

This interview was conducted with John McKeithan on January 12, 1974,
by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries. Transcribed by Jean Pruner.

Bass: Governor, I wanted to ask you what do you think is the Long legacy in Louisiana?

McKeithan: It has been a terrific power but its back really was broken in 1964 when I was elected. Of course, Senator Long, who is the heir to the Long legacy, as you know, supported his cousin, Gillis Long, for governor. Although I had been a Long camp man in my early political career. I was Earl Long's floor leader at the legislature. And I defeated his cousin. In fact, his cousin ran a high third. He was very close between me and him. But I had a great part of the old so-called Long group, well, with me. Earl Long's widow was my . . . known as my statewide campaign manager. And the widow of George Long, who had been congressman, died in office, was active for me. And then I got a number of lesser known Longs about half-way out Longdom. But after I was elected governor, as I see it, and I'm not trying to . . . just trying to give it to you straight, Chep Morrison died, who was really the Long ~~opponent~~^{opponent}. . . represented the Long opposition of this state. And Earl had died in 1960. Chep was killed there in '64. And it really left a vacuum in this state, the leader of the Long faction dead and Morrison having been tragically killed. Although Morrison and I opposed each other in '64, personally he and I were very friendly and our objectives for the state were not a great deal different. I more or less fell into that vacuum and by doing it I kind of pushed the Long and the anti-Long people together for a program for the state. And, so far as there being a Long side, an anti-Long side in this state, there isn't anymore. Now the name Long, just as the name Jones, former

Governor Sam Jones, the name Kinnon, a former governor. That gives a person a big step. But now it's at the point where, while the man Long will open the door . . . the name Long will open the door for you, you're pretty well on your own, just about on your own. And the door was opened for former Governor Jones' son; he's state senator. And former Governor Kinnon's nephew, named Kinnon, was just elected public service commissioner. But it isn't . . . it isn't an overwhelming factor here at all anymore. In fact, it has its drawbacks usually. Because immediately you say Long you have about as many who are on the other side as you do still on the Long side.

J.B.: Where is the Long legacy in Louisiana in terms of programs?

McKeithan: Well, liberal. Very liberal. And they are very liberal in many ways, perhaps not so liberal in others. But, generally speaking, it came for helping the poor. That was Huey Long's great . . . that was his basis, was helping and doing for the poor. And then Earl came along and took it a little further, or carried on where he . . . where Huey left off. However, Huey Long was really a product of the times, as I look back and see the scene of this state, and when he came on the political scene here the huge sawmills were one of the big powers in this state. Right here in this parish, for example, there was a sawmill known as Louisiana Central Lumber Company, now about seven miles south of here. They owned several hundred thousand acres of land and perhaps hired as many as 2,000 employees. They were the wealth. Most of the people who got jobs worked there. There were no unions, no wage and hour laws and they were just there really at the . . . not the mercy, perhaps, isn't the proper word, but just there at the pleasure of the employers. And workmen's compensation, for example, just came into being about that time and it was a fight. And the masses here,

while appreciating the jobs, resented those who had the money and who had

the land and who owned the houses and who owned the stores, owned the picture shows, and owned the library. Although they wouldn't express it, that resentment was there. And Huey came along as a young attorney and started representing the injured workmen, where he really got his start against those large companies, successfully where others had not. And he soon became recognized as the foe of the person who had the money and who had the wealth. And he began to attract the masses and that . . . and then when he got into office . . . wasn't easy for him to get into office. He was defeated the first time he ran. Second time he got considerably less than the majority of the votes but he made a deal with the one who ran second to him and got him out of the primary. First governor's race that I really recall. When he got in there, he carried through on his commitments of free school books, things of that nature, and became to many a hero and to many others a villain. If you go back and check returns of the elections as I have, he never won what you would call an overwhelming victory. I think that he never got as many as 60% of the votes, even in his heyday in 1930 when he ran against Senator Ramsdale. Was elected governor in '28 and ran for Senator ~~in~~ and I think if you'll check the returns he either got . . . it was 54, or maybe 58% of the votes, which is a good victory but not anything approaching the 82% that I got when I was elected governor, It was a hard and bitter campaign. Of course, he had the opposition built in. The newspapers were against him, which is a real dynamic, a real strong force in this state. But here the basis of their support is helping the poor, but Roosevelt came along and took over his program, virtually, and got to the point even with Earl's time there was very little left to do for the poor. And Earl came along in '48. I speak of him as Earl. I never called him Earl publicly or

to his face. Just for the sake of brevity I refer to him. I always called him Mr. Earl. And raised old age pensions, about the big mark we did there for the poor in '48, just to carry on with their . . . raised schoolteachers salary and things of that nature. But then there's not much left to . . . nothing come up about helping the poor that is really left to be done. The federal government has gone in there and taken over. Medicare, Medicaid. We had Medicare and Medicaid before the federal government ever thought about it. We had, you know, by far *better hospital* any other state in the Union who had a system of charity hospitals like we had. In fact, Charity Hospital in New Orleans for a long time was the largest single institution of its kind in the world. It was at state level, wasn't federal level, wasn't county level. We have been taking care of our indigently ill a long time before there had been a Medicare and Medicaid, etc., etc. But that's their . . . that's what their legacy was based on. But now everybody is for that. Even the most conservative Republican, why Social Security, well, of course, we've got to do that. Charity Hospital, why, of course, we've got to take care of our needy. Even the most conservative people recognize that as a way of life. I say, there isn't much left. But the name Long still gets a person to a good start in this state, as I pointed out, as do other names which have been known favorably in the past. It's gotten to the point, beginning about ten years ago, where you become, although your name is Long, it'll take you just a short way and then you're on your own. That's true about Senator Long now.

J.B.: Is there any Long machine or organization or

~~McKeithan~~:

J.B.: Okay. Do you think it's possible in the future for a person like Earl or Huey Long to be elected?

McKeithan: No, because this state now feels like, the majority of the

people, we're doing about as much as we should, or more perhaps. We're . . . go so far, people say, well, somewhere people got to work. The Longs believe in that, too. And there is nothing left here to do for the poor. You find a consensus here that it isn't being done except for the black. Many of the blacks feel like really that someday, anyway, a lot of them do. I'm just speaking very frankly with you. And if you could work them up and rouse them up in a force. I think they are 21% of the votes here in the state. Had 13% when I was elected governor. I encouraged the rest of them to . . . many of the rest of them to become registered and get ready to vote. But I don't think . . . it's not possible to work among the poor. Well, most everyone has something now. You take right here, so man, he's talking about giving somebody as much as I'm getting on Social Security and I worked to get mine. Do you follow me? It's hard to get a big enough segment worked up and aroused. Blacks, but if you attempt to make it a black-white race in this state, you'd be dead. Because you couldn't, just 21%, you couldn't do it. If you ever got them really took it so far, really tried to get the black as a real nucleus, it could destroy you politically in my opinion. The ideal thing is to get both. As I did. I had the support of both of them, virtually all of them while I was governor.

J.B.: Well, on ~~the~~ eggs . . . the book that we are doing is kind of a short-hand version or, the way we describe it, is like V. O. Key's book Southern Politics.

McKeithan: Never read it.

J.B.: Well, his book treated . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

It had gotten to the point, when I was elected governor in '64, the thing of

pitting black against white was getting awfully close.

bus tickets and try to get them to go, but they aren't. They suggested they go back to Africa; they aren't. Don't stir it up. Just . . . we just do the very best we can with what we have. Now it had gotten to the point when I was elected governor in '64, that it was becoming difficult to use that to be elected. Wallace's election against Weber, as an example, where he just did squeak by, as you recall. That's what he . . . that's what he had going in there when he ran against the last time, as I saw it. Just did squeak by, even though he had been a popular governor who was kind of a hero in Alabama, if you recall, just a very few thousand votes. But now that the , unless you had incidents which would just really arouse the whites to a fever pitch. Do you follow me? To get them aroused temporarily. It would not be a campaign slogan that would be the thing to run on here at all in this state.

J.B.: You think those days are gone.

McKeithan: They're gone. Unless you have an incident where you had a riot, say, in the city of New Orleans and some whites were murdered and some policemen were murdered, things of that nature. You'd get the white in fear . . . for fear would back up and take a stand which would lead solidly. But to make a race saying about the blacks are going to take over and I'm going to run them . . . that would defeat a man in this state.

J.B.: Do you look back, say, over the last 25 years, is that one of the most significant things that has happened in this state?

McKeithan: No question about it. Of course, the real thing that has done it is education. Younger people taking over who have not . . . were not as fixed in their notions and their ways and their habits, but more than

anything else, the black voter registration which makes the leaders stop and think and look over his shoulder. I recall a group came to see me from one parish, which name I will not call. I had been governor two or three years. They said they weren't being treated right about something there in their community. There were about twelve, fifteen of them there. One of them was a Catholic priest. I believe the priest was white. I said, "You aren't, are you?" I knew the population had about 40% black. I said, "How many of you are registered to vote?" I think there was one out of fourteen. I said, "Well, don't come to me for help. Go help yourself." I said, "If you get registered to vote, then if you don't get justice, come back to see me." So they put on a voter drive and in about six months this priest said, "An amazing thing happened." Registration drive on and about 2 or 3,000 blacks were registered. He said just turned completely around. I said, "Well, isn't that interesting!" He said, "You gave us the right advice." There's no . . .

J.B.: Did he give you any specifics of what happened on that?

McKeithan: You mean about what they were being discriminated against?

J.B.: Yeah, and what happened then to turn it around.

