

Interview with Dick West, editor, Dallas Morning News, December 18, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter de Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen. On tape Bass identifies West as editorial writer.

Jack Bass: You've been here, on the Dallas Morning News, how long?

West: Well, I came here immediately when I was graduated from the University of Texas in '35. I will have been here forty years next year except during World War II I was with the AP for three years. I was a reporter and what they call a special writer, industrial writer, for a while. But I've been on the editorial staff since '45.

J.B.: So that covers the whole period we're really interested in: '48 to the present.

West: Why did you pick out '48?

J.B.: Well, to some extent, that's where Key left off and also that's when we feel politics. . . it's almost an era. That's when real change came about after the post-World War II period. Key's book was published in '49. Mostly we're dealing with the contemporary situation but the whole historical background and development and forces of change since that time. What are the major changes that you've seen in Texas politics during that time or has it really changed much?

West: As far as the results are concerned, election results are concerned, I don't think it's changed much. I think unquestionably that the Democratic party is still pretty firm control and the elections last month proved it. The Republicans had some attractive candidates. Whether

it was the recession or inflation or Watergate, I don't know. Politics is an intangible and you never can put your finger on why a candidate gets beaten pretty badly or what. I would guess the most important change is the slow but rather determined drive by the Republicans to make this a two-party state. They have succeeded in places, and in places they have failed. The biggest change--and I'm talking not about the state as a whole but right here and possibly in the cities--are these court rulings that enforce what we call individual districts. You know what I mean? That is the biggest change in Dallas and I would say Houston and wherever the individual district system applies. And that is where you elect members to the legislature and, of course, county commissioners. Now there's a big suit on to force the election of city councilmen by districts instead of the city as a whole. We have opposed that editorially. I think personally that it kills interest in politics. It develops a provincial type of office holder, where he represents only one neighborhood or only one part of the town or one part of a county instead of the county as a whole. We happen editorially to favor the at-large system rather than the individual district system. But, the individual district system has forced a strange alignment, here and wherever it's been tried. And that is, an alignment between the liberals, blacks and the Republicans. To try to get somebody elected. If a Republican runs county wide in Dallas he doesn't have a chance. If he runs from a certain area, an affluent area, he's got a cinch. If a black runs, he hasn't got a chance if the whole county votes on him. If he runs just from a black area, he's a cinch. So that is the biggest

change that I see here. The Dallas county delegation to the state legislature used to be nearly all conservative Democrats because the whole county voted on them and the whole county is Democratic, but conservative Democratic. Well, that delegation of eighteen down there now to the state legislature from just this county--it's got two or three blacks, it's got about five Republicans, and it's got a bunch of liberal Democrats, and strangely enough very few conservative Democrats even though the county is conservatively Democratic. Depends on where you draw these lines for these little districts, you know. That's the biggest change that's occurred here I think in ten years.

J.B.: Does that delegation tend to vote together or not on matters affecting Dallas or on urban matters in general?

West: Sometimes yes but not often enough. They are human and if they tend to vote the way their little district wants them to vote. I probably would do the same thing. But the Dallas county delegation to the legislature now is no longer a cohesive unit. They can't get together on everything.

J.B.: Do they get together on anything, though?

West: I'd have to go back and look. I was trying to think, in this past session, which was '73. . . . I can't think of any examples right off of where they got together on too much. But I guess there were some things. I don't know. I don't remember. I'd have to look at the issues and how they voted. I don't have that right here. But there's nothing like the harmony they used to have. And I don't think the country has as strong a representation as it used to have when they had harmony. The Dallas delegation in the state legislature was a power-

