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Interview with John Knaggs, aide to John Tower, December 10, 1974,  
conducted by Jack Bass and Walter de Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

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Jack Bass: John, give us a little bit about your own background,  
political involvement.

Knaggs: Well, I guess the first involvement here in Austin was  
I worked for the legislature in 1961 while I was finishing up my journal-  
ism degree at the University of Texas. I was a volunteer at that time  
in Senator Tower's first election. That was the spring of 1961. Subse-  
quently I became a correspondent here in the state capital with United  
Press International covering politics and legislature and state govern-  
ment. And covered the 1962 campaign here in Texas. Was hired as public  
relations director for the State Republican party in 1963 and I held  
that position for about four years. Summer of 1967 I became a partner  
in a political consulting firm with Marvin Collins, who had been execu-  
tive director of the state Republican party about five years previous to  
that. So in the summer of '67 Collins and I opened a political consult-  
ing firm. We were active in a number of races, mostly here in Texas  
although we did handle a governor's race in Virginia in 1969. That was  
Linwood Holton's campaign, which Marvin managed.

Walter de Vries: What was your firm called?

Knaggs: Collins, Knaggs and Associates. We both had worked for

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Sen. Tower's re-election in 1966 in our party headquarters capacities. Then after the 1970 campaigns, Marvin left the business and I continued on as John Knaggs and Associates and my firm participated in the '72 campaign for Sen. Tower's re-election campaign. Other campaigns we worked in were Paul Eggers for governor in '68 and '70, George Bush in '70 for US Senate. A number of legislative races. We were fortunate in handling the first Republican victories in Austin, Houston in the legislature. Also we participated in the first state senate victory by a Republican in Dallas. We worked in a number of municipal races and so forth which I don't think would be of interest in your study because those are non-partisan.

J.B.: Did you work in Steelman's race?

Knaggs: No, I personally did not. As you know, Marvin Collins is now Alan Steelman's administrative assistant.

J.B.: Did Marvin work in that race?

Knaggs: Sure he played a prominent role in Alan's re-election this time. In the previous one I'm frankly not sure. I believe he did. He and I were not associated in '72. 1970 was the last year we were associated together and I kind of lost track of exactly what he was doing in '72. But I think he did participate in Steelman's campaign.

W.D.V.: How would you characterize the growth or lack of growth in the Republican party during that period. It really didn't get going until 1960, did it?

Knaggs: Well, not really until '61. I think the election of Sen. Tower would be more or less the starting point. There was a fairly

serious effort made by Thad Hutchison in 1957 in that special election in which Ralph Yarborough was elected. This was before my time. But it was a three way race, I'm sure you know. Thad Hutchison was a Republican and Ralph Yarborough was a liberal Democrat and Martin Dies Sr was a conservative Democrat. Under the old rules, which have been changed, but under the old rules of plurality won without a run off. This is why Ralph Yarborough won. But I mention this race because I think Thad Hutchison made a fairly serious race. But of course it was unsuccessful. Tower, of course, did mount a good race in 1960 against Lyndon Johnson for the Senate seat and then in '61 was elected. I think that was kind of the starting point for a lot of the organizational building that really went on in the early '60s. With Tower's '61 victory.

W.D.V.: How do you see it now? The party. Let me go back. Did you anticipate, starting in the early 'sixties, particularly the '66 victory, that it was going to keep on building? More state legislative seats and so on.

Knaggs: Well, of course you're never satisfied and our party growth has not been dramatic in terms of Congressional seats or, for that matter really, legislative seats. Although we finally picked up quite a few as a result of the court decision on single member districts. I felt like the assassination of President Kennedy and the attendant circumstances--the tremendous emotionalism of it having occurred in Dallas and in the state, and the ascendancy of Lyndon Johnson to the presidency--had a lot to do--plus what you might call the canonization

at that time of John Connally as governor--hurt the Republican party quite a bit. I think that held us back from '63, say, to '66. I think after '66 the ball seemed to be rolling a little bit. And the re-election of Tower was accomplished with a good margin. I think there were two Congressional seats picked up in that election, despite the fact that Johnson was still president and Connally was still governor. So I thought things were looking up. But we were unable, for whatever reasons, to capitalize dramatically--put it that way. We never broke through in the governor's race. We've never unseated a lot of entrenched Congressmen. We've made modest gains in the legislature. Not what I'd call dramatic.

