

J.B.: Why did you run for governor in '72?

Farenthold: Are we going to go through that again? I didn't plan on it. Well, again, this isn't hindsight, this is the way it seemed then. I thought that then the reform movement was a very important thing in the state, that we could really get something started insofar as opening government. And I had great belief in that. And I looked at who was running and I read up on Briscoe and I saw that he was part of the same thing. Now, the way that the whole thing started out was through members of the "Dirty 30". We met through 1971, after the session was over, we went around and talked on campuses and stuff like that. And our first idea was that it wouldn't be a slate, but to try to field people for statewide office and to try to have ethnic representation, gender representation, although that wasn't the most important thing. There was more concern about having a Mexican-American, having a black. Then, when it got right down to it, no one would run because they had the sense to see the enormous energy in running that it would take.

W.D.V.: The "Dirty 30" now caucused in '71 and '72 and

Farenthold: Yes.

W.D.V.: They were looking for candidates among that group?

Farenthold: Yeah, or others, if we could find them.

W.D.V.: And you couldn't find any?

Farenthold: And I remember here, Tom Bass, who is now the county commissioner, said that he would like to run for treasurer, if he had the money. I remember standing out in front of the university where he teaches here, maybe in December of '71, and he said that he just didn't have the money for it. And the same thing with Sam Holmes, the black legislator who was later my campaign manager in Dallas County . . . for the railroad commission. I talked to Joe ^{Bernard} ~~Bernard~~ about Lieutenant Governor, all in a very loose way. But then it got down to it, and there wasn't anyone. But really, the impetus had been the reform and all that that had gone through '71. So, it got down to me and it got down, as far as I was concerned, basically between two races. One was Governor and one was Lieutenant Governor. And I guess that starting at Christmas of '71, I tortured over that decision. When I heard that John Hill was going to probably run for attorney general, I recall saying to one of his supporters that I would get out of that because he was a better lawyer than I am. And there were a dozen things that you waived back and forth. And I looked at all those races. I remember people phoning me about this one and that one, the railroad commission, treasurer and attorney general. And it seemed to me that where the greatest change could be made was in the Governor's office. And I still contend that. I don't pay any attention to all this talk about what a weak governor we have under our constitution.

The governor can do a lot. We just have a kind of climate here where he doesn't. And as I said, had I thought that Briscoe was a different cut in his backing and support and philosophy, I wouldn't have run. One of the things that brought me to the idea that he wasn't any different was a book, that wasn't written for that purpose, but it's called Money, Marbles and Chalk. And I read it during that period. It's by a man named Jimmy Banks. It sets out the meeting that was held at the Caterina Ranch, which is one of Briscoe's ranches, about one of John Connally's races. So, I never took him seriously as a significant indication of change.

W.D.V.: One Democratic conservative that we talked to asserted that Briscoe was not a member of the Democratic establishment. That he was a cut different than Preston Smith. . . .

Farenthold: They are not the same at all. But

W.D.V.: That he was not part of that group.

Farenthold: Actually, he's much closer to that group than Preston Smith. And I think that I know enough about Texas politics, I saw enough of it work, to say that. Smith had his own lobby and stuff, that whole West Texas scene and the power did for awhile shift out there. He would have been protected by this press much more than he had been. Briscoe is much closer to Connally, to Locke, that whole thing that centers right in Dallas today, where so much of his financing came from along with Miss Nettleton and Jess Hay. Those are Locke compatriots. The Locke law firm. But neither Smith or Mutcher, they were kind of political . . . no, I don't mean political mavericks, but power mavericks. I just know that first hand. I can read the first chapter . . . Jimmy Banks didn't write it for that purpose.

W.D.V.: What did you learn about Texas politics in those two campaigns that you didn't know before?

Farenthold: Probably more than I want to talk about.

W.D.V.: Did it reinforce what you already thought, or did you learn something new?

Farenthold: I learned new things.

W.D.V.: But your experiences suggest that things really haven't changed very much in Texas politics in the last twenty years?

Farenthold: I don't think that they have, except for this overt racism.

W.D.V.: Why not? Is the grip that strong?

Farenthold: I think so? That's why

W.D.V.: Why can't you shake it?

Farenthold: (laughter) That's why I had felt so deeply about that reform, because I knew how hard it was to get anything like that started in Texas. And that's why I thought that it was so important.

