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This is an interview with Lindy Boggs, United States Congresswoman from Louisiana. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass *and Walter DeVries* on January 31, 1974 and was transcribed by Susan Hathaway.

JACK BASS: There is one story that I heard in New Orleans, except no one else seemed to know about it, so I wanted to ask you about it - whether it is true and if it is, if you would elaborate and tell the whole story. The story I heard was that you and your husband, your husband in particular, and you back in graduate school and in law school were more or less the leaders of a young group in the late thirties that really went to Washington and got federal action to come down and prosecute . . . to prosecutions that eventually came, and that out of that group developed a more or less, a cadre of people who went on in Louisiana politics.

Lindy Boggs: Well, Hale was the leader. It was called People's Week, and there were a great group of young people in an organization you know, there still exists a multi-factional organizational situation in politics in Louisiana, and there was no one faction with which they seemed to identify. They did form a group called People's League and Hale was the

Chairman or the President or whatever the chief officer was.

J.B.: Was he in law school at that time?

Boggs: Yes. I think by the time that they were formally organized with a name and officers he may have been out of law school. He got out of law school in '37 and they didn't have any formal outward organization until perhaps '38 or '39. Several state senators, Lawrence Eustis was a member of the group, Chuck Morrison, who became Mayor and then Ambassador to the Organization of American States, was a member, as was his brother Jake. Raymond Monroe, who was not a political office holder but who, from that time on, was very active in political organizations and all the ensuing races for Governor. Goodness, I should remember them all. They were just an enormously effective group of young people who felt that they couldn't identify especially with any particular faction in order to do a job that they felt was necessary, and that was to establish a feeling that the government could have integrity and could serve the people well without having any monetary difficulties. They did very effective work legally and they did, of course, talk with various governmental agencies that should have been involved, Justice and Post Office. They staged large rallies conducted by the People's League on the White House steps. There was a grand jury investigation going on and the grand jurors felt that the District Attorney was not

rewarding their efforts of justice with a thorough investigation, and from that time on the People's League was identified as a political entity, non-factional political entity, and they went on to work effectively and affirmatively in the political organization. The first major effort was the gubernatorial election of 1940. I suppose the campaign started in the fall of 1939. They were able to elect the Governor of their choice, Sam Jones, and Sam has become a very conservative person in the way that he is. He was the candidate of the People's League and all of us went into very active ward - precinct organizational politics. We had ward leaders and precinct captains and poll watchers. We worked very hard on voter registration drives. At that time you had to register every year and by the time you had cleansed the rolls it was time to start all over. I think it gave all of us a sense of responsibility at the precinct level, which is extremely helpful all through your political life. If you go back to the essentials it is there. The issues are explained and the votes registered and voters translated into the polls and counted. So, it was a very valuable lesson. Then, of course, there was no longer a need for a separate organization. They had done their work in exposing scandal and trying to re-establish integrity in government and to attract good people into running parties, making themselves available as candidates and officials. Then they went on. The various members of

the League were just absorbed into other factions which they felt compatible with their political feelings. Of course, World War II came along and disbursed a great many of them.

J.B.: Was there any coming back together after World War II of the same people?

Boggs: No, but they more or less remained together, I hate to use the word ideologically, but I guess for want of a better word, they seemed to always react, more or less, the same way to political situations and to political candidates' platforms.

WALTER DEVRIES: As you think back over the period to 1948, both in terms of Louisiana and the Congress, what are the major changes that you have seen occur in terms not only the state politics, but also the politics of the southern delegation?

Boggs: As you have said, our state politics are different. They are very interesting. I think that generally that state politics from that time on there has been a great deal of citizen participation. Some of the so-called reforms of that era are probably registration, voting machines in larger cities. Larger areas, I think, led to more active participation by a larger number of people from different economic, racial, ethnic backgrounds. That probably could be so of every southern state.

W.D.: Did the issues change during that time?

Boggs: Of course, the issues, the national issues always change. We were hampered for many years from doing many other things because we had to strengthen integration. It was always hanging over our heads, I mean the South's head. The South has always produced, I think, remarkable Congressional leaders mostly because people of ability offer themselves for election and their constituencies from the years gone by have kept them in office long enough for them to gain an expertise and power and effectiveness in Congress.

W.D.: In other words, do you see that changing?

Boggs: I think that no seats are any longer safe. There was a time when various seats were considered safe, if it were a one party state. Louisiana was and several of the southern states were and as you well know, that has changed considerably in the last seven years.