W.D.V.: Why not?

Knaggs: Well, I think the ground rules are one of the reasons. The multi-member districting. I'm not familiar with other states--some of them but not many--but up until just '72 we only had single member districts in one county in this state, Harris county. And we got them in Dallas and San Antonio. This made a lot of difference. Immediately started picking up seats, obviously. But we still have not got single member districts in the rest of the urban areas of the state. And frankly, I think it's going to be very difficult for Republicans to be elected in these urban communities until we have single member districts. It's too expensive. I participated in this federal suit where we got single member districts in San Antonio and Dallas. My testimony was on the fact that it's just absolutely prohibitive to expect a person to file and be elected in Dallas, Texas, and try to raise \$50,000 to get

elected to a job that only pays \$400 a month. Which was frankly what we were faced with. And that's why we weren't electing people in Dallas. We'd elected one legislator there in about the last three or four elections.

W.D.V.: Were you able to attract candidates?

Knaggs: Well, since we have single member districts, you see, everything changed.

W.D.V.: Did you have difficulty with the multi-member districts?

Knaggs: Oh, absolutely, yeah. See, it depends on what county you're operating in. In Dallas, as I said, we went from one to seven or eight now. Just bingo in the next election. Simply because they could run in a contained district and didn't have to raise that huge amount of money just to win. But let's look at Tarrant county, Ft. Worth. We don't have a single legislator there. We have a state senator, but not a state representative. And that county will go Republican in a Republican year just as sure as night follows day. But having to run county-wide I think is a tremendous barrier to legislators.

W.D.V.: Do you anticipate that's going to change? There's another suit? But not by legislation.

Knaggs: No.

W.D.V.: What did '74 do to the party?

Knaggs: Well, '74 is a paradoxical year in Texas. The state-wide candidates were badly defeated, as I'm sure you know. Had a net loss of one Congressman. Lost to a conservative, panhandle Republican [?], Bob Price. On the other hand, on the local level, seen tremendous break-

throughs. Won county judge's race in both Harris and Dallas county. Two biggest in the state.

J.B.: What is the role of county judge?

Knaggs: He's pretty powerful. Lot of patronage involved. He presides over the county commissioner's court, which is comprised of four commissioners. And they run the county government.

J.B.: So he in effect is the chief administrative officer of the county.

Knaggs: That's correct.

J.B.: Does he have any judicial function?

Knaggs: Not really. They lied on that. But he's a pretty powerful man politically, traditionally in this state. These were unusual circumstances. There were hints of scandal, what have you, in both court houses. But nonetheless, the fact is people in those communities were willing to vote for their first Republican county judge. I think it's going to help us politically.

W.D.V.: So you broke through at that level, but you lost one Congressman and you lost in the state legislature.

Knaggs: The state legislature was a net loss of two, I believe. There are three Republican state senators, only one of whom was up this time. You know, they draw for two or four year terms. Only one of them was up. And she won. And that's Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ of Ft. Worth. She won barely. She won a very close election. She was re-elected. In the house of representatives I think the net loss was two, out of I guess

seventeen. Had a hard time keeping . Lost one seat in San Antonio, lost one in Harris county, Pasadena, Texas, outside Houston. Pardon me, I believe the net loss was only one, because we picked up one in the panhandle.

W.D.V.: Other than the multi-member districts, are there any other factors or variables that make it difficult for the Republican party to grow in Texas?

Knaggs: I think so. I think the business and industrial community has traditionally stayed with the so-called conservative Democrat faction in state politics. And I think this imped<sup>e</sup>s our Republican opportunities because invariably the conservative Democrat candidate for governor is much, much better financed than the Republican. Which again may be a paradox in other states. But in this state I think you could prove it by just going up there and looking at the figures in the secretary of state's office. They're getting a lot more money and they still retain the labor support and what have you--the traditional Democratic support--which doesn't want to identify or participate in the Republican side. So they're having their cake and eating it too, so to speak. Now there are a few exceptions to this where some of the supporters of Sen. Yarborough and some more independent liberals have come over and openly--not come over, but I mean they have openly helped the Republican candidate. Not only US Senate, but also for governor occasionally. When this happens, you know, you have a little more interesting ball game. But when the conservative Democrat candidate for governor has got all that money, plus the organizational support, plus the tradition in the

state, plus most of the newspapers. Makes up a political campaign you know who's going to win.