McKeithan: They were claiming police brutality and their lack of jobs. Couldn't get no jobs and the local governing authority, etc. Oh, just general complaints . . .

J.B.: Then what happened after the voter registration?

McKeithan: Well, they said well, we . . . come on, let us talk. We want to work the thing out and work with you in harmony here. We're all here together. Just complete about-face. They never came back to see me.

J.B.: This is about a local . . .

McKeithan: No more complaints. One of the . . . parish here, you know, is

county in your . . . in all the other states in the nation. As an example of it, I found that if the blacks here that they are not being discriminated against insofar as the use of force is concerned. And that the whites being made to do the same things they are being made to do. In particular, if you can get some blacks in the enforcement of what you propose to do that you can get strong support from the bulk of the black community in putting down riots and taking over buildings and things of that nature. They are strongly opposed to it, too. But you've got to be awfully careful that you don't turn it into a black-white thing. For example, I called out a National Guard perhaps more than any governor in the history of this state. I'm quite sure I did. Never used it, really, but I had it there as the threat of force. And I would always be . . . I said, "All right, the first thing now, get every black we have in the Guard" Awfully hard to recruit blacks for the National Guard. We really went to great lengths trying to get them in there. I don't know why but we couldn't get them in there. But we had a member . . . several members of the Saints football team. They missed one game, almost missed a game, because I had them out on riot duty. I said, "Get all the blacks. Now, be sure and get them out in front where they can be seen." And, so that the blacks would realize that, look, this is law and order, not just white-black law and order. This is law and order. And we used it extremely effectively. We never had any serious trouble because at the first threat of trouble

at university campuses or marches, we called out massive force without live ammunition. We never issued live ammunition, which is a terrible mistake. You call out the National Guard, a man who has worked in a grocery store, hadn't fired a rifle in two or three years, well, he'll shoot . . . he'll fire probably accidentally while he's there. The

likelihood of an accidental death is . . . is always . . . if you have live ammunition. And the trouble we had while I was governor, I never issued live ammunition, except in extreme cases. We were on the Southern campus one time and, well, we had an incident almost like this one that came up down here last time. But we always moved in quickly, quickly, quickly, with massive force. If we needed 100 National Guard, we called out 1000. If we needed 1000, we called out 5,000. And that's, I think, the big mistake they have made in other parts of the country.

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: . . . particular turning points operational to what you said in the eight years you were governor? Was there any threshold or something you look back on . . .

McKeithan: Well, I went into an area that previously had . . . was uncharted here in this state. For example, there hadn't been a black in the front door of the governor's mansion ever 'til I became governor. There had not been a black that had sat down in the dining room, probably some eating back in the kitchen, to give you a small thing. But it's really significant. I did that. And I integrated all the boards and commissions that I could which were not covered by Civil Service. Civil Service acts really as a . . . it's really unfair to the blacks for this reason. As you know, if you get a civil service job, they get frozen there for life, unless they can prove fraud or something. We have a very strict civil service in this state. And the blacks, even though they can qualify, there aren't any jobs there. They are already taken by civil service employees in there. I mean in all the boards and commissions where we could, we integrated with blacks, put blacks in there deliberately. And it was accepted. But what I found was that the bulk of the whites here, so long as the blacks will act right, and that right, you

know, it takes in a lot of things. If they will conduct themselves as decent Americans, really. Meet the standards which the whites would like to have themselves meet, law and order . . . it's just so many things, you understand? They say, "Well, fine, just because his skin is black . . . we got to treat him right. We can't . . . we can't expect him to stay on our backs, no way." And I was given a chance to get . . . get that across and by doing that, I was able to do some things that did not hurt me politically. Well, I remember one time we had a march from Bogalusa. They were determined to march from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge, for no reason. Except to create a big furor, really, and ended up about eight of them marching. They had been over there near Baton Rouge and the whites just determined, well, blankety-blank, they weren't going to march. And the head of our state police . . . I'm giving this is an example of what I was able to doing kind of hit . . . to satisfy both black and white. I wasn't doing it just to do it. I was just doing what I thought was right. I wasn't doing it, let's say, I wasn't politically motivated. I was doing what I thought was right because at that time I thought it was very . . . I thought I might . . . may have . . . might have ruined myself politically. And they got over there about 20 miles east of Baton Rouge in Livingston Parish and those whitemen coming out of those plants working there, union men, who are about as strong anti-black group as you have anywhere, you know, hardhats. They were meeting them walking down that road and they got out of those darned cars and we almost had some shootings trying to keep those whites from actually beating those blacks up. And the blacks *said they would* march the next day. They'd regroup before they marched. And then they decided they would march. And I told the head of the state police, I said, "We've got to let them march. We can't prevent them from marching. They have really got a right to march legally." And he said,

"I'll have to have some help. I can't do it with just the state police." And I called out all of the National Guard, without ammunition. Nothing but fixed bayonets. About 6500 of them. That's a pretty good force. I remember seeing on the national news that evening, they said, "the greatest show of military might since ¹¹ ~~the charge~~ against

And I flew over in a helicopter and the whites were shaking their fists at me like this. You know, we'll get you next.

And we brought them on in there. Head of the Guard wanted to issue live ammunition and I said, "Well, you must have lost your mind." I said, "I've seen a machine gun that went . . . I've seen a machine gun that gets in front of . . . there wasn't a man in six feet of that machine gun and I saw it go off. That's a phenomena and I saw it when I was in the Army." I said, "We get killed some whites or blacks," I said, "we never would stop the blood from flowing." Well, at any rate, when we got there, then this character, black man from up in . . . had been up in Baltimore, the one that's just been convicted of robbing that bank up there. He's a Louisiana boy.

J.B.: Rap Brown?

McKeithan: Rap Brown. He notified that he was coming to Baton Rouge to take over. Well, that gave me the opportunity I was waiting for. And here I'd *told* the blacks, you know, a few days before, but I couldn't wait. I got on national television. I said, "We want him to come to Louisiana." And I said, "When he gets in Louisiana, I'm going to have him arrested immediately for preaching treason against the United States of America." I said, "It's a violation of state law. It may not be a violation of federal law, but we're going to arrest him and put him in jail as soon as he crosses the state line." And I said, "Now we protected the black people

of this state. Some of the rabbleroising blacks think they are going to take this state over, come on down. They are going to get all the trouble they want real quick." The next day I issued live ammunition

because he said he was coming down. We almost had a real confrontation. I'm probably bragging on myself, but the point I'm making is that the whites and blacks alike applauded that. We have demonstrated fairness to the blacks, but we have demonstrated standing up against the whites, and that was the key of the temper. ~~I believe that the whites and blacks~~ of this entire state .

J.B.: Now several people . . .

McKeithan: That was really a crisis that we passed there that from then on it . . . things helped us a lot there, I think, really.

J.B.: Several people we have talked to have mentioned that Bogalusa-Baton Rouge march, including John Marcelle, your former . . .

McKeithan: Yeah, Jack was briefly . . . that . . . that was kind of a b- . . . that was . . . what was that?

J.B.: Kind of a threshold or was that the turning point?

McKeithan: That was kind of, I think, a turning point because I was able to convince the blacks and the whites that insofar as we were concerned, those of us in authority in this state, that we were going to be fair to the blacks and protect them.

J.B.: You went on television, I think, that time.

McKeithan: Yeah, television. And then . . .

J.B.: What was the basic message?

McKeithan: Just about what I told you, that we would protect them. They had a right to march. They had no reason to march. They had a right to and they had a right to protection and that we didn't . . . the federal . . . it wasn't necessary for the federal government to come here and take

law and order in our state. And then, on the other hand, now, if we had some rabblrouisers like Rap Brown who would come here to take over and preach anarchy and to burn and to preach looting, then that we had something for him, too, and we hoped he came because we'd break him of the habit of *superseding* people and that kind of business. And what we were able to do was really kind of touch the sensitive feelings of the great bulk of the whites and blacks both as the opportunity presented. When Rap Brown really . . . well, when the march came, protecting them, which I had no choice but to do. And then when Rap Brown come down, to say he's coming down to really virtually take over in front of the capitol, it gave us a chance then to firm up. And we were able . . . that expressed a position I took obviously the temperament of the overwhelming majority of this state, black and white alike, because for about two or three days we didn't do anything but answer . . . but open telegrams. People congratulating us

J.B.: Were you surprised by that reaction to your speech and to the handling of . . .

McKeithan: Oh, yes, by the overwhelming reaction, I was surprised. I was surprised. I just didn't realize it was going to be such enthusiastic approval, but I felt like that that's the way I felt and I felt like the majority of the people of this state felt that way, black and white alike. But I was in uncharted ground and I know I . . . I called up some of the officials in state government when I started . . . decided to protect those blacks and they said, "Well, I'd just as soon you hadn't called me." Said, "I don't take any responsibility for it." But that day when we protected those blacks, *we* had just, you know, had just prevented them from marching, if you will recall, just a short time before. They had that terrible thing, why, I say terrible thing, it was on national television, you know. Had attempted to let them march, when you had the

state police charge through them. Well, we had taken a different . . . a different course, which was the way that the people of this state obviously wanted, black and white alike, as I see it. I think the bulk of our whites now feel like that if a black man will conduct himself as a first class citizen, he'll obey the law, and just conduct himself decently. I don't mean that he'll be an Uncle Tom, but just conduct himself decently, that he's accepted here. I don't mean lots of people want their children to marry them, but that's nothing unusual. Protestants don't generally like Catholics to marry their children if they have been converted the other way, and I'm sure the other way. And Italians would prefer to marry among the Italians, Jewish among the Jewish. That's nothing new in America as you men know. You can do what you want to but there is preference that ethnic groups have. But I suspect that the feeling towards the blacks is as good as it is in any state in the nation. The forced integration of the schools has been a terrible thing. It ruined the school system, absolutely ruined it, absolutely ruined it.

