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This is an interview with Louisiana State Senator Edgar Mouton. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries on January 13, 1974. Susan Hathaway transcribed the interview.

Mouton: In '56 you had pretty well defined lines. You had Longs and anti-Longs and whether they were Longs or anti-Longs, the philosophies blended fairly well into two different positions, almost like conservative and liberal or Socialists and non-Socialists. But McKeithan broke the barrier when he ran as a Long man, as an old Long man and was able to absorb many of the Morrison people into his camp in '64 to '68. So you had no real political camps based on Longism or anti-Longism when Edwin ran.

Walter DeVries: So he was the end of that era in a sense?

Mouton: I would mark him so, yes. I would think so. Earl died right after the election in '60, when he was elected to Congress and died within a week after election. I think, up until the time of Earl's death, we still had the very strong line of Long, anti-Long, and

you could say Sam Jonesisms, but it was just the anti-elements against the pro-Longs. But McKeithan got in, while he used the Long base for support in south Louisiana, because the Longs had always been popular in south Louisiana among a certain element. Once he got in, being a pretty astute politician, he absorbed as much as he could of the Morrison support in south Louisiana to build a better base for himself, while trying to keep as much control with the Long support that he had. He took on Gillis, and Gillis has never been recognized really as the heir of power to the Earl Long

dynasty. Now Russell is a different breed of cat. He is in a little nitch all by himself. When you see Russell, he is Huey and a little combined, but only for Russell. He can't bring that anywhere except himself in this area. I am not speaking state-wide. But McKeithan, I think, really shattered the lines and brought some unity, if I can use that word to north and south Louisiana. And where there was not as much antagonism between north and south, if you will look at McKeithan's appointees, he possibly had more south Louisianians in his high echelon than any Governor ever including Edwards. On every board he had most of his key personnel. ~~He had B~~

Just about every place you went his top man was from south Louisiana. When Edwin ran, of course, he just, I think he completed the cycle. He just about destroyed any semblance

of Long, anti-Long because the campaign was not anti-Long, it was McKeithan and corruption. It was a whole new ball game. So, I think, from a practical standpoint, that era of Longism ended in '64.

W.D.: Do you think the era of *Northwestern* domination in state-wide office is a power shift to the south?

Mouton: I have never been convinced that there was a controlled state government by north Louisiana. I was convinced that north Louisiana controlled the Governor's chair, but they paid a certain amount of political homage and patronage — ~~and~~ based on the need of the population of south Louisiana and the economic impact on the state of South Louisiana, I think that our part of the state, and this is almost pure heresy, fared as well as it could under any Governor under the Longs and under the Sam Jones and under McKeithan, as if they had been right in the middle of south Louisiana. Because while they were from north in geographical location, their political power base was from the south. They gave as much to the south to maintain that power base, as if they were from the south originally. So it has never bothered me that you have north Governors and this is true heresy. I've heard them speak for years about ~~you know~~, south Louisiana. Edwin is there now, and he is a political friend of mine. I was raised with him. We came from the same area,

and he is very kind to our area, but no more kind than McKeithan was or Earl Long was or Jimmy Davis. It is the same old thing in politics. You have to go where the votes are and take care of the needs. Otherwise, you lose the controls. So, I would not say the north dominance is dead. In fact, it is so simple for the north to split us because of Orleans Law. In my judgement, this is all subjective, it's three different states. It's Orleans, it's south and it's north. You have almost as much political in-fighting between south Louisiana and Orleans as you do between north Louisiana and south. You have as much in-fighting between Orleans and north Louisiana as between south Louisiana and north Louisiana. North Louisianans are very aggressive and very astute politicians. They have been able to use that division between *the South* plus Orleans and your roughly 500,000 votes in Kittiana to their benefit. *They* pick one man and make a combination and they'll vote while we will not vote strictly based on region, *and the North* always will. When Edwin ran against Bennett, Bennett was not a real political power in north Louisiana, and except for a light vote on that particular day, he would have beaten Edwin and Edwin knows this because he beat Bennett bad in this part of the state, broke even Orleans and ran a poor race not on percentage of votes gotten but on the percentage of votes cast. But I frankly feel that



this state can be governed as well by north Louisiana as south Louisiana.

J.B.: Where do the Florida parishes fit in the geography?

Mouton: I would think that Florida parishes are ultra-conservative parishes in the state. They would tend to go more <sup>with</sup> the philosophy of, if I can use the word, the old south desegregationist, etc. And they would tend to work in north Louisiana. I think our part of the state has become more liberal and of course that is a matter of degree. I think the north is much more liberal now than we were say ten years ago. But I think when you take the whole state as a general thing, you'll find that the south Louisianians are still more liberal in their thinking than say <sup>North</sup> parishes or say <sup>Orachita</sup> ~~Washtaw~~ parish might be, and I think Florida parishes fit into that except for one thing now. With the registration and the right to vote of blacks, and I think we have a reasonably heavy population of blacks in Florida parishes. While the white population still tends to align separate north Louisiana things, that the blacks align their thinking to our part of the state.

J.B.: But is registration of blacks in the Florida parishes relatively low? I mean, there are no barriers, but insofar as really getting people registered that there is considerably more potential for registration?

Mouton: Yes. I have never looked at it that closely,

but I think you are correct. From what I know about it, I think that there is still a vast number of blacks not registered. Although the blacks have registered to a point now where they almost control there as far as the local government. They have got more blacks in office, etc.

J.B.: What does that mean for ~~Rarey~~ *Parish*

Mouton: Oh, it presents problems for Rarey. But, of course, as long as ~~Rarey~~ *Parish* keeps his district, keeps Baton Rouge, which strangely enough is one of the . . . I didn't realize this, but east Baton Rouge is almost a Ku Klux type parish in certain elements of it. As long as he has east Baton Rouge, he'll be tough to beat.

J.B.: What is the role of ~~Farr~~ *CAR* and Cable in terms of politics and government?

Mouton: Well, I don't want to sound cynical, but I won't be as critical. Cable, I relate myself to two people, Ed Stagwood Cable and Ed ~~Stynwood~~ *Stein* *CAR* ~~Rarr~~. Cable, I have found, to be fairly objective, and I have found that if he had pushed vested interest they have done it on a very sophisticated level, where I have not been able to see as clearly as before. Ed ~~Stynwood~~ *Stein*, I don't know him personally, but to a great extent represents totally vested interests. You can change his color just like the *chameleon* because he can do what he wants at a given time. I respect their

position on many things, but I resent their attitude to what is the Louisiana state government. I'll give you an example. You are talking about politician now, and these are very sensitive people, politicians, because we feel maligned very often. The last four years has been very difficult with the mafia pull committee, and David Chan's article on all the the good things about everybody in office being corrupt. I've done my best to do a reasonably good job. *PAC* put out a pamphlet on voting records. Now, my record is not a great record, it's not a bad record. I think it is an average record. I did what I had to do to get things for my people and I think I was very consciencious. I would like to think I was. But *PAC* ~~Parr~~, for example, there was a program where we spent \$60,000,000 on what they call off-system roads. Now Louisiana, as you know, is a very, almost Socialistic state government. The state government is extremely powerful. All of your dollars start from there and come down to the local government. Little of it has changed but it is still like there is almost a state-wide system of highways, a state-wide system of hospitals. Well, off-system roads are the responsibility of the juries, police juries. They build their roads with what they call royalty road funds and local funds. They are limited in their taxing powers and limited to funds. Now, Lackey is the smallest parish geographically in the entire state. We have no royalty road fund because we have very little

production. See, Martin, for example, has a lot of production, and big royalty road funds. Wilder is looking for money from off-system roads. So, we passed a \$60,000,000 bond issue that authorizes the state to spend money legally on these roads; we couldn't do it without that particular statute. Lackey got 87 miles of black top road that they couldn't have gotten otherwise. There was no way for the police jury to blacktop 87 miles of gravel road, and dust is dust and cars that used those roads paid state graveling tax. I voted for the bill and I got my share of the money. When Parr was analyzing the votes they didn't say that we spent \$60,000,000 on off-system roads, they said we spent \$60,000,000 on political roads. Now that may sound like a simple thing, but why would or any man knowing government use the word political road, which has an evil and corrupt connotation. Like the state wasted \$60,000,000 on roads that didn't deserve to be black topped, that didn't help the people. It didn't help the farmer, it didn't help the person in the country, it didn't help the jurors trying to run their parishes. When off-system is the really legal definition of the road, especially when the only difference between an off-system road and a state road is the fact that somebody was able to take two miles of off system and exchange it for two miles of state system and blacktop the state system and leave the other two miles gravel. Very often Parr was attempting to sell something to people in

Louisiana. They do it with fancy words and adjectives and phrases and verbages that are not totally correct and not totally honest. Deceptive is really the best word I can use. They will deceive towards their own end.