W.D.V.: Is it an oversimplification to say that the strategy to build the Republican party in Texas was to make it a conservative party?

Knaggs: I think the old theory was. Certainly in the early 'sixties, when the Goldwater candidacy was blooming, this was the idea. To give conservatives a home in the Republican party. And of course a lot of this was pegged to the Goldwater candidacy. You know, if you're conservative you ought to be for Barry Goldwater, you ought to be a Republican. You know, blah-de-blah. And in '62 I think this was having some effect. John Tower had been elected our US Senator. So you had the credibility there of having a senator. You know, here's a man who's been elected. I think this may have been one of the main reasons that Jack Cox was willing to switch parties. He had run for governor in the Democratic primary in 1960 against the incumbent, Price Daniel. And he switched parties and ran as a Republican in 1962 and ran a very credible race against John Connally. Who was a tremendous candidate. I covered that campaign, the Cox-Connally race. Real good candidates. But Connally. . . you know, he was good on TV. The young John Connally was really quite a candidate. But anyway, Cox I thought ran a very credible race. Got about 46 percent running for governor. But to try to answer your question, it was a very conservative party at that time. Or at least I think that was the main thrust of it.

W.D.V.: What is it now?

Knaggs: I think it's still basically conservative. It's not

that kind of pitch.

W.D.V.: But the strategy was to get the conservative Democrats to move into the Republican party. And John Connally's role, in the last couple of years, was to do that. But apparently nothing happened when he switched. Or did something happen? '72 when he headed the Democrats for Nixon. . . .

Knaggs: Well, he didn't switch parties until '73. The effect would have been the '74 election. But in '72, you know, his open support for Nixon and all certainly was very beneficial to Nixon in this state. There's no question about that. In '74 you just never know.

J.B.: Let's go back to '72 for just a minute. Here was Connally, had been in Nixon's cabinet. He came back and he was very active in the Nixon campaign. Have you seen Neil Pierce's book? He has a chapter on Texas in which he quotes Nancy Palm blaming Tower for, in effect, keeping Republicans from making a broader challenge in '72. More Congressional seats, more legislative seats. Making a real across the board challenge. She blamed it on Tower for putting the brakes on because he feared it would bring out more Democratic opposition in his race. And syphon off more money from his race.

W.D.V.: The analogy is that that's the same thing Yarborough did when he was Senator, discouraged liberals from running because it would hurt his candidacy.

Knaggs: Let me go back to '66 because I'm on familiar ground in both those races. '66 and '72. I'm not in '61. I was a volunteer and all but I didn't know what the party leadership was up to and all. But

in '66. Go back to '64. You know the defeat was terrific. We lost both Congressmen in Texas. We had no Congressmen at all. I think we had ten legislative seats. Lost all but one. The loss was absolutely devastating. Okay. The party leadership, in concert with Sen. Tower-- and at that time Texas had a very strong Republican state chairman. I'm sure you've dealt with him or known about him. Peter O'Donnell. <sup>O'Donnell</sup> ~~O'Donnell~~ and Tower and the rest of them, who participated in those decisions, felt like it was really going to be tough to get back up in the '66 race. It did look pretty bad. So, at that time, there was no effort made whatsoever to make a broad challenge. They didn't want a strong gubernatorial race. They didn't want on up and down the line for obvious reasons. It would have been counter productive. So that's possibly what some other people may refer to in relation to '72. But I don't think it's true. In '72 everybody that I was working with in the Tower campaign pretty well took it for granted the turn out was going to be high anyway. It didn't make any difference as far as local contests were concerned. There was going to be a big presidential year turn out. So it wasn't that kind of thing. There was a spirited contest for the Republican gubernatorial nomination. So that race was going to be run anyway. Didn't make much difference. I can't tell you much about the other races because I didn't pay much attention to them below the gubernatorial level. But. . . oh yes I did. I remember one. A state treasurer's race was run pretty hard that year. Got 46 percent. But I don't agree. I think there was quite a bit of effort made in '72. You had president, US Senator, governor and state treasurer.