ful force to be reckoned with before this. Now, you don't know what it is. You just don't know. I think, also, that the individual district system--we ran a big story on this not long ago and I meant to save it and I tried to go back and find it--the individual district system has tended--this hasn't been in effect long--to discourage--you will find this all over Texas--discourage participation by the blacks. Because here's what's happened. In most Texas cities, as you know, the blacks congregate in a certain area. Here it's south Dallas and west Dallas. You have two blacks out there representing them in the legislature. These blacks had no opponents when they ran for the legislature this time in November. They had no opponents. Nobody came out to vote out there. I think that you will see that more and more. And I've tried to preach that in speeches and in editorials to the blacks themselves. But they don't buy it. They want two blacks on there. If they were smart, they'd have eighteen on their side. They've got two now. Park Cities, which is the fancy part of Dallas [doesn't] pay any attention to them. Not at all, under this individual district system. I wouldn't either. If my area wanted this and they were against it, I would do what this area wanted that voted for me. But what I ought to be doing is thinking of them, too. Get my point? But you don't do this. Not under individual districts. The proponents of the individual districts system claim that you know your legislator better because you're closer to him. Well, I took a telephone poll. In writing a column about this I took a telephone poll in Highland Park, which is the fanciest part of Dallas, with the highest literacy rate and the most college graduates. And I asked them what district they were in. Every

one of them college graduates. And who was their representative in Austin? Twenty-three out of twenty-five didn't know. Yet this is supposed to make them know their representatives better. They didn't know. But they used to know. That has been the biggest pattern change here since I've been writing politics. This individual district system. As it effects this city and this county, which is the second biggest in Texas. And if this is true--and I have an idea it is--all over the urban areas of Texas, this will be a change. It will be a drastic change. You will have more representation of blacks, of the minorities and liberals and labor and less of the really dominant faction. Dallas county--depending on the race--is Democratic, I would say, sixty to forty. And that sixty is predominantly conservative Democratic. But the conservatives in the legislature from this county are smaller than they've ever been.

J.B.: Are most of them Republicans?

West: A few conservative Democrats, but not many. Used to be all that way.

J.B.: Does that have any effect on voting patterns in state-wide races?

West: No, no. Hasn't had any effect in state-wide races. Mainly Congress, the legislature and municipal races. County and courthouse races. Now they've got a big lawsuit going on now to force the city council to be elected by districts. But all of this will change the pattern of voting and the type of candidate that comes up in the future, in my opinion.

J.B.: Has it cut election costs, campaigning costs. This is

what we've heard. That it's cut campaigning. Some of the Republicans have told us that they find it easier with single member districts to recruit candidates.

West: I would think as far as the individual candidate goes it has cut them. He doesn't have as much ground to cover. He doesn't represent as many people and therefore can afford to raise money, I guess, for his own little, individual race. Whereas he used to have to campaign all over the county. I sense that the individual district system has cut voter interest tremendously. There are so many of them. Here I sit, as editor of this big paper, and I'm supposed to make endorsements. We are. In '72, there were 96 candidates for the state legislature from Dallas. Ninety-six! There's no way I could see them all. Then they raise hell when you don't. That's just one race. Used to be eight or ten contested races for the legislature. You got to know those people, year in and year out, and they rose to positions of prominence on committees in state government. Just as southerners, for years, have dominated a lot of Congressional committees because of the seniority principle and they're re-elected every time automatically. But now this is no longer true. It's an awful job here to try to see all these people. All these candidates from all these districts. Eighteen separate districts for the legislature and three or four of them running for each one. I wouldn't have any time to do anything else if I saw all of them. And I'm supposed to make some kind of decision on them. But how you do it, I don't know. Hell of a job. There are some good points to it, I guess, but as I say, we've opposed it and I still do. I think it's going to hurt. It's going to hurt the county and the type of candidate

in the future. I don't think he will be as good a candidate. He'll be more provincial. About six or eight months ago there was a proposal here to set up a law school. The Dallas-Ft. Worth area is the biggest metropolitan area in America without a tax supported law school. SMU has a law school but of course that's a Methodist school. There's no law school in Ft. Worth. Only one here is expensive as hell. The tuition at SMU. Unbelievable. So there was a proposal to have a bill introduced in the legislature for the state of Texas to set up a state law school in this area. Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex, complex. You couldn't get these guys together! One wanted it in this part of town; one wanted it in this part of town; one in that; one wanted it in Ft. Worth; one wanted it over here. Never heard about it anymore. When I used to cover the legislature, when that Dallas county delegation came together before the speaker of the house, before the governor, or before the highway commission wanting a freeway, it was an old, unwritten rule: you've got to have them all together. They all got to want this project if they're going before the highway commission. To try to get exactly what you all wrote in on. We can never get them together now, in my opinion, because of this. You'd think you could, but you can't. Awfully hard to get unanimity. And that law school, why that was the biggest joke I ever saw, that idea for a law school. And they need one. But somebody wanted it out in northend, somebody wanted it out in the east end, somebody else somewhere else, and gave up. As I said, on highway projects, which are vital to Dallas. . . . Somebody once wrote that Dallas and Indianapolis were dependent on highways more than any other two cities in America. Highway transportation. Well, the way to get a