In one big high school here and it just got to where they had to call out all the police and everything. Honest to God, went and had a basketball game the next night, it was about 95% black. and the whites just turned it over to them. It really ruined the school system, most of it. Neither side wanted it. They couldn't bet a black person to even petition the Justice Department to integrate the school system here. Justice Department did it all on their own. They just wrecked it, absolutely wrecked it. Anyone who says it didn't is just . . . they're just trying to admit something that isn't correct. They wrecked it. Go in any school system here and they'll tell you . Even the most liberal will tell you that. Instead of bringing those who didn't learn or didn't want to learn or the slow

learners up to the standard, they brought the whole thing down. I have two girls there in school, two daughters in school, and their closest friends around the high school, some of them blacks, but they come back and say the school . . . the school is a joke. My wife went to substitute teach one time. She had the tenth and eleventh graders and she asked them conjugating a verb. Said they looked at her like . . . a verb. What is that? Big joke and she had a hard time . . . it ruined it. Ruined it. Ruined the school system. That's a fact. They just go . . . turmoil all the time. You get the deputy sheriff and everything We had nothing but racial tranquility until they just forced the whites and blacks together. Paid the teachers the same, had the same kind of building, and everybody was just happy to learn . . . been turmoil ever since. The same thing is going to be at Southern and L.S.U. if they force them together. The blacks don't want to go to L.S.U. When they had that trouble over there, oh, three or four years ago, I went out there and I . . . first thing, the president of the student body told me when I walked on in there, said, "Don't you try to make us gotto L.S.U." don't want to go to L.S.U. We want to stay here at Southern." I said, "Well, you're going to go to L.S.U. if you don't behave yourself. I'm going to close you down." "What with?" I said, "That National Guard right outside the gate. I'm going to close you down." But this is tragic in my opinion. And those who have been under the gun as we are here You find the same reaction in the East. You go up there to New Hampshire and Maine, someplace where there aren't any blacks. Oh, fine, with you all down there, over yonder. But they aren't doing it in Washington, as you know, . Well, there ain't no white students left. They all abandoned them, abandoned the schools. That's off the subject.

We were talking about . . . this is current. What else do you want to know?

J.B.: What is, speaking of current things, what . . . how do you assess the state of the Democratic party in Louisiana?

McKeithan: It still has a tremendous advantage because virtually all of the local officeholders are Democrats. And, for example, when I ran for the Senate here last year, the surveys which we had made and Wall Street Journal made and the Atlanta Constitution made about a week or two before the election, showed me leading. I ran as an independent. But one thing, that darned voting machine is so set up, if you go in there and you want to vote for all Democrats and maybe you don't like the National Democratic Party, but all your friends and everything are Democrats and there is one master lever you pull down. And it gives you a tremendous advantage. But so far as the National Democratic Party is concerned, now, the Republican party is generally much more popular. If you'll just get the blacks among the whites, overwhelming more popular. Of course, the difference with the blacks is uniformly, 99-9/10% Democratic. *the state has been Democratic* as you know, on down through Truman, Lyndon Johnson, the Kennedys. But the thing in our state that, if you aren't a . . . if you aren't a Democrat, you're disadvantaged. here, if you're running for local office or state offices because so many people will want to vote all the Democratic people there, that's who they are for. See, our election here, of course, if you *win* the Democratic primary. I'm sure this is true, too, to some extent in North Carolina, to a lesser extent probably. Democratic primary. We don't *have a general* election *its a* real farce. Accordingly, everybody is Democratic and for the reasons I have given you.

It's just hard . . . everybody is scared to change over. If they changed

over en masse, it would be a different thing. They're afraid to change over. Now when I ran there, as I say, I . . . I started getting calls the morning of the election that the machines were out of order. I must . . . our telephone just rang . . . all the machines out of order. What was happening, particularly among the blacks. Over half the blacks I know wanted to vote for me. They were pulling the Democratic master lever and when they did, my lever is the independent one over there, wouldn't come down. It was locked. They thought the machine was out of order. And I got hold of the Custodian of Voting Machines and she said, "Well, it's not out of order." Said, "They pull that master lever down and your lever is locked. The only thing you can do is go back and pull them up and then go back and pull your lever down and pull out each individual person they want to vote. Why, it made it impossible . . .

J.B.: The voting machine . . .

McKeithan: If I had known the machine was going to be like that, I would not have tried to run.

J.B.: Are voting machines used statewide in all precincts?

McKeithan: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. People here thought that. . . the good government people thought there was a tremendous amount of vote stealing going on, or vote buying going on, stealing. And it was really remarkable that, they were put in in '52, and they thought the Long faction was stealing all the votes, buying all the votes, you understand? And after they put the voting machines on, Earl came back in '56 and ran for governor again and he got over half the votes first primary. And they were just . . . with all voting machines, you understand? Which destroyed the myth that the voting machine be the answer to honest and true and good elections because there was a certain percentage, but you have it in every state and everywhere

a certain amount of . . . by stealing, I don't know about that, but I'm talking about favors and buying, etc., but very, very, very, very, but very, very minimal. Very.

J.B.: Governor, how do you respond to . . . the image, at least, that Louisiana has of being more corrupt in its politics and even more, of higher tolerance for corruption than other states?

McKeithan: I didn't know it had that reputation. I thought that perhaps New York had that reput- . . . or New Jersey.

J.B.: How about in the South?

McKeithan: The only thing . . . this . . . while I was governor, there was no other state in the South that run as clean and good as we ran Louisiana and the only thing kept them going was lack of investigations.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . via the Long thing of Huey Long's day and the big scandals that came out of his regime I think is obviously what got us the . . . and Huey, you know, when he went , he claimed he put in dummy candidates and that got national, international attention. New Orleans . . . Louisiana had become the . . . I didn't realize it but . . . shucks. I'd like to see Mississippi or some of those states undergo the investigations we've undergone here, or any other governor, as far as that's concerned. I don't say they're bad men but the things they did are no different than we do in every state. We have . . . we have the greatest bunch of reform laws in the state . . . on the statutes of this state than any state in the nation.

J.B.: What would be some examples? Would the universal use of voting machines . . .

McKeithan: Oh, for example, we've got the Code of Ethics which was

something completely new for the state for elected officials. We have the Code of Ethics. We have a . . . to give you an example, for all elected officials, which requires them not to do or to do certain things. If he doesn't, he is subject to being censured and then removed from office, from the governor on down. Civil service, this is the tightest civil service you've ever seen in your life. I couldn't . . . while I was governor I couldn't hire you if I loved you to death, unless you went in there and took a rigid examination and you became at least third on the list. Otherwise I would have been prosecuted. Those are two. And then voting machines is another. Code of Ethics, voting machines, civil service, various laws on the statutes that prohibits purchases, that any purchases made above \$1,000 by the public in this state without competitive bidding is subject to criminal violation and removal from office. Just to give you some classic examples of it. Now those four We have, for example, an architect-engineer here signed a contract with the state that would not let what happened to Agnew would not have occurred here. God, while I was governor, I required that they make an affidavit that they had not paid anyone nor promised to pay anyone anything whatsoever to get that contract with the state. And the reason why engineers do it, and architects is because, as you know, their association requires them to work on a fee basis which is set by their association. You can't let it out by competitive bidding. I'm sure you've been aware of that. So while I was governor, we required an affidavit to be made by . . . not by the m- . . . by the architect and engineer, which puts him in violation of the law. But he has to sign an affidavit — which would have kept Agnew out of trouble. He should have in Maryland. And I gather things have been pretty nice in Maryland from what I read made the Vice President resign. But if I had done what Agnew done,

and from then on to the jail. But what he did there is . . . governors just don't do, to my knowledge, and never have. I know Earl Long didn't. He had a terrible reputation. I give you voting machines, civil Service, Code of Ethics. And I dare say you won't find another southern state that has all three, or I dare say you won't have any other state in the nation that has all three.

J.B.: Do you attribute the voting machines, I mean the problems you have outlined to us here about the voting machines, as the primary reason for your loss in the gov- . . . in the Senate race?

McKeithan: That made it impossible. I was running at a very difficult time. I had been governor eight years and an old shoe, you know, wears out pretty quick. But I had enjoyed tremendous heights of popularity, I'm sure as you are aware. Like my popularity rating, approval rating was the highest that's ever been recorded by the various polling people who took the various polls here. But if you've been there eight years, particularly when you've had the . . . been Life magazined like I was, you know, even it's been proven to be false, as it was, that is a lot of wear and tear. And, boy, you just build up . . . there's certain decisions you have to make. See, I was on labor's unfair list here practically the entire last term, according to things I felt like I stood up against them on and then you'd give an inch to labor and industry would jump you. And that . . . it made a difficult time for me to run and I didn't want to run against Senator Ellender anyway. The voting maching thing, the way it turned out, the way the voting machine worked made it impossible for me to win. And had I known that I would not have won . . . not have run. Additionally, my administrative assistant is indicted by a grand jury for making a false

statement, not for having done anything wrong, but having made a false statement. And we knew . . . he was known as Mr. Clean.

But I was led to believe those indictments were going to be withdrawn.