J.B.: But you had the other constitutional offices weren't contested, nor were a number of legislative seats nor were about half I think of the Congressional delegation.

Knaggs: Well, in Congressional, I honestly cannot remember. But again, if I was sitting up there in Ft. Worth and you know somebody came to ask me to run for the House of Representatives up there I'd say no. If I'd call an ad agency and they told me the budget I'd need to get known in Ft. Worth I wouldn't run. Some of them did. But you know, I think they're fools. Not foolish, but I think it's so up hill it's unreasonable.

J.B.: Even with Nixon's coattails to ride on in '72?

Knaggs: I think your ticket splitter syndrome comes into play. People vote that way in this state. They wander all over that ballot. Our state representative here in Austin, Maurine Hanley, outpolled Nixon in Travis county. And I can give you all kind of examples of ticket splitting in that election. Sure, Nixon got the biggest vote, but he didn't necessarily have all that much coattails.

W.D.V.: What could you say Tower has done to build the party since he's been its leader.

Knaggs: Number one, he's won re-election twice, which has been I think extremely important in this state. He has, on a number of occasions, lent his support to other candidates both for fundraising and rallies and direct mail and so forth. Which I think has been of some help in some of those races I mentioned where we were getting our breakthroughs in the legislature. As I recall, the Senator lent his name to

virtually all of those campaigns.

W.D.V.: Is there a Tower campaign organization in Texas, or does he use the traditional Republican apparatus? Is there a ~~Republican~~<sup>GOP</sup> organization throughout the whole state?

Knaggs: Yeah, but I can't tell you. If you haven't already scheduled a visit to Republican state headquarters, you'd have to get these facts over there, because I just don't remember how many chairmen they have.

W.D.V.: But is that organization separate from what you could call the Tower organization?

Knaggs: Well, it was in '66 and '72. I don't know exactly if I can explain this right. The door to door canvas that was conducted in 1966 was conducted through, I think, the Republican party, for Tower. Now Tower's campaign people had a lot of input into how they wanted it canvassed and how many precincts and targeting and all that. But I think they used the regular party organization as I recall. In '72 there wasn't a door to door canvas. It was all done by telephone and it was combined with Nixon's operation. They were called Nixon-Tower phone banks. I really can't remember whether they used the regular Republican volunteers or Tower volunteers or what. I'm sure a lot of those people were both, kind of meshed together. But both in '66 and '72 Tower did have a separate headquarters and staff.

W.D.V.: Did he organize the state the way the Democrats do? I mean they pretty well ignore the party apparatus and set up their own personal organizations. And each state-wide candidate's got his own

organization.

Knaggs: No, I don't think so. Certainly not in '66. I can remember that campaign, as far as organizational work, better than I can '72. Because in '66 I was working at Republican headquarters. I was more familiar with how they did all that. But I know they went through the regular Republican apparatus in '66. In '72 I just flat cannot remember. I suspect, since they were combined Nixon-Tower phone banks, they were ad hoc organizations. Probably not regular organizations. Would pretty much have to be. For those canvases.

W.D.V.: Why does it take so much money? What was it, \$2.4 million in '72 for Tower to win when he had the Nixon going with him. I have trouble understanding an incumbent Senator spending all that money with Nixon on the ticket, running almost a joint campaign. He didn't win it by very much.

Knaggs: 300,000 votes. Tower did. I can just again point out to you that in race after race after race in this state there is a whale of a lot of ticket splitting. Whether you say you're to Nixon or not, I think some fairly large percentage of voters out there . . . they're going to make up their mind independently of the top of the ticket.

W.D.V.: It's also a big state.

Knaggs: Oh, lord yes.

J.B.: Fulbright spent \$900,000 last year in the Democratic primary.