End Tape One, Side One

Mouton: When the commission was formed to revise the Constitution, <sup>Stein</sup>~~Styner~~ was against legislators serving. I don't know why, but his opinion was that legislators have vested interests and they will try to please their constituency, and he was very successful - in my judgement, the strongest they could elect in the commission form of revision and it failed, totally. And the convention starts and before the convention takes one step forward, <sup>PAC</sup>~~Parr~~ is critical of the convention. They say that the make-up is not proper, that the people should be allowed to vote on the make-up and all these things. Well, <sup>PAC</sup>~~Parr~~ recognizes, as does any person of Louisiana, that our Constitution is a great draw back to efficient government. And <sup>PAC</sup>~~Parr~~ should further recognize that their time for opposition is when the product is presented, not those people who will present the product. Because 127 people to draft a Constitution have a tough job, and when they get a bad start, when they start off behind the line with the <sup>Stein</sup>~~Styner~~ and <sup>Tell</sup> the rest of them saying, "Well, this is not the way to do it." Well, we have failed five times since 1944, five times. Until you

know what the product is, you can't say this is the way to do it. We tried commissions, we never could get a convention by referendum. For them, knowing how much we need a Constitution, to take a negative attitude before we've had a chance to get off the ground, they are back to their old tricks again of protecting the one thing that I think <sup>PAR</sup>~~Parr~~ wants to protect and that is your tax exemptions in the Constitution. They aren't at all happy with any idea of changing the Constitution that might take industrial exemptions out of the Constitution. If I sound bitter and critical, I am bitter and critical. Because I have watched Ed <sup>Sternel</sup>~~Stynwell~~ now for 12 years, and he is a nice, articulate, well-informed, impressive person. But his motives are not really that of an objective group trying to do best for Louisiana, and I'll fuss at him for that. I'll fuss at him for trying to say that is what he is. What he is, he is a lobbyist. That's just like Vick <sup>Buene</sup>~~Buene~~, the difference between <sup>Sternel</sup>~~Edstein~~ and Vick <sup>Buene</sup>~~Buene~~, Vick is a lobbyist and he makes no bones of it. Or <sup>Sternel</sup>~~Edstein~~ is a line to industry and should come out and say it. We want to protect the industrial tax exemptions. We want to protect against any further taxation. We want to do everything we can to give them as much revenue from this state as possible with the least taxes as possible, property and otherwise, and live that life, but be honest about it, and don't through a type of governmental subterfuge and fancy words and phrases, don't come before the public on a golden white horse saying one thing and meaning something totally different. I know Edward would fuss at me

for saying these things, but he understands it.

J.B.: Do you feel that most politicians in Louisiana share that view of <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~?

Mouton: I think most politicians are afraid of <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~. I think <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ has developed a state-wide image of being looked upon as being an opinion maker. Because of that you prefer to have them with you rather than against you. I would think that if you would talk candidly with any person who has served in the legislature more than four years, I would think that you would find my opinion echoed a hundred times over, and I don't think I miss the heart beat of the legislators, I think I am very close to most of them. Very few of them will be critical of <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ publicly for fear of the fact . . . like the lobbying forces might have some impact on the voters. But I think generally that the legislature, which is the element of more influence by <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ than any other, all would say the same thing that I am saying. It has reached a point now, that <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ has gradually lost the influence with the legislature on an individual basis for that very reason.

J.B.: How about Cablé?

Mouton: A different ball game and I really don't know why.

J.B.: It is a lot of the same people, isn't it?

Mouton: Yeah, it is. I think the difference might well be the manner in which the leadership handles themselves.

Let me explain this so you don't misinterpret my statements.

I think <sup>PARR</sup> Parr performs a very real service to the state. I think he has come through on some very fine, strong ideas on reform in government. I think, for example, since '64, to '68, McKeithan's first term, I think they were very instrumental in the changes that McKeithan and the legislature made. Keibler was involved deeply as well. I think the whole thing is the way Cable handled it. I think that they will come forward with a constructive idea on a form of government, recognizing the difficulties of trying to give change, quick change in with our politics, and they work towards it in such a way that if you succeed, fine; if you fail, they don't take after the world. They don't fuss with everybody and raise hell with them. I think Parr is the reverse. I think <sup>5 term</sup> ~~Stynwell~~'s approach is reform through criticism, constant, always and total. I think Cable is reform through education, constant, always and total. I think <sup>PARR</sup> Parr works by trying to build pressures on those in office, by being critical over what is, almost to the point of being crminating critical, whereas Cable will work very constructively and objectively, never being critical, understanding the problems of trying to bring change about. When we fail, <sup>PARR</sup> Parr condemns all of those who tried, even those who are *friendly*, whereas Cable quietly backs off and reorganizes and tries to think of



some new way to . . . Cable, by the way, was the guiding force behind the Council for Higher Education, and they were the ones that convinced me McKeithan would move on it. It took on the LSU System, it took on the State Board System and it successfully created the Council, which would eventually evolve into a single Board of Education, which I think is the greatest thing this state could ever have. <sup>PARR</sup> Parr's approach would have been completely different had they been the mastermind. Because they would try to intimidate to gain down there and Cable doesn't do this. I think Cable understands more of the practicalities of the individual politician than Parr does.

J.B.: How about in their individual dealings with politicians?

Mouton: I think the same thing can be said. I've only dealt with Ed Stagworth with Cable, but I think he is very persuasive.

J.B.: But how does he actually work with you or with any other political figure?

Mouton: Well, I can only go with me, because I have never watched him with anybody else. But he will come forward with his ideas and his reasons and he will appear before the committees and explain them in such a way that he'll try to get the votes for the change in the program. It is a kind approach, if I can use that word. It is an educational approach. It's not one where there is always

the *pressure* that if you don't do it, you are going to be condemned by us on state-wide television and state-wide newspapers.

J.B.: They were a lot more on persuasion through understanding?

Mouton: That is well said, that is correct, in my judgement.

J.B.: Say, would he deal with you on a one to one basis also after he appears before committees then does he meet with you and go to lunch?

Mouton: Yes, of course, it is a very informal thing because he is your friend, and Ed is a friend, but his attitudes, he'll appear before a committee and explain his position, and then he'll visit with you before the session or after we adjourn or you may have lunch together. It is a very casual lobbying type approach. It is very casual. It is a soft *sell* type thing where he wants to make you understand that he feels this is why it should be done. And the thing that has always impressed me with Ed is that you can disagree with him and it is not a personal thing. It's not the end of the world. He is not going to try and hurt you politically because of it. I don't think Parr is like that. I've watched him too long, and I think when you disagree with Parr, they will do their best to urge you back on, not understanding your

J.B.: How close do the two of them work together?

Mouton: I have no idea. I've often been told that Cable was extremely close to <sup>PARR</sup> Parr with much mutual make-up of their sponsors. I know this goes in the last two years. While Cable<sup>5</sup> still listed completely as a nonpolitical organization, Parr has been listed more or less as a lobbying force, and ~~that Sty~~ requested because ~~of the fact that they have so obviously taken a vested~~. And again, I know I am coming across to you bad, like I am bitter at it, but I am not. I respect them for what they are trying to do, but I just want them to be what they are. I <sup>don't</sup> want them to come before the public as an objective constructive non-profit political group, because they are not. They are not objective. They are as objective as labor is. I want them to come across just like Bussie does. I want them in their corner saying our primary motive in government is to make certain that industry gets the best of everything that happens. There is nothing wrong with that. That is why they are there. Because Bussie is in that corner saying I want labor to come up with the best possible benefits and legislation.

J.B.: Doesn't labor actually lend some financial support to <sup>PARR</sup> Parr?