Had I known they were not going to be withdrawn, I would not have run.

Additionally, about three days . . . two or three days before the election,

here comes Newsday magazine out saying that Russell Long himself had prevailed upon the Justice Department not to indict me; they didn't say what for. Of course, that was determined to be absolutely false.

Mr. Peterson and all that just absolutely false and the United States Attorney and everything else. But that was enough . . . that was enough to defeat me right there, that Newsday story, published papers picked it up. But the voting machine made it impossible. For example, I didn't get a black vote for the reasons I have given you. They were voting Democratic and then going over, and many of them try to pull my lever down and it wouldn't come down. And I knew I had to have half the black votes, if I had gotten half the black votes I would have won. 150 . . . we had estimated 300,000 votes the state, 150,000 off the Democratic nominee and 150,000 on me, say that's 300,000 votes.

If I had gotten half the black vote, I would have won, just that simple .

I didn't get any. And I know over half of them wanted to vote for me.

No question about that.

J.B.: Getting back to the Longs, the Long tradition, when you were growing up, did any influence . . . I mean, what was your . . . thinking back on it, were you influenced or have you since been influenced by Longs and by growing up with the Long tradition, how do you . . . how did that affect you?

McKeithan: Of course, when Huey Long was elected governor, I was just a

child. You men weren't even born, but I was . . . the first, really, governor's race I really recall, when he was elected governor in '28. But my people here, my people were schoolteachers and small successful businessmen and they did not vote for Huey Long in 1928. They thought he was too crude. And just . . . he didn't go to church every day. We went to church every day, every night, virtually. But then they began to believe that he was doing . . . trying to help the masses of the people, that they felt like what he was doing was good, although there were many people around him they didn't approve. And I think that's pretty well my gist, but I never took Huey Long as a hero. Many of his closest friends became my closest friends. A close friend of mine, Seymour Weiss is, for example, was perhaps Huey's closest intimate, and I didn't know him when I was elected governor in '64. But I knew he had been the closest intimate Huey Long had. And I kept him on the Board because I felt like it must be a lot of good in him. He owned the Roosevelt Hotel, Fairmont now. ~~And I~~

~~then~~ And I found that in many ways he was not a great admirer of Huey Long, either. But Huey Long was never really a hero to me. I really . . . when Mr. Earl Long was . . . when he wasn't sick. He was ill the last four years in office, virtually all of them. Had had . . . had periods of, I think, illness while he was governor from '48 to '52, but he had many qualities which I admired greatly. Some of these crudities . . . how do you pronounce it? C-r- . . . is there such a word as c-r-u-d-i-t-y?

W.D.V.: Charisma?

McKeithan: No.

J.B.: Crudities.

W.D.V.: Crudities.

McKeithan: Crudities . . . that's . . . some of these crudities I disapproved of terribly, like picking his nose in public, taking his teeth out and putting them in a glass of water, rinsing them off, and putting them back — *those things* I disapproved of. But I found him to be a basically a real honest man and determined to really protect the taxpayers and just that much I was convinced of . I know, for example, when I was 28 or 29 when he called me in there the first session and told me he wanted to make me a floor leader for him, and I was just a green, unexposed legislator. He told me then, he says, "I think you have a great future in this state. You may very well be governor of it someday." He said, "I've observed you up here this first session." I had only been down there about six weeks then. Said, "I know your family. You come from one of the finest families in north Louisiana. I knew your mother well." He always says, says, "She was the nicest girl and best dancer I ever saw." They'd . . . he'd . . . they'd known each other at Louisiana Tech. "I'm going to make you floor leader. Now, I want to give you a little advice." He said, "Watch out for that whiskey." He said, "It's ruined a lot of good men who had come here and had had a future." He said, "Leave women alone." He said, "You ever read over the vows a man takes when he gets married?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Well, you leave them women alone." And he said, "Don't take nobody's money." He said, "Keep yourself where you can look any son of a bitch in the eye." That's pretty good advice, isn't it? And when these young Republicans . . . young attorneys came in and started investigating around, I was in a position where I could look any son of a bitch in the eye. And they know it. Gerry Gallinghouse to former Governor Sam Jones

governor that I was as clean as a hound's tooth. I had kept myself where I could look any son of a bitch in the eye. And I wasn't worried . . . concerned about someone would turn state's evidence on me because there wasn't anything to turn on. It might have been the administration . . . W. W. McD who was indicted for making a false statement. He swore under oath and his attorney did, too, at his trial. It was common knowledge that he'd . . . that United States Attorney had told him three different times, his lawyers, "If you will tell us something you know on McKeithan, your indictment is not necessary. Just tell us something on McKeithan." He said, "You'll just have to try to send me to Atlanta or Leavenworth." Said, "I don't know anything about Governor McKeithan except something good." Said, "You'll just have to try to send me." That's putting the pressure on a man, isn't it? I had kept myself where I could look any son of a bitch in the eye. And that advice he gave me . . . I was already going to do it, but that advice he gave me was pretty darned good advice. Because Earl was going through one of those darned scandals, as you know, investigations, and he kept . . . and there wasn't anything on him. And he ended up a big martyr and a hero and that's what elected him governor in '48. Because he survived those investigations. Of course, at that time, they uncovered a lot of things. Of course, here they never uncovered anything. There hasn't been anything done, nothing to it. But at that time, they . . . there were actually people committing suicide. And lot of people had been . . . trucks had been paid for twice and hotels been sold two or three times and things of that nature, but nothing like that, of course, has been uncovered. Nothing like that went on. You have a few individuals you will find in any administration that make a little money for themselves, somebody down the line, but so far as anything major

there hasn't been anything and won't be. Isn't anything. And I think they are reconciled to it now.

J.B.: Do you think the image of corruption is a myth?

McKeithan: I certainly do. I think there is some here that I don't know about. But there's no more . . . perhaps not near so much as there is in the neighboring states. I gather they have had a little something out in Texas recently about bank stock, etc. I think it involved the Lieutenant Governor to the best of my recollection. And even to a less extent the governor's name was thrown out pretty loosely about the stock. There was never anything like that occurred here. The Jim Garrison thing was a terrible debacle, with all the evidence they had against him, but that's the District Attorney. And after all is said and done, although the evidence was certainly damning, to put it mildly, he was exonerated. (Laughter.) Did you read the *story* on that trial? I guess that's the proof of the pudding that he . . . but I've known Jim Garrison since . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: . . . a man like Earl Long or Huey Long could get elected again in a state like this with television and the media and so on?

McKeithan: Well, in '56, we had a lot of television then and Earl never appeared on television. He was pretty slick. He was not a good television personality, nor radio. But I was very active in managing his campaign in '56. And we got a bunch of fine-looking young, fresh people on television for him. When Davis debate Morrison, or they'd discuss with Morrison, you understand, Mr. Earl just . . . just running loose. He played it pretty smart. I think if Earl Long were back on the scene today, he'd be a force and power and not . . . through his own personality, not because his name was Long, because of his own person- . . . he was something else, really.

As you probably found out, he was something else. He was a great showman. He had a lot going for him, a lot going for him. I liked him very much, but the last four years of his life I stayed completely away from him and he and I were out on the Public Service Commission then but . . . he just couldn't, because he was sick. You can't do anything with a sick man.

J.B.: Well, we had heard that you had broke with Earl Long. Is that correct?

McKeithan: Oh, break. I don't know what you'd call it. I just announced here last year he became governor in '56 that I didn't approve of his conducting himself as governor, didn't approve of his program. And everybody said I was a fool. And I had helped elect him governor, done everything I could and we were close, close and I was just in the paper the heir apparent to the Long dynasty, I think one story called it. But there is a little principle and honor in this thing. You got a little self-respect, for God's sakes. If it takes that to succeed, I think a lot of us when we began to see this thing, well, I don't want it. I've got to, you know, just condone the way he is conducting himself. Principly, I just don't want it. And I thought at that time, perhaps they were right, really. Thought perhaps they were right. At that time a governor could not succeed himself and someone had to run in '60. He called me here, here in Columbia when he was running for the Congress. I'll never forget it. He called me just a week or so before he died. I led that second primary and he said . . . no, it must have been the first primary because I didn't have . . . I defeated my opponent the first primary. I . . . it must have been two or three weeks before he died. He called me on the phone, said . . . First he called my brother and said, "Do you think John would talk to me if I called him. My brother is a doctor in the neighboring parish. And

he said, "We haven't . . . I haven't talked with him in over four years." Since I had issued that statement, and I didn't get any . . . I just issued that statement and started tending my job on Public Service Commission. And, "Yeah, I'm sure he would." So my brother called me, said, "Mr. Earl is fixing to call you." And he said, "I urge you to talk to him," said, "'cause he can't live very long." And I said, "Aw, he's too mean to die." I remember telling him, "Why, he's not going to die." He said, "Yes, he is. He's not going to live long." I said, "Well, I don't mind talking to him." So I picked up the phone, and he said, "Hello. Hello. How's the weather up there?" I said, "Fine, Mr. Earl. How you, sir?" "Well," he said, "I'd have elected you governor if you hadn't quit me." "Well, Mr. Earl," I said, "I didn't quit you." I said, "You know, you ran me off." I said, "You made it so difficult for me I couldn't stay there." "Well, I'd have elected you governor if you hadn't quit me." He said, "I think if I . . . if you'd let me put out a sample ballot down here," said, "with your name on there and mine, it would help me a lot," and said, "and wouldn't hurt you but a little." And he said, "You don't need no help." Said, "I need a lot of help. This is the meanest son of a bitch I ever ran against in my life." He said, "He'd talk out of both sides of his mouth at one time." Said, "He's got a mouth like a catfish." I said, "Yes, sir."