W.D.: But isn't the tradition of sending the same person to Congress, is that changing too? It used to be, at least we have heard in some southern states that once you got the nomination, the election *was assured*.

Boggs: I don't really think that is true anymore. I think that rapid communication, particularly television communication, has changed the voting patterns, well, the

life style of a great many people because instantly, everywhere all over the country at the same time, people are hearing the same things, seeing the same things, evaluating the same things from a national viewpoint, projected from a national viewpoint. There are so many particles that go into what makes a campaign click and how a person is elected that it is impossible really to pick out any one thing. In our area, in Louisiana, of course, the growth factor, people in suburbia more or less have the same problems that they have everywhere else, and they have almost the same attitudes. We have been fortunate in New Orleans that we still have a viable inner-city situation, and that hasn't been depleted. Of course, the downtown business district is alive and well. Mostly, I think, because it is the local shopping center to the French Quarter, which is really a year round residential community as well as a tourist attraction. In so many cities, of course, you have all the urban problems from the people paying taxes fleeing the inner-city and the people who need tax money spent on them overcrowding the inner-city. The urban problems are so much the same as they are in any other city in the country, that it is hard to think of them as a southern problem.

J.B.: How did the removal of the race issue affect what your husband did and what you are doing now?

Boggs: I don't think it is completely removed. But of course it is being removed more and more. I also think that you are going to find, as we have in the last seven years,

the many constituencies where there is going to be a large percentage of black voters and have more black candidates and more black officials. Perhaps this has helped change some of the attitudes of some of the white politicians. I always felt that Hale held great contribution in that regard, that as he grew in thinking and in stature, that he was able to lead people from our own area along with him, and perhaps all of them didn't catch up with him, but he could say that these are the realities of life and certainly of the future, and to lead them as far as they could go at the time. Also, to be able to give courage to other white politicians of the South, that you could take these stands and be elected. So often, I think, people were afraid to take stands that would perhaps defeat them.

J.B.: Neil Pearson is coming out with a new book on the deep South states that we have seen the proofs of, and it includes an interview with Hale Boggs in which he referred to his last victory after his votes on civil rights measures and it sort of gave him a new sense of freedom to act to vote for his convictions even though he felt in the past that they were dangerous. The fact that he was able to survive that election.

Boggs: I think he may have said that in the context of what I have said, "Survive to be an example to others that

you could survive." I don't think that he, saying that he didn't mean it just about his own survival, because he often took stands that were, as far as his own survival was concerned, that he often times disregarded. But I do think that the fact that he had no opponents, everything was going along very well, we had had a year and a half of more or less political stability within the Democratic party in our area, and he had been able to go home a great deal more than he had been able to in the last several years. Then along came the open housing legislation and his vote on it almost defeated him. The fact there was no serious challenge to his leadership and to his political survival at the moment was not successful. It did give him the feeling that the area was ready for him to move forward in the field of civil rights. But I don't know how he could have felt much more free on voting rights and open housing.

J.B.: How do you and Congressman Treen get along?

Boggs: Very well. He is an extremely kind and polite and gracious and whenever there has been any kind of testimonial for me or anything in my honor, he has always participated very actively. We've worked together on two or three projects for the ~~those~~ districts, which particularly are on the coast line.

W.D.: Does the Louisiana delegation meet as a delegation?

Boggs: We meet occasionally. We meet often through

our administrative staff members. We try to set up a meeting for the delegation and/or administrative assistants for people from home with various problems or ideas or promotions.

W.D.: Is it structured?

Boggs: It's a loosely structured thing. We cooperate very well together, and we have felt this year that it has more impact if we write a joint delegation letter, for instance on what we consider a serious problem. This has worked very well. A joint letter always received immediate attention from the highest official of whatever department to whom it is addressed, and we have had action, sometimes solutions to problems.

J.B.: Is this House and Senate meeting?

Boggs: Yes.

J.B.: Can you give us one example of that?

Boggs: For instance, we have joint meetings on NASA projects. We do have a \$16,000,000 contract at . We've had, we were very concerned, of course, last year with the flooding of the Mississippi, concern this year, the water is higher than it was last year at this time. There were various members of the delegation who felt that certain things weren't happening in their own districts that should be, and so we had a very fine meeting with the Corp of Engineers and other people, and actions were taken to relieve situations in particular districts and out of the

entire meeting evolved a re-evaluation by the Corp of Engineers of the data on which the flood insurance rates had been predicated, ~~because they had been predicated on the~~ for flood insurance. They were predicated on the belief that the levies were paper levies and *the* highest flood pressure had ever been recorded and held in our area. So we were able to get a re-evaluation of the rates completed in time to, for the implementation of the new bill. Those are two positive examples. I could probably think of a lot more.