Mouton: I have no idea.

W.D.: Speaking of just the . . . as you look around the country on how to organize labor and its impact on the state legislature and state government, I think it is apparent

that he has got more impact on this state legislature and this government than just any other organized labor leader any place.

Mouton: I am sure he does.

W.D.: Why is that?

Mouton: I couldn't give you a reason, maybe it is the man. It might be the personality. I think Rayburn now is weaker than ever in the legislature. I think they were much stronger in '64, much stronger in '68. Their same influence is on the senate right now, I believe they are very weak in the house. I think it is the man. I think Bussie is a very unusual person. He is self made, totally dedicated. Ed <sup>Steinell</sup> ~~Stynward~~ was the reverse of the same thing, works 40 hours a day in his profession. He lives, eats, and breathes Louisiana government. He is involved in everything and all phases and facets because as you know, if you look into its pockets, labor itself, while you want their support if you can get it, is never a deciding factor on a state-wide election. It's better to have them than not to have them. But take my parish. I guess my voting record would be labeled as just as good as anybody's state-wide, because I happened to have believed in many of their programs. But in *these* times, labor is nothing. Their endorsement of me means zip. I got elected without them. In fact, they opposed me. And I've got elected with them in the past, and it hasn't made that much difference. Organized labor cannot deliver a vote, 80% vote of their union, or their card carriers except possibly in some areas of Lake Charles and

some areas of Orleans and east Baton Rouge. But outside of that, they have no real impact. Bussie is a very unusual man. I don't know if you have had a chance to talk to him, but he is a very unusual man, one of the brightest people that I have met and I rank him equal with McKeithan in a type of charisma. McKeithan has a rare talent, where if you put him in a room long enough with somebody, he will mesmerize them. He's, that's the only one I've met, and Bussie is right up there with him. I think that is probably the reason. I don't think labor was that strong before Bussie got involved, and I am not sure it will be that strong when he decides to quit. But I would contribute certainly 87% of their success to ~~the~~ Bussie and he works there.

J.B.: You say that they don't have as much influence in the house as they had?

Mouton: I don't think so, no.

J.B.: Why is that?

Mouton: Possibly because the make-up of the house is different and much fresher. By that I mean, you had many more new people who were determined to prove their independence of any political organization, labor, ~~PAR~~ <sup>PAR</sup>, anybody, after the last election. When you look at the same make-up you find as much as 75% of the senate being composed of

people who had served for the last 12 years in either the house and/or the senate. You know, people in the house would run for the senate and win, etc. Based on that, they have, Bussie has a better relationship with them through the years.

J.B.: Is reapportionment a factor in this house change?

Mouton: Yes, I think very much so.

J.B.: How do you assess the impact of reapportionment in the legislature?

Mouton: In what respect?

J.B.: What has it meant in terms of change?

Mouton: I can only speak for my district, but I think it has meant a better legislature, and I was opposed to it. Understand this well. Lafayette had three representatives running at large, well, three to be elected, well, two and then three with the population increase. I was opposed to reapportionment because I saw all kinds of problems. You were crossing parish lines, which still presents a problem by the way. You were crossing parish lines, and political sub-divisional lines and it was very difficult. But I find now that the mechanics make for a better legislature, because now the individual is extremely responsive to his own district. He is very responsive to his own district, and yet, he does not ignore the rest of the geographical confines because it overlaps. You are never sure where that voting structure ends.

You can have a Landry that lives in District 44, and he may be talking to the man in 43, and he might have 15 cousins in 43. So the man is as much responsive to the needs of Lafayette parish as he would have been at large. But more responsive in his own district. I find this to be a much more efficient operation.

J.B.: I've heard the view expressed that reapportionment has resulted in legislators who are more responsive to their own district but take a less broad look at state needs. How do you react to that?

Mouton: I would think that is probably correct. Of course, you have to understand I am limited because of my parish. My parish is so small, geographically small, that we have never had that problem. We've always been responsive to the confines of Lafayette parish. But from a practical standpoint, I would say that is exactly correct, that he will be very responsive to those thirty odd thousand people who put in him office and may lose the overview of state problems. It tends to create a more microscopic type of representation that limits, wrong word, not limits, but hinders his desire to do things that may hurt him with that little element. Of course, as you know, the smaller the group you represent, the more subjective your representation becomes to that element, the less broad-based is your desire to accomplish things on the state level. When I say that I think it has worked for the better, I think it has made better legislators because they can't pass the buck that easy.

J.B.: How do you access the McKeithan administration, both first and second terms if you want to separate them that way?

Mouton: Well, I can't be completely objective with you because I was part of McKeithan's, I was one of his floor leaders and McKeithan to me was a really strong and good Governor, scraping away at the surface of the David Chanler article, which did more damage to Louisiana than the Civil War did, in my judgement, and did so by the way of less fact. Just McKeithan's emotion and he reacted badly to it. I rank him as probably one of the best Governors we have had. The first four years were unbelievable. The first four years he took care of local problems, he brought about a reduction of the Governor's powers, that many people thought couldn't be done. He *made a* ~~some~~ fiscally sound base, and everything just fell right for him. He never made a mistake. We had more industrial growth, year for year for year, we broke the record in '64 and topped that every year afterwards, over five hundred million every year. Things fell right for him. The second four years, in my judgement, were governmentally as successful as the first. But from the public standpoint, because primarily because of David Chanler's article, the way he reacted, over-reacted, and where people became suspicious of government in general, and the *Life* controversy which plagued him throughout, and him determined



to *get revenge* left a very bad taste in the mouths of the public. But his accomplishments were equally as great. ~~We have one great~~ ~~we had the~~ ~~that divides part of the state.~~ We had one bridge, or two bridges across and he has three now, five altogether now under construction, which will increase the economic development. I think he brought about more governmental reforms. He followed *Parr* ~~Parr~~'s recommendations to the letter the first four years. Anything *Parr* ~~Parr~~ recommended, McKeithan did. I would think that down the road, when you can forget emotions of what happened the second four years and just look governmentally at the accomplishments, they will rank him with any Governor we have had. Now, one thing that happened the second four years, McKeithan is a very egotistical person. I don't mean this to his detriment, because he is one of my best friends, but he hurts easy, he is thin-skinned, and he is a card puncher. He's doesn't plan, he just reacts. The second four years when he went . . . he was convinced by some to be Vice-President. McKeithan just made up his mind that he was going to be Vice-President. He played it very coy, he had no shot to be Vice-President. When all of this fell apart and he lost interest to a great extent the last two years in state government and backed off completely, almost advocated . . . well, Baton Rouge was being run by all of his subordinates including McDougal who was a very

confident man. He just got very disillusioned and discouraged in government. McKeithan is a real fine politician. I don't mean this in the sense of an insult, because I respect a real fine politician. Before you can be in government, you have to be a real fine politician, and he is the best I have met. He may be relaxed in his organizational capacity once elected, like Earl Long was, or like Huey Long was, but as far as getting things done, when he wants to get behind something, there weren't many that I have met any better. I would rank his total eight years as a good constructive period in our governmental history. I would say the first four were exceptional, because everything just fell in place.

J.B.: You think his handling of the Life article made the effect even worse?

Mouton: Yes, no doubt in my mind.

J.B.: What mistakes do you think he made from it, how did he mishandle it?

Mouton: totally, in my judgement. I am just a two-bit senator. But I know David Chanler. I lived with him for three days. He came down here and he didn't impress me that much. He may be a brilliant young writer, but I would say with hindsight, 90% of everything he said has never been substantiated, and it has been looked at not by McKeithan's friends but the enemies in the

administration. From his article, not one single indictment flowed, not one single charge developed. They put on the stand for two straight days and he never took the Fifth one time, one time in two days on something that happened in Canada. He answered questions from what you might call an anti-McKeithan committee, with the media there, the FBI there, and David Chanler there for two days. He never took the Fifth and nobody not one person. Jarritt took the same chair under oath and took the Fifth about 75% of the time, but the way he mishandled it, in my judgement, . . .

J.B.: Chandler actually took the Fifth?