"Have you ever heard the way he talks to his poor old mama and daddy?" You know, he knew that my family was real close and everything and he knew that I revered my . . . revered my mother and father. He said, "Have you ever heard how that boy talks to his mother and daddy?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "You ought to hear it." He just

everything on me about his opponent, and I knew his opponent quite well. I said, "Mr. Earl, I think your opponent is going to vote for me, too." "I don't care who he's going to vote for." I said, "Go

ahead if you want to, and put out a sample ballot with me. That's fine." So I guess I had the honor of being the last man on a sample ballot with Mr. Earl Long. And that was our conversation on the phone. My wife was . . . was up in my office helping me address some cards out. We had sent a few cards, "Vote . . . if I made a good public servant, vote for me again." And she picked up the extension phone in the other office and listened and she . . . got through she said, "You don't owe me a dime for working for you." Said, "Hearing that conversation between you and Mr. Earl," said "I've been paid well." He was a slick one. He'd go out of state when . . . after he and I were weren't friends any more, political friends, he'd write her cards and write her letters. "Dear Margie, I always thought you were the sweetest little mother and wife I've ever seen. And I always consider you one of my dear friends. Sincerely, your friend, Earl." You understand? Oh, she'd

Mr. Earl writing me," you understand. She got a big bang out of it. She said, "Look here, Mr. Earl has written me." And he'd write her, too. And he knew he was getting to me a little bit, too. But he was a shrewd one, really. He was a real shrewd one. There wasn't any question about that. He was a shrewd one. Had a lot on the ball, too. In other words, the Long name didn't do it. He did it . . . he did it, oh, about 75 or 80% on his own. He was something. You ask anybody, now, he was something else. The last four years didn't count because he was really . . . he was sick but he was very scrupulous about the state's money. Fellow wanted to give him a campaign contribution, well, fine, thank you. But when it came down to dealing with the state, he was scrupulous as could be about it. He was awful upset if he felt like someone was overcharging the state or they weren't giving the best deal. That was my experience with him all along.

J.B.: We've had several people . . .

McKeithan: Well, I think the myth about Louisiana being more corrupt than any other state, what about Maryland? What about Texas? I just read where they got about half the cou- . . . the commissioners over there in Mississippi were getting kickbacks on culverts over there. They were selling those various counties. Have you read about that? Nothing like that happened down here. You find a person down the ranks where one or two isolated individuals is a crook but you're going to find that in private business. You take . . . take several United States attorneys, the task force, and start investigating a private business, you'll find some wrongdoing in there, too, that the *people* didn't realize was going on at all. But it's rather unusual for you to catch a person who is in a responsible position really violating his trust. You get some employees that's worked his way up to become a quasi-supervisor position and making some money, no matter how hard you try. I daresay the other states talking about their reforms don't have the strict law we have on investment of state monies. During my administration we made that so strict that really got to the point where the banks didn't want any state money on deposit. We charged them so much . . . so much interest for it. We made them pay us so much interest that when I became governor, one of the great here, and it wasn't as far as I know a payoff, but a great favor you could do a bank was . . . is to make a deposit of state funds in there. And we had rumors and then we had a couple of incidences where actually that . . . and in many incidences, in a number of incidences, the officials of the bank were making payment not to a governor or something like that, but to someone who actually had the responsibility of depositing those funds, like an auditor or a comptroller or one of the departments. They

had a little hanky-panky going there and besides that we picked up a lot of money for the State Treasury, too.

J.B.: Tell me, what's been the affect of P.A.R. on state government?

McKeithan: Not a great deal. Not a great deal, in my opinion. They'll nearly run you crazy down here. You get down there and do the very best you can and if they don't find something wrong, they haven't got any business. And I really ran . . . we nearly ran them out of business. I did everything the good government people suggested we should do to improve the state and they know that. And then they'd still nitpick around. If they couldn't find anything else, they'd go prove that some department had more employees than it had two years before. They don't take into account that perhaps it's operating two or three times as many institutions as they had previously. They say more employees in this department than it was last year. That means bad management and, you know, poor government. Wouldn't take into account the additional services, for example, that . . . that they were running. I didn't like P.A.R. I know Ed Steimel well. And he's got to find something wrong or he can't keep his job. P.A.R. . . . you see P.A.R. refuses to list their membership, who supports them. Isn't that interesting? Private, you see. And you can see it, you'll find the large industries, the very conservative, who feel that all taxes should be cut and services cut in half.

~~support~~. And then the papers *suggest* it, all the newspapers. And there they are. What makes them effective more than the fact that they are P.A.R. is the fact they give them tremendous newspaper support. And I caught him a time or two having changed his position completely from a previous administration to mine. And . . . but they've got to find something wrong.

J.B.: But haven't they taken positions that big business objected to. For example, all the banks pulling out for a few years because of P.A.R.'s position . . .

McKeithan: All the banks didn't pull out. They have been very careful to to get one segment at a time to prove . . . to prove just that, that they weren't the tool of businesses, you understand, done it deliberately. But the investment of idle funds, that's a recognized reform and good government thing in this state. But they went . . . it got as far as it should go now. You take a little poverty-stricken area like this of our state. Well, the state would come in here and put a million dollars in these two banks without charging a real high rate of interest, just really pump the economy up, where they could lend more money out at a cheaper rate of interest. It wasn't . . . in many instances, it wasn't a great wrong being done, you see what I mean? It was helping the economy around, particularly in these small areas. Well, but P.A.R. is . . . I don't think you'll find very many in political life who will say P.A.R. is a great thing for the state of Louisiana. I'd be surprised if they do. I don't think so. If they would do the purpose for which they say they are intended, making research and publishing facts, it would be a different thing. But they get on areas that are very political and then also you can take a sheet of facts and make it play Dixie or Yankee Doodle . . . For example, about industrial development. What's been industrial development in this state last year? Well, let's see, two billion dollars invested in the last year which is five times as much as has been invested in the last ten years. God, what a sensational headline! Then, well, what about jobs it produced? Well, actually less jobs were produced. I'm just talking about how . . . you

understand, if you bring that . . . they'll just pick out the part they want. I've had a lot of . . . I'm very friendly with them. I . . . most of their former officials I've put to work in state government. Many of them I've put to work in state government.

J.B.: Would you . . .

McKeithan: I appointed a commission . . . Joe D. Smith, for example, is one. He was one of the originators of P.A.R. I put him in state government.

J.B.: How about . . .

McKeithan: There are so many people I've already taken away from P.A.R.

It's made up of many good men but usually the people they had out front,

J.B.: How about the role of organized labor?

McKeithan: Very strong factor in this state. Not in getting votes at the polls, except in the urban areas, like New Orleans or Lake Charles, Baton Rouge. But now it's gotten to the point where in most instances labor and the blacks are together. But if you could turn in to an organized labor, anti-organized labor fight in this state, you would win if you were on the side of the anti-organized labor. And I'm very friendly with organized labor, as you perhaps learned. *they* supported me everytime

I've run. But I wouldn't say that where it would hurt them. But where they are really effective is in the legislature. This constitutional convention, for example, because they are well organized, they have very efficient leadership, Bussie and the people with him. And then they have managed to get their people into some real key positions in government. They have . . .

J.B.: Such as?

McKeithan: Well, perhaps I shouldn't say . . . I shouldn't say such as. I'll just say they are very influential in the state government. For example, you've got a head of an institution and labor is recommending him highly to get it and there he is. He's in a position of prestige and influence.

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: Is that because of the personality of Bussie?

McKeithan: As much as anything else. He is a very effective, aggressive, intelligent leader.

J.B.: What's the key to his effectiveness?

McKeithan: Strong, strong personality. Man of great courage and great intellect.

W.D.V.: See, we can't find another comparable situation in the country where labor . . . where a labor leader has the kind of influence we think he has in this state.

McKeithan: Well, he doesn't have in statewide elections. For example, when I was elected in '64, he was against me, although he and I were very friendly. They are not effective in the statewide popular election realms. They are effective in organization in the legislature. They have well-paid lobbyists there and in so many parishes they have been influential in electing legislators. I think if you interviewed Bussie that you would say . . . that they have really spent their force and effort in getting legislators elected.

J.B.: They don't . . . do they provide campaign assistance for statewide candidates?

McKeithan: Do you mean money?

J.B.: Financing or manpower.

McKeithan: So far as I know, they have never made a campaign contribution to me. When I ran for Senate there were some of their national . . . of their . . . for example, the Seafarers Union, for example, made a contribution to me in compliance with federal laws and regulations, which I presume came out of their national headquarters. I don't know how they do it but, so far as Bussie himself, to my knowledge, they do not give to statewide campaigns.

J.B.: Do they work in statewide campaigns?

McKeithan: Not actively. They usually just endorse, if the individual wants them to endorse they're for, and let it go at that. And they spend their work with the local level.

W.D.V.: Do you consider their endorsement an asset in this state?

McKeithan: Yes and no. You can't hardly tell a powerful group like that you don't want their endorsement and I wouldn't want to be saying that now, but Mr. Earl Long, for example, has always suggested to them, well, just be for me and just leave that endorsement off. That's my recollection of the way he did it. It's not as bad now as it was twenty years ago. But organized labor as such cannot carry today in this state, in a general . . . or popularity. I think Bussie would be the first one to tell you that.

J.B.: Do you see a . . .