project was for the entire Dallas county delegation to come together and go before the highway commission and say "Look, everybody here wants this particular thing, this particular project." They got it. I don't foresee that kind of force in the future, due to the individual districts. I just don't see it. That has made a drastic change in voting patterns and, as I say, the type of candidates that have emerged. I wish it were differently and I'm not saying that under the individual district system you can't have harmony. I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that those people are human.

J.B.: One of the points made recently by the state Republican chairman was that Republicans really didn't do all that bad this year in. As an example he pointed out winning the county judgeship here and in Houston. We were in Houston and the general report there was that it resulted more from special circumstances than from anything else.

West: The same is true here. The man who got beat was who is seventy, who is sick, had been there twenty-five years. And even some of his best friends voted against him, voted for this Republican, because they thought that if he were down there any longer it would kill him. Very beloved man. Been a very fine county judge. But it was a special circumstance. It wasn't any show of strength, I don't think. I think anybody with a name at all or qualified would have beaten him.

J.B.: Do you think it will be a temporary situation having a Republican in there or, once elected, that he's likely to stay?

West: Let's see, he was elected in '74. Now here's what counts more than anything. He'll come up again in '78. No. He may survive. A Democrat could beat him in '76. Depending on who the Democrat is. That's when you have your big turnout. Whoever heads the presidential

tickets has a lot to do, here and now, with local races. We had a very popular Congressman, Earle Cabell, who was mayor of Dallas. His father was mayor and his grandfather was mayor. He was beaten by a Republican in 1972. What really beat him was McGovern heading that ticket. There were 176,000 straight lever votes for Republicans in this county because of the opposition to McGovern. That means that 176,000--I think that figure's correct--went in there and pulled the Republican lever straight and voted for Nixon. And when they pulled that lever straight they voted for every Republican running for office. This beat Cabell, who was a very popular Congressman. Alan Steelman, a young Republican, and a good Congressman, defeated him. I told him "You don't think you did this, did you?" He said "Well, sometimes wonder." I said "No, Cabell was beaten by McGovern heading up the ticket." Dallas will not go for anybody like McGovern.

J.B.: Do you think that's what accounted for the closeness of the governor's race in '72?

West: Absolutely, absolutely. A guy named Hank Grover ran against Briscoe and worked pretty hard but even a lot of his own people didn't like him. Now their candidate this time was a popular man. He was a dentist from Lubbock named Jim Granberry. And very articulate. But he didn't even come close. Why? Because it wasn't presidential election year, first. And secondly because of Watergate and the economy and things like that. But he didn't have a chance. I told him that the danger he faced was in reverse to what Grover faced. The biggest thing going for Grover in '72 was McGovern. But I told Granberry

this year running for governor as a Republican "What you face is a straight lever pulling campaign by Democrats who are fed up with inflation and the Watergate." And that's what happened. He's a very able man, this young fellow, this dentist. Very articulate, very politically knowledgeable. Good candidate. Didn't have a chance. Now, if somebody like McGovern or Ted Kennedy or Humphrey--Mondale has ~~knocked~~ out--is nominated, a Republican running for local or state office here is going to have a better chance. Because this Texas is basically conservative Democratic. I think the pattern's changing a little more.

J.B.: Changing in which direction?

West: It's becoming a more, I call it, hunt and peck state. Becoming more independent. The ratio of people in Texas, I find, that won't identify themselves with either party is pretty high.

And sometimes they'll get emotionally worked up and pull the lever all the way--what we call voter straight. They've been saying that for years in Texas: voter straight. They'll voter straight like they did when they couldn't stomach McGovern. But they're becoming more of the hunt and peck type. They'll go in there and look at each candidate, regardless of party, and vote for him. Becoming more of an independent state, I think. I sense at least they are here. But there's an old saying "You'll never know who a woman will marry or who a mule will kick or how a man will vote" and you sure don't. Because elections become emotional. A Watergate thing can set the Republican party back for years. Certainly a recession can. And a candidate like McGovern can on the other ticket. Republicans had a primary out in west Texas near where I grew up. Breckinridge, in the oil fields. Five showed up and

it's a pretty nice town, Breckinridge is. Pretty good town. Five showed up this past November. That's an independent town. It's got some oil men in it that are conservatives and Republicans. And five of them. . . .