Mouton: Oh yes. If you want an interview, we'll talk with Claude DuVall who served on the committee. He wouldn't answer any questions. He took the Fifth continually. But McKeithan over-reacted when the Life article came out because he is very sensitive and he wants everybody to love him and he wants the state to be looked upon as the great glorious state, which it will never be looked upon in our lifetime. He only made one simple statement, "If Mr. Chandler has any proof of wrong doing by our administration, and any evidence that Claude runs Louisiana, he has state and federal grand juries available. Just go and give it to them. That's it. I closed the door, shut it, that is what grand juries are for." Instead, what McKeithan

did, he immediately dismissed two or three people based on what was said in the article, without even looking behind that which put more fuel on the fire. Then he created a

committee and to his credit, he didn't put a single administration leader on the committee. He had

~~who was anti-McKeithan, more or less. He~~

~~had~~ ~~who was totally anti-McKeithan, he had~~

~~who was totally anti-McKeithan, he had Ed Stynwell.~~

He put one newsman, I can't think of his name without the paper. But basically the make-up of the committee was not pro-McKeithan, and they handled the misery for, I guess, six weeks, brought everybody in and when the smoke cleared they turned everything they had over to the District Attorney in east Baton Rouge and made everything available to the federal people and to the Attorney General. From that investigations, not one thing that Chandler said was substantiated. Now, I am not saying that there was not a lot of truth in his articles. I am sure that in there many things he said were correct, but McKeithan's reaction to it, in attempting not to whitewash but to prove the purity of state government was so violent that, and the over-reaction was so violent that they just compounded the problem. Then when everything else started to come apart, when you had a Sheriff getting in trouble, nothing to do with the administration, that was bringing on corruption in the McKeithan administration.

Then problem after problem after problem. But when you look back and talk about McKeithan's being the most corrupt administration of all times, from his eight years in government, you've gotten a total of six indictments, none of which were related to Chandler's article. You've got McDougal's indictment, and he was declared not guilty. You've gotten Sammy Downs' indictments and you've had two hung juries now in two trials. You've gotten five legislators on sharing insurance premiums and then going to trial this month, and my guess is that they may convict one. I think the other four are clean, and that was about it. But the over-reaction did such a tremendous amount of damage to the image of Louisiana that it hurt us economically and it hurt us governmentally.

J.B: How about this tax revenue business, wasn't that an issue? Tax collections?

Mouton: Yeah, yeah. I think that was more the result of a system that deteriorated over 20 years and it wasn't

any overt action or wrong doing. Our tax revenue department had always been extremely lax. They had no funds to put enough field men out. They had a limited amount of money available to them for their staffing. They came to us as early as 1966 and 1967 requesting, as I recall, a half-million dollars in appropriations to hire more personnel because they couldn't handle the work load. We didn't have the money so they were not funded. I don't think

you are going to find, you might find favoritism, which is as wrong as intentional dishonesty. You might find some favoritism on the method of collection. But I don't think you will find a scheme of corruption. I don't think you will find an overt plan by individuals in the revenue department to corrupt and to defraud the public of their tax dollars. I think you will find a laxity, where John Doe, Revenue Collector, may say to his friend, "Well, look, take six months to pay it off." It's not right, but it was the system. You never change when you have no problems. The only time you change in government is through crisis. As long as there are no crises, people won't accept change. They like things like they are. I mean, I'd show them what the change might mean to them, but unless the atmosphere of crisis is there, you can't change, and there was no crisis. So McKeithan came in and the same procedure was followed. Now there is one thing that Chandler did to his credit, and he was correct by this. There was some dereliction of the mechanics of the office, and it has been tightened up quite a bit. Moreso through Tragell and Edwards than through anything McKeithan did when he replaced *him*.

W.D.: When people write about Louisiana, ~~I've been studying it so long~~, they always mention corruption - that this state has more corruption than any in the nation or in the South. How do you see that?

Mouton: It is very hard to explain or to react to it. I guess I have been in politics all of my life. I've been in the legislature now for 12 years and I've been involved in politics, and maybe I have the wrong definition of corruption, maybe there is something that I am missing, but I don't see it like they see it. I understand that you have a lot of *favars* and small things on the local level, but during McKeithan's term, and I can't speak beyond that, because I didn't serve in office for any one else but him, I've never found a lot of people on the take. No one has ever given me a dollar to vote for a bill, or not vote for a bill. I have never been hustled to do anything dishonest, or illegal. Maybe it is just because I am smaller and look innocent, I don't know. But when I hear about other states and their operations. For example, let me give you this perfect example. I am a lawyer. We have five lawyers here and we have a branch office in Orleans. I wouldn't touch any state business with a ten foot pole. I couldn't, you just can't do it in Louisiana. You've got the press watching you, everybody is watching you, it is down right precise. A friend of mine from LaMar came down here and his brother-in-law is serving in the legislature. He is in the house of representatives and he's the attorney for the highway board. There is just no way that would happen in Louisiana. It just can't be done. Yet, over there,

it is accepted. Of course, I am giving heresay, but I think maybe that Louisiana basically because of Huey Long, basically because of his operations in the thirties, when the nation focused their attention on this very unusual and dynamic type of person, who just took a state up by its guts, and ripped it up and turned it around and flipped it and changed direction. Because of the sensations with his life style and the manner in which he died, and then because of Earl Long's problems, mental problems down the line, I think that we are more inclined to be looked at than most southern states. We have had a very volatile political history since 1930, and I am not sure that it is a corrupt history, but it is a very explosive, and ~~getting~~ history. A man like Huey Long, who came up with his whole program almost is exactly what you have on the national level now, almost totally Socialism. This type thing, divide the wealthy, take care of the poor, build charity hospitals, state-wide road programs, free school books, but when you put all these things together and then the man was obviously a type of demagogue, who was determined to get national attention, and then you follow through for his brother who had a rare genius for elections, and a certain pattern for governing in the crudest form, and I am an admirer of theirs. I try and take away the bad things and try to look at the good things that we wouldn't have had except from a man of that caliber.



A very crude man, no sophistication, no tact, no . . . he was not the Spiro Agnew type guy, you know, who comes across very suave, and then he goes off, he uses his mind and walks around with a pillow case on his head. I think that the nation just naturally judges us by one or two people who happen to have been in government and who had a great impact on our total state government. I don't think you will find any more nor any less corruption than you will in Mississippi, or Texas, New York, or California.

W.D.: How about the parish levels, say with the police jurors?

Mouton: That is a bad system. It is a bad system because it has been again much like the revenue system. They have done things to custom that are not legal but in your mind not right. They've given their friends a load of gravel for their private road. They've cleaned out their third cousin's drainage ditch. To custom, and when you repeat an action long enough with no one condemning you for it, then it becomes right. It might be illegal, but it is right. The jury system, generally, as is operated in Louisiana probably could stand a major revision, much more so than state government. First of all, not many people want to be a juror. So, you are limited in who is going to run for the office. Secondly, many who do run for the first time see it as a gold mine on the ground. It is just

not that way. They watch it pretty close. So they nickel and dime you to death. Like the parish, they indicted three or four of them for things that shouldn't have been done, repairing equipment that was never broken, things of this nature. I've got to agree with you there. I think on the local level, on the state level too, I am sure, on the local level we could stand some upgrading. The biggest thing that I find with politics is that it is getting more difficult to find any type of person of any decency to run for the office. Because the pressures have gotten so great and the economics to justify it just aren't there. I am blessed. I have a good law partner and he understands me so I can devote 80% of my time just to my job. But I bet you that there aren't 10 legislators that spend the time that I spend on it, not for the money involved. And they say, "Well, why run if you don't want the money?" Who can explain a politician's mind? It is like a duck hunter fishing, he spends his time and then goes out and then kills , why? It is just something he likes to do. But because of the general attitude and opinion of people about politicians, we are less than the average person. We are condemned individually, or we are liked individually, or individually I am given all the respect and courtesy and nice and kindness that I could expect from any profession. But collectively, as a senator, not the senator, there is a

certain amount of disrespect in that way as a politician. It came up pretty good when the McKeithan stuff broke, it was really bad for all of us for a while, and it is still there.

W.D.: How is Cajun politics any different from any other type of politics?