J.B.: Why didn't any of the so called "progressives" in statewide office now run against Briscoe this year? Was it just fear of the two term tradition?

Farenthold: See, I couldn't . . . maybe I was the one in error, I couldn't buy the two term tradition. It's one of the things that was controlling in my own situation this time, the fact that we were going into four year terms of office. This is the first year that we have had four year terms of office. And I have an idea, again I'm not in the center of all this, I have to observe or go through my own experience . . . I think that I have seen enough to say that I believe that the lack of opposition this year, and I know two of them that were both headed that way if they can get there, Hill and Hobby . . . it's a part of the Bentsen strategy. I don't want to overstate what I know, but I am inclined to think that. And part of it was to have no dissension, have a quite convention. I remember somewhere . . . and I used to say during this primary of mine this year, "let's not let state government go down the drain

over presidential politics." Well, the four year term was passed in '70, it was not even discussed. Everyone just sort of stayed in place. And I remember during the campaign just seeing the thing that . . . well, several things lead me to saying what I just said. One is the night before I filed this time, when a labor lawyer told me . . . and I lost my labor support this time, just like that. He said, "Your problem with labor is not Briscoe, but Bentsen." Then I remember during the primary reading where Bentsen said that his office was working with Briscoe, his office was working with his 254 county contacts and they in turn were working with Briscoe on the convention. So, that's the way I feel in part. I remember going to the state convention in September and the Steelworkers supported me last time and they did not this time, and one of them said to me, "We can't support Leonel this time, just as we could not support you in May and the reason is that we want unity for '76." Now, you analyze that, I'm not able to.

W.D.V.: It looks like you already have. What about the assertion that if you put together the black vote, the Chicano vote and the liberal vote, you've got a majority in Texas?

Farenthold: It hasn't happened yet.

W.D.V.: Is it there?

Farenthold: Theoretically. Let me give you two experiences. I don't want to generalize from this. In a way, maybe I am speaking about leadership, or people in position. I would like you to turn that thing off and
(tape turned off)

W.D.V.: How about the rest of them

Farenthold: All I can assume is that this was part of the Bentsen picture.

W.D.V.: Well, it's been alleged that the poll . . . (inaudible due to

excessive background noise) . . .that the poll showed that this was unbeatable.

Farenthold: Do you want to know where the poll came from?

W.D.V.: No, I'm just saying that this is

Farenthold: Yes, but this is one thing that I found interesting.

W.D.V.: But they didn't want to change, really?

Farenthold: Yeah, and that may be true, and obviously they didn't

W.D.V.: They wanted to rest.

Farenthold: They wanted to rest, and you obviously could not stir up the farm thing, which I think has really been superficial, because I don't think that it has been followed through. But that poll . . . I remember precisely when it came out. It came out in October of 1973 and it came out of Bentsen's office.

W.D.V.: Bentsen's office released the poll?

Farenthold: I remember that it was on the right hand side of the Houston Chronicle one day.

W.D.V.: That was the major reason that nobody else got in it?

Farenthold: I don't know the thinking of the other people. I also know that that was soon followed by the biggest fund raising . . . the dinner that my lawsuit is over. That was on October 31st of '73. And after those two things, they apparently considered him unbeatable.

J.B.: How much did they raise in that thing? \$700,000?

Farenthold: Something like that.

W.D.V.: \$350,000.

Farenthold: No, that was Bentsen's dinner in October. No, this thing, they claimed to have raised \$750,000, but 400 and something before the October 19th, which is when I claim that they should have had a campaign

manager. I don't know the inner workings of these things.

J.B.: Was Price Daniel, Jr. one of the "Dirty 30?"

Farenthold: No. Only at the end and only peripherally. And I will explicit about that. Because in those early days of the legislative session in '71, I was very anxious to get his help because I wanted us to broaden our base. We had what were then considered liberals and some Republicans and I wanted to move out. And I can remember two occasions very explicitly, one was when I had written a letter to twenty-three legislators and signed it. We were sending it to over four hundred state office holders, elected and appointed, asking them if they would join us in making a full financial disclosure. My whole idea about Sharpstown was that unless we did that, we would be living in glass houses ourselves. I got twenty-three signatures including my own on that. And what was involved in a financial disclosure which would have shown those things which had been acutely portrayed with the Sharpstown scandal was a matter of having loans without collateral and that kind of thing. And also, it would have required a filing of the income tax return. And I remember that I brought young Price in in the morning and I said, "Can you sign this with me?" And he would agree to one but not the other. He didn't sign. And then I remember when it later became his piece of legislation, but in '71, I had a rules change which would have required financial disclosure of speaker candidates. You know, that's one of the real slush funds there. And I believe that also I had a one year term of office requirement in there. Again, it

W.D.V.: One term limitation?