J.B.: That was a primary for state-wide office or local?

West: State-wide. Both. Republicans held their own primary. They had five in the race at that time. I imagine Breckinridge has 15,000 or 20,000 people.

J.B.: What does all that suggest about Tower?

West: Tower's kind of a mystery to me. I don't know. He's very articulate. He's a tireless campaigner. And, of course, he's well financed. His own party likes him and business interests like him. He's an articulate campaigner. Let's see, when does he run? '78. I don't think anybody will beat him. Unless we have a bad depression. The Republicans will be blamed for it, which they will. He could be in trouble. But I can't see it lasting that long.

J.B.: Do Tower and Bentsen get financial support basically from the same sources?

West: I would say so. Tower gets more. I don't know much about where they get it. Tower would get more from the Senate policy committee than Bentsen would, I believe. Basically I think they would get it from the same type people. Oil interests and businessmen in general. Have you all seen this poll?

J.B.: How do you assess Lloyd Bentsen as a potential presidential candidate?

West: Well, he's very able, very articulate, very charming, very

knowledgeable. He will somehow have to divorce himself from the Texas image that Johnson developed, that Connally carried forward. He will have to obliterate the oil man tycoon. Everything that made Johnson and that made Connally, in my opinion. He'll have to do that. Connally was one of my best friends. I mean, is one of my best friends. And if someone comes up and asks me why he changed to the Republican party, the answer's simple. He knew that being a protege of Lyndon's he could never get the nomination as long as he was a Democrat. Lyndon was hounded out of office, as he phrased it on the ranch to me later, over Vietnam. Never was popular in the East. I don't think any Texan would be. He's got to obliterate that image someday. Whether he can, I don't know. He has the tools. He has the personal tools, Bentsen does. Do you know him? Very attractive man. Very articulate. Very able.

J.B.: How do you compare him with Connally? Both as a politician, in terms of ability. Philosophically.

West: Very similar. I always said that the three ablest Texas politicians I ever knew were those three right there. And I still think Connally was the ablest of all. I mean he had more of. . . you know. Take knowledgeability, savvy, personality, charm, vigor, energy, ingenuity. I believe he rolled more of those into one package than anybody I ever knew in this state. Shivers had the finest political mind. Johnson was very persuasive, knew the ropes. But Connally could charm you out of the seat. Boy, he's something else. And it's a tragedy what's happened to him. I don't know all the details, but I don't see how they can get to first base with that lawsuit. But they may know more about it than I do. How you convict a man on perjured testimony I don't know.

But that's their law suit. But he's one of the ablest men I ever knew. He's something else! He just charmed Nixon. Nixon just looked at him

. You imagine going in there ranch as Secretary of the Treasury and in two months visiting 36 countries and snowing all of them and impressing all of them and learning everything about their country and currencies and everything. Unbelievable. This guy's mind's unbelievable. He can do it.

J.B.: Does Bentsen have that kind of ability?

West: Yes. Very similar. They're the same type.

J.B.: What has been Shivers' role since he left the governor's office? The impression we have is that there has been very little visibility but that he plays a significant sort of behind the scenes role that is seldom seen or heard.

West: Well of course he and Connally. . . wait a minute, I don't want to get this wrong. Connally headed up Democrats for Nixon in '68 or '72, I've forgotten which. Maybe both times. I was trying to think if Shivers played any role in that. I think he did, in one of those races. Shivers' role was when he was governor and has been since he was governor was to keep what we call the conservative Democratic coalition together. He preached what this paper preaches. That look, the Democrats numerically are going to run Texas. Now you good people, you conservatives, stay in that party. Don't go off and vote Republican. Don't go in the Republican primary. Stay in the Democratic primary and nominate good people and support them. Because they're going to win anyway. I mean the Democrats are going to win anyway. The question you've got to decide what type of Democrat? A Democrat like I have been

or like Connally has been, or one like Ralph Yarborough. Now that is what he's preached all of his life. A conservative Democratic philosophy.