McKeithan: The main strength they have there is really the force of personality of leadership in Bussie. He's a powerful man, an extremely courageous man, a very loyal man, and I have found to be a man of honor. I must say, although I was on their unfair list for about three or four years.

J.B.: Do you see . . .

McKeithan: I thought I could buck it and that labor organization kept

putting me on the unfair list. I went down there and talked to them and I don't think there was a vote against me putting me on that unfair list.

J.B.: What's the unfair list?

McKeithan: You don't know what . . . organized labor's unfair list? Can we turn that off just a minute?

(Interruption on tape.)

J.B.: . . . your administration you served eight consecutive years.

McKeithan: That's right.

W.D.V.: What were the highlights . . . what do you think in the eight years?

McKeithan: Well, we had a tremendous industrial inducement program in the state, the greatest the state has ever seen. There is hardly a parish in the state didn't get some industry we brought in here. We really . . . I hired a topnotch professional man from Mississippi, did not give it to a political, you know, did not treat it as a political
we got a professional. We brought ^{more}/industry in this state than they ever had before. Hardly a parish here but what got some industry. We handled race relations better than it's handled anywhere in the nation, not even close. We . . . we put more reform on the statute books than has ever been done before in the history of the state. I brought more just clearly professional people in to help me than has ever been done before in this state. ~~I ended~~ . I've got a general, retired lieutenant general, David Wade. He went to Tennessee and recruited and got us a topnotch professional warden, put him under civil service.

(Interruption on tape.)

I can't think of a thing I would have done . . . I would do differently, as I look back over it. I got the very best people I could to run

government.

I had General Wade running the Department of Institutions, the penitentiary and things of that nature. I went to California and recruited a professional man to run the Tourist Department, by the name of Morris Ford. I got a professional warden out at Angola ^{that} had been a real problem, ~~here all~~

the only thing because they wouldn't leave the warden alone, I thought. They didn't want to get a good man that would run it. I went and recruited me a man from Tennessee and got him under civil service and he, of course, they couldn't fire him, and so he's on there and doing a good job up there. I went to Mississippi and got a real professional to run the Department of Commerce and Industry. This P.A.R. organization you are talking about here is a . . . has a action wing of it called C.A.B.L., C-A-B-L. I worked intimately . . . very closely with them. I even used their executive director for six months as my executive secretary. And then when he left, I asked them to help me find somebody else, we came up with Mr. McDougal. The insurance program which they were investigating when he was indicted for having made a false statement, we had put in a form of self-insurance here for the state which had saved the state three-fourths of the insurance commissions which they had previously paid agents, do you follow me? It's self-insurance as far as the committee I appointed felt like we could. One of the great political handouts in the state had been the rent of state office space to political cronies or friends of political cronies. I put the state, the state office building, we build it . . . created a public corporation where we built the buildings, you follow me? Rented them to the state, took those rent contracts, departments of the state, bought and built the buildings. The only difference was that when the bond was paid off the title to the property reverts to the state rather than to a private

individual. I did that. And every year where I felt like we could save the state some money I did. I did not hesitate in bringing top-notch people in to run it. And another thing, I know we did a superior job in race relations. That's the conclusion of everyone. Superior job of that. Built more colleges and universities than had ever been built in the history of the state. This Northeast State University, the president told me we built more Northeast State University than was there when I was elected Governor. Nichols State College, now Nichols State University, now down on Bayou Lafourche, the president told me the same thing there. And we had a massive highway program going on, of course, it's come to a standstill now. For example, we built and had under construction when I left four new bridges across the Atchafalaya River. That's a river that just comes right down the middle of our state. During the history of the state there has only been two highways across that river. I don't know of a thing I can do that we'd do differently. Oh, when I started getting national attention. I started. . . I really started getting it, mentioned as a possible candidate for Vice President is where it does more, I guess. Here Life magazine comes out, turned me into, by implication, as a part of the Mafia or Marcello. It turned out that when they had the investigation, he didn't take the fifth amendment on a thing in Louisiana, not a single thing. But he took it on Texas. He went down there to testify. He said, "I will not take the fifth amendment on any individual or anything you ask me about Louisiana. But I reserve the right to take it on anything outside the state." Asked him if he knew me. He said, "I saw the governor one time in my life." He said, "I'm sure he doesn't remember me because it was at a political meeting, you know, a rally," and he said, "he was coming down a line shaking hands with people."

And he said, "I put out my hand and he shook hands." And he said, "I'm sure he didn't recognize me." I sure didn't. I don't know I ever saw him or had any contact with him in my life. "Well, you know any official in Texas?" "I respectfully take the fifth amendment." "Know any in Mississippi?" "I take the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh." Florida, took them all. Arkansas, everything. But it came to Louisiana, he said, "I'll answer any question you want to . . . me to." And the F.B.I. task force was sitting right there, taking notes, and recording everything he said, you understand, to get him on perjury and put him in the penitentiary. And, of course, it was just bullshit. But, when you get smeared up on a national magazine, it's just devastating. Absolutely devastating to me as governor. Sent the task force down here. And they based upon . . . part of the so-called task force to indict W. W. McDougal, Mr. Clean, for making a false statement before the Grand Jury and there hasn't been a glove laid on Marcello. If that, you know, if that's the Mafia and it apparently is because everybody . . . everybody is screaming it, you understand. And there hasn't been a glove laid on him. McDougal they indict for making a false statement and then, of course, was exonerated. Completely, by a 12-man jury. But we ran this state just about as clean as was ever run and it's beginning to unravel now. They're beginning to, "Well, I'll be darned. Maybe old McKeithan's telling the truth." I tell them, I say, "I'm so clean you won't believe it when you get through examining." You see, you've got a lot of people, men who are crooks and thieves at heart and in mind. But normally you take some chance when you violate a law, when you steal or take a bribe or something and they are afraid to do it. And they say, however, if I was in a position up there in high government where I could . . . all that money flowing

through my hands and architects and engineers doing things like they do in Maryland and every other state in the nation, I'd let a little of it stick to my hands somewhere down the line. And he's bound to have, because I'm an honest man and I'd do it if I was there and I know in my heart I would, and so he's bound to be doing it. And we'll catch him one of these days. And it's hard for some people to see but you might have a few people left in this country in public life who really are not in there to enrich themselves.

But so far as I know, no one really . . . has really questioned my personal integrity, and Life magazine went to some length to just kind of brush me aside, you know, and say I had some underlings who were involved which turned out to be untrue except for one old alcoholic I had picked up and tried to make something out of. But he got back on whiskey. Of course, he got involved in really nothing of any consequence, except he got . . . thought he was smart and called Marcello on the phone, things of that nature, and Marcello called him, you understand, but he had about as much influence with me as you did and I didn't even know you. To give you an example, you understand, of the kind of things of that nature makes sensational news.

J.B.: How about your political future?

McKeithan: I don't know that I have any. The incumbent governor is running high right now, real good. He's really a creature of mine.

W.D.V.: In what sense?

McKeithan: Well, I elected . . . I made him. I elected him to Congress when he was state senator. He knows that. I wasn't . . . it's kind of brazen to say he's a creature of mine but had he not been elected to

Congress . . . I gave him a stepping stone. I bodily elected him to the Congress. He'll tell you that I was instrumental if you ask him who elected him to Congress. But I say this, he's a . . . he got there. He's a fine looking man, he makes friends easily and we ran him for Congress because we thought he would be the easiest man for us to elect. But if I hadn't supported him, he wouldn't have won. I got the black votes for him in two or three key parishes the night before the election. Had I not done it he would not have gotten in the second primary.

J.B.: How did you do that?

McKeithan: He was a floor leader of mine. The blacks thought I was the greatest friend they had ever had in this state at that time and I had . . .

J.B.: You had a reputation . . . you had a reputation apparently of being Earl Long's chief speech maker among the blacks.

McKeithan: That's what he said, sorry rascal. At that time, it was awfully unpopular to say that. He said, well, he said I was the best nigger speaker that he ever heard. That was a hell of a note. I said that's a hell of a thing to say about a man. He was mad at me then. He kept . . . said, "Well," says, "he's the best nigger speaker I ever heard."

And I'd make a speech

once or twice to some black groups for him because I enjoyed it. They are a very appreciative group. Well, he got up and said I was a big nigger speaker. But I had stood up for the blacks and they knew it, while I was governor and they had . . . would like to, you know, show their appreciation for it. And besides that, I think they felt like I would not mislead them in the man they should support. And he had been a friend of the blacks, too. I did not mislead them. I would not have attempted to take them someone who I felt like would have, you know, would have been against

them and demeaned them and things of that nature. But I'm not trying to take credit but Edwin Edwards was one of my floor leaders and he ran him for Congressman.

J.B.: How would you summarize your political . . .

McKeithan: So was Bennett Johnston, as far as that is concerned. Bennett Johnston was one of my floor leaders.

J.B.: How would you summarize . . . well, getting back to that one then, which one did you support in the governor's race?

McKeithan: Neither. Each had been one of my floor leaders.

J.B.: You stayed out completely in that governor's race?

McKeithan: Frankly, everyone running, I had a very harmonious relationship with all of them.

J.B.: How would you summarize your political philosophy in terms of what role should the governor play?

McKeithan: In what area, in what field? What area?

J.B.: Well, in terms of state government, how do you perceive . . .

McKeithan: I think you should have a strong, strong state government.