Mouton: I think it is more fun. I think the campaign parties are more fun. I think the people look forward to the election. I think the candidates do too because there is a little more get togetherness. I am speaking because of the rural elements in a rural part of the state. Orleans is completely different. But I think that you will find that the Cajun has a different mentality than most people. They can probably rationalize more than any people on God's earth except maybe some of the blacks. We can make even the worst look good by just a mental process. We can just flat rationalize. If there is any difference between our campaigning and say, north Louisiana and Orleans, it is that we look forward to it. We get into it, it's almost like a game, something you really enjoy doing. You are organizing, you're plotting, you're scheming, you're laying your campaigning out, at the same time, you are going out in the country and meeting all your people that you haven't seen in two or three years. You've got your barbecues. You've got everything that is good. It is just one big 45 or 50 day party. I think the Cajun politician is

probably more susceptible to not being vindictive in his attitude. He recognizes why people tend to be against him and still be his friend. He recognizes that generally the person who votes against you has a reason. In that man's mind, that reason justifies that vote against him and he understands it. The Cajun is a very tolerant person. I don't know what causes that but he will understand more than say a north Louisianian, or Orleans, why he has opposition, why he gets 14,000 people voting against him, and if there is any of the same traumatic impact that he might have on north Louisiana that he feels that if a man votes against him, he doesn't like him. I don't think we think that way. I have a bunch of people who voted against me and I think they like me, but they had a reason to vote against me. Most of the time, it is in their own mind.

J.B.: Do you think that is going to make a difference in the way Edwards operates as Governor?

Mouton: Yeah. I can see it already. If you've talked to him, if you talk to him again, you mention one word he is very candid with you. That is part of the Cajun trait. They will be honest with you, genuinely, with the strong belief that you will understand that their candor does not mean that they're bitter about anything, that is just how it is. They can understand that is how it is, but

they are going to take it. And I think it makes for a better Governor in Edwards because he is not devious, he doesn't scheme and plot and lay things out. The beautiful part about it is that he takes you on every issue on that issue. He will not project a position, nor will he resent your position. For example, in the Convention, when he put the Convention building, he did not want any legislators to serve on the Convention. I was against this for a very simple principle. I didn't want to run. I just got through three years of working trying to revise the damn thing, but ~~I didn't feel like a legislator should be~~ ~~to something less than a normal~~ . I could not understand why he should say no legislators. If they want to run, and if they want to risk getting beat going for it and show their weakness, or if they want to get elected and then have real headaches, that is their business. So, I amended the bill on the senate side and it passed. He was all upset. He came in and he was raising all kinds of . . . he said, "I am glad you are my friend," and I said, "Well Governor, I'm sorry. I just can not sit in my chair and let anybody say that a legislator has the same rights as anybody else. If they have the right to serve in the legislature, they should have the right to serve in the convention. If they are stupid enough to run . . ." He said, "If you want to be on there, I'll appoint you." I said, "I don't want to be on. You couldn't give me the job. I've

just gotten through three years of agony with it, but I am not going to sit by and let the public think that you can exclude the legislators because it is something less than honest, something less than capable, something less than deserving." Now, if you'd take that approach with McKeithan, and he would have carried a little cross with you for a while. Edwin, the next day he was the same way. He doesn't let it carry over. He'll let you decide on what you think is best and he says, "You live with it. If you are right, more power and glory to you. If you're wrong, you made a mistake." I've seen him pull that a hundred times. In fact, that is the beauty of his situation with the older members in the legislature. Everyone expects him to come and lobby, like McKeithan did, I am sure like Davis, or Earl Long did. They expect to be called in and talked to about their vote. He doesn't talk to anybody about his vote. He puts his program on the floor and if you are for it, fine, and if you are against it, it's your business. I bet you Edwin has not lobbied a vote since he has been Governor on any of the bills, tax bills or other ones. There is a certain, you use the word candor, what he thinks, this is right, and if they disagree, they certainly have the right to vote against him and there is no other *factor* involved.

J.B.; Does he use any sort of pressure, even subtle pressure to get his bills passed?

Mouton: I think what he really uses is his leadership. He will explain the purposes and the causes of his bill, and he will re-orient his position now and then if he thinks they are in trouble. But I think as far as calling individual legislators and saying, "Look, I want your support or else," I don't think he has ever done that, and I don't think he ever will. I think he'll talk to Billy Brown, he'll understand that Kay Carter is going to be against this, what is his problem, where is his hang-up? Well talk to him and see what it is. But as far as calling him in and just telling them point blank, he just doesn't do that. McKeithan would occasionally.

J.B.: So, he'll use persuasion?

Mouton: Yes.

J.B.: Do you compare him with McKeithan in the same way as Cable versus <sup>SAR</sup>~~Farr~~ in approach?

Mouton: No, no, because . . . it is kind of difficult to explain because the atmosphere of Edwin's legislation has not been the same as McKeithan's. Atmosphere is very important to pass a bill. The energy crisis, for example, has a *position* without any fear of loss of votes for the gasoline increase and the severance taxes from a parish that is an oil parish, because the atmosphere will justify it. I possibly could not have, I would have if I had thought it was important, but I would not have voted with the same political freedom say three years ago, the

atmosphere wasn't . . .

J.B.: Would that be the best example of his political astuteness and timing?

Mouton: Yeah. I would say that he picks and chooses what he thinks he can get done and he moves on it based on atmosphere.

J.B.: Does this element of tolerance that you mentioned among Cajuns also apply to tolerance to political corruption in the broader sense?

Mouton: Yes, I think so.

J.B.: As an example, the Governor allowing the architect to pay his wife's rent in the Washington apartment and then his explanation of it and the apparent public acceptance of that. I mean, in most states that would have just created one tremendous uproar.

Mouton: Good point and that complements what you were saying about Louisiana corruption. I think it is a totally different attitude where we can accept things and, let me use a bad word, place them in the proper prospective. For example, the architect paying Elaine's motel bill, or whatever it was, as bad as it looks, probably in every state in the union, you've had some Governor receiving some benefits from some architect that is not as obvious and above board as that, as a favor. Yet, the people of this part of the state will accept that as just something that happened. It



has just been done. Nothing is wrong. What is wrong with a friend helping out a friend. Even if he is Governor and can benefit this friend many times over. In other states I think the same thing might be happening, but it may be done with a little more caution and maybe little more discretion.

J.B.: How do you explain the acceptancy in north Louisiana?

Mouton: I don't.

J.B.: I mean, it didn't get anybody upset there, did it?

Mouton: No.

J.B.: Was it his candor that did it?

Mouton: Well, he faced up to it and didn't try to give any phony excuses. He just said it happened and that is it. "He's a friend of mine and there is nothing wrong with it." He left it at that. Of course, let's remember, the time that it happened, that is always important. When you sin in the first two years of your administration, you are less likely to draw a lot of flak than if you sin the year of elections. Had this happened say in '75, the year of the election, it may have become a position. But how can you keep alive the fact than an architect paid a bill for his wife, or let her use an apartment, how can you keep it alive as a running issue for three years? You just

can't do it politically. Now you can revive it at the proper time, but you can't keep something that insignificant alive. Now they can tie in and they have tied in the airplane situation, the man with the contract and these things. If they can tie it in to some direct benefit or even indirect benefit that the person is getting, then you can create some problems that will come back to haunt him. You can't really gage people's questionable actions. In 1973 or 1974, when there is an election of 1975, and I think that is almost nation-wide. Because people are generally apathetic about government. No one is worried about the speed limit unless it catches them. Nobody is worried about traffic tickets being fixed until they get the ticket. People expect in government, what they expect is good government in this category, and then they expect appropriate personal service in this category. The two sometimes are not able to be put together. Because you might expect, for example, USL to give every dollar it needs for its higher education program, and that is a good government. You expect that. But you are going to demand that your third cousin get a state job, or your mother . . .

End Tape One Side Two. Begin Tape Two, Side One.