Walter de Vries: How does he hold that coalition together?

West: It isn't too hard a job if you've got the right leadership, because most Texans think that way. The average Texan wants to be a Democrat. But he wants to be a Connally-type Democrat, not a McGovern-type. That distinction. That's what it is. They prefer, because of their heritage, to stay in the Democratic party. But if the national Democratic party puts a McGovern on the ticket in November the conservative Democrat is likely to vote for the Republican, if he is a conservative. That's happened too many times.

J.B.: What was it about McGovern that turned them off? What were the most frequent criticisms?

West: They felt he was unstable, that he was radical, that he was unstable. They like more of a middle of the road approach here. The state does. More middle of the road type candidate or a little to the right of it. And they felt he was too radical, too liberal, and somewhat unstable, due to that Eagleton affair is my guess. I was trying to think. Did Texas go for. . .? Texas went for Kennedy, with Johnson on the ticket. It went for Humphrey? That's right.

J.B.: With a plurality. Wallace in there.

West: Yeah, that was it. The Wallace people took a lot of it out. If you take Wallace out, they wouldn't have.

J.B.: You think most of the Wallace vote would have gone to Nixon.

West: Oh, hell, yes. Eleven out of twelve of them.

J.B.: Do you see anything in that philosophy of conservatives? Do you see any realignment? The Republicans talk about realignment. Liberal Democrats talk about realignment. Is that likely to happen or is that likely to remain talk?

West: It depends on the candidate and the economic conditions at the time.

J.B.: How about within the state, in state politics?

West: That's what I'm talking about.

J.B.: Suppose someone like Frances Farenthold had gotten the Democratic nomination. Would she have been elected governor? That would have been against Hank Grover.

West: No, I don't think so. I think Hank would have won. Rather, I think McGovern would have won it for him.

J.B.: How about in a nonpresidential year?

West: She might have had a chance.

J.B.: The Democratic party itself, during that twenty-five year period, has it moved to the left in Texas from where it was?

West: Very little.

J.B.: The conservatives are still in charge, in control?

West: Yeah, firmly. Briscoe is very conservative, if he's anything.

W.D.V: How do you evaluate Briscoe?

West: He is, I think, very well intentioned. He hasn't been the aggressive leader that some had hoped he would be, but he's made very few mistakes. He hasn't rocked the boat. He's been the type governor

I think they wanted. He's very different from Connally or Shivers.

W.D.V.: How is he different from them?

West: They were more aggressive, more of the leader type. Dolph isn't quite the magnetic leader type they were. They were both very magnetic governors and shoved through programs and had an image as a strong governor. Briscoe has not, in my opinion, been that glamorous type, as they were, but he hasn't made bad mistakes. He's been a pretty good governor.

W.D.V.: How about Smith?

West: Smith was the same type as Briscoe. Not too dynamic, but he didn't make too many mistakes. Sailed the boat, he didn't rock it much. A lot of people like that, particularly rural areas.

J.B.: How about Price Daniel?

West: He was the same type. Price Daniel is the champion office holder in Texas history. He's held more offices than anybody else. Member of the legislature, speaker of the house, attorney general, governor, United States Senator, and now supreme court. No man in Texas history ever touched that record. His son, you know, is speaker of the house until they elect a new one. But you never know, you can't tell what will happen in these things. A depression can change the whole ballgame. A bad depression. A Watergate type thing can change it. We had a Watergate in Texas in 1970.

J.B.: If the economy ends up in some sort of extended recession or even a depression, would it be likely that Texas would feel it a little bit less in so far as state government because of the money you get from oil and gas? Would the effect on Texas be less than elsewhere

because of the state revenues that come from the oil industry?