Farenthold: Yes. I think that I had that in there plus financial disclosure. And so, I thought that . . . Gus was still in office and I thought, "Well, to get anywhere with this, I will try to get as co-signers the key

likeliest candidates for speaker. And they were Price Daniel and Raeford Price and neither would sign it. That's why earlier I said that it was the '73 session which is called the reform session, it harks back to '71, but in '71, we were trying to do things with rules changes.

J.B.: In '71, your attempt was through procedural reform and then in '73, you went from there to substantive reform.

Farenthold: That's right, theoretically.

J.B.: Has that whole reform movement crested in Texas?

Farenthold: I'd like to think not, but I have no indication that it isn't over.

W.D.V.: Will more single member districts bring more reform to the legislative process?

Farenthold: I think that it will help. And you know, again, I really felt that this was going to be a significant issue. Because I don't know if you knew, but a three judge panel had called for redistricting into single member districts . . . you know, we have three counties now, or four . . . three, Dallas, San Antonio and Houston are single member districts. And so, this court decision called for seven more which would get you into your areas where you have a high Mexican-American population. El Paso, Corpus Christi, Tarrant, Travis and I've forgotten where else . . . Port Arthur. And at the request of the governor the week before the filing deadline, the attorney general asked for a stay and was granted a stay. So, those single member districts have been postponed. But I think, based upon what we saw in 1973, that the single member districts are significant.

W.D.V.: So, where do you see it going? If we come back in ten years from now, what is going to change here?

Farenthold: I can't tell you.

W.D.V.: Do you think that it's stalled?

Farenthold: Sure it's stalled. Now, I can see the changes in some things through single member districts, that were never even attempted before that. And I speak specifically of prison reform, and of course, the blacks are into that. We didn't even consider such. I can see stuff with the women coming in, on credit discrimination. Those are specific things that were started in '73 and that weren't even discussed prior to that.

W.D.V.: Has there been a change in the last twenty-five years in the role that women have been playing in Texas politics?

Farenthold: Some. I think that you are going to see a good deal more. I guess, and I don't say that it is the be-all and end-all, and I that's why I don't particularly start with it, but since my first coming into elective politics in '68, I think that I have probably seen as much or more change there than any other area.

W.D.V.: Is that going to continue?

Farenthold: Oh, sure.

W.D.V.: How about in the other southern states? How would you compare Texas to the other ten states of the old Confederacy?

Farenthold: Well, I'm only in and out of those. For example, I would say that Texas . . . it's a generalization, but it's ahead of the southern states.

W.D.V.: Ahead of all of them?

Farenthold: Well, O.K., you know about North Carolina . . . well, all right, I'll take the number of . . . I guess that the first way that you could measure it is the Equal Rights Amendment. Now, we'll see if there is a serious

recision

W.D.V.: It's under attack.

Farenthold: Yes, it's under attack now and we will see. When a legislator started that in '73, he didn't get very far. But this is a much more organized attack and I suppose that in this state we had it in the state constitution because we passed that in '72, I don't know of any state of the old Confederacy that has an equal rights amendment in their own constitution.

W.D.V.: What other indices would you cite?

Farenthold: Well, I suppose those in public office'. And I would have to go maybe to the legislature and I think there are now seven women in the Texas legislature

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Farenthold: . . . Arizona made the most remarkable increase in women legislators.

J.B.: We're dealing just with the southern states.

Farenthold: I know.

J.B.: Let me ask you this, if you take the eleven states of the old Confederacy and this will just be very impressionistic . . . but if you rated them on a scale of one to ten in terms of progress made of women in politics, and ten was the highest, one the lowest, how would you rate each one, starting with Texas?

Farenthold: Well, it would be so impressionistic that it would be worthless.