Mouton: No reason to explain it. I would guess that, to give you an example, I don't know how it works in all

districts, but my campaigns, and I always have Republican opposition, runs me an average of about \$70,000. Of course, I go first class. There is no way for me to recover that at all through the office legally or even through the law office legally, even from the exposure I get. I would have to say that Louisiana politics is probably the most intense. I've never been anywhere else so I don't know. I think it is probably the most intense of any in the nation. I think it is almost like a phobia with the people. It's not, the money is not being spent for necessarily for what others expect to gain from the Governor's office, through favoritism, or through contracts or through things of this nature. I think it is like when you back a football team, or baseball team, or basketball team, when you get deeply involved. You just believe in and the spirit that you have to see that your side wins. You don't always gain from your side. I would venture to say that the greatest disillusionment to people in Louisiana who had never been in Louisiana politics is that if they contribute \$1,000, or \$500, or \$10,000 campaigning and don't get anything back for it, except a handshake and a smile recognition. They have the impression, some people have messed with it before, that their \$10,000 will reap them *bread* cast upon the water. I don't think it really happens. I know I sound naive, but I have been there a long time and I know the guy would be me. They've

got some people, I won't mention names, who are with McKeithan, an awful lot of money. And they didn't need that same money with anybody else. No matter who is Governor, those same elements would have made the same amounts of money. Whether they back McKeithan or whether they back Morrison, or whether they back Johnson or Edwards, they are in a position where they will make money with the state. There are others who will spend a lot of money to get in and think they are going to make it and they can't do it. It's not going to happen.

J.B.: What is the role of oil in financing political campaigns?

Mouton: I am sure they have an element that puts up for the Governor's race. I don't think they get involved locally that much. They have a fairly active lobbyist. Their lobbying group is very good.

J.B.: Who are their chief lobbyists?

Mouton: They used to have Hoy Bogin, he used to be the chief man. Hoy served in the legislature under Huey Long in the thirties, and they have what they call the the mid-continent oil, mid-continent oil association, which is an association of all your major companies. That is in the deep South. They have the same group that lobbies in all your southern states. They have joined together. Sin Regard right now is the head lobbyist for the oil group.

He represents many of the major companies. I think our group relies upon their individual impact on the individual legislators in a given area. They have their lobbyists to coordinate. I don't think they try to capture any senate or house seats. I guess Lafayette is as much of an oil parish as any. It owes its growth to the oil industry. So I think that I would be more susceptible to influences than say a legislator from Red River. ~~xx~~ . I never find them trying to put pressures on. They'll call me, and talk to me and I'll go visit them and try to explain to them why I am doing something. In elections, I find no unit of organization that will get behind "A" against "B" to elect them from the oil community.

J.B.: But they are the people with the most money in the state, collectively?

Mouton: Yes, I would think so. I am sure they contribute heavily in the Governor's campaign. I am guessing now.

J.B.: How about in your races. Would they contribute to your race?

Mouton: No, of course, I am the world's worst money raiser. I'd say that 80% of all the money I spend, I spend on myself. I don't raise much money. I have some close friends who put up a couple hundred dollars apiece and we'll have a barbecue and raise a few dollars, stuff like that.

Lafayette is a very difficult town to raise money. I think it is politically. I've never heard of any one person raising an awful lot of money. Most of the money spent, I think, is spent by the candidates themselves. But as far as the oil people coming to you and saying here is \$5,000, here is \$10,000, here is \$25,000, and we expect you to be our man, it just doesn't work that way.

J.B.: How about just making a contribution without any expectation of return?

Mouton: Oh yea. I've gotten support from various people in the industry who feel that I am the person they want in Baton Rouge. I think the largest single contribution that I have ever gotten is \$500 from a person who owns one of the smaller companies. Of course, he is a friend of mine, but by the same token he is friend and therefore if he had given me \$50 it would have been just as good. That is the single largest contribution I've ever gotten from anybody, quite frankly. I am sure the companies probably contribute, when I say the companies, I am sure the leadership of the companies, the Presidents may give \$100 here, \$50 there, just to make sure that their name is known to the person running. But as far as a substantial amount where they underwrite a campaign, or put up a material amount of money for the candidate, I don't think.

J.B.: In state-wide and Governors races, they'd give more, wouldn't they?

Mouton: I would think so, yes. I heard the opinion and I could be wrong, but I have the opinion that in 1948, 1952, and 1956 and even as late as 1960, money meant much more in the Governors race to control and give them benefits from the Governor's chair than it does now. I have that feeling because I think now that there are so many controls, built-in controls, through your Code of Ethics, whatever that is worth, through new legislation passed, even media, who are very active and always looking, through Parr, who is a good government group and does watch and does perform a service, through Cable, through the League, that it is very difficult for a Governor to favor any one element totally. Again, that may sound naive, knowing the history of Louisiana, but I'll give you an example, from the McKeithan administration came the insurance situation. That to my knowledge forever. It is done today even in business. You've got

which is a big store in South Louisiana. When they write the insurance policy they give it to you as their insurance agent, and you pay half the premium and then they split it with A, B, C, D, E, F, and G, and you split that commission with county agents because they stores. Well, through the years, the state insurance has been handled the same way. One or two agencies would write insurance, get the premium and they would hold at least half and then the Governor or the Division would say, give "X" number of dollars to this insurance man. No one thought much of it until this scandal broke on a deal that people who

weren't supposed to be getting it, were getting it. Edwin put a stop to that. No more single agent. Now it all goes through one person, through the state rather with no agent. A bank deposit, which was a big big thing in the past. Nothing much thought of it, but from the Davis administration you had the operation, and the situation, where the bank would give him 1% for all funds kept on deposit by the state. Well, as a result of that you had McKeithan's bill which provided that you can't have idle state funds, they must draw interest. As a result of the favoritism, you have a situation now where the Treasurer's office with some controls, invest in one or two banks and they'll pour some of your local stuff off like your University account and your hospital account will go into local banks, but your big money go to your banks, because it is more orderly and you've got better controls on what is being done with the money, and you get better interest. I think that time is taking care of corruption to some extent. There is still some going on. I am sure there is a lot going on, but I think the major stuff, when they really get, I think time and public attention, not the individual, but the collective public attention through the media and through Parr and through Cable and through the League and through your Chamber of Commerce, and your city clubs, and just through the fact that there is more exposure constantly, I



think that is bringing about a more stable situation in Louisiana politics. At least, that is my opinion. I've seen some change in the attitudes of people.

J.B.: Do you think that legislators' salaries need to be really established in Louisiana, but legislative *pay* needs to be increased to improve the quality of the legislature?

Mouton: I would think so, and it is going to be a very difficult thing to do. I know what the answer is for this reason. If you are going to do your job, it's a full time job. If you live in a town like Lafayette, now again, maybe if you live in the Florida parishes or maybe in Red River one of those, there is not that much to do. But in Lafayette, we have the University, the State Police Headquarters, every state agency is located here. You are the seat of government. Every agency you have in state government, Lafayette has a district office for. So that waiting room on Monday morning is filled almost every Monday and all week long looking for jobs, welfare, food stamps. It is a full time deal. Then the intra-committees that serve in Baton Rouge meet, the budget committee meets three times a week, the banking committee meets once a month, various committees meet. So that if you are really going to do the job and attend the meetings and all these good things, you should have some type of

reasonable pivot to give you an assistant. We are getting into that now for the first time. That is part of the problem of corruption, by the way, in the legislature. We have no staff, we have no office, we have nothing. My office in Baton Rouge is my desk on the floor of the senate and except for my head, that's it. Who I can con to type letters for me now and then, and that is the extent of what I have as far as physical facilities to domy job. We've started to improve. We are remodeling now and getting some staff, but how do you establish a \$20,000 or \$15,000 or \$12,000 a year salary uniformly when the work loads can be so varied. That is the big problem. You will have some legislators who never go to Baton Rouge, and never have anything to do with state government except during the sessions and that's it. You will have others who are there every day of their life working full time because, not through anyone's fault, the goeographical set-up of the Louisiana government, but I think if you can attract more competent personnel, you have to give them adequate facilities first of all in Baton Rouge, that is the big thing. Because we work under the most ridiculous, impossible conditions and secondly you have to give them some type of compensation. I would feel, and I may get out of it if they do that, but I feel that a *adequate* compensation with a *legislation* staff and the person must do nothing else. He must *desert* from

everything else that he does. He is either going to be a full time legislator or he won't serve at all. Until you get to that point, you will always have a problem with a conflict of interest and all these other things.

J.B.: Why do you stay in?