W.D.V.: It's asserted that that was the most money spent in a

Senate election anywhere, period. What Tower spent in '72.

Knaggs: Is that right? I was thinking Connally spent over \$2 million running for governor back in '62. I know for the United States Senate. I was just thinking about this state. You know, we have more media markets than any state in the Union. Got 56 commercial tv stations in this state. When you start looking at media budget here, you just chew up money just as fast as you can write it on a piece of paper. It's extremely expensive. Travel has gone up I don't know how much. But you know how much it takes to fly around this state. Terrific. I've forgotten how much was spent on media in '72, but substantial amounts for Tower. I'm sure you've studied in New York and California. But tv spots in Dallas are now up on some of that prime time to \$800 per 30 seconds. Terrific. We spent about \$600,000 in this governor's race and hardly even made a dent. People barely knew that [Granberry] was running.

J.B.: If you wanted to put on a half hour documentary on every tv station in Texas, what would it run roughly.

Knaggs: Just to hit every market would cost you about \$18 or \$20,000 just be one station. If you wanted to saturate them, not quite three times that, because some of them don't have three stations. But some of them have got more than three down there. Maybe three times that. \$60,000. Something like that. Plus production.

W.D.V.: Do you detect any change in campaign techniques since '61?

Knaggs: Yes. I think the major changes--and I suspect this is true of other states--the most dramatic thing since '61 to today is that more and more people--and I'd say this is probably particularly true in suburbs--are really turned off on politics. It wasn't just this year. This year was the worst, obviously. Turn out in this state was just unbelievably low. Barely 30 percent. But back about '66 I guess, my former partner Marvin and I were talking about it. Just seemed like it was harder and harder to get people to come out to any kind of political event, particularly in the cities. They're just getting nearly all their politics off the television and the newspapers, I guess. Very distant. A barrier there or something. Lack of interest. Whatever you want to call it. I think it's getting more and more pronounced as time goes by. So that to communicate effectively in Texas in a political campaign you have to use, I think, a lot of media. Particularly in the metro-urban areas.

W.D.V.: That means you have to spend a lot of money. Some people charge that big money controls Texas politics. That they decide who the candidates will be. That means it's going to be worse in the future.

Knaggs: Well, that's possible. Unless there are tighter limits or controls put on spending and correspondingly more public service time made available, for instance, on television. Maybe a little more extensive news coverage, if that were the case. In gubernatorial races, for instance, I think it would improve the situation. Take off some of the burden of having to raise so much money. Otherwise I would tend to agree. I think in Briscoe's case, in his first election and then his

re-election, he put a lot of money in there and it's really helped him immeasurably. He's had the advantage, no question about it.

W.D.V.: Why doesn't the big money go to the Republicans like it does in most states? You said the conservative Democrats get all the money.

Knaggs: Well, I think the world loves a winner and they've been used to winning with conservative Democrats. There's never been a Republican elected to the governorship of Texas in 100 years. Perhaps if a Republican won things would change.

W.D.V.: Does Tower get some of that money?

Knaggs: Yes. See, he's a winner and he's been in. He's a known quantity. He's, of course, now well established. He's been in since '61. Fourteen years experience. And of course he has a conservative voting record and he is quite acceptable to the business and industrial community.

W.D.V.: Do you see the Republican party growing much in this state in the next ten years?

Knaggs: I still think the key is the governor's race. I think if we could elect a governor, I think it would change the ball game.

W.D.V.: Do you see that coming?

Knaggs: Well--

J.B.: Let me ask you a question about that, John. Arkansas elected a Republican governor. Florida elected a Republican governor. Virginia elected a Republican governor. Tennessee elected a Republican governor. In all those states in the last couple of years the Republican

legislative numbers have diminished. Godwin won, but he lost five seats in the legislature when he won. In North Carolina they got wiped out. They went from fifteen senators to one and thirty-five representatives to eight or nine.

Knaggs: To what do you attribute that? Watergate fallout? Couldn't have been any state issues that compelling, could it?

J.B.: It's open to interpretation.

W.D.V.: The point is, it happened. What were considered to be solid Republican gains were just wiped out.