J.B.: Well, I

Farenthold: Let me ask you, was it North Carolina that elected a woman to the Supreme Court

J.B.: Yes, as Chief Justice. She had been on the court for some time.

Farenthold: She had been on the court, but even so, to date, we do not have a statewide . . . I mean, if you are looking at that

W.D.V.: A statewide officer?

Farenthold: Yeah, that is a woman. I had those figures, and the thing that makes me hesitate about the deep South states is that I have had the figures about other states, the total number of women office holders. And they have been from 6%, which was in Texas of 17,000 elected office holders . . . yeah, 1100 are women. 6% in Texas to 12% in Oregon. But during that, I never had any occasion to check the old South states. Now, I can tell you, I've been in Louisiana and

W.D.V.: What's your impression of the way that they are organized and

Farenthold: Organized caucus-wise?

J.B.: Not just caucus-wise, but in terms of influence as well and the degree of development, I guess, is what I am talking about?

Farenthold: I don't know that much. I can tell you just my impressions. I can see, for example, in Louisiana . . . I can speak several ways, I can speak of just the last couple of weeks when I was there with the caucus and there is a strain between the black and the white women. It is a pitiful little thing beginning, but there is a strain there. Then, you go over to an affluent place like the Sophie Newcomb campus and you find young women just amazedly conscious of where they want to go. But that doesn't say anything about political power, if you want to call it that, or even visibility. Visibility is the first thing.

J.B.: Projecting ten years, and in the South, do you see the role of women in politics being a significant force in terms of change?

Farenthold: I hope so, that's all I can say.

W.D.V.: What have you seen in the past ten years?

Farenthold: Well, again, on that I have to pretty much limit myself to Texas. I have been traveling in the other states the last two or three years.

J.B.: What will this change mean? Beyond strictly women's issues?

Farenthold: I hope that it means less racism. You know, I used to say over and over that I hoped women could be the bridge to the more conspicuous minorities. I don't know if that is going to be the case. It's pitifully little right now. But I see women really emerging.

W.D.V.: How?

Farenthold: With the battles ahead and then you see some places where they can . . . (interruption by waiter) . . . and then, of course, you get women and you can get them all up and down the spectrum, too. Isn't there a woman in North Carolina who fights the Equal Rights Amendment?

W.D.V.: She got beaten.

Farenthold: Did she get beaten? I spoke to the governor of Louisiana the other day, because women don't feel that he is really helping them. And I asked him why, and he said, "Well, you don't have to go past the point that the greatest opponent of the ERA in the legislature is a woman." So, how can I generalize about women?

W.D.V.: That's a Edwards saying.

Farenthold: Oh, I know it. But let me tell you the beautiful conclusion of that.

W.D.V.: I didn't mean to throw that in, but he's

Farenthold: I know it, but let me tell you the beautiful conclusion to that. The president of the state AFL-CIO came up and I was introduced to him. And I had heard that in Louisiana, the state AFL-CIO has been very helpful to the ERA and so, I thanked him accordingly. And Edwards said to him, "Well, do you think that there is anything that can be done or is it hopeless?". . something like that. And the state president said, "There would be one thing that would pass the ERA and that would be the forceful support of the governor." (laughter) I thought it was beautiful. I didn't want to hear another thing. I just said, "Thank you," and went on.

W.D.V.: Did you get a chance to talk to him at all, the president of the state AFL-CIO?

Farenthold: Just that brief time. (interruption on tape) . . . the thing of it is, when I am cruising around, I only see people that are involved, limited as it may be.

W.D.V.: Is there any change in their involvement or the types of people, that you have seen in the last two or three years, or four years?

Farenthold: Well, I went to a political workshop in Atlanta. It's being done by the National Women's Educational Fund.

W.D.V.: I helped them with it.

Farenthold: You did?

W.D.V.: I helped them in terms of getting guests and so on.

Farenthold: Yeah, well, again, it was well attended, enthusiastic. Women that had not run before or if had not this time, planned to next time. And that has a kind of mushroom effect. As I say, women will be in office in significant numbers, the only question is whose lifetime.

J.B.: Do you know of any other southern state that has a Women's Caucus that is organized to the extent that North Carolina is, from the standpoint of

being both bi-partisan, of having come up with a data bank on women's capabilities, and providing input into the governor's office and getting appointments made and providing the kind of workshops that they do for women candidates? Is Texas that organized?