W.D.: Can we talk a little bit about the southern delegation if there is such a thing, but a group of Congressmen and Senators from the eleven southern states, and their influence in Congress in the last 25 years. Some give us the hypothesis that it is on the increase, some say that the power is waning, some say that it has leveled off. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Boggs: I think the power has been there, and certainly the southern states had a direct influence on the actions of Congress. The seniority system, of course, placed many southerners. We said earlier that the people did continue to elect a person who was well qualified and who had the desire to remain in office and naturally they became ranking members or chairmen of the committees and directed decisions of the Congress. Everybody on those committees

and everybody on other committees who has business with those committees naturally must deal with them in the nice sense of that word. But the resignation and death of a lot of older members of Congress, or the long term ones have changed the committee picture somewhat. As a matter of fact, I read recently where the head of the House had been in Congress less than six years. So that certainly is changing.

W.D.: Is that reflected in their philosophy and influence?

Boggs: Well, the House this year, as you well know, has operated under new caucus rules, where there is a great deal more openness of all the committee hearings, and meetings are open. Even lock up sessions in many committee meetings are open sessions. The Rules Committee has certainly become much more liberal in granting rules than the previous one was. The sub-committee chairmen have been opened to the chairmanships and opened up to younger members because now you can hold only one sub-committee chairmanship at a time. I think there were 23 sub-committees that were opened up. There is a provision in the caucus rules where members of a committee can object to actions of the chairman, and by a vote in the caucus, the chairman can be forced to a re-election, to an election by the caucus. So I think you find a great many changing

feelings about seniority, about the power of a person who is a chairman or a sub-committee chairman. What we have to keep remembering is that the seniority system was itself a reform. But I think there is still the solid background of people who have been members of the House for a long number of years, and who have a history of the standing and they have the respect of *the Congress*. Those people, whether they are southerners or not, a great many of them are southerners because they have been kept in office a longer time, have sort of a natural affinity to form associations with people who feel the same way *about* ~~of~~ legislation, ~~and~~. So that they are able to cross the party lines one way or the other.

W.D.: Do you belong to any of the Democratic organizations, like the Study Group? ~~or the Research Association~~

Boggs: I subscribe to the Study Group's analyses, excellent. They supported me during the campaign, so did everybody else.

W.D.: But isn't the Democratic Research Organization in effect sort of an extension of the old southern caucus?

Boggs:

a middle of the road group.

W.D.: Yeah. The United Democratic . . .

J.B.: U.D.C., I remember that.

Boggs: Sounds like ~~unite Darden~~ . . .

J.B.: That's how I remember it. United Democrats of Congress.

Boggs: *there are* good people are behind it but seriously I did feel that various members of all the organizations tried to elect Hale majority leader, and all of them have been very specifically helpful and kind to me in my campaign.

W.D.: What I am trying to get at

Boggs: Very very good attender at the Democratic caucus. Is it still a southern block?

W.D.: No, southern delegation if you want to call it that, act as a block on issues other than say ~~and~~ busing, racial matters, ^{and} economic issue?

Boggs: If they do, I am not aware of it. I am sure they must, but since I am not a member, I have no way of knowing whether they have meetings to discuss, or what they are going to do in caucus or on the floor.

J.B.: Is there any such thing as a Women's Movement in politics in Louisiana? At least that is distinctive from any traditional role that women played in politics. There has always been some role in politics in the South anyway.

Boggs: Always, and in Louisiana the women were really the ones with the young people in the aftermath of the

Louisiana scandals who set up the sort of organizational structure for political participation and for the registration drives.

J.B.: I have an image of two different, the merging of two different "reform" groups from Louisiana. One has been sort of a reform group more concerned with corruption and clean government, basically business oriented conservatives. Another reform group has been the progressives on social issues, but has been concerned with "clean government." The two sometimes get together, but they are also two distinct groups.

Boggs: That is a very very accurate analysis and there is a . . .

W.D.:

Boggs: The conservative business group really grew up as being an anti-Long group, and that was one of the difficulties of the young people at the time that Hale came along. When I said they really couldn't identify in their desire to [Interruption] . . . it was because they didn't want to be identified as Long or anti-Long because you immediately have people firing against you on both sides. This was something they felt superceded those difficulties, but later on they did, the members of People's League, did become involved into the factions of their choice.

W.D.: Is there any kind of women's caucus?