I think you should have a strong, strong executive and that he . . . I mean by that that he not only should have a strong personality but he should have the powers to do . . . to effectively do it with. I think government is going to be less effective and less helpful the more it is diluted. Now from the chief executive in any state. Now the national thing I'm not prepared to . . . just to speak on. You're out of my realm. But to effectively get things done in the way of reforms, for example, I had to make compromise on the tremendous amount of reforms we made to get a majority of the legislature to vote for them. Of course, so many of the

legislators are not interested in reform. And I did some things there which bordered on the unethical in help . . . in doing things with the legislators to get them to vote for the Code of Ethics, for example.

I had one senator call me up right after the election in '67 and he said . . . my endorsement for so many years was tantamount for them being elected, at least that's what they felt because we had gotten about 82% of the votes. The second primary, I had no . . . I was just loose.

what I wanted. He called me up. I had not endorsed him. He called me and said that . . . told my executive secretary, said, "You tell governor that if he doesn't endorse me, I'm going to get beat. And that I'm desperate and that if he doesn't endorse me . . . if he does not endorse me I'm going to get on the radio and tell everything he has done for me." Now what kind of threat do you call that! You understand? I said, "Just tell him that he's an endorsed candidate." And I had done that to get him to vote for the Code of Ethics and to tighten up the investment of idle funds and the listing of . . . see, I passed a law down there, too, for example, listing of all . . . all of unclassified employees. Previously, you had only had to list the classified. But I passed a law where you had to list all the unclassified employees on every payroll

administration. Now you take, for example, about things I tried to do or, for example, in every other state's done it, about the commission on voting machines, which I knew had been a political pull. It turned out one of my associates made a tremendous commission on voting machines.

violated the law. Well, they said he was so close to me that he in truth was an official. Therefore, he had been bribed. But actually he wasn't on the payroll and they tried it twice and each time they . . . and then

they just lacked one or two of being exonerated. But at any

rate, about reforms I had immediately after I was governor, I had our Division of Administration get written assurance from voting machine manufacturers that there would be no commissions paid on machines sold in the state of Louisiana to anyone. Now we were sitting there with that assurance and it turned out that they had gotten to one of my associates and given him a commission and sold machines to the state. We sued the voting . . . we have a suit on there against the voting machine company now for those commissions to back because they had promised us in writing they would pay no commissions at all. Do you follow me? Just a minor thing but I assure you there wasn't any other governor in the United States of America that sought that assurance. Well, Shoupe was doing that in every state in the nation. You've ~~rad~~ read that, haven't you? And I was the only governor who had attempted to prevent the payment of commissions to someone who was close to the administration, which is a common practice in this state and every other state. And I was the only governor who had attempted to prevent it and get the saving for the state is what the record shows. And, man, mine was just as clear as could be . . . they had . . . we had the letter as evidence. Commissioner of Voting Machines, I mean, from the manufacturer of . . . there will be no commission paid in this state. We had . . . they had produced a letter there from the agent who previously had been given commissions in California somewhere that this governor down here doesn't believe in paying commissions that aren't absolutely necessary and this thing in Louisiana is a lot different now. It was all there for the jury to see. And the man who got them who was close to me felt like . . . he said, he testified that the man in California was going to make 20% and

he offered me half. I said, well, thank you. I'll take it. At any rate, that's just one of the minor things I'm telling you we did to save money for for the state of Louisiana. Worked out that someone made it anyway but there wasn't any question that I wasn't aware of it and I had tried to stop it. They had gone to great lengths to prevent me from learning about it.

J.B.: Governor, we have had several people tell us that you are the only person who could have gotten through the two-term . . .

McKeithan: There's no question about it.

J.B. . . . provision and . . .

McKeithan: I really didn't get it through. It was kind of a ground swell thing and I say it was really because I think there was a vacuum in this state as I explained to you previously. And we had done . . . we went down there the first year and did everything that just about anyone would have us do to improve state government. And since Morrison was dead . . . if Morrison had lived I daresay the second term amendment would not . . . would not have ever been brought up, but it wasn't something that I moved to get done. It was done by legislators really who had previously not been for me. And after it was there on put on the ballot, though, it was then a test of strength of my administration. I had to see that it wasn't defeated. It would have carried without opening my mouth. It carried about 71 or 72%, I believe, which is unheard of really in this state.

J.B.: We've heard some people tell us they think it's the most, single most important achievement of your administration.

McKeithan: Oh, I don't . . . well, I don't deserve any credit for it. I didn't even sponsor it. I don't think it's . . .

J.B.: But you do think it's helped strengthen the state . . .

McKeithan: I think that, if I look back now, that the successive two-year

term perhaps is the most desirable. With unlimited number of terms. Do you follow me?

J.B.: I'm not sure.

McKeithan: Like in Texas, Arkansas, two years, and you can run as long as you want to.

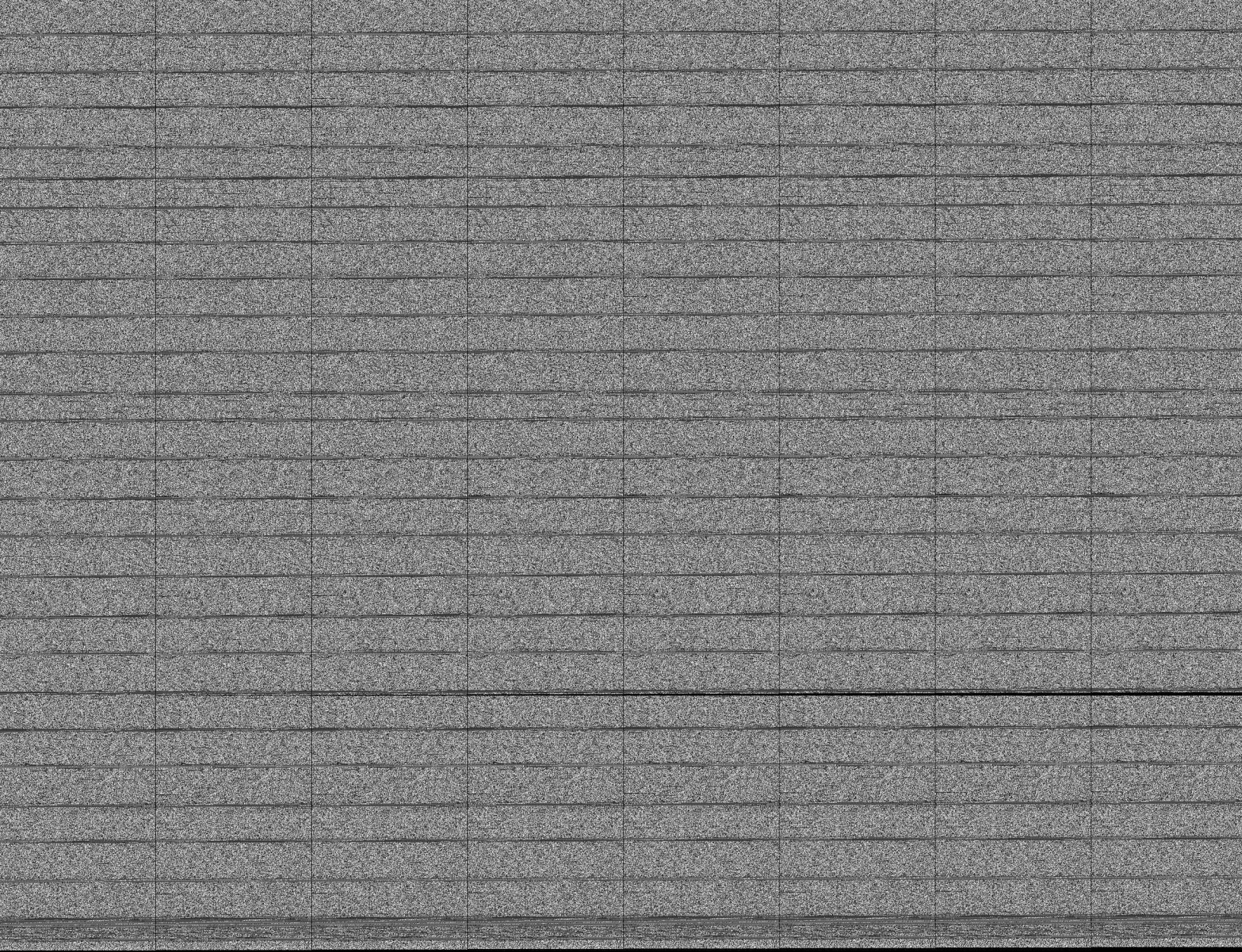
J.B.: Well, you think it ought to be a two . . . two four-year terms and that's it? Or do you think it ought to be . . .

McKeithan: No, you see, if I had my preference, I would recommend the two-year terms without any limitation . . .

J.B.: I'm sorry. I misunderstood you.

McKeithan: Then a man could quit if he got tired, if he felt like he had become ineffective. And the people would have a little better check on him and then if he . . . also the goal there if I just continued to really tighten up and do real good I'd stay here as long as I want to. And I'm inclined toward the two-year thing without any limitations on it. But not being limited to one term gives you certain advantages. A lot of things we did there in the first four years we could not have done had I been a lame duck. As I say, we did everything that the good government people asked us to do. There's not a thing . . . the only thing they asked us to do that we didn't do was equalization of assessments, property assessments, and that's what's going to defeat the constitution if it's defeated. And it probably will be the way it looks now. They have gotten into the property assessment thing now, which people don't understand and they don't want to understand it. They like it the way it is and I think it will defeat it unless they do some big changes in the next few days.