Farenthold: Texas does all of that.

J.B.: Does the governor make appointments on the basis of that input?

Farenthold: I'll tell you a funny story on that. I addressed the state Caucus a year ago and at that time, made the statement that there was not one woman on the appellate court in this state, intermediary court. Within four days, there was a woman appointed. The appointment came so fast that they did not even have her first name in the governor's office. That's one isolated instance. I am trying to think of some other states. When I went down to Florida in December of '73, but that was . . . you see, in some places, so much of the effort has been put on the Equal Rights Amendments. Florida is one of those states and they were still trying to work in coalition. The same thing was true when I was in Alabama a year and a half ago. South Carolina, I hear . . . and South Carolina did elect its first black woman to the legislature this time. Did you know that?

W.D.V.: Yeah, that's his home state.

Farenthold: I hear that there is some chance for the ERA in South Carolina. I would like for us to get through with the ERA myself.

W.D.V.: Isn't that getting to be sort of a hang-up now? It has almost gotten to be a minus rather than a plus.

Farenthold: What do you mean?

W.D.V.: In terms of time and money and

Farenthold: You know, I guess that . . . I am just appalled that we are sort of phantoms floating around in the Constitution, personally. I would rather

not put my time on it, in a sense, but I can't get over that.

J.B.: Do you plan to be a candidate again?

Farenthold: I have no idea. I have never programmed my political life. I think that maybe all of us politicians that have lost learned something from Nixon's '62 declaration. (laughter)

W.D.V.: Any regrets?

Farenthold: About what?

W.D.V.: About what you have done in the last

Farenthold: No, no.

W.D.V.: Would you do it the same way?

Farenthold: Given what I had to go on, yeah. You know, I went up to Washington the day after this primary. And it was a miserable experience, to put it mildly, miserable. And Sander Vanoucer said something to me that put it very aptly. He said that it was a no win situation. And I stayed out of what I thought was a miserable situation.

W.D.V.: It's still no win.

Farenthold: It's still no win. It would have been no win that way, because I would have been wretched with myself. The best thing is to move on to something else.

W.D.V.: But you don't think that that primary defeat precludes another chance at the state White House?

Farenthold: My concern isn't so much the external realities as the internal ones. I will have to make my own decision.

J.B.: Do you see any substantive difference

W.D.V.: Well, what I was getting at, some people say that after that defeat

Farenthold: I know, Time Magazine said it, too. Well, let them be. Those are not the things that . . . that's what I was trying to say, that's not the things that my decision is made on. I am aware of that.

J.B.: Do you see substantive regional differences in terms of women in politics and specifically, do you see the South, Texas to Virginia, that whole region, is there any difference in women in politics there from elsewhere in the country?

Farenthold: You know someplace that I have been impressed with the women? Tennessee.

W.D.V.: We've been there.

Farenthold: Nashville, I guess, is where there is . . . a ^{Carleen}~~Colleen~~ Waller?

W.D.V.: Yeah, we interviewed her. Very lengthy, it went about four hours. Karlene Waller.

Farenthold: Karlene. Yes. Karlene Waller.

(interruption on tape)

J.B.: I'm asking you really, is there a cultural difference.

Farenthold: I know, people have asked me that and I could argue either way on it. I know that traditionally, it is to say, "Yes." And then I have seen places where women have a hard time outside the South, too. Sometimes, I wonder if it is maybe a more rural-urban thing rather than a difference in I mean, the areas that are predominately rural, I can take that from my own experience. I am always a disaster in rural areas.

J.B.: In other words, as a candidate?

Farenthold: Yes. And maybe that is the difference rather than a regional North-South. It's the rural-urban. I know that that goes against your

W.D.V.: You know, we are trying to write a book on southern politics. And

the premise is that southern politics, whether male or female, or somehow different from the politics in other regions of the country. But if it is based on the rural-urban in the case of women, then there probably isn't much difference.

Farenthold: I think that should be considered.

J.B.: How do you define the role of religious fundamentalism in terms of shaping political attitudes?

Farenthold: Would you ask that again?

W.D.V.: Be precise. (laughter)

Farenthold: Yeah, I know. Because I'm not part of that movement.

J.B.: How would you define religious fundamentalism in terms of shaping political attitudes?