West: No, I don't know. I'm not that much of an economist or an oil man. But the oil industry now isn't what it used to be here in Texas because of government policies. Price controls, which they had on natural gas so long and on oil. If they knock the depletion allowance out, which it appears they're going to, determined to do, the oil picture in Texas isn't rosy, isn't at all. It's the riskiest business in the world. About 75 percent of all new discoveries are by independents. You know, little men. Not the majors. They get their oil elsewhere. And if you don't have this incentive in the way of the oil depletion allowance, I can't see many plungers. I can't see many wildcatters going out and hunting oil. One hopeful sign is a new process they talk about of going down and uncapping the oil. A lot of people discovered oil. A lot of independents in east Texas, west Texas, in the oil field areas. When the price got so low, they capped off the well. The oil's still there. Now there's talk of going down into some of those old wells and knocking those caps off and redrilling, you know. But costs are so great, the risk is so great. If the incentive isn't there in the way of a higher price or a compensatory price and the oil depletion allowance, I don't know what they'll do. I really don't. The majors are in a position to buy from Venezuela or wherever they can. Of course have far more capital and can afford the risk more. But you can't get away from the fact that in Texas history since 1900--that's when the first big one was discovered--the great discoveries have been by little men, by independents, who had a lot of guts and went to the bank, borrowed

the money, went out and drilled a well. But they had a free market and they had this depletion allowance which gave them a tax incentive. Now if they don't have either, I don't know. The price of oil has gone up. It was pitifully low for so long until recently. But I don't know what they'll do without this oil depletion allowance. That was a big incentive to have.

J.B.: Does the legislature have any influence on local government?

West: Oh yes, yes. Every city and every county is a creature of the state, constitutionally and statutorially. It has a little too much.

J.B.: Do they effect anything such as local elections? Are there anything like local bills that pass the legislature? They still do that?

West: Oh yes, gosh yes. Ridiculous. You can't build a hospital in Dallas, public hospital, without going to the legislature. Even though the local citizens support it. You've got to have a bill passed. A very fine public hospital here, where Kennedy died, Parkland. Massive complex out there. But it's supported by special hospital districts which the legislature sets up and gives the local Dallas county people the power to levy taxes to support it. But you've got to go to the legislature first. Which, in my opinion, you shouldn't have to do.

J.B.: What was the effect of the Kennedy assassination on Texas politics? Not only the Kennedy assassination but the wounding of Connally.

West: The event had a drastic effect. It caused Connally to win. Connally was in trouble until that happened. We had a Republican

Congressman until '64. The assassination occurred in '63, then Earle Cabell, the man who I was telling you about who had been mayor of Dallas, he resigned as mayor. Ran for Congress against this Republican who was named Bruce Alger. Very handsome guy. Been an all-American center at Princeton. Very articulate, fine speaker. But had a drastic effect. Sympathy vote for Democrats. This is why Cabell beat this guy who had been so popular for a lot of years, in my opinion. And it made Connally, of course, into a national figure. And he went on to stay three terms. Connally had made some enemies. He was first elected in '62. But some people thought he was in trouble when this happened.

J.B.: What was the secret of Yarborough's success?

West: Ralph, of course, had a solid base to start with politically. He had to so-called liberals, the minorities. Labor real strong. And he ran very strong in the rural areas. He was bitterly opposed by conservative Democrats most everywhere. But Texans are funny. The average rural voter, farmer and stockman, is very conservative. But basically he's a populist. He goes for somebody like Yarborough, Johnson. But if you stop and talk to him and question him on certain issues, you'll find out he's a pretty rugged individual. He's conservative. But he will go for people like that.

J.B.: Conservative and populist are usually terms that don't go together.

West: That's correct. It's very strange.

J.B.: Where do they split on issues?

West: I don't know, it would be hard to say. Yarborough was kind of a spellbinder.

J.B.: Was it Yarborough's style that appealed to the conservative, rural conservatives? Style more than substance, or both?

West: He was more like Jim Ferguson, a governor we had here back about World War I. Yarborough really knew how to get on tv or radio and cuss the bankers and cuss the rich men and they're starving you to death and all that stuff. This appeals to farmers. He'd really roll them up in the rural areas.

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W.D.V.: It's only in Texas that you have a large group of liberals in the Democratic party. No other southern state has this. Why do you think that's true in Texas?

West: Because Texas is possibly more industrialized.

W.D.V.: What is a Democratic liberal in Texas? How would you define him?

West: Yarborough type liberal. A liberal Democrat in Texas is like a liberal Democrat anywhere else almost.

W.D.V.: Are there any liberals in state-wide office now?