Boggs: No. We meet informally, and there are some issues on which we naturally feel tremendously proud of, like the Child Abuse Law this year. I do feel that Pat Schroeder, and Liz Holzmman were more or less instrumental in having treatment for the abuses incorporated into the law. A particular insight on that came from their background of community work and that was brought to the bill, and the other women members actually supported them very strongly on it. You are elected as the representative of your district, you are not elected as a woman. All of us have sophisticated districts with various problems and it is very natural that we would all be sponsoring the Truth In Lending Amendment against discrimination in credit because of sex and marital status. I placed an Amendment with the Banking and Currency Committee. It was a similar one about small business loans to individual businesses. But we have no caucus as such. But we do meet occasionally. We did give a baby shower for Yvonne. (Laughter.) Really, the Congressional members are very special, and the freshmen are remarkable. I think Barbara Jordan is one of the outstanding members of Congress. She is going to make a real name for herself, practically a Constitutional lawyer. She certainly holds the affectionate respect of the Texas delegation. I am glad she is on Judiciary.

J.B.: Is there anything we haven't covered . . .

Boggs: Maybe that says something about politics, a member from Louisiana is saying this about the first black woman who has ever been elected, ~~from the open~~ .

W.D.: I was going to ask you about that. If you think about that, what does it mean? Jack went to the Presidential prayer breakfast this morning . . .

Boggs: So did I.

J.B.: If someone had told you twenty years ago that Senator Stennis would be introducing a black Congressman from Georgia at the Congressional - Presidential prayer breakfast in 1974, what would you have thought?

Boggs: Well, because you would put analogies into it, it would probably alter my answer. I think Senator Stennis would have done it with the same grace 20 years ago as he did today. And, Andy Young is an exceptional young man. I better praise him because he was born and reared in New Orleans and his mother was a wonderful civic leader. I serve on the Banking and Currency Committee with him, and he has such a solid head as well as a . . .

J.B.: I got to know him when I was covering the Charleston Hospital strike. He is just fantastic.

Boggs: It is such an interesting experience. We went to the International Monetary Fund Meeting in Nairobi, and he said that when he was a youngster and went to the ministry, he wanted to be a Missionary in Africa. First we stopped in Dacarg Synagogue, in French West Africa, which is so similar

to southern Louisiana. They ate good food, drank the same strong coffee, much of ~~the~~ was alike, but the openness and friendliness of the people is very similar, and I was really very gratified at Andy's response. He wanted to get off at the Peace Corp villages, which we did too, and another weekend Mr. LaBott, who is the director of the Peace Corps had asked to stay on an additional two years, and to have him talking about his children having now survived the cultural shock of living in Africa, that he wanted to stay on for another two years. I think it would be very good for white Americans to do that. I think Andy Young has far far places to go in the political world if he wishes to stay in it. [Interruption] I have great admiration for Congressional wives. They are extremely helpful to the causes of the government.

J.B.: Is there anything that we haven't covered that you particularly wanted to comment on?

Boggs: At the expense of sounding as though I am bragging, I do think that southerners bring a certain graciousness and understanding in the individual relationships that sometimes alter the course of the legislation or affect it that is unique among the other sections of the country.

J.B.: Do you think that situation this morning was an example of that?

Boggs: I do.

J.B.: Would you consider that to be an unchanging aspect of southern politics that in the past has been overlooked because of negative factors?

Boggs: I really do. I think the relationships between the races is really more genuine in its friendliness in the South.

J.B.: What kind of ^{are there} ~~this~~ relationships between southern members of the Congress, white southern members of Congress and black members of Congress who are not from the South?

Boggs: I'd really think that you'd have to talk about it on an individual because I think, for instance, Charlie Diggs has a lot of southern friends, his portrait was being hung in the committee room yesterday or the day before ~~and the chairman's portrait was~~. I was in George Mahon's office and he said, "Sometimes I forget the hanging of portraits, but I really want to go to Charlie Diggs, because I want him to know that I like him. Incidentally, this is all

but the same place that did George's portrait for the committee room did this of Hale and I was in his office getting it. I think it is an absolutely remarkable likeness, I can't get over it. I just stuck it here so that's why it is on the floor. It has got to be recreated and sent home. But I think you find these individual relationships that are

very warm, very cordial. Ralph Metcalf has a lot of southern friends. I could probably think of a great many others, but certainly those two come to my mind right away. Ralph's mother was from Shreveport, Louisiana. One of the California black members was born in Louisiana. It is an individual thing. I don't think there is any animosity because they are black, or any special relationship because they are black. It is a tough body, that House of Representatives.

End interview with Lindy Boggs.