Farenthold: Well, I think that it is strong. The thing that strikes me most, I guess that it is part of the political situation in terms of the traditional roles. This is where I was most struck by it, because I could never get past that point, the traditional roles of men and women. And I go to Alabama on that, when I debated Phyllis Schlafly in Birmingham on the Equal Rights Amendment and someone stood up and asked me if I was a Christian. And the inference was that anyone who espoused such things as I was couldn't be. And I can't even get into the other political attitudes, because I do think that that has so shaped the concept of women's roles.

J.B.: What other issues do you see associated with that? In terms of liberals and conservatives?

Farenthold: Well, first I think that you run into the distinction between the races. I think that is very prevalent. Everybody in his or her place. And I think that has enormous ramifications politically. "For the preservation of the status quo." I remember being in Wichita Falls in one of the '72 campaigns and a man said, "You just can't mention the fact that you are a Catholic, that

you are a woman or that you are a wet." I mean, I was just shutout. And the basic core of that is . . . well, I don't know which came first.

J.B.: What role does the frontier tradition play in Texas politics? Particularly in terms of

Farenthold: Guns.

J.B.: Could you go beyond that, in terms of rugged individualism shaping political attitudes and in terms of providing state services for people? I mean, it usually is pictured as big wealth wanting to keep taxes down.

Farenthold: Yeah, but it's more than that. I can recall being stunned when I first went to the legislature because I had been in cities, but I hadn't been over the state and I was simply appalled by the reaction of many of the legislators from West Texas and their hostility toward Mexican-Americans. I mean, even more than the black situation, we run into that. Now, whether that is frontier, and I guess that in part it was. The conquerors or what have you. It is appalling. West Texas could match deep South Texas anytime on that subject. I mean, they still fight things like bi-lingual education, you know. "This is America, this is Texas. If they don't learn that language at home, it's their hard luck." I think that the frontier theme has had a lot to do with the treatment and the attitude towards Mexican-Americans. It's all pretty appalling.

W.D.V.: Has it changed?

Farenthold: Not much.

J.B.: What's the political affect of suburbanization of Texas?

Farenthold: Well, which suburbanization of Texas do you mean? The lilly-white enclaves or something that someplaces may be a little different? One, I think, is just to sort of remove yourself from the problems, and I think

that a lot of that goes on. Right now, where we live is all white. They are different from the way that my life was in Corpus Christi. I mean that in just everyday experiences, I don't see any blacks except people that work as domestics. You don't see any Mexican-Americans. And I guess that you can remove yourself and you vote accordingly. If you've had a loss of memory. I found in the legislature, no, it was after I left, but probably the most significant change is the single-member districts. And why? Because the inner city got some consideration that way. I remember a great statement made by the wife of a legislator. Dallas was notorious for having a slate selected, I don't know if you are aware of it, and when they ran countywide, you had to get on that slate, or you would never win.

W.D.V.: Who put together the slate?

Farenthold: Business groups. They have a specific name up there, I've forgotten it. And anyway, when the single member district opinion came down, they were just stunned. Only a handful of them ran, by the way. But one wife came to me, one wife of a legislator, and she said, "Does that mean that Doug has to run from where we live?" And I said, "Yes, it does." So, the single member district has been a countervailing influence, but surely one slow to come.

W.D.V.: Could I go back to that liberal-conservative thing? Do you. . . you are perceived in Texas as a liberal. Do you perceive yourself that way?

Farenthold: No. I perceive myself, for lack of a better term, more radical than that.

W.D.V.: For example, on what? Take taxation. How would you differ from a liberal?

Farenthold: Well, you see, I see myself not so much in what we would be saying, but in what we would be doing. I guess that I've got a congenital

defect with this "you go along to get along." And that, with rare exception, Yarborough is an exception, I have seen among the liberals in Texas . . . in fact, I have seen where that term is sort of institutionalized. I can't speak for anyone else. I'm not even critical of them. Let's just say that I distinguish myself from them.

W.D.V.: But on a specific issue

Farenthold: No, no, it might not be on a specific issue.

W.D.V.: You are talking about strategy, not issues.

Farenthold: O.K., well

J.B.: Let me ask you the question a little differently. Suppose you had gotten reelected in 1972, what would have done as governor different than Briscoe, if you want to put it that way? And while I'm asking that, let me ask you this question? Did you come closer than you expected, or did you expect to lose?