Mouton: I guess it has gotten in my blood like every other thing people enjoy doing. My father was in politics and I was raised in it, and he didn't want me to get involved in it ~~and~~ he got out of politics. He said, "We're through with it, you are going to be a lawyer." His exact words were, "It's a bad, messy, dirty game." He said, "Just don't fool with it." I almost ran for city judge in '56 and I changed my mind. I wanted to run for the house in '60, and he talked me out of it. I wanted to run for the unexpired term in the senate in '62 and he talked me out of it. So in '63 I went to him and told him I was going to run for the house and he said, "Okay, are you sure?" I said, "Yeah." He said three things then. He said the first thing, remember that while you can enjoy yourself, your family is going to be miserable. He said the second thing you are going to lose many of your friends, never get bitter over that. He said never get bitter if a man can't be for you or with you, because you are in a position now where many things you do, you will never understand. He said finally, never expect any gratitude. If you can live with those three conditions, where your family

will to some extent suffer, where you will lose some of your friends, and you'll learn for the first time which people don't like you. Many people think that there is nobody who doesn't like them. I know 14,300 didn't like me last time. That was on the ballot. Never expect too much gratitude. I enjoy it.

W.D.: Did it work out that way?

Mouton: Yes. I think the single greatest disappointment to me in politics, the hardest thing for me to live with was the friends I have lost. I mean close friends. People who felt like, because they were my friends, I should do this for them or do that for them. I should vote this way or that way. When I couldn't do it, our friendship was not so deep rooted as I thought. They went the way of the flesh and I was a no good son-of-a-bitch. That was the hardest thing. The second thing was with the family. I have four daughters, they are fully grown now, most of them, but they were babies then, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. When all this stuff started, and when I fought the sex education bill, they couldn't answer the phone, or when they went to school the kids would say, "Your daddy is a dirty politician." Segregation was really bad. I've received calls and dirty letters for all these things. But it is in your blood, and you enjoy it. Good things flow from it. When you drive down the road and see a football stadium and

say, "I built that, it's mine. I am the guy who put the mechanics together." And you see the new mental health facility, and say, "Look, that is my building. I am the fellow who found the way to finance it and how to work it out." And you are in the country and you are on a black top, "I am the fellow who gave the vote to John McKeithan and got my money for this." It gives you a certain personal satisfaction. The Government part is the easiest part of politics. There is no sweat to government. That is the easiest part of politics, to go up there and get things done in Baton Rouge is easy. The toughest part is to come back home and put up with everybody who thinks you've got to bend the rules just for them, the perfect personal service part. Their phone call must be returned immediately, their cousin must get the job, their bridge has got to be repaired, their ticket must be fixed. That is the hard part, and that is where you lose your friends. I've never yet lost a friend, in my judgement, over my governmental votes. My sales tax vote, my gasoline tax vote, my severance tax vote, I never lost a friend on any of those things. But I've brought things back for them. I lose friends when I can't get your cousin a job, or when you feel like you don't have to take the real estate examination, so Mouton should go talk to so and so to fix it. I tell him that it doesn't work that way. It can't be done, it's

illegal, then they get mad. Government is easy, people are hard, that is where the problem is. But essentially I like it, I really do.

W.D.: What about the future?

Mouton: Oh, I had some ideas last time of moving up, because you can't stay in Lafayette too long. In fact, I hold the record, believe it or not. I am the only senator that has every gotten re-elected from Lafayette. I am on my third term. They always beat them after the first four years, it is that kind of parish. You can't stay too long in politics in a stable position because you *will run up against* some articulate aggressive guy with no scars on him and a white piece of paper to eat your lunch, because you have to explain sales tax votes and things like that. I thought last term I would go for Lieutenant Governor and when Edwin announced for Governor, I was a dead duck, because if you get a guy from Lafayette and a Cajun going for Governor it would have forced Edwin to make a deal somewhere down the line with probably Fitzmorris, and when Edwin makes a deal going for Governor, and he is from Lafayette *and so is the* Lieutenant Governor, he cuts my power base. So I am probably going to stay four more years if I can in the senate. I am where I want to be. I am chairman of the committees I want to be chairman of, I am on all the committees I want to be on. I've built up a

nice comfortable reputation, and if I can survive four more years and Edwin's term is finished then, then I will re-evaluate. I'll either run for something else or quit. I wouldn't go for anything else except for Lieutenant Governor or Governor, and I couldn't win going for Governor. I wouldn't go for Attorney General or any of those things because that is not . . . my thing is the legislature. I love the legislature. I just like everything about it. I like the Executive Branch, I think that is where all the action is, and that is where you get things done. Everything else is just a hot hand as far as I am concerned. I don't care what you call them, whether it be Comptroller or Treasurer or Attorney General, they are not contributing anything to government. They are contributing a service in an administrative capacity to government, but they are not contributing to government itself. The legislature contributes to government and that is where I want to stay.

J.B.: The Congress?

Mouton: No. I've thought of it, but I discounted it. Maybe it is my Cajun mentality. Washington doesn't, it'd be to win, but if I could win, Washington doesn't appeal to me at all. I don't know why. It just never has. McKeithan had tried to get me to run in '66 when Edwin ran, no, I am sorry, when Willis was so sick, he tried to get me to run and I told him that I wasn't interested. At that time,

my daughters were much younger and my wife was not in favor of it. I was tired of thinking about it. Congress doesn't appeal to me. I couldn't run for the U. S. Senate, and I wouldn't want to be in the House. Because I would just be one of 450 and I don't think that I could contribute anything there. I think I have more influence and can benefit the people of my state better, and this sounds corny, being in the senate, one of 39 in the senate, who has some influence on a Congressman, and who has some political influence on the Senators, than if I were there myself. I think I can do as much for Lafayette parish, knowing John Brull and being close to John Brull and knowing Russell and knowing Bennett Johnson if I were up there myself trying to get in and I enjoy it much more on this level, which is selfish. But I don't think I'd like Washington. I am kind of what you might call a parochial type politician, a provincial. I like my little area, and I don't think there is anything more stimulating than the friendships you make in the legislature. I've made friends with people that I would never know otherwise, state-wide. It gives you tremendous insight into human frailties and human strengths and you sit back sometimes and you see people like \_\_\_\_\_ for example, he'll be a judge now, a grey haired man, good lawyer, competent legislator, never has been really appreciated by his



constituency. He has done more for his district in Orleans than if the Messiah had come down. Yet, he knows that if he runs again, he is beat. That is why he is taking the judgeship. You wonder about how these things happen, a person who serves in public life is a leper, he is a political leper. The longer he stays in, the more disease gets him and things fall off, and you lose an arm and what have you. When the smoke clears, if he has not regrown some of these things through some new avenue of support or some new depth of ability, then he is out of it. And I am about to reach that point. I've got one more term left, I think, where they won't beat me. It might be close, last time it was close. After that, I either have to move up or move out.

J.B.: Do you think McKeithan has any political future?

Mouton: I would think so not based on what is now, but knowing the man himself. What he is now, I think that Bennett effectively buried him, when Bennett beat him as bad as he did, because he used up his green stamps in that campaign. It would be very difficult for him to come back right now. But knowing how talented he is, and knowing his natural instinct for politics and people, I think he has a future. Now he wants to run for Governor, so I was told, not by him, but by somebody else. He wants to run for Governor in '74 at the end of Edwin's term. I would guess

he'll start working at it right now.

J.B.: Is that the end of Edwin's second term?

Mouton: Yeah. When you review and look at, if the dome doesn't fall in his face, and if they don't indict everybody for being involved with it, if the dome is half-way successful, it'll probably be McKeithan's biggest achievement, because it was the single most important economic boost Orleans could get. Orleans was having many problems. It sounds corny to think that one thing could save it, but the dome did. He stuck his neck out that far for it. He might get some favoritism there and he is still popular in most of south Louisiana. If Edwin is out of the way, McKeithan could come back. You never know.

J.B.: Most people we talk to take the position that race as a viable political issue in a state-wide campaign is dead in Louisiana. Do you agree with that position?

Mouton: That race is not an issue in Louisiana?

J.B.: That it is not a viable political issue in the campaign early.