Knaggs: Well, all I can say, at least in my experience, I feel that the major associations, the people who really exert a lot of influence and are really active in state government are very hesitant to support Republicans because they don't think they can win. I think winning the governor's race would be pretty dramatic. I may be relating it to the Tower experience. But it would provide a breakthrough. It would provide a lot of interest. It would stimulate a lot of interest in the party. It might get more people who would be willing to run on a Republican ticket. All of these things, I think, would get more and better legislative candidates. But let me mention one thing in regards to the legislature. And again, I don't know all the other states at all. But I think in this state we have two significant barriers. One is the filing deadline, which is so early in this state. The first week of February. It's hard to get people to think about running so far ahead.

W.D.V.: That benefits the incumbents.

Knaggs: Sure it does. And the other thing is the salary. See,

I've gone out and tried to recruit candidates before for the party. And it's easy to recruit somebody running for city council or county commissioner than it is the legislature. Because even though you think it's a more prestigious position, perhaps. But when a man has to sit down--and bear in mind most Republicans are business and professional people--and think about splitting their home between Austin and wherever. Time away from their profession and business. At least four months a year maybe more, depending on special sessions. And all for \$400 a month. You'll find your prospect list dwindling in a hurry. So it's hard to get people even to sit down and get serious about running for the legislature on the Republican ticket. For a number of things. And then this thing I mentioned about here in Tarrant county, Ft. Worth. And the guy says how much it will cost in advertising campaign. Spend \$25 or \$30,000. Couldn't possibly raise that much money. And he can't. Three strikes and you're out. One, the election of a Republican governor would help immeasurably. Number two, would be the extension of single member districts throughout the urban areas of the state. It's back in the courts. We're hopeful it will happen, but you never know. The other thing, I think, is changing the filing deadline and the pay.

J.B.: Is there any move to raise legislative salaries?

Knaggs: Takes a constitutional amendment. We had a vote on it about a year ago and it went down the chute again. [Wanted to] pay \$15,000 a year. But it went down the chute. I don't know when it will ever happen. You've got a lot of staffers on the legislative staffs making a

lot more than the boss.

J.B.: What was the provision in the proposed new constitution on legislative salaries? Did that include an increase?

Knaggs: I can't remember whether it was that or a pay commission. I think it was a pay commission, that would have been set up to set legislative salaries. The whole thing went down the chute so it's a moot point.

J.B.: What do the polls show in Texas in terms of people's self identification as Republicans?

Knaggs: Very, very small. The last one I remember was run this fall. It was only about 15 or 16 percent.

J.B.: It's about the same as the rest of the South. Do you remember what it was for Democrats and independents?

Knaggs: I think it was fifty some odd for Democrats. 56. Something like that. And the rest independent.

J.B.: Do you know if that reflected some increase for the Democrats?

Knaggs: I believe it did. Those figures are off the top of my head, but I think it was a slight loss on the Republican side. I figured that was due to Watergate. Not as many wanted to salute when things were bad. We get a lot of questions that are phrased like Republicans versus the Democrats in this community or that community as though we had an identifiable two factions pretty close by. And even in Dallas, you know, which is traditionally the most Republican city in the state, I think up there there's only about 20 percent will openly

identify with Republicans. They're behavioral Republicans and vote Republican in most elections.

W.D.V.: And they have for a long time, haven't they? Why is it they don't identify? Because of the primaries?

J.B.: Because of Watergate, this year. Do you know if it was any significant change from '72?

Knaggs: I think it was a slight decrease, but I'm not positive. The primary turn out was down. Of course it was down in both parties. That was the lowest Republican primary vote in several elections this past time. But the turn out was so low, you've got to be careful on drawing a lot of conclusions. Because Eggers, running for governor in 1970, losing on a Republican ticket, got more votes than Briscoe got winning this time.

[Interruption]

--Yeah, Bentsen's up next time. I haven't heard any real noises. I guess if anybody came out and really made a serious race on Bentsen it would pretty much have to be some Republican Congressman.

J.B.: So you'd have to go to the existing delegation to find somebody to run. What about governor in '78? Is there any other way for the party to develop leadership other than the Congressional district and state legislature?