Farenthold: No, you . . . at least, I have never gone into a race without fighting my life out to win. And I have always been grossly offended, beginning with my first race, when people would assume, maybe because I was a woman, maybe because I was a long shot, that it was just some kind of exercise. I've never gone into anything like that. Well, one of the first things . . . and he waited until the end to do it and it is a big problem in this state and I don't have the answer for it, but I would have put people to work immediately on it. That's public school financing. Immediately. There was a big setback for us to have the Rodriguez case. And that was one of the really significant issues. For example, I would never have asked a stay in the redistricting. Just on specifics like that. I would probably right off have recommended a public

utilities commission, which everybody is talking about now.

W.D.V.: What about a corporate or personal income tax?

Farenthold: A corporate profits tax I proposed back then. I proposed it . . . as a matter of fact, I co-sponsored one. And so, it isn't so much a matter, as I say, of what we talk about as what maybe we do or what we settle for. And where I think one of the most significant powers of the governor is, because of that spread out kind of authority that we have, is in the appointments. And I made quite a study of this and did what I could to discuss it, but to no avail during this last thing. Because this time, we had at least one term of Briscoe to look at. By and large, Texas has been governed by campaign contributors. And this term was no exception. Now, maybe some people don't find anything wrong with that.

W.D.V.: You mean in terms of appointments or policies?

Farenthold: Appointments. Straightout appointments. I have a file on it, because it is fascinating stuff. Even interesting is the kind of thing of campaign contributions coming in a month before or after an appointment. I am not talking about steady folks that give you money at campaign time, but also those giving you money around the time of your appointment. I had all that reasearched. Again, because I didn't really think that there had been any basic change in the kind of governor that we had.

W.D.V.: Now, you've come up with a new wing. We have the Texas radicals, liberals, moderates, conservatives and we have Wallace. Now we have five wings.

Farenthold: That's right. You know, what I used to do to get away from the tag of "liberal" in '72, because I . . . well, we have a lot in differences.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but this is one southern state where that label seems to mean something to people.

Farenthold: Well, anyway, I tried to get away from that label by calling myself an "insurgent." I started that in El Paso. I took not the first definition of "insurgent", but the second. It sounded safe enough to me. (laughter)

W.D.V.: That's Texas, to threaten a coup d' etat rather than work with . . . (laughter) Well, what is the second definition?

Farenthold: "Willing to work within the system, but for change." Something like that. I remember that the first one is pretty strong, a turnover, or whatever. Well, I guess that that's it. I've probably not told you much.

J.B.: What is the role of organized labor in Texas politics?

Farenthold: You ask them. (laughter)

J.B.: Is there a difference between George Brown and Hubbard, for example?

Farenthold: Not George Brown. George Brown is Brown and Root. You are thinking about . . . before Hubbard. Hank Brown. Well, I never worked, I mean, I wasn't in office. I remember that my first experience was that they were going to go in support of my opponent. I had such naievte when I ran in '68, I took the hardest race on in our district. But I simply took it on because that office was held by a Republican and at that time, I thought that there was a difference between Democrats and Republicans. (laughter)

W.D.V.: You concluded that there wasn't?

Farenthold: No, this was my first experience and I got word that AFL-CIO was supporting my opponent. You see, he had been good enough to them. So, what's their role? It varies. I guess that all of them, Briscoe and Hill certainly have their support. Hobby, I don't know. Roy Evans was one of the

team of Brown and Hubbard.

J.B.: Is there any difference between the two of them?

Farenthold: Evans and Hubbard?

J.B.: Yes.

Farenthold: Again, I can only personalize, which is not always the best thing to do. I think that in my own experience in '72, Evans opposed me, I would say, in many ways. And Hubbard fought for me, he was on the executive council. '74 comes along and Hubbard assures Briscoe that he will not have . . . again, I put it in quotes . . . "any liberal opposition." I was not privy to that conversation, but I've heard it from two different sources. Billie Carr was there, she can confirm it. I think that maybe there are differences in their relationship to their staff and all that kind of thing, but I am speaking now outwardly, and I don't see any difference at all. Anything else?

J.B.: Anything else, Walter?

W.D.V.: What should we have asked that we didn't?

Farenthold: I couldn't even tell you right now. I'm sure that there will be something that I will think of, but I'm sorry.