J.B.: How did you read what Edwards said the other day when he appeared before the convention?



to have seen my home. It burned a little over a year ago and I've built it back. Had some beautiful mementos of my eight years in office. They all were destroyed. I have a beautiful home down here on the lake and I . . . after you talked to me, I didn't know where to call you back. I was going to say well, come on down and we'll have coffee and we'll drive back and talk in the car and go up there and talk. But I don't have any really ambitions. The main thing I would like, my ambition is to have respect and confidence of the majority of the people in this state, whether it's in office or out. And I'm beginning to feel . . . last week was the first time I had accepted any speaking engagements in the last year . . . as I go around the state that there is some revival of that, you understand. That this man made us a good governor and he's been badly treated by some of the news media. By God, if he's been through this investigation by this federal task force and all this ambitious United States Attorney and not anything found, he must be as clean as a hound's tooth. For example, I talked to the Executive and Advertisers Club in Baton Rouge on Monday night of this week and they had the biggest crowd they had ever had in the history of the club and when I was introduced I got a standing ovation. I finished with a standing ovation. I introduced McDougal and he got a standing ovation and they're pretty damned independent and a pretty hard-nosed group, as you know, and I had a tremendous reception in New Orleans before that committee and around the committee, etc., and began to feel that people said, "Well, this man did really truly make us a good governor." And many of them felt that ~~from~~ ~~where that was concerned.~~ Those who knew . . . those who knew me, you know what I mean? But those who don't know, why, they are led by what they see and what they hear and what they read and by events. But those who were really in the know knew that. My ambition really is just

to have the respect and confidence of the bulk of the people of this state. Not just necessarily to hold public office again because I have been to the top of the mountain and to have been able to have the people spontaneously change their constitution, as they did. The polls showed that the only thing it had going for it was my popularity, the fact that I would run for governor again. That so far . . . basically over half the people did not prefer it. They had rather not have had it and so what I had was, "Let McKeithan run." That was what we had on our billboard. "Let McKeithan run." But the polls showed that if it had been left just whether or not they preferred two, they preferred the one term, so that's what the polls showed. I did not sponsor it but when I got in it, I couldn't stand . . . I couldn't let it be defeated. It would have been . . . it would have seriously affected our ability to perform if we had a disastrous defeat at the polls. So after the amendment was passed . . . after it passed the legislature overwhelmingly, without my support, just about everybody was for it.

J.B.: You weren't opposing it, thought, were you?

McKeithan: No, I wasn't opposing it, but I wasn't sponsoring it. My floor leaders did not sponsor it. I didn't have anything to do with it.

J.B.: Governor . . .

McKeithan: I was embarrassed somewhat. You, know, something like that, you ~~do~~ don't want to go down there politicking. It's just kind of embarrassing. Well, see, if Morrison had lived or had Earl been alive, it would not have been *possible* but we had to fill in a vacuum there to a great extent. And I made peace with people who I should have made peace with, Russell Long and Hale Boggs, who were powerful men in the Senate and the Congress. They had been opposed to me, but I knew them

both intimately. Same class L.S.U. Law School with Russell Long. And he has quit drinking now and become, I think, a very, I think, a very effective United States Senator.

W.D.V.: What's his influence in the politics of this state?

McKeithan: In elections, not very much. He put everything he had in the election of '64 and his man ran third and since that time, he's stayed out of it, virtually completely.

J.B.: Do you think he will continue to do that?

McKeithan: I think no question about it.

J.B.: One thing we've heard . . .

McKeithan: I suggested he come back and run for governor here in '72 and he had married this new wife. I said, man, why don't you come over here and take it over. He could have won, I'm sure. He's very popular in the state.

J.B.: Did he consider it seriously?

McKeithan: No, never did. I . . . I wasn't trying to get him here. I just said why don't you come back and run for governor and retire here in the governor's office. But I don't think he will now. He's got such a prestigious position in the Congress.

J.B.: One thing we've heard that cost you popularity was in the speculation in '68 the vice presidential nomination. What happened on that?

McKeithan: Well, I . . . if the Democratic party had come South for a running mate, and Bob Kennedy, had he gotten the nomination, very well could have. If they had come South, I was one of three or four who might have been selected and perhaps me because I had such a good record on race relations and was riding higher than any other southern governor at that time. Had just been reelected overwhelmingly for a second term, 82%.

And there was a possibility I might be a candidate for Vice President. Well, having your name thrown around as a possible candidate for Vice President is an honor in itself, particularly for a man of my stature, ability and background. And I did not refute it. I did not say, "I won't run with Hubert Humphrey." Hubert Humphrey was not popular in this state at all. And that cost me the friendship of a man, for example, like Leander Perez; that cost me his friendship. Because I did not refute that. Do you follow me? And then the Kennedys were . . . we had friends who were talking. As a matter of fact, Bobby Kennedy was coming to Louisiana, you know, when he was actively seeking the nomination. He was coming to Louisiana to appear at Loyola University and was to be the guest in the home of a close friend of mine. We were going to have a reception for him. And I had . . . I went to New York on some type of trip connected with state government. I was at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and Bobby Kennedy called me on the phone from out West somewhere to tell me about Martin Luther King's assassination. In the meantime, I had learned he had been assassinated, which would prevent him from coming to Louisiana and that he wanted to talk with me and he had hoped to visit with me then and he wanted to talk with me again, which indicated he had been considering the possibility. And that was . . . a national magazine, too, mentioned me as a possible candidate. But it had gotten me in a position where previously I had stayed in the middle between the liberal Democrat and the conservative Democrat and even the Republican. I just stayed out of it and had not taken a position yea nor nay. Do you follow me? When it reached the point where I could not . . . the Perezes would have me denounce Humphrey and a lot of the whites would have me denounce Bobby Kennedy. And I just felt like that I sh- . . . I didn't feel like announcing it anyway. Didn't want to for them to feel that way about it.

And that got me where I was considered as . . . as having gone out and gone . . . more or less sold out to labor and the blacks, liberal Democrats. That's just a calculated risk you take and I . . . it really didn't make that much difference to me. I couldn't and never could tell when lightning might strike. I might be Vice President. And Humphrey came so near winning. I went to see Humphrey after he was nominated and he and me, we talked about it. I said, "Mr. President," I said, "You *du* not going to be able to . . . this thing has gotten around, Mr. Vice President, where you aren't going to be able to carry the states in the South anyway. And I honestly don't think it would . . . a candidate, a running mate from the South would help you one iota to carry a southern state." I said, "I honestly don't believe that you and I together . . . now I could carry Louisiana for you." And I said, "If I were you, I'd get a man up East and try to win it up here. And I think that's your best strategy." He said, "You really *think so* ?" "I certainly do." I said, "I don't think you can carry a southern state if I run with you or anyone else down there, Connally or anyone else." And I said, "If I were you, I'd get me a man up East to try to win it here." And he almost did.

J.B.: This was before the . . .

McKeithan: Right close to . . . we were at that Democratic nomination.

(Interruption on tape.) Right . . . just after he was nominated.

J.B.: I thought you had gone home before the nomination.

McKeithan: No, I was there when he was nominated and then they commenced to nominate a Vice President. After his nomination I came home. I talked to him after he was nominated in my hotel room. I said, "I'm going on home. There is nothing else to do here." And I said, "I" I had the

I had the largest single black delegation up there of any state in the nation. First time a black ever went to a Democratic convention in the history of the world, I took them up there. You know that?

J.B.: Hm.

McKeithan: I took the first ones up to that. . . that got me a lot of . . . that didn't help me a lot. I took the first blacks ever been taken to a Democratic national convention. I took a whole slew of them. But, no, I talked to him after he was nominated and I told him what I thought. Of course, there are a lot of people who said, well, I got disgusted and left. I still wanted to be Vice President but I suggested to him that . . . I said, "I don't think that . . . I don't know what you propose doing." I said, "I'd be honored to run with you," or words to that effect, or someoother thing. "Any other Southerner would, I'm sure." But I said, "In my opinion, you can't carry a southern state, no matter who runs with you." And I said, "If I were you, I'd go East and get me a running mate and try to win it up here." That's what he . . . I'm not saying he did what I told him, but that's what he eventually did. And I said, "I'm going home. There's not anything else." Because, see, at that time, I was . . . helped him get the nomination. That hurt me badly. I helped him, you know, backed him for the nomination. Of course, when Bobby was assassinated, he didn't have any opposition but at that time he had something on his hands.

J.B.: What is the role of Leander Perez in Louisiana politics?

McKeithan: Oh, he's a strong conservative.

His strength has waned,

less and less. But up until about my term of office . . . He supported me in '64. I was not his first choice but in the second primary he supported me in preference to Morrison and it was very . . . very effectively helped me. Worked hard for me. See, I was in a position *that* very conservative

whites took the position that I'd just as soon have Morrison as have McKeithan. You understand? In fact, Rayneck told me that. I called him on the phone the second primary, asked him to support me for governor. He said, "I'd just as soon have Morrison as have you." I said, "You don't mean to tell me you're going vote" He said, "No, I'm not going to vote for him." He said, "I'll go on and vote for you, but," he says, "I'm going to support Charlton Lyons." That's the Republican, in the general election. He said that straight out. You've heard of Rayneck, haven't you? Told me on the phone. He told me, he said, "I'll tell you what I might do." Said, "You let me name the head of the state police, state registrar of voters, custodian of voting machines, the head of the highway" He started naming them off and I said, "Wait a minute." I said, "Can I keep the mansion?" He said, "Well, don't try to get smart." Said, "Well, after all, you called me. I didn't call you."