Knaggs: As I said, Eggers' has run twice. I don't much think he would go again. So it would probably be Granberry, if he wanted to run again, would make a go at it. Or probably somebody out of the

legislature. There are two or three of them in there that are pretty sharp and ambitious. I'd say Ray Hutchison would be probably the most likely. He announced last time for governor. Ran about three or four weeks and decided better of it and got out. At that time Hank Grover was still running and Granberry and one other fellow. There were four of them in there. Hutchison dropped out and Grover dropped out and it wound up with Granberry and one other guy. Granberry won. I would guess Hutchison would be probably the most likely. He's from Dallas. Real sharp guy. Has only been in one term, but he's smart as a whip. Probably is going to be a factor in whatever they do in the legislature. We have a good state senator from Dallas named Alec Harris. He considered running for lieutenant governor this last time and decided not to. Very attractive candidate.

W.D.V.: How come the Republicans decided to run someone against the state chairman?

Knaggs: In '72 the guy I used to work with, Marty Samuel~~s~~, ran against the state chairman, Jesse James. James was vulnerable. He was kind of thought to be--and there wasn't anything illegal put out on him--but he was thought to be somewhat tainted by the Sharpstown scandal that shook up Texas politics so much. I think this is one reason decided to run against him. It wasn't the Republican hierarchy or anything. It was just a state representative thought he might get him because of being in the Sharpstown thing. I believe that was the main reason he thought he had a chance to win. He didn't spend much

money. He got 46 percent and spent about \$160,000. Which isn't much in this state. I guess maybe you could say he was helped by Nixon's candidacy. But the ticket splitting was very interesting, because he ran ahead of Nixon and Tower. Not only here but in a couple of other places. Most dramatically here, that I recall. So again, I think it points up that this state is full of ticket splitters, full of independents. They do tend to vote Democratic, though, if they feel like that guy's got the edge. If the Republican is a real good candidate and they field an independent, broad-based type of campaign, I think he's got a crack at it, depending on the year.

J.B.: Do the Republicans in the legislature work as an active caucus?

Knaggs: No.

J.B.: Is that a weakness?

Knaggs: Oh, you can argue it both ways. My experience in the legislature here is that there are more substantive issues argued over rural-urban lines than they are party lines. It's very rare that there is really anything party oriented. Stuff on election code, yes, something like that. But most of the other issues. . . there are not enough Republicans for there to be a real two party type factor. Rural-urban issues seem to be more dominant.

J.B.: Do you know why the Republicans in the legislature don't serve more as a watchdog capacity?

Knaggs: Oh, I think they try.

J.B.: Has there been anything that's gotten any attention in

that regard?

Knaggs: Well, to be real frank, I think after the Sharpstown scandals hit everybody else was very careful. I don't know if there is anything wrong going on up there or not, but that was quite a scandal and it really shook the foundations up.

J.B.: Who was the land commissioner before Armstrong?

Knaggs: A guy named Jerry Saddler.

J.B.: His problems weren't related to Sharpstown, were they?

Knaggs: No.

W.D.V.: Is he the one that went to the penitentiary?

Knaggs: No, I don't think he went up to the penitentiary. He was always contraversial. He'd do things like. . . [something about not letting a photographer take his picture]. People claimed they couldn't find him for two weeks. Gone to east Texas hunting or something. Wouldn't tend the store. I can't remember all those things now. He was very controversial, though. Bob Armstrong was a very nice, clean cut young fellow. He walked right on in.

W.D.V.: Who do you see as the strongest Democrats in the race for governor?

[Interruption]

J.B.: Was it a surprise to Republicans, after Connally switched and before he got into his other problems, that he did not attract a lot of Democrats with him? Wasn't this supposed to be the real big cross-over move. That Connally would be the guy who could bring them over?

[End of side of tape.]

--Republican party and he was very warmly received by these Republicans. I think if he had not been implicated in this milk thing and had he put his full weight behind, let's say, Granberry, I think you would have seen some change in that campaign this fall. You would have seen more financial support and more organizational support. Because I think Connally would have swung it, just like he did for Nixon. The people who follow John Connally, I don't think, care that much about the party label. They're more interested in Connally's leadership and what he was trying to accomplish. That's why I think at least most of them would have supported Granberry had Connally not been implicated in the milk situation.