West: Attorney General is quite a liberal. John Hill. Bob Bullitt, controller, is fairly liberal. Bob Armstrong, commissioner, is fairly liberal. John White's a big liberal, agricultural commissioner. That's about all. Three or four. There not many state offices, so they're fairly well represented.

W.D.V.: Is their strength diminishing or is it staying about the same or decreasing?

West: Hard to say. I don't know.

W.D.V.: Were they stronger, say, in the 'sixties than they are now?

Or stronger in the 'fifties than they are now?

West: Oh, they're stronger now. I believe they're stronger now. Due to the individual districts. Because more of them are being elected to these lower echelon offices in city and county government and to the state legislature.

W.D.V.: Well, then as you get more single member districts you think the liberal strength will increase?

West: Yes sir, you better believe it.

J.B.: Will that have the effect. . . . If conservative Democrats can't elect other conservatives as Democrats, will they start voting Republican?

West: Could.

J.B.: In state-wide races as well? So you think this political realignment remains a possibility in Texas?

West: Due to these individual districts, yes sir. It's been a boon to the liberals and the Republicans here. And I imagine the same is true in Houston. Depending on how you draw the lines, how you draw the districts.

J.B.: What will the effect of that be, say, in rural areas?

West: Very little.

J.B.: Suppose someone like Hill, who you consider to be fairly liberal, becomes the Democratic nominee for governor and he runs against a conservative or conservative to moderate Republican. Would Hill, as a Democrat, run strong in the traditionally Democratic rural small town areas regardless of who the Republican is? They'll vote party?

West: Yes.

J.B.: In the urban areas, he may lose some traditionally conservative Democratic votes. Is that right?

West: That's correct. I think he'll be the next governor.

J.B.: How do you evaluate Hobby?

West: Hobby got into a scandal, into a jam down there not long ago. He won, but there was a lot in the papers about it. . . out drinking with somebody. Hobby is rich. A publisher's son. Do you know him? Did you talk with him?

J.B.: Yes.

West: Well, he's not the politician type. He's not aggressive enough. His personality is not quite as flamboyant as some. Did you meet Hill?

J.B.: No, we did not.

West: He's a stemwinder! He's the opposite. Hill is a Connally protege. Very articulate, very personable, good looking. Can speak. Oh brother, can he let it loose. He will be hard to beat. But Hobby will have money. He's a billboard man. He's got enough billboards! Down every highway. He'll have the dough. It will be a race, in my opinion, between the two of them and possibly maybe Bob Armstrong, who is very popular. Good looking boy. Now land commissioner. He can be that the rest of his life if he wants it. But I know Bob real well and know that he's ambitious. Good vote getter. But of the three, I would say that if he can get adequate financing it would be Hill. Attorney General. That's another strange thing. Texans, in the past, have tended to elevate to governorship an attorney general rather than a lieutenant governor. The attorney general's job has been the best training,

politically, to be the governor. A lot of attorney generals have become governors. Very few lieutenant governors have. Shivers was one of the few, and that was by death. He and Preston Smith. I don't know of any others. Might have been one or two more. But I can think of a lot of attorney generals. Price Daniel. A bunch of them have been attorney general.

J.B.: What was Connally when he ran for governor?

West: Secretary of the Navy and resigned in August and came back and started campaigning. His first poll gave him three percent.

J.B.: To what extent did Lyndon Johnson dominate Texas politics when he was alive, when he was in office? As president and in the Senate.

West: Pretty strong. I think outside the presidency he was, of course, strongest when he was majority leader of the Senate. Enormous influence, lot of it. And took care of his home base pretty well. Yeah, he was a dominant figure. He knew power and knew how to use it.

W.D.V.: Is it an oversimplification to say that Shivers dominated the 'fifties, Connally dominated the 'sixties, and nobody dominates the 'seventies?

West: I said that in a column one time. That's true.

J.B.: In the 'sixties, was it Connally dominating but also with Johnson's blessing more or less?

West: Oh yeah.

J.B.: If Bentsen doesn't run for president, or get the nomination, is he likely to emerge as the dominant figure in the 'seventies?

West: Very well could. He's that type. He very well could.

W.D.V.: Do you foresee any major changes in Texas politics in

the next ten years?