Mouton: Oh no. I would agree that I wouldn't build a campaign around it. I would not make it an issue. I don't think. If what they are trying is this, that "A" is pro-Negro and "B" is anti-Negro and they'll make the issue on that, like Morrison and McKeithan in '64, I don't think you can do that anymore. I think the electorate is too sophisticated and it is not that important. It's important in certain segments, like your Florida parishes, but it had

as many pluses as minuses. I don't think there is any one man coming out anti-black figuring to capture more votes because of it because he will alienate as many votes as he will capture. But I think race as a sub-issue of a campaign is still in. I think, again, by their example, when Davis ran last time, while race was never an issue in the gubernatorial campaign, Davis, and his special sessions on integration and segregation in the sixties, because of his position at that time, had no shot to get any percentage of the black vote even with a black candidate in the race drawing from the other white candidates. Davis couldn't pick up any fringe votes from the blacks. I think your position on, that may be better stated, your position on race would be important, but race itself, as an issue, would not be, if I make myself clear. I don't think you could say, "Well, I'm a poor white. I'm a Ku Klux, so vote for me and ask to be king in my campaign." But I think that my general background is such that I'm pro-black or anti-black, that may have an effect on the campaign, my personal campaign. Race itself, I don't see it anymore as a real issue, not that it couldn't be revived. It doesn't take much to revive things like that.

J.B.: How are the black legislators received in the legislature? There are none in the senate, I understand. But do you have relations with those in the house?

Mouton: Yes, Mrs. Terry. I am Chairman of Health, Education and Welfare in the senate, and she is Chairman of Health and Welfare in the house. Overall they are received good. There is, I think, a very good rapport between most of the house members and the black legislators. I find, and this is just a personal observation, but I find that the white members of the house will go much more out of their way to accommodate the black members than the black members will the white. I find that the whites will not only cast a vote that they may not really be that enthusiastic ~~about to try and~~ I can use the word to hand friendship to the blacks. But the blacks will not *move* from their position. They are going to stick on a strictly racist position and I can't blame them for it. But if they are going to stick on a strictly racist position, that the blacks need certain advantages over and above what is to make certain gains in Louisiana and they are not going to compromise that position no matter how close you are to them or how friendly. If there is a bill that comes up, where you have ten people to be appointed, they will amend it every time to say that a certain percentage must be black. And you argue with them that that is not fair, and that is not equitable, that won't stand on its own merits, on the merits of the individual and they will say,

"No, we've been discriminated against for a hundred years, and now we want the discrimination in our favor." What I am trying to say is that I think that they will be extremely cooperative until such time as the issue involves any type of social benefit to the public, or governmental benefit to the public, at which point in time, they will want black guarantees within. The whites, I find, will go out of their way to accommodate, to try to show that they want to work with them, and the blacks will not give that same *ground*. But then you have to understand, there have only been blacks in the house since 1968, you had one, I think. Then, now you have five or six, I forget how many.

J.B.: Eight.

Mouton: Most of them are from Orleans and one from . In fact, I think all of them are from Orleans, and one from Katum. No, one from Baton Rouge. It's a new responsibility for them and they are fairly strict to the black constituency because it is obvious that they are from the district, and that is what you were saying earlier, is strictly black. I'll say predominately black. I find that they are hard working and very conscientious, because they want to prove themselves to themselves and I guess to their own people. But I don't find any real problems as a result of it. I haven't seen any of them.

J.B.: Is part of the attitude among whites who sort of go out of their way to display good will or whatever, is part of that also because many of the whites have some black constituency as well?

Mouton: I am sure that is it. It's a combination. They certainly have to be responsive, knowing that if they get a label as anti- black and they have 15% black in their district, it would make a difference. Also, I think you will find that generally, especially in the south Louisiana politicians, they are becoming frankly more attentive to the needs of the blacks as a person. I was born and raised here and I had never shook hands with a black person before I ran for office. We had black servants, and black people working for us and the first time I shook hands it was a total traumatic thing. You know, walk in a board room, and sure enough the first was a Mouton, a black Mouton. I walked around these meetings with my friends and I found my friends with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in another, and I've got to shake hands. But then once you got into it and saw the very difficult times that the blacks have had and that they really . . . it sounds like I am talking about some kind of thing in a cage, but the blacks, how they survived in our society with the burden that government put on them, is unbelievable without a revolution before now. I've gotten real close to the black community. I

got deeply involved in the Poverty Program. It was falling apart and I tried to revive it, some elements of it, and I learned to respect greatly the feelings of the blacks. It is very difficult to understand what they have been through, unless you campaign among them for a while. You find more of a sensitivity among the white politicians for the black community. You do not find that same sensitivity in the black community for the white politician. I think no matter how kind the white politician has been in the representation of the black, that he will get their allegiance, he'll get those he has worked with who recognize him as a competent person, possibly. But if a black man gets in a race, no matter who he is or where he comes from, the majority of the black vote is going to him because he is colored. They will vote on the color over top of the competency. You find more and more people like Dickie Brewin, and like Paul Harty and like myself, I guess, in our delegation, where they go into the black community, not necessarily seeking their vote, of course, wanting their vote, but recognizing that they just have peculiar problems. You have to try to resolve it. By the same token, knowing that if they throw a black man in a race against you, he will get 85% of the black votes. Every time you run from now on, there will be a black man against you. There is not much doubt in my mind.

J.B.: Do you think that white politicians in the South, or at least in Louisiana, and would you extend this to the South, tend to be more sensitive on racial matters than the white population generally simply because of campaigning and more exposure to blacks through campaigning.

Mouton: Yes, I would think so. I guess it varies with individuals, but I would think the white politician tends to become much more sensitive to the black community. That was my experience. I didn't know much about the blacks, and when I got into it, really into it, I started campaigning, you see, I used to represent three parishes. It was a very difficult race. I met with black and white leaders. In that campaign, I had been in office two years in the house, I was running for the senate the first time, taught me an awful lot as far as just the mentality of the black. It sounds corny, their mentality is no different from yours or mine. It is the exact same mentality, but I never relate to it that way. I went to a meeting where I was the only white person there, and I made about a five minute simple talk, you know, very general broad, and said, "good-bye." "Wait," he said, "We've got some questions." I stayed there for three hours answering questions in the LCP group. The single question which is obvious to anybody. They asked me if I would appoint blacks to boards, and I took the position that if he was competent, very routine stuff.



One man said, "I have a question that I can't answer, if you can answer it, I'll vote for you." I said, "What is that?" He said, "I have a boy who is seven years old and we were driving down the road the other day and he said he saw a                      lineman working on a power line and he said 'daddy, when I grow up I want to be a lineman like him.' I said, Gulf States doesn't hire black people. Can you tell me how I can tell my son he can't be that lineman because he is black." I couldn't give him an answer. It opened my eyes and put it in good perspective that that fellow had the same feelings that I got for my daughters he had for his son. When you think along those lines, a corny as it sounds, when you put yourself into a one and one human relationship, you can see where they have bad *human* problems and if they get bitter and kind of hit us a little bit you can't blame them. Knowing full well when you run . . . the last time I ran, in fact, I got  $47\frac{1}{2}\%$  of all of the votes in the first primary against five opponents. I won by 294 votes in the run-off. I picked up exactly  $2\frac{1}{4}\%$  of the votes. But the reason I didn't win the first primary was that they ran a black lawyer against me in the field, a man named Finley who is not well thought of by the blacks. In fact, he is kind of a hustler. The blacks have no use for him. Yet, he picked up 4,200 votes, which I had gotten conservatively 75% which would have made the difference in the run-off. I would have won the first primary. They just

threw him in, the Black Alliance for Progress, and that son-of-a-bitch got after me in those black boxes and he ate me alive. He wouldn't debate me. I'd say let's get Mr. Finney out and let's stand side by side and talk about the black community and let's see what he can do for you and what I can do for you. He wouldn't meet with me. I gave it by myself. He just stayed home, put the ballots out, never intended to win, he didn't have a prayer, but they wanted to get me beat, the opposition did. They were smart enough to pick a black man to strip my power. That is the fun of the game by the way. That is what makes it interesting.

J.B.: Is there anything else that you wanted to comment on that we haven't discussed.

Mouton: No, I've over-talked already, I guess. I can talk politics all day long. I didn't mean to talk as much as I did. Do you have any specific questions.

W.D.: That was very interesting, thank you very much.

End interview with Edgar Mouton