J.B.: Do you think he would have also brought in a number of other people? You know, candidates, this sort of thing.

Knaggs: I think some. That's hard to say as far as candidates are concerned. There's been speculation in the past that a number of conservative Democrats would change parties. I mean office holders. I think any incumbent politician looks at it a little differently. He looks at his real hold card to see whether or not he thinks he can win on that ticket or not. That sort of thing. So I wouldn't even speculate on how many might have crossed the line. But getting back to the kind of support he could muster behind Nixon in '72, I think he could have-- maybe not that strong for somebody like Granberry, because Granberry was challenging an incumbent Democrat. That's a different ball game than an incumbent president, obviously. But I still think a lot of people would have followed Connally, a lot of conservative Democrats.

J.B.: How do you view the lack of party registration in Texas in terms of the Republican party?

Knaggs: I don't really have anything to gage it by. Not being active in other states, it's just hard for me to say. The things that I mentioned to you earlier, the things that I feel are the worst barriers to Republican growth, moreso than registration. Because I feel like as long as the Republican party is strong enough to be a vehicle in most of the communities of the state to put people up for public office and still win your share of elections, you can get a couple of these ground rules changed. I think those are very important. But I really don't know about registration.

W.D.V.: What have I missed?

Knaggs: I really don't know. I'm not much of a historian. If there are any election you want to try to retrace I would just have to do it by

[Interruption.]

J.B.: You say this was a poll run by the Houston Chronicle the day of the assassination? And it showed Johnson at an all time low in Texas. That he was actually a negative factor.

Knaggs: As I recall the survey, Johnson was considered a negative factor.

J.B.: Do you recall why? This was before the passage of the '64 civil rights act, so it presumably was not racial.

Knaggs: No, I don't believe it was, but I'm trying to remember what it might have been. Bear in mind the Kennedy-Johnson ticket won

Texas by a very close margin in 1960 anyway. Other than the Cuba missile crisis I can't remember a very dramatic event between the '60 election and this survey. But I do recall the survey showing Johnson at an all time lowest ebb in Texas and that Goldwater was projected on the survey to be leading Kennedy. This was in the early editions of the Chronicle on November 22, 1963. It was jerked from the subsequent editions as the news came in of the assassination in Dallas.

W.D.V.: How long will the effects of that assassination be felt in Texas politics?

Knaggs: As far as directly felt at the polls in elections, I think '64 was the dramatic impact. I think by '66 the impact was lessened and maybe it wasn't too much effect at all. I'd say '64 very, very definitely, obviously. I couldn't say past then.

J.B.: What's your assessment of Lloyd Bentsen?

Knaggs: I personally think he's a very adroit politician. I grew up in south Texas and he was our Congressman when I was a young fellow down in that part of the state. He always did his homework and was so strong that no one took him on in either party as I recall. I do think he's a very adroit politician. If you have any specific questions I'll try to answer them.

W.D.V.: Do you think he is seriously considered within this state as presidential material?

Knaggs: That's a hard question for me to answer because I'm not active in the Democratic circles. The one major newspaper in this state

seems to give him a lot of attention. That's the Dallas Morning News, which is an important newspaper politically. They seem to be behind him. The L.A. Times bought the Dallas Times-Herald. The Dallas Morning News is owned by a small group of people there in Dallas. I don't know. I feel like Bentsen's got at least a fair chance simply because it doesn't seem to me like any of the other Democratic candidates have that kind of lead or anything. And with Mondale out of the picture, I don't know, it seems like Bentsen might have a chance. I just don't know. But he will be in the awkward position, as you know, of having to probably run both for the US Senate and for the president simultaneously.

J.B.: When is the Democratic primary for the Senate held? In the spring?

Knaggs: Yeah. Starts in the winter. The filing deadline is the first week in February and then the election's in May, first primary. Not that he necessarily will have strong opposition. He might, in the primary. Who knows? It's too far ahead to say. But he'll be up for re-election in the Senate the same year as the next presidential election.

[End of interview.]