J.B.: Let me ask you this. Texas is unique in southern states of the old Confederacy in that it has, outside of women, it has two distinct minorities. The Chicanos and blacks, who together, form a substantial minority. Around 30% or more. Do you see those two groups exerting more influence in the future?

Farenthold: Well, I think that's where it would be helpful to talk to Leonel. I think that is what they are working on here between the blacks and the Chicanos. And they really do have a kind of base here, Benny Reyes and

Castillo. But of course, Houston has always been, for Texas, the seat of liberalism or minorities, or whatever you want to say. More than any other area. I mean, the handful of rich "liberals" are here. Yarborough can tell you that. When you raise money for a statewide race, probably more than half will come from Houston. So, I think

J.B.: Is there a specific Jewish role in politics in Texas?

Farenthold: There was, and then I went to talk to somebody about it the other day, Bill Blue, he's the house liberal for the Baker-Box law firm. And he was saying that since the whole Israel defense, that much of the liberal money has gone there. There was a time, I have never been part of it, because it was before I was up here, my experience has been . . . that's why I brought up Dr. Garcia, my experience from all that ten or fifteen years that I had in so-called "community affairs," OEO and that whole gambit of stuff, my experience was principally with Mexican-Americans and some blacks. You see, Corpus Christi is about 49% Mexican-Americans. Nothing like that votes. But again, there is an enormous difference between the power, if you want to call it that, of the blacks and the Mexican-Americans in urban areas and in rural areas. So, that's why I can't say it's . . . I first saw it in '68 when I campaigned. I went out into rural Neuces County, Corpus Christi is in Neuces County, and into Kleberg County. And it was like 50 years behind even Corpus Christi. That's the way it is in West Texas. And in East Texas, in every campaign, you talk to some blacks and they say, "We are going to organize and we are going to register some voters." And it just doesn't happen. So, that part of Texas is very old Confederacy. Well, Houston is the most striking example. And I think that you will see changes in those mid-sized cities with

single member districts. You will see an enormous change with the Craig Washingtons and the Mickey Lelands and the Ben Reyeses here. Because that gives a focal point, I guess traditionally like the sheriff used to be. A liberal does a darn sight better when they are contesting single member districts, I can tell you that. I've had that experience. That's where the vote gets out.

J.B.: Success breeds success?

Farenthold: Well, it is a focal point for local interests.

J.B.: You mean registration, getting out the vote and this sort of thing?

Farenthold: A surprising number of those of minorities that came in two years ago did not have opposition this time.

J.B.: Anything else, Walter?

W.D.V.: No. I enjoyed it very much.

Farenthold: I hope that I've helped you some, I doubt it.

(tape turned off) . . . the favored, the anointed.

J.B.: Barnes was in '72?

Farenthold: Oh, yes. And had I not been there for four years and observed how he was treated with kid gloves, how he even made political mistakes like that Barnes Bread Bill to put a tax on food, that he consented to, I would have probably . . . had I been at a distance, I would probably have voted for him, because he sounded better and had all the trappings. But, I was right there and I thought he was limited. He was the one that had been selected. And one of the few persons in '72 who said, "Go ahead and run," was Professor McClesky, he is now at Virginia. He was the head of the government department at Texas. He told me this, "There are only two big

races in Texas and Barnes, regardless of all this build-up . . . "you know, he got the largest number of votes when he ran for lieutenant governor, all of his NATO assignments from Johnson, he said, "Regardless of the votes he's gotten before, he has never been tested. There are only two races in this state and that is the Senate and the governor's." And so, whatever his reasons, he has his reasons as well as I have mine, about his showings, and there are a dozen others, I guess. I know that no one would take him on. At the end of May of '72, I went to a Dallas Gridiron dinner and I said that I have never seen three sicker men, in expressions, that evening, than Barnes, Bentsen and Strauss. And yet, within nine months of that time, that faction of the Democratic party was well entrenched in the DNC. With Strauss there and with Bentsen playing a role in the campaign. And through that experience in '72, everything points to that it was Barnes who was being groomed, and you just don't know how seriously groomed, again . . . it is over with, you know. But, it was quite extraordinary.

J.B.: Do you think that Strauss is in effect, fronting for Bentsen?

Farenthold: Sure. I don't know if you could even say "fronting." It's one and the same. Well, I'll see you.

(End of interview)