West: In my opinion, a great deal of this depends on who controls the national Democratic party, the type people ideologically. If--and I've said this before--the McGovern type continues to head the ticket, in my opinion you will see more and more independents and conservative Democrats voting Republican for higher offices. Governor, Senate and president. I still think the great majority of them will stay in the Democratic primary. But in November, at the general election, I think you will see these conservative Democrats--and all this pattern started in the 'fifties under Shivers--you'll see them moving over to oppose a McGovern type. You'll see more and more of that.

W.D.V.: So it principally depends on what happens nationally is what you're saying.

West: I think a lot has to do with that, yeah. This is what Bob has been trying to tell them as head of the Democratic party. He's developed some enemies, particularly with the McGovern wing. Bob Strauss. But he's been trying to tell them to get under that middle tent. Preaches that all the time. He got through this mini-convention very well. Better than he thought he would. I had breakfast with him before it. He was a little worried about what people like Jean Westwood would do. But I see he came out of it all right. But Bob is aware of this. He's trying to pull this party closer to the center, make it more of a moderate party. And he learned that under Johnson and Connally.

J.B.: Does Strauss play any role in Texas politics?

West: I don't know. I don't much think he does right now. He's too busy concentrating on the national end. He was a close lieutenant

of Johnson's. Very close to Connally. Very close. Almost like brothers they were, have been. They still have lunch together a lot. But he's in no position now to play much of a role in Texas politics. Too busy where he is. He might, could try to pull some strings down here. I don't know what kind he could pull. I don't know how he gets along with Briscoe.

J.B.: Is his closeness to Bentsen generally considered to be a big plus for Bentsen in terms of his own presidential chances?

West: I think Bob will have to keep hands off. He will try to run an orderly convention, of course, and see that the delegates are seated fairly. There won't be anything like it was last time. They won't have these quotas. Would be disastrous. I don't know. I don't think he can afford to get too close, to show any partiality to Bentsen. I don't think he can. I think he'll have to be neutral as far as these candidates go. But he will try his best to set a climate which would favor a Bentsen type candidate rather than a McGovern type candidate. He doesn't think you have a chance to win if you don't.

J.B.: Has there been any talk at all of the Democratic national convention coming to Texas in '76?

West: I haven't heard much of it. Sure haven't. I did hear that the Astrodome was trying to get it. Been some time ago. I haven't heard any more about it. Whether it will or not. But there was some talk of Houston interests trying to get it for the Astrodome.

J.B.: Houston would have the accommodations to handle it in terms of motel/hotel facilities.

West: I'm sure so. Have you all been to Houston? Did you talk to Hoffhinz?

J.B.: No, we didn't get to talk to Hoffhinz. Connally is not giving interviews. We'd written to him and talked to him. I'd seen him a year ago. The secretary said they'd discussed it and because of his current situation he just doesn't want to give any interviews on any subject.

West: I guess his lawyers have told him not to.

J.B.: Is there anything you wanted to add that we haven't discussed? Let me ask you this one question. Do you see the day coming and how far away when a Mexican-American would be elected to state-wide office in Texas?

West: There again, a lot would depend on who he is, but I don't see it. I'm not saying this in a sense of discrimination or whatever you call it. I just don't see it.

J.B.: Even to a lesser office?

West: Maybe not to a lesser office. Maybe from some south Texas county where Mexicans predominate. Down in the valley and below San Antonio. The whole area below San Antonio. And there again, depending on how articulate he is and how well respected he is in his area, he could possibly be elected to Congress from a district heavily populated by Mexicans.

J.B.: I was thinking more of a state-wide office.

West: I don't know. I just don't see it.

J.B.: Why have the liberals in Texas never made any effort to elect people say to the railroad commission? Do you have any ideas on

that?

West: They've made efforts to, but they've never been too successful. I don't know, I just don't know. There haven't been too many liberals elected state-wide to anything. When you get to thinking about it, not too many of them have been elected state-wide. But not too many of them have ever run for the railroad commission. Why haven't they run? I don't know.

J.B.: That is basically a very powerful. . . office in Texas isn't it?

West: Yes. They either haven't had the appeal or haven't had the type candidate or the financial backing or something. I don't know which. I don't recall any of them in the railroad commission. It's a powerful office.

J.B.: Was there anything else that you wanted to mention that might give us an insight into Texas politics?

West: No.

[End of interview.]